

## **Building Quality at the University of Georgia**

### **Michael F. Adams, President**

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Good afternoon, and thank you for the invitation to be with you today. One of the things I enjoy about this job is the opportunity to meet with this and the other civic groups which are vital to the strength of Georgia's communities.

I want to talk about three things today, and I will leave time for questions. I want to talk about students and student quality; I want to talk about research, because I believe UGA's research mission is the least understood of our three-part mission to teach, to conduct research and to serve the public; and I want to talk about some challenges and opportunities UGA faces and how you can help.

We enrolled this year the most academically prepared freshman class in UGA's history, and while we have been able to say that for the past several years, the class of 2004 has pushed the bar very high. This class has an average GPA of 3.72 and an average SAT score of 1237, which tops the previous record of 1215 by 22 points. Within the Honors Program, the average SAT score is 1453 and the average GPA is 3.91, which compares very favorably with Duke or Vanderbilt or Stanford.

That simply does not happen very often. UGA is now in a peer group of universities where scores creep up a couple of points each year – such a jump from one year to the next is an indication that this university is on its way into a new realm.

Those freshmen enter a student body that last year won nine major nationally competitive scholarships and fellowships, honors such as the Marshall, Truman and Goldwater Scholarships and the Mellon Fellowship. Since the spring of 2001, UGA students have won 25 such honors, a record that compares very favorably with any other public university.

What does it mean for UGA to have such a student body? It means first of all that the future of Georgia is in very capable hands. We are proud to continue the UGA tradition of preparing leaders. The difference today is that we must prepare leaders who can function globally as well as locally, because there is increasingly little distinction between Georgia and the world, particularly the world economy.

There are more than 1,600 companies with international roots operating in Georgia. In 2003, Georgia companies exported more than \$16 billion in goods and services.

What happens in Tokyo and Stockholm and London has a direct impact on Georgia, and students at the University of Georgia understand that.

The increasing quality of the student body is paralleled by the increasing quality of the faculty at UGA. Last fall, Eve Troutt Powell, an associate professor in history and specialist in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Egypt, received one of only four MacArthur Foundation "genius grants" to be awarded to faculty at public universities. The \$500,000, no-strings-attached grant will allow Dr. Powell to spend summers with her family in Egypt to continue her research into what is clearly a critical part of the world.

In the spring, we learned that Jeff Bennetzen had been elected to the National Academy of Sciences, the crowning achievement of an American scientist's career. Dr. Bennetzen, who is one of UGA's Eminent Scholars through the Georgia Research Alliance, joins six of his UGA colleagues in the Academy.

I want to talk a little about the research mission at UGA, particularly about why it is important to the state.

Funding for research last year from external agencies, such as the federal government, corporations and private agencies, increased almost seven percent last year to a total of \$159.9 million, and has grown 56.8 percent over the past five years.

Combined with the internal support that the university provides, UGA's research program easily exceeds a quarter-billion dollars.

The economic impact alone of the salaries of the faculty, technicians and research assistants – in Athens, in Tifton, in Griffin, on Tybee Island and all around the state – is a direct benefit to the state economy.

Last year alone, UGA research produced 103 invention disclosures, 70 patent applications with 17 patents issued, 71 licensing agreements and \$28 million in license income.

What is happening in the labs at UGA has real-world application and is part of the land-grant mission of serving the public.

The range of research at UGA is astounding to many people. There is our long-standing commitment to the agricultural industry in this state. The work we have done over the past decade or so in poultry production, peanuts and alternative crops has greatly increased the income potential in those areas.

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In education, we received \$5.3 million from the National Science Foundation as part of a state-wide effort to improve student achievement from pre-school through high school.

Many of you may not be aware of the amount of biomedical and health research that is conducted at UGA, research which ranges from the very inner workings of cells to the behavioral aspects of human health.

Last year a group of faculty in the Complex Carbohydrate Research Center, one of our most successful research programs, received a \$6.7 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to study a class of complex carbohydrates found in molecules on the surface of cells. This research has the potential to lead to treatments for cancer and Parkinson's.

Other researchers have received funding to develop intervention programs for rural African-American families. We have opened a Center for Drug Discovery in the College of Pharmacy. A researcher in the School of Social Work is developing a virtual reality program to help those who want to quit smoking. We have a number of people working on the critical issue of obesity, particularly childhood obesity. There is work on osteoporosis, on stroke therapy, on exercise and fitness, on the amino acids that could help fight AIDS and leukemia, and the list goes on and on across the range of human health.

Research funding is an extremely competitive area. Faculty proposals are evaluated by their peers, and financial awards are based on the quality of the proposal and the quality of the institution. The fact that UGA researchers are receiving more and more funding each year speaks to the quality of the proposals, the work of the faculty and, frankly, the reputation of the institution itself.

The research mission at UGA is vibrant, it is vital and it is relevant to the lives of Georgians.

Finally, I want to talk to you about some of the challenges and opportunities that we face at UGA.

These are difficult times for public agencies in Georgia. All of you are aware that the state has been cutting its budget for the past 30 months or so. At UGA, we are down more than \$75 million from the FY02 base budget. And there may be \$16 million in additional cuts this year.

The total budget at UGA this year is about \$1.2 billion; the state provides about 34 percent of that. The

rest comes from other sources, such as tuition (12-13 percent), external funding for research, auxiliary enterprises such as parking, housing and dining, and other smaller revenue streams.

The state portion of the UGA budget, however, is the primary operating budget – it's salaries and travel and office supplies and telephones. That budget has been cut 19 percent – you can imagine the impact such a cut has had on the daily life of the university.

But in this time when state budgets are pinched and state agencies are being asked to cut back, I would submit that funding for higher education is truly an investment which pays off every time. In fact, the state's \$400 million investment this year will pay off almost 1,300 percent in lifetime earnings of the students we graduate, who will accumulate more than \$5 billion in additional earnings over their lifetimes.

University system graduates earn on average \$14,000 per year more than those with only a high school diploma, and the lifetime impact of a college degree is almost \$1 million in added income. Above and beyond the value of an education in and of itself, educated people earn more money, spend more money, buy more houses and cars, and generally contribute more to the revenue stream – and to society as a whole through civic involvement, volunteering and philanthropy.

I do not doubt that the state budget is facing tough times. I would argue, though, that it is in the difficult times that choices carry even more weight. If we face further cuts at UGA, the quality that this state has come to expect from its flagship institution will be damaged.

One of the greatest challenges we face in this state is extending the opportunity that a college degree offers to more of this state's population. More of Georgia's families must take education as seriously as most of us in this room do, so that Georgia's children will grow up with academics as a priority and college as an expectation.

We've also got to talk about curriculum in this state.

Let me tell you what I tell parents whose children are considering UGA: The decision to enroll at the University of Georgia is best made in the eighth grade, when a student and his or her parents should map out the most rigorous curriculum available in high school. That curriculum should include four years of English, four years of math, at least three years of science and at least two years of social science such as economics or

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American history. If there are Advanced Placement courses available, take them. If you can take a language, take two consecutive years of the same language.

Standardized test scores follow curriculum. Challenge yourself with a rigorous curriculum.

I will close with a request for your support for this state's flagship university.

Public universities are dependent on private support for the margin of excellence. Private support, from alumni, from corporations, from foundations or from those who are simply friends of the university, is what makes the difference between good public universities and great public universities.

Last year, we set another record for private giving with \$77.8 million in gifts and pledges and more than 55,000 donors, which is very good news. But compare that to some of our peer institutions: In 2003, the University of Virginia received \$261 million; UNC, \$163 million; UCLA, \$288 million; Purdue, \$311 million; and the University of Illinois, \$168 million.

UGA ranks 19<sup>th</sup> this year in *U.S. News*; Virginia is tied for second; UNC is fifth; UCLA is fourth; Illinois is ninth. Only Purdue is ranked lower than UGA at 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Is there a direct connection? I don't know. *U.S. News* analyzes multiple factors in its rankings, with no one factor dominating the equation. Is there a corollary? Absolutely. Those institutions that have the luxury of private support are able to target those resources to areas that make them great, and are not hurt as much by the cycles of state budgets.

We have made the most of the resources on hand. In the future, to continue UGA's rise into the upper echelon of American higher education, we will have to generate greater levels of private support, and I hope we can count on those of you who love the University of Georgia.

I want to leave a few minutes for questions, but let me recap quickly: Quality is our selling point at UGA. Student quality is at an all-time high. Research funding is at an all-time high. Private support is at an all-time high. And great universities create the resources they need to carry out their missions.