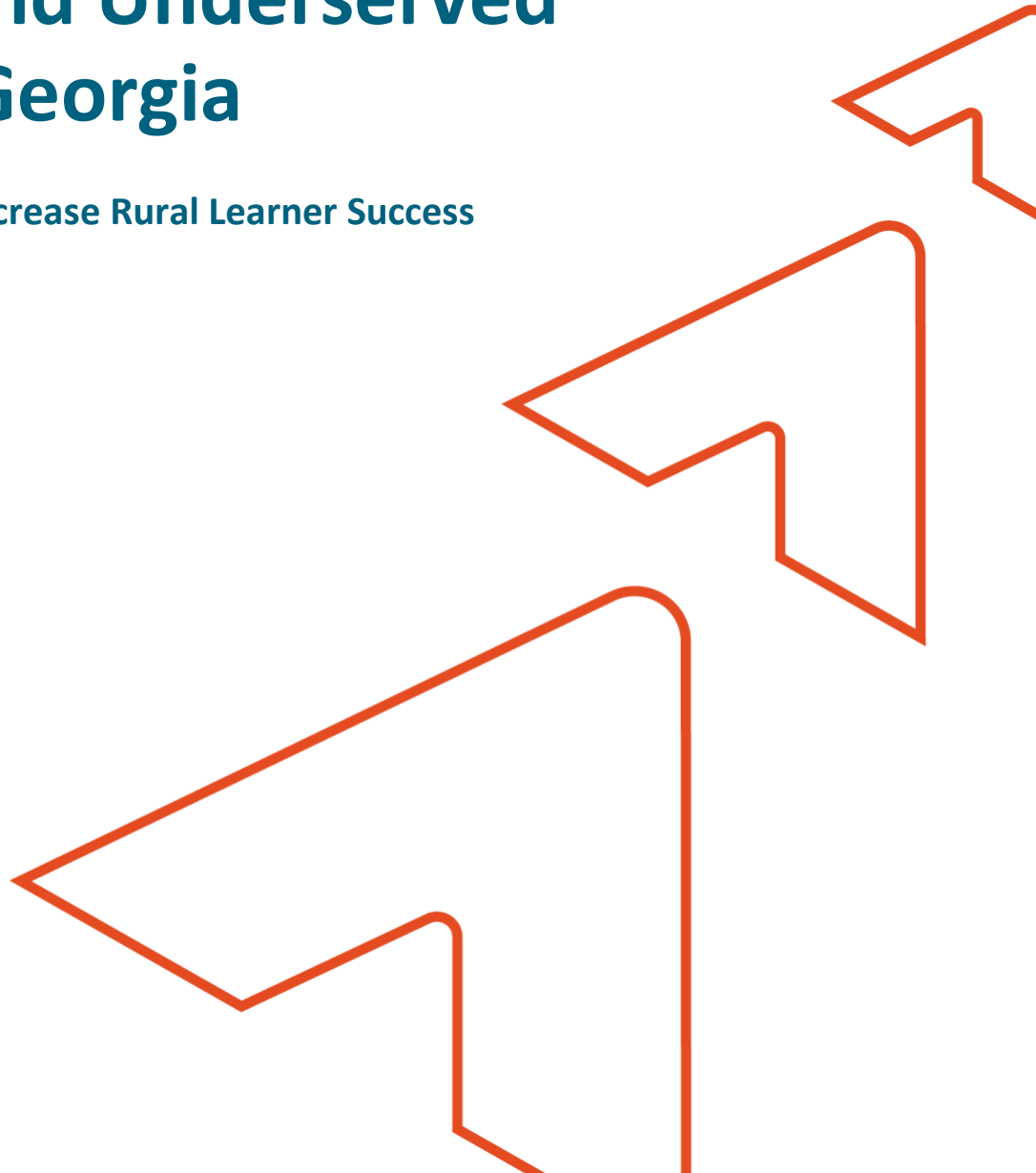Project Profile

Expanding College Access for Rural and Underserved People in Georgia

Building Evidence to Increase Rural Learner Success

Expanding College Access for Rural and Underserved People in Georgia

Organization

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Social Media: Twitter, LinkedIn

Geographic Focus

Georgia

Population Focus

The project focuses on rural learners, rural learners from low-income backgrounds, and historically underserved groups who are attending technical and community colleges and who have access to the eCampus initiative.

Project Overview

The project examines the impact and importance of the eCampus initiative that was implemented by the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). This project:

- Generates evidence regarding the impact of the eCampus initiative on rural learners' course and program enrollments and academic success.
- Examines the way the initiative's technological, instructional, and student success supports reduce distance and other barriers and improve access, choice, and success in technical college education.
- Studies the way the initiative contributes to the diffusion of advanced learning technologies.

> Our team is eager to study how the eCampus distance-learning initiative at the TCSG is expanding college access for rural and underserved learners in Georgia.
>
> *– Georgia State University*

Research Questions

1. How do the availabilities of eCampus courses and programs affect academic and employment outcomes for rural learners, rural learners from low-income backgrounds, and historically underserved groups? How do courses, and subsequent academic and employment outcomes, differ for rural learners, rural learners from low-income backgrounds, and historically underserved groups who enroll in eCampus and in institution-specific online and in-person courses? How do outcomes for rural learners associated with eCampus differ from outcomes for nonrural learners?

2. How does the availability of local campus technological, instructional, student success, and other supports, as well as off-campus supports (e.g., provision of Wi-Fi hotspots), affect the outcomes associated with eCampus for rural learners, rural learners from low-income backgrounds, and historically underserved groups?

3. How does eCampus contribute to the diffusion of advanced and innovative learning technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality simulators, to TCSG's rural campuses and rural learners? Do experiences with these technologies improve course, skills, other academic, and employment outcomes for rural learners, rural learners from low-income backgrounds, and historically underserved groups?

Research Methodology

The project will conduct quantitative impact analyses of student-level administrative records of technical college students in TCSG institutions. It will also analyze narrative data from semi-structured interviews with students. The project will prepare public-facing policy briefs for each of the three sets of research questions, a scientific technical report, manuscripts for submission to peer-reviewed journals, and presentations to accompany the reports and briefs.

Research Significance

Among the many innovations of the eCampus initiative is extending course offerings traditionally available for rural learners by providing access to courses in other TCSG institutions outside the home campus. This work will answer whether the eCampus initiative has an impact along all stages of students' experiences from enrollment to the transition to employment and can pinpoint the ways in which the initiative makes a difference in students' academic careers. The work will also unpack the effects of supporting components and particular technologies and will indicate the way these contribute to students' success.

Lastly, by applying an equity-centered lens and conducting analyses that are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other characteristics, the project will provide evidence of the way the initiative enhances equity and of places where the initiative can be made more equitable. Findings from these disaggregated analyses will identify differences in learners' characteristics that contribute to unequal outcomes and differences in the way the eCampus initiative, its supports, and the technologies affect learners with these characteristics.

Grant Period of Performance

March 2023 to February 2026