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Georgia Perimeter College enrolls more freshmen by far than any single 4-year institution in the State. In Fall 2009, nearly 15,000 freshmen were enrolled at GPC, compared with only about 5000 at the University of Georgia and similar numbers (4000-5000) at several other colleges and universities in the State. While there are 33 Geology majors, fewer than 5 students graduate each year with a Geology degree. The other students transfer directly into 4-year institutions before graduation through our Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) Agreements, which guarantee acceptance at one of approximately 40 4-year institutions, when maintaining a particular GPA and amassing a certain number of credits. At one time, we were told by a local University that GPC transfer students performed better and graduated at higher rates than students who started at that university.

Teaching at a 2-year college has a number of challenges. Many of the students are older, so we face issues not typically seen at a 4-year institution. Colleagues at a 4-year school were stating that all first-year students should live in a dorm. My immediate comment was "what would you do with all of their children?" They did not seem to understand my question. Students quite frequently have issues relating to their children – leaving class early if a child is sick at school, for example, or asking if they can bring their children on a geology field trip. A young black male in my class this semester had three small children. Many semesters I have several pregnant women in my class, which makes field trips difficult. This semester I had a young man confined to a wheelchair – we could not take him on a fieldtrip to a local museum because we did not have a van which could transport a wheelchair. Unlike at a 4-year school, many of our students work – and sometimes work "full time" to support their family.

The average age of students at GPC is about 24 years. This semester I had a 63-year-old white female Geology major in my class. The other Geology major I had was an Asian male in his 20's who scored 99% or better on virtually everything all semester.

We have many successful geology students. I heard from one this week who took Geology online with me in 2003, and he emailed that he had just completed his Masters degree in Geology at UGA. He is 42 now - an "atypical" student. He had worked in business until he saved up enough money to go back to school to study geology (which he wished he had studied the first time around).

A white male hairstylist who owned his own salon studied Geology with me online a few years back. He sold his salon, and is now working part-time and focusing on grad school.

Sometimes we don't find out that they are Geology majors until after they have gone. A young white female student covered in tattoos from 2007 wrote to me last year, "I was in your historical geology lecture not too long ago. I just wanted to thank you for introducing the subject to me. While I was in your class I was constantly debating if I wanted to change my History major to Geology. After a few semesters and a study abroad trip to the Andes I finally made my decision. Currently I am in Savannah, GA at Armstrong [Atlantic] University, and they do not have a Geoscience program (strange because of the surrounding environment and coastal erosion and what not...). Anyway, I plan on transferring to a Geoscience program [at another university]. So, thank you again for a great class and helping me find my path!"

In 1992, I taught an older black female student with two children, one of whom was disabled. In the intervening 18 years, she went on to get her Bachelor's, Masters, and

eventually her Ph.D. in Geology in 2009. I think she is about 60 now. I helped her get a teaching position at a Georgia university. She reminded me that I had helped her to get one of the AGI Minority Geoscience Scholarships. She summed it up like this:

"I chose GPC because for the first time in my life I was willing to let go of my ego and do what was necessary to ensure my success as a student. That is to start from scratch, get a good foundation in the basic principals of my discipline and related subjects that would be used as I continued my education. My years at GPC were some of the most meaningful, when it came to my education because it was both a rigorous and accommodating program. My professors demanded that I rise, rather than to my personal expectations, to the level of my true ability. They inspired me. Their aid in 1992 had a snowball effect. As I went from one school to another, it was the programs that they introduced me to and encouraged me to engage in that left an impression on what would be funding and research opportunities for the rest of my academic career. You guys teach hard and give much love and guidance. You don't see that in universities. A person can come out of GPC and compete with students at any school in the country including Ivy League universities."

Something that is somewhat surprising to me is that these students remember the two-year school where they got their start, and they come back to reconnect with their roots. Part of this is the small class size and the individualized attention that we can give to our geology majors. And part of it is that we take students, wherever they are in their life and encourage them. We sit down with them and make a telephone call to connect them to the Geology Department at a 4-year college or university. We put them on the phone and have them talk to the undergraduate advisor. This is a big help to them, and a confidence booster. Once they speak with an advisor at the 4-year school they are energized and excited, and we know we have put them on the track to success.