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Strategic Plan for The Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities

Dan Lavery
dan.lavery@gcsu.edu

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Capstone Project

Strategic Plan for the Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities

By Dan Lavery
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FLANNERY O'CONNOR
INSTITUTE FOR THE HUMANITIES

GEORGIA COLLEGE & STATE UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Mary Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964) is the most prestigious alumna of Georgia College and State University (GCSU). On March 25, 2025, GCSU celebrates the centenary of her birth. In the period leading up to that time there are many activities and events to commemorate this significant occasion. One of the most significant is the renaming of the Andalusia Institute at GCSU to the Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities (Institute) in March 2024. To coincide with the renaming, a new strategic plan with an updated mission, vision and goals is required. This Capstone Project fulfills that need by creating a new strategic plan for the Institute which aligns with Imagine 2030, the new strategic plan for GCSU which was launched in 2023.

Introduction

GCSU was selected by the University System of Georgia (USG) to be the state's designated liberal arts institution in 1996. Mary Flannery O'Connor ('45) represents the best of that liberal arts tradition. O'Connor was not just a prolific writer but also shined as a painter, poet, speaker, and cartoonist. In honor of that legacy, for over half a century GCSU has encouraged and engaged scholars, students, funders, and the public at large to explore the life and oeuvre of Flannery O'Connor.

To better explore O'Connor's legacy, the Andalusia Institute was established in 2020 with an initial mission, "to engage with scholars, writers, and readers inspired by Flannery O'Connor's works." (Andalusia Institute, 2020). Since its founding, the Institute has been a hub for collaborative activities under the theme of Flannery O'Connor's life and works. In 2024, a new strategic plan process for GCSU began entitled Imagine: 2030. To ensure the Institute aligns with the new strategic direction of GCSU, Provost Costas Spirou requested that a strategic task force examine the original mission, vision and goals of the Institute.

In the Summer of 2023, three meetings were held. At their conclusion the task force concluded that a new mission, vision and goals for the Institute were necessary to reflect the changing landscape of GCSU and the humanities at large. This shift reflects the task force's belief that O'Connor's life was more than that of a writer but as the living embodiment of the arts & humanities.

This project addresses how the new strategic plan for the Institute aligns with Imagine 2030. Through data collection and analysis, and based on a thorough literature review, this project develops a new vision, mission and goals for the Institute. It brings together stakeholder input and the latest academic recommendations to create metrics which are achievable and measurable. This process ensures that GCSU and the Institute remain at the forefront of O'Connor scholarship and as a hub for the study of the humanities.

For the purposes of this project, I have identified fifteen key stakeholders who have a vested interest in the success of the Institute. These stakeholders are comprised of internal (7) and external (8) stakeholders. A quantitative analysis will allow for specific recommendations from these distinguished stakeholders which can be synthesized into measurable outcomes. The desired outcome of this project is a new mission, vision and goals for the Institute that are clearly defined and align with Imagine 2030.

Imagine 2030 states that GCSU will fulfill its mission as Georgia's designated liberal arts institution, "through a commitment to an expansive educational experience, highly intentional engagement, diversity and inclusive excellence, and preparation for leadership (Imagine 2030, 2023)." This will be achieved through a focus on five "Pillars." Each Pillar lays out an overarching theme with a series of goals attached to each. The Five Pillars are:

(i) *Innovate* - We will further enhance our leadership in transformative curricular and co-curricular experiences to prepare students for an ever-changing global society. We will expand and deepen student engagement by remaining agile and forward thinking.

(ii) *Distinguish* - We will demonstrate the importance of our unique liberal arts experience and strengthen the university's reputation for attracting the highest caliber students, faculty, and staff.

(iii) *Empower* – We will promote and foster an environment that encourages and supports holistic wellness, nurturing connectedness, resilience, well-being and the desire to lead and thrive for all students, faculty and staff.

(iv) *Engage* - We will cultivate an environment that promotes lasting positive change by collaboratively developing and sustaining meaningful, reciprocal relationships that value and elevate the contributions of all on campus, with local communities and beyond.

(v) *Advance* - As the state's designated public liberal arts university, we will cultivate a fair, just, and inclusive community that prepares our students, faculty and staff to excel in a globally connected workforce.

While initially this project sought to identify how the Institute aligned with each Pillar, due to time constraints I chose to focus specifically on *Distinguish* as it aligns most closely with the goals of the Institute's strategic planning process. The goals of *Distinguish* are:

1. Clearly define a shared understanding of our unique liberal arts experience
2. Develop and implement a new brand campaign to expand and enhance our statewide and national reputation.

3. Deepen our collective commitment and shared goals across campus to align with the mission and vision of GCSU and embody our shared identity and brand.

During confidential interviews, stakeholders were asked how the life and works of O'Connor can help achieve these aspirational goals. In addition, participated in a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the current Institute. Their responses, along with a thorough literature review, ensure the goal of this project to develop a new mission, vision and goals for the Institute align with Imagine 2030.

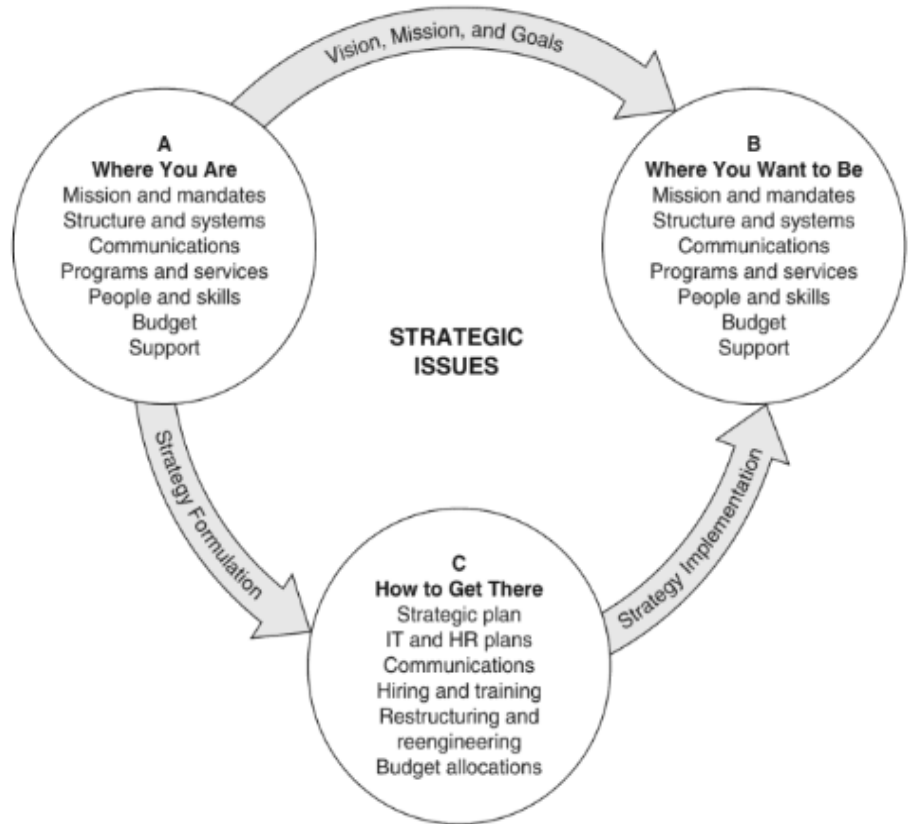
Literature Review

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is an essential component for institutional success. These plans ensure that all agreed upon goals and objectives will be achieved through an alignment with an organization's mission. They are living documents which detail what an organization strives to achieve and how it will measure future successes. "A deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why (Bryson, 2018)

In the adjacent diagram, we see a visual description of what the strategic planning process consists of beginning with where you are (A), to where you want to be (B), to how to get there (C).

Bryson, (2018)



However, as Immordino states, higher education institutions present a unique set of challenges when it comes to developing effective strategic plans. “With its range of missions, multiplicity of stakeholders and distinctive shared governance structures, higher education is a unique industry requiring special considerations when it comes to strategic planning (Immordino, 2015).” This should not be viewed as an impediment to creating a successful plan, but rather a process that serves as an inflection point for university leadership. Further, it is an opportunity to evaluate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to any individual area, in this case the Institute.

Further exploring challenges identified in Immordino, with a specific focus to GCSU, provides warnings as the strategic planning process begins. For instance, not only is GCSU the scholarly hub of O’Connor’s work, but it also is her physical home. Andalusia farm, which is located in Milledgeville, has a separate study of O’Connor’s life as a historical figure. The

stakeholders involved in Andalusia the farm differ from those involved in Andalusia the Institute. However, with its former name of the Andalusia Institute, there was always confusion as to which Department of campus was responsible for which part of O'Connor study. While this project will specifically focus on the new Institute for the humanities there will be significant overlay with other parts of O'Connor's work. Indeed, the challenge of being the literary and literal home of O'Connor is that there are many different avenues to explore. It will be important for this strategic planning process to focus solely on the scholarly pursuits of her legacy through the exploration of the humanities.

For this project, the planning process is a deliberate community-wide initiative which articulates future strategic direction. Wilson (2006) encourages an approach to planning that is both communicative and participative. All stakeholders who are involved in the planning process serve as important resources and without them, the most well-crafted strategic plans would flop and be worthless (Hamdan, 2020). In my own personal work experience, there is often a conflict between staff and volunteers when it comes to how best to achieve organizational goals. Strong communication through engagement and allowing their voice to be heard results in a higher performance rate, which grows the organization's ability to reach their vision and goals. (Bryson, 2018).

Both external and internal partners help drive an organization's strategic plan and must be involved in the planning process to reach its highest goals. Specific to higher education, faculty and staff are responsible for delivering the university's services and ensuring students receive a high-quality education. "Organizations that satisfy their key stakeholders according to the stakeholders' criteria and that create real public value at reasonable cost have earned the right to exist (Bryson 2011)"

In order for a strategic plan to remain viable once it is finished, it must be built on a robust set of goals and objectives that can pivot in the case of unforeseen circumstances. As Snyder states, “One important action item is assurance that one's plan, when formed and when implemented, is robust enough to weather unexpected circumstances (Snyder, 2014).” With the ongoing uncertainties in the future of higher education, and in particular with funding, it will be important for the Institute to have the flexibility to be able to pivot any future challenges not foreseen at the time of its development. Ruben, Immordino and Tromp (2009) assert that “Higher education is a business... and that business can be described as the production, dissemination, translation and use of ideas, and the cultivation of learning and learners.”

The Humanities

Terras, et al defines the humanities as, “academic disciplines that seek to understand and interpret the human experience, from individuals to entire cultures, engaging in the discovery, preservation, and communication of the past and present record to enable a deeper understanding of contemporary society (Terras, et al. 2014).” As the state’s designated liberal arts institution, GCSU is uniquely positioned to be a leader in the field of the humanities. Since its inception as a teaching college in 1889 and up until the present day, GCSU has been producing students who are well rounded in their education and in their experiences. Indeed, as Fitzpatrick, et al states, “the value of the humanities is that they foster skills critical to being a good human being, worker and citizen. (Fitzpatrick, et al. 2017)

Unfortunately, there has long been a crisis in the field of humanities, what Cheney describes as, “the problem of the pervasiveness of politics in today’s higher education, particularly in the humanities” (Cheney, 1992). In more recent times the term ‘liberal arts and humanities’ have been falsely linked to liberal politics. State legislatures from across the country

have begun to attack liberal arts schools and forced them to either alter or eliminate all together many staples of the humanities including history, political science and literature.

In response to these attacks, academics such as Geiger, et al have proposed a ‘new deal’ for the humanities. Their recommendations, which will be a primary focus of the Institute, are that institutions of higher learning move away from the major/minor scheme and a focus on how exploring beyond the classroom can convey a broader array of options. The Institute will show how O’Connor’s rich life experiences – in and out of the classroom - shaped how she developed into the shining example of a liberal arts and humanities education. O’Connor was a woman writer with a disability in the mid-20th century American South. Exploration of those factors alone will commence a journey for anyone to explore the rich tapestry that is how Flannery O’Connor developed as a human being.

Geiger, et al go on to discuss the importance that this new deal has as conversations continue forward. In many cases, university bureaucrats are not able to fully grasp the meaning of the humanities, and how best to do program evaluation in a 21st-century context. Indeed, even as the states designated liberal arts university, GCSU has a business college which focuses on such non-humanistic issues as accounting, management, and business development. Further, there is an emphasis, both at GCSU and universities at large on the importance of job preparation. In some cases, prominent public figures emphasize the value of technical colleges as opposed to the liberal arts institutions.

While there is not one uniform school of thought of how best to promote the humanities in a 21st-century context, there has been work done among universities to bring the best ideas to the table. Many of those who contribute to Geiger at all, got together with the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS) in the hopes of coming up with broad-based ideals in as

these conversations continue. The challenges faced are trying to find common themes with such a wide breath of disciplines -ranging from global history to anthropology. At its most fundamental level, “a new deal must entail an administrative recommitment to the principle of the comprehensive public university (AAAS, 2013).” At GCSU, that will need to come from the USG through funding key programs such as the Institute.

Rather than fear how political administrators may perceive the humanities, academics such as Pawlicka-Deger suggest, rather than retreat, that institutions of higher learning double down on the humanities now more than ever. The opportunity to rebrand the Institute allows for GCSU to be at the forefront of this train of thought. GCSU can continue to produce thought leaders at a critical time in our nation’s future. Indeed, as Geiger et al state, “a democracy can only be as energetic as the minds of its citizens, and the questions fundamental to the humanities are also fundamental to a thoughtful life (Geiger, et al. 2015).

Methodology

The strategic planning process for the Institute utilizes a qualitative approach. As mentioned previously, in the Summer of 2023 seven stakeholders were approached to discuss the future of the Institute. This project significantly expands those interviews to evaluate additional stakeholders’ points of view. Stakeholders are asked to reflect on the Institute and give input as to the clearest path forward to success. In addition, they are asked to give open-ended responses to one of the pillars identified in Imagine 2030. These data points form the foundation of the new mission, vision and goals for the Institute.

The stakeholders selected represent a diverse group perspectives and interests. Diversity of input will ensure the best strategic plan is created which incorporates multiple viewpoints. Initially the criteria used to select each stakeholder was a connection to GCSU and/or a

knowledge of O'Connor's works. However, as interviews proceeded it became evident that a broader perspective of opinions was required. The composition of the interview pool expanded to ensure that both internal and external stakeholders were selected. Specially, it became evident that it was critical to receive input from those who have access to internal resources necessary to ensure the new mission, vision and goals of the Institute can be achieved.

The stakeholder pool consists of the following:

- 2 Authors of Imagine 2030
- 2 Faculty in the GCSU Department of English
- 2 Staff members of the Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities
- 3 Administrators at GCSU with oversight of O'Connor related programs
- 2 Emeritus Faculty with extensive knowledge of O'Connor's work
- 2 Donors to GCSU with significant support of O'Connor.
- 1 Alumna with no connection to O'Connor
- 1 Current MFA student

The following message was sent to each individual participant:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this process! Your input is important to help identify key themes and components that will become part of the final strategic plan. Don't worry if you are not familiar with either [Imagine 2030](#) or [Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities](#)! You were selected as a stakeholder because of your connection to O'Connor and/or GCSU. Diversity of input is what will ensure I create the best strategic plan that incorporates multiple perspectives. We want to take Flannery from behind the typewriter as it were and look at her whole life to see how we can continue to be a nationally preeminent liberal arts institution.

Attached are the questions that we will go over during our discussion. The first is meant to be more of a dialogue than a question and answer session. The second page is our Strengths,

Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats exercise. Please feel free to review these and even jot down some notes. As mentioned previously, our conversations will be recorded, transcribed and saved for 1 year per GCSU policy.

Attachment

In February 2022 during her inaugural state of the university address, GCSU President Cathy Cox announced the beginning of a new strategic planning process. Released in Fall 2023, Imagine 2030 highlights five goals, or pillars, which GCSU aspires to achieve. Of these five, Distinguish, is the most relevant to the newly rebranded Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities. For purposes of this exercise, please read the description of Distinguish below and think about how the exploration of Flannery O'Connor's life and legacy would help GCSU achieve each.

DISTINGUISH

We will demonstrate the importance of our unique liberal arts experience and strengthen the university's reputation for attracting the highest caliber students, faculty, and staff.

ANALUSIA INSTITUTE (now named the Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities)

Strengths:

- *What do you believe Institute does best?*
- *What do you believe is the Institutes greatest achievement?*
- *What makes the Institute unique among the study of O'Connor?*

Weaknesses:

- *How can the Institute improve?*
- *How can GCSU improve its focus on the humanities?*
- *What do people say we do not do well when it comes to the study of O'Connor?*

Opportunities:

- *How can O'Connor's life and legacy be used to highlight the humanities?*
- *What types of activities would you like to see GCSU promote as part of O'Connor's 100th birthday celebrations?*

- *How is the study of the humanities changing and how can the Institute take advantage of that?*

Threats:

- *What obstacles does a focus on the humanities face?*
- *Who are we competing against when it comes to the study of O'Connor?*
- *What is the biggest challenge the Institute might face in the next five years?*

Ten interviews were conducted in-person and five over Microsoft Teams. All participants were guaranteed anonymity. Prior to beginning the formal interview, I gave a detailed explanation of the goals of the Andalusia Taskforce, its initial recommendations, and how this project would amplify that initial work. I explained that if participants were not familiar with the work of the Institute that the SWOT analysis could focus on the humanities at large. As per the consent form, after the SWOT analysis and goals exercise, all responses were transcribed, and the recordings destroyed.

Transcripts were entered into a spread sheet with each participant having their own column (Step 1). Next, key phrases were cut and paste into a second spread sheet to identify themes, concerns and opinions (Step 2). Responses were refined by identifying keywords that appeared in multiple responses (Step 3). Finally, these refined responses were then analyzed to identify overall ideas and concepts (Step 4). Those concepts helped to form the direction of the vision and mission as well as specific goals and objectives which can be measured. This entire process is demonstrated below (Learning for Action, 2024)

Step 1: Read through the combined data file

Pay attention to word choice of respondents and the context around responses, as well as the frequency, extensiveness, and intensity with which topics discussed.



Step 2: Identify themes

Start organizing the data into broad themes, and then sub-themes. Avoid the temptation to create too many overarching themes. As you code the data into themes, look for data that either supports or challenges progress toward outcomes, as well as themes within factors that explain program success or point to areas for improvement.



Step 3: Refine the themes

As you read through responses, continue to identify themes and organize data using one or more of the following techniques: Cutting and copying text in the appropriate sections and themes in a document.



Step 4: Re-read and refine responses

Are there themes and sub-themes that should be further combined to go together?

Findings

Distinguish

Each of the 15 interviews with stakeholders began by reading the meaning of *Distinguish* as defined in *Imagine 2030*. As mentioned previously, all participants were given the definition ahead of time. Some chose to write out their responses and submit them while the majority chose to engage in a back-and-forth conversation. Each participant brought a unique perspective to how the institute could help distinguish GCSU. It became clear during the interviews that distinguishing the Institute had both internal and external aspects.

Internally, stakeholders agreed there is a need to distinguish the Institute from existing areas such as creative writing and Andalusia Farm. At the same time, the idea of developing co-curricular and interdisciplinary programs began to take shape. This strategy would allow for greater exploration of the arts and humanities with the Institute serving as a hub for a multiple discipline approach. The Institute would distinguish itself as the coordinator of this approach. One example was to have students in theater act out some of her letters and assign them different characters. Likewise, an art class could compare the sketch art she did while as a student at the then Georgia State College for Women (now GSCU) with her paintings later in life. This approach would involve the Art Department, Library and Historic Museums – coordinated through the Institute.

From an external perspective, participants expressed a hope that the study of O'Connor could bring exposure to GCSU from national and international audiences. Several spoke to the fact that this exposure is a way to reach out to both alumni and the broader community through existing programs, such as our lifelong learning programs. Further, many discussed that using a similar interdisciplinary approach, programs could be developed to generate interest from the general public. As an example, during the Oscar's there could be programs that discuss her works that were developed through film. This would engage the Film Club (student group), Visual Arts Department, Life Long Learning and Theater Departments – once again all coordinated through the Institute.

The use of technology was cited by several as a way to deliver on these programmatic advancements. By utilizing technology, such as podcasts and virtual reality, the Institute can reach diverse populations through engagement opportunities on a global scale. Indeed, already the O'Connor Book Club has individuals from all across the globe, including Japan, Italy, and

Mexico. Engagement through technology will expand the access to knowledge through the arts and humanities. The Institute would be the platform by which these tools are applied.

All participants agreed that a vision and mission for the Institute can not just exist on paper. There must be tangible and measurable goals and objectives. The themes of these goals became apparent during the interview process. There must be an interdisciplinary approach in order to ensure as many disciplines as possible are represented. Likewise, participants expressed a desire to reach a broader audience via life long learning programs. The means by which to do this will be through technology.

SWOT Analysis

The swat analysis was a reflective exercise which allowed participants to give feedback as to how they felt the Andalusia Institute did, or did not, meet its initial mission. Some participants were not as familiar with the Andalusia Institute, so the discussion was broadened in to think about the humanities in general. Specifically, nine gave feedback specific to the Andalusia Institute, and six on the humanities overall. As with the approach to distinguish, each participant brought a unique perspective and their insights helped to shape what the overall objectives of the new institute should be.

Strengths

Overall participants believe that the original Institute fulfilled its mission. “Its greatest achievement lies in establishing itself as a hub for promoting critical dialogue and scholarship surrounding O'Connor's contributions to literature and the humanities.” While that initial mission was very specific to the study of O’Connor scholarship, participants shared that it built a solid reputation among the scholarly community. “Its greatest achievement lies in preserving and promoting O'Connor's legacy while engaging scholars and the public. ”

External recognition of the success of the Institute's initial mission came in the form of three grants which received through the National Institute of the Humanities (NEH). The NEH grants helped to fund an annual conference here in Milledgeville, which brought in scholars and interested individual from across the country which brought recognition to the Institute. The awarding of these grants, "cements our reputation as the place where top-notch scholarship is produced." This gave GCSU and the Institute a unique reputation. Indeed, to achieve such success in such short of time truly strengthened the Institute and put it on the map.

At the same time, USG invested significantly in GCSU for the construction of the Andalusia Interoperative Center which opened in March 2023. This new building on the grounds of Andalusia Farm allows for greater exploration of O'Connor's legacy. While not related to the scholarly study of O'Connor, which is the focus of the Institute, it was another public recognition of GCSU as the home of O'Connor's life and legacy. The Interpretive Center holds events and features rotating displays on various aspects of O'Connor's life. Data collected by the Center shows that the number of visitors – mainly school children – has increased each month since its opening. .

Due to Covid, the Institute was forced to pivot to using technology to hold its annual book club. The book club has been immensely popular both here in Milledgeville, and in other areas around the region. By pivoting to a podcast, it has now reached globally with recognition and participation from across the globe. In just four years since its creation, there are now over 1,000 members of this book club from across the globe. By embracing technology, the Institute has increased its reach significantly to external audiences. This allows for another strength of the institute, having such distinguished faculty members on staff who are well known in the

O'Connor scholarly community, to reach a global audience. As noted in the interviews, "I also think that in this too, we have to recognize the ever-changing landscape of technology."

- Hub of O'Connor Scholarship
- Promoting O'Connor's Enduring Legacy
- Reputation for Exemplary Literary Analysis
- Global Recognition

Weaknesses

The Institute faced several weaknesses during its first three years of existence. There was a change in leadership, both at GCSU and the Institute. These changes in leadership led to confusion as to the strategic direction of the Institute and its place in GCSU's plans for the future. Several participants said "The people who work with it (the Institute) need stability." In addition, a lack of resources invested in the Institute by GCSU led to low morale among the staff. "I think that funding is the biggest challenge. What makes funding the Institute more important than putting a faculty member in the classroom?" The NEH grants may have led those in the Administration to believe that the Institute had significant amounts of funding. However, those funds were very restricted, and could not be used to hire additional staff.

Another weakness of the institute is a lack of interest in O'Connor from today's students. "We need resources to promote (O'Connor), to kind of get this fresh look for younger audiences out into the world." While she remains popular and is internationally renowned, she has not translated as well to today's students. While the Institute did create curriculum for elementary and high school classes across the region, those have not been utilized on a broad scale. This likewise gets back to resources and lack of marketing that the opportunities that the Institute has for the community large.

Finally, when the attempts were made to create co-curricular activities, it became evidence that many departments and programs at GCSU had a silo mentality. Specifically, there was internal conflict between the Andalusia Farm and Andalusia Institute as to who was the true lead on O'Connor matters. Said one scholar, "If you walk through Andalusia Farm you wouldn't know that there is a large university just up the road, they barely acknowledge that she was a writer. It's just an old Farm House." Clear communication from leadership would help to lesson these internal conflicts (i.e. create signage) In addition, there are other programs which could provide a pathway for success. Specifically, the John E. Sallstrom Honors College is not a degree conferring unit but does provide a significant amount of co-curricular and interdisciplinary programs. By partnering with it, and evening mirroring its success, the Institute could overcome these internal challenges.

- Lack of Leadership (no Executive Director)
- Limited Institutional Support
- Internal Division – Silo Mentality
- No Strategic Direction

Opportunities

There are several opportunities that present themselves which could allow the institute to develop into a true leader in the arts, and humanities through the study of O'Connor. O'Connor remains an inspiring figure, and she holds in during relevance from the global scale. To capitalize on this interest, the further expansion of technological advances can help grow that passion. GCSU has a robust Digital Huminites program. Engaging and partnering with it would allow for expansion of the humanities through O'Connor. This would also allow for shared resources (faculty and implantation costs.) As one faculty member noted, "with the evolving

landscape of the humanities, the Institute can leverage digital platforms, collaborative research projects, and innovative teaching methods to expand its reach and impact”.

The most significant opportunity is the upcoming centenary celebration of the birth of O’Connor. On March 25, 2025 there will be significant attention paid to O’Connor because it is a 100 birthday. There is an eagerness among faculty members to explore this opportunity. “GCSU could organize symposiums, workshops, and artistic performances to commemorate O’Connor’s 100th birthday, fostering greater appreciation for her works and the humanities.” A new movie is being released about O’Connor’s life entitled *Wildcat*, which is directed by popular actor Ethan Hawk and stars, his daughter Maya Hawk. Maya Hawk is popular in her own right from starring on the show *Stranger Things*. This film, which will be released later in 2024 will bring significant attention to O’Connor and curiosity as to the places which developed her mindset.

As part of those centenary celebration and events, collaborative partnerships have been developed with other institutions, such as Fordham university, Georgetown University, and Emory University, all have a piece of the O’Connor legacy, however, not as significant as GCSU. Each month these institutions gather for a monthly Zoom call and a calendar has been created to ensure that work is not being duplicated. GCSU took the lead and created the new logo which all institutions will use under the banner of “Flannery at 100.” The hope is that by working collaboratively with these institutions, additional resources will be available for a traveling show of her artwork, public readings of her writings, marketing of upcoming events - as well as using some of the co-curricular and interdisciplinary work that the Institute see to develop.

After these celebrations subside, it will be important to leverage this attention on O’Connor to continue to grow the study of the humanities. Already there are virtual reality tours of Andalusia Farm, it will be necessary to further enhance these technological advances to reach

diverse audiences and provide accommodations for those who might not be able to enjoy O'Connor's work due to physical limitations of handicaps. As one scholar noted, "this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to strike while the iron is hot when it comes to her work!"

- Centenary Celebration & Significant Events
- Enduring Relevance of O'Connor
- Collaborative Partnerships with Other Organizations
- Technological Advances

Threats

The threats to the Institute, and the arts and sciences overall, have grown significantly in recent years. Specifically, there have been attacks on the arts and humanities from those seeking to make political game. Indeed, there are universities in Florida, which were liberal arts focused that have been forced to change their entire structure and charter due to political pressure. All participants agreed that "politicians are cracking down on the liberal arts, and what they referred to as "anti-wokeness". While difficult to define, it is essentially an attack on critical thinking and examining problems from varied viewpoints. It's a chilling development and one that threatens all liberal arts institutions, including GCUS and the Institute. As a new political campaign season begins, and as the states designated liberal arts university, GCSU makes itself a prime target for these types of attacks.

In addition to the political attacks on the humanities, the Institute faces several other specific threats, such as loss of the NEH grant and external competition for dollars. "You'll lose your next Executive Director and then the National Endowment for the Humanities (and other sources of funding) will give up on us." To mitigate that it will be important that the GCSU Foundation begins an active fundraising campaign around Flannery at 100. As mentioned

previously in an opportunity, collaboration among institutions has greatly expanded the reach of O'Connor scholarship. However, that brings more competition to attempt to secure limited funding for these types of programs.

Lastly, the greatest threat comes from O'Connor herself. Said one noted scholar, "I do think O'Connor's racial politics is another pretty big threat, especially as people pay more attention to O'Connor." Many of her writings, particularly earlier in her career, contain visceral and repugnant racist language. There is no explaining them away or trying to lessen their negative impact by describing her as a woman of her time. Indeed, the most recognized scholastics that I was able to interview for this process identify this as perhaps the most significant threat.

How best to mitigate these threats involves several strategic steps. First, by expanding the vision of the Institute to be more externally facing, it will increase the number of individuals who are exploring the humanities through O'Connor's work. This will in turn create more support – and votes – for those who want to see institutions such as GCSU continue to provide them. Second, a diversified fundraising plan which incorporates individual, corporate and foundation giving should be developed by the GCSU Foundation. Finally, there is no explaining away O'Connor's writings. It must be addressed head on with diverse points of view. The Institute must be willing to accept the criticisms and not try to explain it away. .

- External Competition
- Humanities Under Attack Nationwide
- Funding – NEH Grant Expiration
- Tarnished Legacy of O'Connor



FLANNERY O'CONNOR
INSTITUTE FOR THE HUMANITIES
GEORGIA COLLEGE & STATE UNIVERSITY

INTERNAL FACTORS

STRENGTHS +	WEAKNESSES -
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hub of O'Connor Scholarship• Promoting O'Connor's Enduring Legacy• Reputation for Exemplary Literary Analysis• Global Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of Leadership (no Executive Director)• Limited Institutional Support• Internal Division – Silo Mentality• No Strategic Direction

EXTERNAL FACTORS

OPPORTUNITIES +	THREATS -
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centenary Celebration & Significant Events• Enduring Relevance of O'Connor• Collaborative Partnerships with Other Organizations• Technological Advances	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• External Competition• Humanities Under Attack Nationwide• Funding – NEH Grant Expiration• Tarnished Legacy of O'Connor

Conclusion

Since its founding in 2020, the Andalusia Institute has achieved significant amounts of global recognition, while being seen as a scholarly hub among O'Connor scholars. This is a notable achievement, considering the various threats that have impacted its development.

Founded during a global pandemic, and undergoing two leadership changes, it is the passion and

dedication of those who want to expand the reach of O'Connor scholarship as well as those who are passionate about GCSU, that lead to its success.

Currently, the Institute has an Interim-Director, Project Coordinator and Administrative Assistant. It has not had a full-time Executive Director since 2022. These existing resources significantly limit the Institute's ability to achieve the recommendations below. It is imperative that a full review of the existing resources be completed and that a nationwide search for a full-time Executive Director begin. This will require an internal audit by GCSU, something which other Departments and Divisions have undertaken. In addition, several other Departments must be engaged to ensure the Institute is successful.

- Office of Special Events. Their expertise is required to ensure the Flannery at 100 celebrations meet expectations.
- GCSU Foundation. A full fundraising campaign to capitalize on the attention around O'Connor during Flannery at 100 to ensure future resources.
- University Communications. A marketing plan which incorporates all units of GCSU with a focused message on O'Connor and her work.
- Office of External Affairs. This will ensure that collaborative relationships are developed locally to help tell the story of O'Connor.
- Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Race is a significant factor in O'Connor's work. This Office has knowledge and resources which can help address this controversial topic and speak effectively to her legacy.

There are many risks associated with focusing on O'Connor. By fully engaging all the resources of GCSU, the Institute can mitigate the threats and weaknesses as identified in the

SWOT analysis. At the same time, the Institute must build on its strengths and the opportunities with Flannery at 100 to distinguish itself. After a thorough literature review, interviews with key stakeholders and data analysis, I have reached to following conclusions:

Vision

The new vision for the Institute must reach a broad audience that focuses goes beyond exploring O'Connor as a writer but as the embodiment of the arts and humanities. The benefit of having a vision that looks beyond the borders of Milledgeville is that it allows the Institute to capitalize on its current strengths, while also developing new and innovative programs that will be able to reach a broad scale. Therefore, it is my proposal that the new vision statement for the Flannery O'Connor Institute for the humanity be:

The Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities will distinguish itself as a vibrant hub for the interdisciplinary study of the arts and humanities.

Mission

Likewise, a new mission statement needs to be created for the Institute which will guide the members of the staff as well as the GCSU Administration as to how it will achieve this vision. While the vision is a global aspiration, the mission explains how GCSU and the Institute will achieve this vision. The mission will have two parts one that expresses what it is trying to accomplish, and the second part discusses how the arts and humanities are intertwined with the study of O'Connor's work, therefore is my proposal that the new statement of the flaming O'Connor Institute for the humanities be:

The Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities seeks to foster a deep appreciation for O'Connor's works and insights through innovative scholarly research, educational outreach,

and creative endeavors. It inspires diverse audiences to examine her enduring relevance and profound impact on the study of the arts & humanities at GCSU and beyond.

Goals & Objectives

Based on the SWOT analysis and interviews with stakeholders, I have developed three primary goals for the Institute's strategic plan: Promote Interdisciplinary Scholarship, Cultivate Lifelong Learning, and Embrace Technology. While the first goal of promoting interdisciplinary scholarship is inward facing, the second goal to cultivate lifelong learning is external facing. It is my hope that when a new Executive Director is hired that more goals can be built out to further achieve the new vision and mission.

Goal 1: *Promote Interdisciplinary Scholarship*

Encourage collaboration across academic disciplines at GCSU to explore complex human issues from multiple perspectives which will inspire critical thinking through the study of O'Connor.

Objective 1: *Promote Interdisciplinary Scholarship*

In order to promote interdisciplinary scholarship, this proposal recommends that a GCSU a GC1Y class be created with a concentration on exploration of the arts & humanities with O'Connor as the focus. All freshman will be required to take this class which would feature a rotating speakers and program that explore one aspect of her life – as an artist, writer, speaker. It could further feature her relationship with her mother, institutions such as the Catholic Church and her views on LGBTQ issues. This class would appeal broadly to all students and aligns with

the GCSU mission as the designated liberal arts university. It would foster critical thinking among students as they explore the various facets of her life.

It will be important that this class **fully** explore the O'Connor legacy, including tackling the ugliest aspects of her legacy. A conversation led by the Department of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion would explore her racial views. Local members of the Milledgeville community could be engaged who knew O'Connor and Milledgeville at that time. The focus need not be negative, but along the lines of how far Milledgeville has come since the time of O'Connor. This conversation would provide a welcome opportunity to explore the arts and humanities, and to teach incoming freshman of the importance of how, as the state's designated liberal university, GCSU is helping to shape well-rounded individuals with critical thinking skills as a means to approach different perspectives

This goal will be measured by the number of freshmen who participate in the class. The Institute will then offer out of classroom opportunities to further explore topics discussed in class. Attendance at those programs will offer a key indicator as to how impactful this GC1Y class has been.

Goal 2: Cultivate Lifelong Learning

Offer lifelong learning opportunities for GCSU alumni and the broader community, including lectures, workshops, and continuing education programs that promote intellectual enrichment and personal growth through the study of O'Connor's life and legacy.

Objective 2: Cultivate Lifelong Learning

Exploring, lifelong learning is long been a goal of GCSU. Engaging with alumni and the general public helps GCSU to remain at the forefront of public universities in the region and increased the opportunities for financial support from these individuals. It will also be important

to engage these constituencies as external forces begin to bear down on GCSU as the state's designated liberal arts university. It will be important to have as many individuals willing to stand up for GCSU as possible.

The richness of O'Connor's life and legacy provide a welcome avenue to explore lifelong learning. As discussed previously, many of the ideas and concepts developed for promoting interdisciplinary study can be used when talking to the general public. As noted in the SWOT analysis, there will be significant interest from the general public with the upcoming centenary of her birth, as well as the release of Wildcat. Developing lectures series, and programs that cater to the general public, and not just the significant O'Connor scholars will provide an avenue to achieve the institute mission by reaching a broader audience, while also being seen as a hub for the exploration of O'Connor's life.

This goal will be measured through attendance at various lectures and series as well as keeping metrics on how many people attend online programs.

Goal 3: *Embrace Technology*

Harness the power of digital tools and platforms at GCSU to facilitate research, teaching, and public engagement in the humanities through the study of O'Connor.

Objective 3: *Embrace Technology*

Technology will play a critical role in achieving not just the vision admission of the Institute but the first two goals stated above. The reason technology is one of the key goals is that it was through technology that the Institute was able to expand so significantly in its first few years of existence. At first, there was great hesitation to embrace technology from O'Connor

scholars, as well as those in the general public. Many of her readers skew older and therefore have a distrust of technology, according to those who helped initially set up the online book club.

It is now possible to take virtual tours of O'Connor's home, as well as explore the surrounding woods and areas that inspired her work. Embracing this kind of technology will only further grow the interest of O'Connor by giving access to many more people. Another significant aspect of technology is that it allows accommodation for those who otherwise cannot fully explore O'Connor's life and legacy. Indeed, it is a great irony that the former office of the Executive Director of the Andalusian Institute was in the building that was not handicap accessible. An Institute that is charged with the exploration of O'Connor would not have been accessible by Flenner O'Connor herself.

Technology has already proven that it is capable of expanding the reach of O'Connor's work. Already GCSU has a robust Digital Humanities Program which would align with this goal. Further investment in online programs such as audio readings of the O'Connor Review would greatly enhance the outreach of O'Connor, and help the institute achieve its vision of being an interdisciplinary hub for the study of arts and humanities.

This goal will be measured by tracking the number of downloads, clicks and digital impressions.



FLANNERY O'CONNOR
INSTITUTE FOR THE HUMANITIES
GEORGIA COLLEGE & STATE UNIVERSITY

VISION

The Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities will distinguish itself as a vibrant hub for the interdisciplinary study of the arts and humanities.

MISSION

The Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities seeks to foster a deep appreciation for O'Connor's works and insights through innovative scholarly research, educational outreach, and creative endeavors. It inspires diverse audiences to examine her enduring relevance and profound impact on the study of the arts & humanities at GCSU and beyond.

GOALS

- *Promote Interdisciplinary Scholarship:* Encourage collaboration across academic disciplines at GCSU to explore complex human issues from multiple perspectives which will inspire critical thinking.
- *Cultivate Lifelong Learning:* Offer lifelong learning opportunities for GCSU alumni and the broader community, including lectures, workshops, and continuing education programs that promote intellectual enrichment and personal growth through the study of O'Connor's life and legacy.
- *Embrace Technology:* Harness the power of digital tools and platforms to facilitate research, teaching, and public engagement in the humanities, expanding access to knowledge and fostering new modes of scholarly inquiry and expression.

Flannery O'Connor represents a shining example of the arts and humanities. The vision of this new institute incorporates the idea distinguishing itself to both internal and external audiences. How to distinguish itself requires a mission that examines the best aspects of O'Connor's legacy. Through measurable goals and objectives, the Institute can foster a deep appreciation of her work and insights. Additionally, by further developing existing programs within the Institute such as scholarly research and education outreach, the Institute will distinguish itself an interdisciplinary hub. This will allow for O'Connor's enduring relevance to continue to impact the study of the arts and humanities.

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