



**2019 Governor's Honors Program
Annual Report**

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Executive Summary

The Georgia Governor’s Honors Program (GHP) is a four-week, residential summer program open to all gifted and talented rising high school juniors and seniors. The program provides students with academic, cultural, and social enrichment and covers all tuition fees and boarding costs. Students apply to attend GHP for one of eleven available majors in academic studies or fine arts and have the opportunity to develop personally and academically by selecting an additional elective outside of their major area.

GHP completed its 56th iteration in 2019 on the campus of Berry College. Students’ classroom experiences were supplemented with residence life and social opportunities outside of scheduled class hours within the bounds of a closed and secure college campus. In 2019, 644 students from 70 Georgia counties attended the program.¹

This report utilizes data collected from 2019 GHP participants—including survey data from students, faculty, and resident assistants, as well as student focus group findings. The results show that GHP’s strengths include its: (a) diverse student population, (b) ability to provide students with a risk-free classroom environment, (c) holistic approach that considers students’ academic, social and emotional success, and (d) long-term impact on faculty and students.

The evaluation findings demonstrate GHP participants’ positive experiences. Key highlights include:

- *Program satisfaction:* Over 97 percent of students were satisfied with their overall GHP experience, and over 93 percent of faculty were satisfied with their instructional experience.
- *Residence life:* Over 94 percent of students reported having a positive residence hall experience.
- *Diversity:* Ninety-three percent of faculty and 92 percent of students reported that diversity was evident at GHP.²
- *Risk-free classroom environment:* Ninety-five percent of students stated that they had supportive instructors and staff at GHP.
- *Holistic approach:* Students were offered free and accessible counseling services throughout the summer. Eighty percent of students who used counseling believed the GHP counselors were helpful to them.
- *Long-term impact:* Ninety-four percent of students reported that they learned new content or skills at GHP that will further their personal development beyond high school. Ninety percent of students reported that they learned new content or skills at GHP that will further their academic development after high school.

¹ The count of Georgia counties includes school districts, city school systems, private schools, state charter schools, and homeschools.

² Each respondent interpreted the definition of diversity individually, however, all respondents were prompted to consider ethnic, gender, geographic and ideological diversity when providing their answer.



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Georgia Governor's Honors Program – A Unique Opportunity

The Georgia Governor's Honors Program (GHP) is a four-week, residential summer program open to all gifted and talented rising high school juniors and seniors. The program provides students with academic, cultural and social enrichment and covers tuition fees and boarding costs. Schools and districts nominate students for GHP in one of eleven major areas:

Academic Majors

- Agricultural Research, Biotechnology & Science
- Communicative Arts
- Engineering
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- World Languages

Fine Arts Majors

- Dance
- Music
- Theater
- Visual Arts

Engineering, science, and world languages have specific concentrations/areas of focus during the program.³

GHP completed its 56th iteration in 2019 on the campus of Berry College, which allowed students to preview the college experience on a secure campus. Sixty-seven percent of GHP students attended the program for an academic major, whereas 33 percent were fine arts majors. In addition to their major, students also choose an elective outside of their major to develop personally and broaden their knowledge and experience. Elective subject areas include a wide array of academic studies, fine arts, and other topics outside of the normal curriculum.

In 2019, schools and districts nominated 3,170 students from 432 public, private, and home schools across Georgia for GHP. Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of the 644 students (20 percent of nominees) from 70 Georgia counties who were selected as finalists to attend the program.

³ A full list of 2019 major areas and corresponding concentrations is available at <https://gosa.georgia.gov/areas-nomination>.



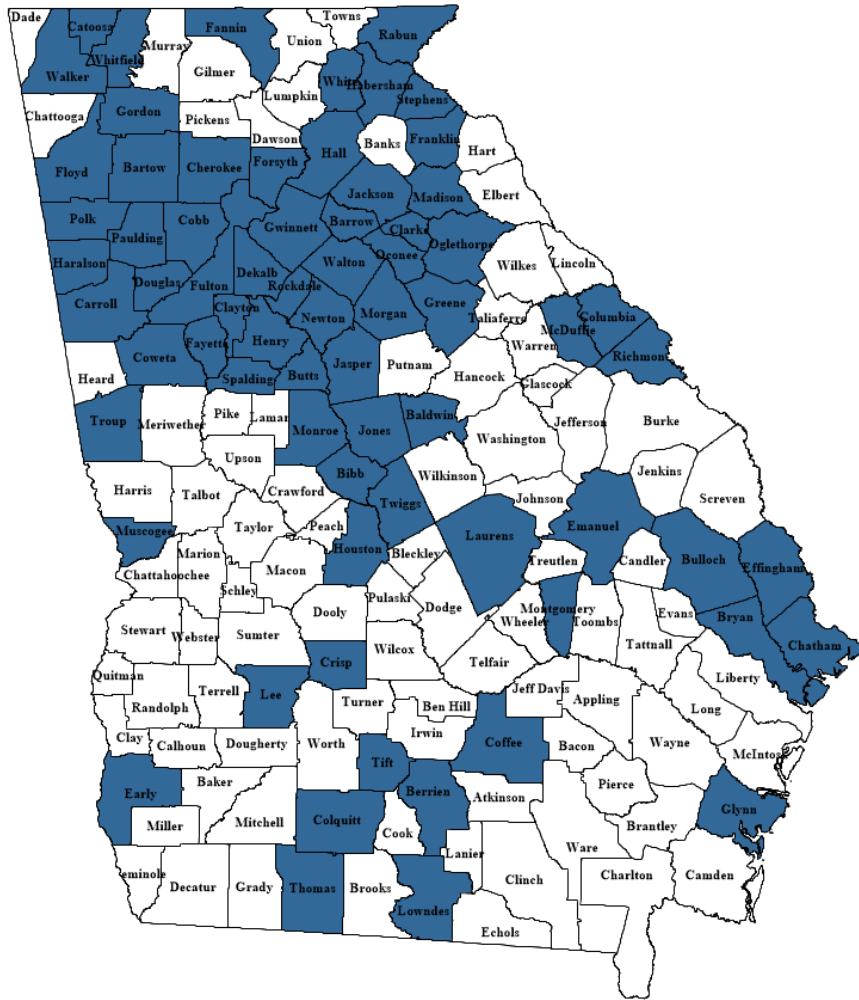


Figure 1: Map of 2019 GHP Finalists.

Evaluation Methodology

GOSA collected data for this evaluation at the end of the four-week program. Students, faculty, and resident assistants responded to an anonymous, optional survey specific to their position. The survey gave respondents the opportunity to answer open response questions and multiple-choice questions using a five-point Likert Scale to determine how much they agreed or disagreed with various categories of statements.⁴ In addition to surveys, GOSA selected participants for one faculty and two student focus groups using a stratified random sample in order to further examine the program’s impact and diversity.

This report utilizes data collected from 2019 GHP participants to discuss the program’s unique characteristics, the GHP experience, and the program’s strengths.

⁴ The response options were Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) or Strongly Agree (5).



This report begins with an overview of the GHP experience, including student and faculty insights on their instructional, residential and social experience at GHP, as well as input from resident assistants. The following section highlights the program's strengths of diversity, a risk-free classroom environment, its holistic approach and its lasting impact on both students and faculty. The report concludes with a discussion of GHP's next steps to increase geographic representation and sustain program longevity.

The GHP Experience

The structure of GHP ensures that students participate in enriching activities throughout their entire GHP experience. Students benefit from courses that allow them to go deeper into an area of study or skill that they are passionate about. Instructors take student interests into account when selecting coursework, which allows both instructors and students to benefit from the course material and classroom environment. Outside of class, students have additional responsibilities that push them to delve into research projects, seminars, rehearsals or structured social activities. Residence life facilitates healthy social interactions between students of different backgrounds and provides a healthy space for social development.

Academic Environment

During their four weeks at GHP, students attend classes in their major six days a week (Monday through Saturday) for four hours a day and classes in their elective five days a week (Monday through Friday) for two hours a day. Specific class schedules for each major and elective may differ, and instructors often take their classes on field trips, modify curriculum to align with student interests and/or hold class in other enriching locations, such as the library or outdoor classrooms.

Overall, both students and instructors positively assessed their course experience at GHP. Approximately 90 percent of students stated that they were intellectually or artistically challenged by their GHP classes, and 93 percent of students noted that GHP instructors pushed them to think more critically than they do during the school year. Meanwhile, 93 percent of instructors reported that they were satisfied with their instructional experience at GHP. Eighty-eight percent of instructors had more than one year of experience teaching at GHP, indicating that the GHP faculty have a commitment to the program, their major, and the students.



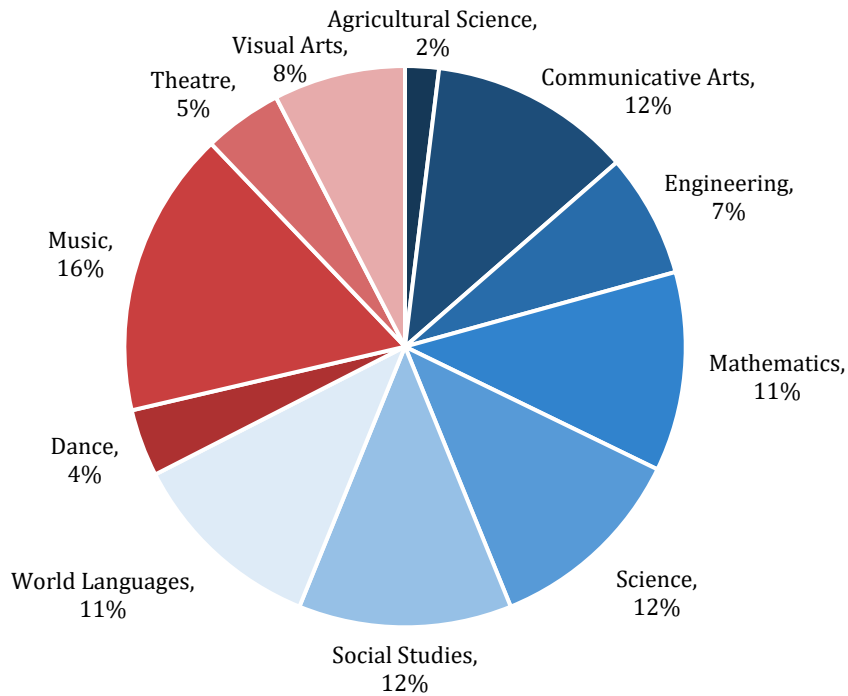


Figure 2: Student Population by Major.

In 2019, GHP included eleven major areas, four in the fine arts and seven in academic studies. Figure 2 presents the percentage of students in each major. Sixty-seven percent of GHP students majored in academic studies, and 33 percent of GHP students majored in fine arts. The music major had the highest percentage (16 percent) of all students, followed closely by communicative arts (12 percent), science (12 percent) and social studies (12 percent). The dance major made up the smallest percentage (4 percent) of all majors, which can be attributed to its performance-based instruction.

Residence Life

All students are required to reside in Berry College on-campus residence halls throughout their time at GHP. Each student is assigned one roommate at the beginning of the program. Whenever possible, students are paired with a roommate from a different major and geographic area to facilitate communication and provide students with the experience of living with someone with varying interests and/or background. Resident assistants also comprise an integral part of the residence experience because they act as sources of information, foster social interaction, and support all students in their designated hall.

Ninety-four percent of students reported having a positive residence hall experience, and focus group responses suggested that students enjoyed interacting with other students they may not have met. Students also had an overwhelmingly positive experience with their resident assistants: 95 percent of students stated that their resident assistants respected the opinions of others, and 96 percent of students



believed that resident assistants fostered a safe and positive living community on their hall.

The majority of faculty members also resided in an apartment-style residence hall on Berry College's campus, though they were not required to do so. Ninety-four percent of faculty who lived on campus felt comfortable in their residence hall, and 96 percent stated that living on campus provided them with more opportunities to build collegial relationships than if they had lived off campus. Focus group data also revealed that living with other faculty members allowed them to grow in their faculty roles, obtain new ideas for classroom instruction, and learn about disciplines outside of their own.

Program Strengths

GHP's longevity allows the program to adjust and adapt according to data-driven feedback and observations from all participants. According to the 2019 evaluation results, GHP's strengths include its diverse population, risk-free classroom environment, holistic approach, and long-term impact for both students and faculty.

Diversity

GHP staff continuously strive to improve the program's diversity and recruitment efforts, but the program's existing diversity is also one of its greatest strengths. A diverse student, faculty, and resident assistant population enriches the overall GHP experience because it exposes participants to alternate viewpoints, varying cultures, and different life experiences.

The majority of respondents positively assessed GHP's diversity and noted that all program attendees have an equal opportunity to learn and express themselves at GHP, no matter their background. Ninety-three percent of faculty and 92 percent of students stated that diversity was evident at GHP. When asked about diversity in the classroom, 85 percent of students reported that GHP classes provided space for students to offer diverse opinions. The open responses and focus group discussions on diversity also yielded interesting insights. The majority of students believed that the experiences and identities of their peers and faculty contributed to their personal growth. When asked what forms of diversity need to be fostered at GHP, students, teachers, and resident assistants discussed geographic diversity as the primary area in need of improvement.⁵

***"I interacted with a diverse array of people during my GHP experience. Diversity allowed for a vast number of different outlooks and experiences between peers. It fostered discussion and the ability to gain new perspectives."
- GHP Student***

⁵ Participants noted that gender diversity in STEM fields and diversity in political ideology were other forms of diversity that can be fostered at GHP.



Risk-Free Classroom Environment

Unlike the typical high school environment, GHP provides students with an opportunity to explore new ideas, attempt new skills and take risks without the stress of receiving a grade that could negatively impact their GPA. Not only do students thrive in their majors, but they also receive the opportunity to try an elective that they otherwise may avoid during the regular school year.

Approximately 90 percent of students reported that their GHP classroom environment was positive. During focus group discussions, students gave examples of how GHP's course structure allowed them to learn for the sake of learning, rather than for a grade. The lack of pressure and the understanding, helpful nature of the faculty/student relationships allowed students to reach new heights in their majors, discover new areas of interest, grow their passions and plan for their future research or college.

In focus group discussions and open responses, faculty indicated that they also benefited from the freedom of the GHP classroom. Many viewed the program as a chance to recharge their passion for teaching before the beginning of a new school year. Others remarked that it served as a learning opportunity allowing them to revisit old textbooks or notes from their university education. Faculty also noted that teaching at GHP later allowed them to bring new techniques and energy into their teaching during the school year.

*“Academic engagement across all disciplines with exceptional staff and students that challenges me beyond my normal high school experience. Love learning from everyone -new things to enhance my work at home and myself as a person.”
- GHP Instructor*

Holistic Approach

GHP's approach to student experiences exposes students to academic, personal, and social development opportunities that may not be available in a traditional classroom setting. Students take a variety of classes within their major area that expands their understanding of the subject area and allows them to delve deeper into subjects/tasks specific to their interests. Outside of the classroom, students can interact with other students, faculty, and resident assistants to enrich their social and personal development.

In the focus group and open response survey questions, many students reflected on GHP's social impact, noting that it allowed them to practice or acquire new social skills, interact with a diverse population that differs from their peers during the regular school year and share and learn new ideas from people with both similar and differing interests. Over 98 percent of students reported both that social interaction with their peers enhanced their GHP experience and that they met peers at GHP who made them feel welcomed. Over 99 percent of students stated that they made new friends at GHP.



GHP also offers students the opportunity to attend easily accessible and free counseling sessions. Over 98 percent of students reported that they were aware of the counselors, and approximately 21 percent of students reported that they used the counseling services at least once during the program. Eighty percent of students who used counseling services stated that the GHP counselors were helpful resources. The open responses were also largely positive, indicating that students appreciated the free service, counselors' availability, and the ability to talk and share with a professional when needed.

“The counselors were always available, attentive and helpful. Never once were my concerns made to seem trivial. The counselors at GHP have convinced me to also seek counseling in my hometown and take my mental health more seriously.”
-GHP Student

Students who attended counseling recommended that GHP counseling services be better advertised and encouraged so students who are not as familiar with what counseling entails will be motivated to attend. Students also noted that including an option for students to make a counseling appointment directly rather than through their Resident Assistant may allow more students to utilize the counseling services.

Long-Term Impact

GHP has a long-term impact that contributes to the students' personal lives and academic careers after the program. Approximately 94 percent of GHP students stated that they learned new content or skills that will further their personal development beyond high school, and 90 percent of students indicated that they learned new content or skills that will matter to their academic development beyond high school. Many students reported that GHP has raised their social confidence and that it helped quell their anxiety about moving away from home or meeting new people during college. Some students also appreciated their experience with a supportive community surrounding a shared passion, which helped to solidify the notion that they are not the only ones who love a given subject.

GHP's long-term impact is also evident in the alumnae status of GHP's faculty and resident assistants. Over 27 percent of faculty members and 72 percent of resident assistants attended GHP in prior years and returned due to their positive experiences in the program.

Next Steps

The 2019 GHP Annual Report offers a high level analysis of the 2019 Governor's Honors Program. This report discusses the academic, residential, and social characteristics of the GHP experience and the program's strengths. GHP constantly strives to improve the experiences of students and faculty to uphold the program's longevity and largely positive feedback from participants.



GHP plans to continue its outreach campaigns to increase the geographic representation of students who are nominated or attend the program.⁶ Specifically, GHP will continue to directly target underrepresented districts and provide school level nominators and students with additional information about the program and which students to nominate.

The GHP Educator Fellowship is an example of a GHP initiative to reach underrepresented districts and will continue with new districts in the 2020 iteration. In its 2019 iteration, GHP established the GHP Educator Fellowship, which invited faculty from districts that had not nominated students in the past three years to experience GHP firsthand.⁷ GHP Educator Fellows internalized the GHP nomination process, observed the qualities of GHP students and learned the expectations of the program. GHP and GOSA will continue to support the GHP Educator Fellows through the 2020 nomination process and will collect data on student nominations to monitor fellowship effectiveness.

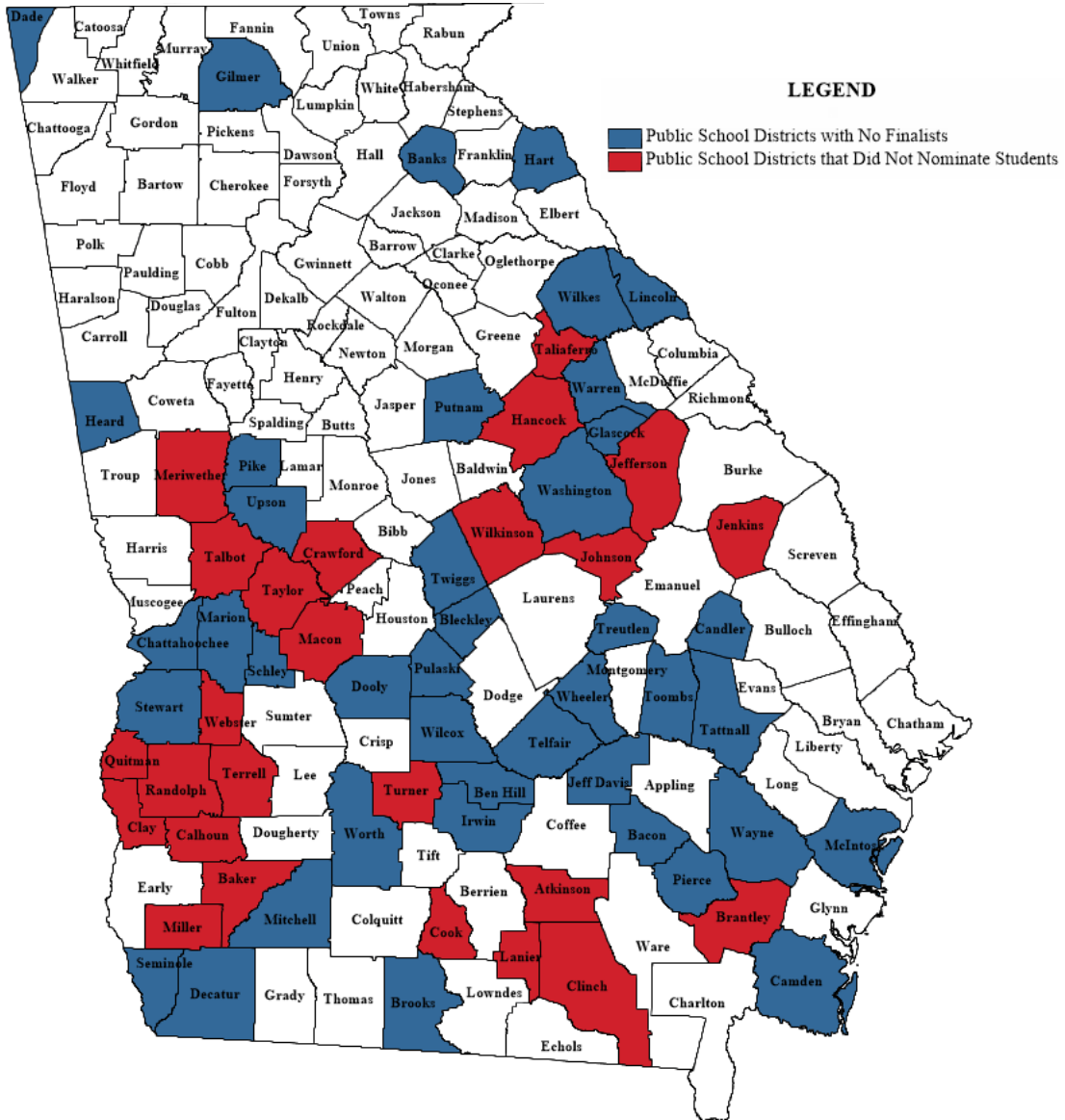
GHP's strengths include its diverse student population, ability to provide students with a risk-free classroom environment, holistic approach that considers students' academic, social, and emotional success, and long-term impact on all participants, including faculty and students. The program will work to continue to sustain these strengths in its future iterations.

⁶ A map of districts without GHP nominees and finalists from 2017-2019 can be found in Appendix A.

⁷ Additional information about the GHP Educator Fellowship is available at <https://gosa.georgia.gov/ghp-educator-fellowship>.



Appendix A: Map of Districts without GHP Nominees and Finalists in 2017-2019



Note: Private schools and state charter schools are not featured on this map.

