

**Convocation 2004**  
**4 p.m. Sunday, August 22, 2004**  
**Stegeman Coliseum**

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You have heard a lot already today about many of the people who have a role in the daily operation of this complex university. In many ways, the University of Georgia functions like a city of 50,000 people, and it takes a number of dedicated people to keep the campus functioning and to allow us to carry out our mission. They have my deepest gratitude.

For the next few minutes, however, I want to talk about you, and what it means for you to be here today.

First, what does it mean to be “here” in higher education? Second, what does it mean to be “here” at the University of Georgia. And finally, what does it mean to be “here” at Convocation?

What does it mean for you to be part of the American higher education community?

For one thing, it means that if you apply and broaden yourself, you will leave here equipped for success in the global economy – career success, financial success, material success, social success. And those types of success are important.

But my experience with many of your predecessors leads me to believe that such success is not the only reason you are here. You are here because you want to be an educated person.

I have recently asked the provost to coordinate a faculty committee to review UGA’s general education requirement, something which has not been done in more than a decade. UGA currently expects of graduates that they leave here with the following proficiencies: an understanding of arts and literature; computer literacy; an understanding of contemporary culture; language and communication skills; quantitative literacy; scientific literacy; social science literacy; and environmental literacy.

That’s an exhaustive list, but what it describes at its core is a true liberal arts education. Not liberal in the political sense, but liberal in the classic sense of an education that is liberating – an education that frees you to pursue all that your life holds for you. It is an education that is broad in scope and which prepares you for the deeper study of your chosen area of emphasis.

A liberal education prepares you for a career and, more importantly, for life.

A good liberal education enables you to think critically, so that as you are confronted with the waves of information available to you in this Information Age, you will be able to process and analyze that data to determine what has value and what does not.

A liberal education prepares you to speak articulately, so that you can communicate effectively with your colleagues, your friends and your family.

A liberal education prepares you to write thoughtfully, so that what you put on paper – or in an e-mail – communicates what you intend to communicate.

A liberal education causes you to respect and analyze opposing viewpoints.

It is an education which prepares citizens for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Samuel Johnson, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century dictionary writer and scholar, said, “The supreme end of education is expert discernment in all things – the power to tell the good from the bad, the genuine from the counterfeit, and to prefer the good and the genuine to the bad and the counterfeit.”

Notice that Dr. Johnson did not say that the end of education is a college degree. He did not say it is expertise in your chosen area of study. Nor did he say that the end of education is getting a job – although I’m sure your parents are hopeful that you will.

Dr. Johnson spoke of education in much broader terms. More than 200 years before the phrase was coined, he was talking about “lifelong learners.” The role of higher education is to produce lifelong learners, people who are prepared for the opportunities and challenges that life holds for them, people who are productive and contribute to society, people who make their communities better places.

You are now a part of the higher education community, and as individuals seeking the kind of education Dr. Johnson described, you are partners with us in the goal of producing educated citizens. Those of us on the platform and in the faculty have dedicated our lives to the cause that convocation embodies, and we welcome you.

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Second, what does it mean for you to be at the University of Georgia?

It means that you are a very good student, and capable of benefitting from the many opportunities UGA will offer you. More than 13,000 students told us last year that they wanted to be sitting where you are sitting today – essentially, for every one of you who enrolled at UGA, there were two more who wanted to be here.

You are the latest in a series of increasingly strong classes at UGA, and you are part of a trend of increasing academic quality at this university. That trend has also helped attract to the University of Georgia a faculty that is the equal of any in this country.

In many ways, and for very good reasons that benefit this state greatly, this is a very different university than it was when most of you were born about 18 years ago.

We have worked hard over the past few years to create a learning environment that is equal to your credentials.

The Student Learning Center is perhaps the centerpiece of that learning environment, and I am certain that you will spend many hours there in class, studying with friends, drinking coffee, talking with friends and, of course, solving the university's and the world's problems.

Every time I am in that building it is alive with academic activity. I have rarely seen a facility's function so closely match the aspirations of the design as has happened in the SLC.

We have also worked to improve and expand the on-campus housing options. Last year, we renovated Myers Hall and opened just last week the East Campus Village, with its nearby dining commons.

Living on campus improves GPAs, and we have the statistics to show that. But equally important is the fact that having more people on campus throughout the day and night is critical to the life of an academic community.

For the past five years, *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked UGA as one of America's best public universities, putting us in the same grouping with North Carolina and Virginia and Michigan and Berkeley. Now, rankings come and rankings go, but UGA's

consistently high ranking is, I believe, a tribute to doing things right, a commitment that is shared by the faculty and the administration as well as your peers in the student body.

I would like for you to do two things while you're at UGA. First, I'd like for you to take advantage of the opportunities that being a student at a research university affords. Visit the Georgia Museum of Art, or stroll the Botanical Garden, or attend a concert in Hodgson Hall.

This year's schedule includes performances by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Philadanco, the Manhattan Rhythm Kings, the St. Lawrence String Quartet and the Atlanta Ballet, as well as performances of *Porgy and Bess* and *Aida*. Student tickets are half-price – a bargain that you won't find when you leave this place.

Go hear some of the dozens of lecturers who come to campus every year. Last year, this campus hosted the 2002 Nobel laureate in economics, Vernon Smith; Hodding Carter, president of the Knight Foundation; journalist and author Daniel Levitas; former Senator Sam Nunn, who participated in the Russell Symposium discussion on weapons of mass destruction; poet Clayton Eshelman; CNN medical reporter Sanjay Gupta; and Robert O'Meally, the director of the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University. Find an hour one afternoon to listen to some of the great minds that come to this campus.

Improve your language skills. Spend a semester abroad. Both of these experiences will prepare you for the global economy that is the new reality for college graduates in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The reality is that people who have the language skills and have familiarized themselves with the world beyond the borders of this country are more desirable employees and, I believe, better people.

Stretch yourself intellectually by taking a course outside your major. Join a campus organization. Lead a club.

You will never again have the range of opportunities that you will have for the next four years – don't look back in a decade and wish that you had seized this opportunity.

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Second, find a way to serve this community. A UGA education is a privilege, and one of the ways that you can honor that privilege is by volunteering. As little as an hour a week can make a significant difference in the life of a child or a senior citizen or a fellow student. Make that commitment early in your time at UGA, and the overall experience will be richer for it.

Finally, what does it mean for you to be here at Convocation?

Convocations have a centuries-long tradition, and trace their roots to meetings of Anglican church leaders as far back as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The word literally means “to call together,” and one definition reads that convocation is “a group of people formally assembled for a special purpose.”

So we are assembled here today for a special purpose. What is that purpose? As you heard earlier, Gretchen D’Huyvetter, a UGA student, proposed an academic ceremony that would unite the university community at the beginning of the fall semester.

Gretchen recognized that ceremonies such as this one are an important component of academic life. They continue the traditions on which universities were founded, and they connect those of us in the modern university with our predecessors of years past.

The academic robes, called regalia, that I and others here today are wearing represent the universities where we earned our degrees and the disciplines in which we majored. The mace, which was carried by the university marshal, Margaret Robinson, at the head of the processional signifies the authority of the university.

The mace is always carried by a member of the faculty, the real backbone of this place.

The flags behind the stage represent the colleges and schools of the University of Georgia and trace their colors and designs to the origins of those disciplines.

There is more detailed information about these traditions in your program, but I hope you are beginning to understand that our presence here today connects all of us to the great traditions of higher education.

I congratulate you for being here today, for, as Gretchen did, you have recognized that ceremonies such as this are an important part of being a member of an academic community. And I congratulate you for being part of the higher education community, for the future of this state and this nation depends upon people who have prepared themselves for the opportunities and challenges to come.

But most of all, I congratulate you for being at the University of Georgia, because that means that you are one of America’s best students. It also means the you are coming to a place still on the rise.

We’ve just finished our best fundraising year ever, at \$77.8 million; our best research year ever at \$159.9 million; and, on paper, at least, you are the best freshman class ever to enroll at the University of Georgia.

We’re counting on you to help take us to the next level of accomplishment. I believe that you will.

Thank you.