

2005 State of the University Address

The Chapel • January 15, 2005

Good afternoon, and thank you for being here.

A year ago it was doubtful that the following statement would be true: Despite budget cuts, the state of the University of Georgia is actually stronger than it was one year ago. But, indeed, I believe that it is.

We have been forced by the circumstances of the state budget to make some difficult choices. Chief among those is the slowdown in hiring which today leaves this campus with some 900 jobs unfilled and requires almost everyone to work more, to work harder and to work longer. I am grateful for the dedication that you all have shown. The uniting power of being a part of the University of Georgia is clearly greater than anything which seeks to divide or hinder us.

Just as we did during the strategic planning process of 2000–2001, we have looked carefully at the primary missions of this institution and at the resources available to us, and made decisions based on those priorities. What should not go unnoticed, however, despite the difficulties on the state budget side, are the many ways in which an entrepreneurial spirit has grown on this campus, resulting in additional revenue streams that help supplement the state portion of our budget.

In the face of 36 months of budget reductions, this university has continued to excel in all areas. Three general statements sum up the successes of last year: UGA set a new record for private giving with \$77.8 million and more than 53,000 individual donors. We set a new record for external research funding with almost \$160 million in contracts and grants. And we enrolled the most academically competitive class in UGA's history.

The following are just a few examples of UGA's specific successes in the past year:

- Nine UGA students won major national scholarships, including the Marshall, the Truman, the Goldwater, the Gates-Cambridge and the Mellon, bringing the total since 2001 to 26. The quality of the UGA student body continues to rise.
- We enrolled the most diverse freshman class in UGA history, and now have the most diverse overall student body ever.
- The Student Learning Center is well into its second year of operation, and is now truly the signature academic building on campus, filled at all hours with students, faculty and staff engaged in the full range of academic activity.
- Dr. Jeffrey Bennetzen, a Georgia Research Alliance professor of molecular genetics, was elected to the National Academy of Sciences, joining six of his UGA colleagues in that elite body. One of his Academy colleagues, Dr. Susan Wessler, was elected to a position as councilor in the Academy this year as well.
- UGA alumnus Joel Wooten succeeded another alum, Governor Joe Frank Harris, as chair of the University System Board of Regents.
- East Campus Village and the East Village Commons opened at the start of the academic year, and have increased the energy level of not only that part of campus, but the entire campus. Great academic communities need students to learn and live on campus.

- The Coverdell Center for Biomedical and Health Sciences is under construction and will house the Biomedical and Health Sciences Institute, the core of UGA's burgeoning life sciences research program.
- Other projects completed in 2004 include phases IV and V of the marine sciences renovation, phase III of D.W. Brooks Mall, a new women's softball stadium, the northwest precinct parking deck and expansion of the South Campus deck, a microgin in Tifton and renewed work on the Animal Health Research Center on this campus.
- We broke ground for the new home of the Lamar Dodd School of Art, a \$36 million facility that is very much needed. The new home of the Complex Carbohydrate Research Center was dedicated and continues to be a source of significant findings and funding.
- UGA was named one of America's top 10 "Connected Campuses," based on such factors as the ratio of computers to students, the quality of the campus-wide network, the presence of a wireless network and other factors that speak to the availability of the latest information technology on campus. This is an area where this campus was clearly deficient only five years ago.
- We are now eighth in the nation in the number of students having a residential study-abroad experience.
- Garnett Stokes was named dean of the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, following the retirement of Wyatt Anderson. Rebecca White was named dean of the School of Law. Nancy Kropf is serving as interim dean of the School of Social Work. With College of Family and Consumer Sciences Dean Sharon Nickols and Graduate School Dean Maureen Grasso, UGA now has five excellent female deans.
- Damon Evans became the new director of athletics, a groundbreaking moment for the Southeastern Conference.
- We produced over 954,000 academic credits and will soon cross the million-credit threshold annually. That UGA recorded a third consecutive increase in credit-hour production with a reduced complement of faculty is a tribute to the dedication and hard work of the teaching faculty.

I have looked for another public institution in America where fundraising was up substantially, research funding was up substantially and student board scores rose by more than 20 points, and I cannot find one. The University of Georgia stands today in rare company.

The only explanation for what has happened here is good people working very hard. I am deeply indebted to each of you and regret very much that because of the state financial situation, we have been unable to give adequate salary increases.

But today's question is, "What must we do now to move this university to the next level?"

First, we must continue to do more for ourselves. While the trend line in private giving is very good, and the annual total has doubled over the past decade, UGA lags well behind institutions such as the University of Virginia, UNC, UCLA, Purdue and the University of Illinois.

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Private giving must be increased, to at least \$100 million per year. We need to continue to enhance research productivity and federal funding for both personnel and facilities. Even in these lean times, we are moving ahead with plans for the new College of Public Health, because it fits with much of what UGA is already doing in that area, presents opportunities for research funding that have been unavailable to us and can help meet a critical need in this state. Let us never forget the land-grant mission to serve the people of this state.

Second, we cannot continue to be the nation's best educational bargain and maintain the quality that has developed here. I want UGA to continue to be a good buy and to continue to provide value for the cost, but that equation has two parts. It is not simply a matter of the cost, but is also a matter of the quality that a student receives for the cost he or she pays. A poor education at a great price is worthless. We must strike a balance between maintaining quality and maintaining access, the hallmark of a "people's university."

The fact that UGA hovers near the top of the annual "Great Schools at Great Prices" lists, while perhaps good for students in the short run, is not good for the quality of this institution in the long run. According to a College Board study released last fall, tuition at UGA is \$860 less this year than the average of four-year colleges and universities in America. There is no such thing as cheap excellence. The people of this state—and the students they send us—deserve nothing less than excellence.

We take pride, and rightly so, in the five consecutive years that this university has been ranked by U.S. News as one of America's top 20 public universities. Yet if state support continues to decline, and tuition is suppressed for artificial reasons without regard to the quality of this institution, our days among the top 20 may be numbered.

But a drop out of the top 20 would signal something far more ominous than the loss of a brag point in a pamphlet. Such a drop would be a symptom of the erosion of one of this state's greatest resources—the University System of Georgia. For if the flagship institution of this state were to slip from the top 20, it would be the result of accumulated budget cuts which, despite our best efforts to hold the line, have taken their toll on the quality that moved us into the top 20 five years ago.

I am grateful that the regents were able to avoid imposing a mid-year tuition increase on the students of this university. Such a move would no doubt have been a hardship on some and, I believe, is a precedent to be avoided. But make no mistake—tuition is a source of revenue that can help stave off the impact of budget cuts. The 5 percent increase in tuition for this academic year is putting 70 faculty in undergraduate classrooms, and I pledge today that at least half of any tuition increase for the upcoming academic year will be dedicated to putting faculty into undergraduate classrooms as well.

There must be a significant differential tuition rate for the four research universities in Georgia. The very nature of the mission we are charged to carry out makes what we do more costly than institutions in the University System which do not have the defined responsibilities to conduct research and perform public service and outreach. Students at UGA benefit greatly from their experience on the campus of a research university, and in order to maintain the quality of that experience, we need the additional revenue of a tuition scale more closely aligned with the breadth of offerings and opportunities here.

The old saw holds true—you get what you pay for.

I need to speak directly to the faculty for a moment. The public scrutiny of the educational delivery process at UGA has been greater in light of the budget cuts and, in my opinion, will be greater still in the months to come. The central administration has talked at length with legislators, with the media and with the general public about the impact of budget cuts on the quality of education at UGA, and much has been written and said about what we can and cannot do, what we should or should not do, and whether we can or cannot absorb additional cuts to the state portion of our budget.

Now more than ever you must help us make sure that UGA's sponsoring public understands the totality of your work as a member of the faculty at the University of Georgia. Help them understand that in addition to your time in the classroom, you do research, provide public service, serve on committees and task forces, advise students, grade papers and fulfill a myriad of other tasks. Talk to your representatives and senators in the General Assembly. Tell them what you do during an average day. Be diligent about how you spend your time and help the public understand that the job of a faculty member at a top-20 public university is multifaceted, challenging, demanding and rewarding—and that state support over the past 15 years or so has helped UGA attain that ranking. We are proud to be Georgians and we want Georgians to be proud of us, our work and our quality.

Further, as I have mentioned, I want the faculty to join me in making sure that the rigor of the UGA curriculum and academic process has kept up with the increased quality of the student body over the past several years. As you know, the provost's office has tasked a committee to undertake a review of the core curriculum, and I want to thank Provost Mace, Vice Provost Jere Morehead, Vice President for Instruction Del Dunn and the members of the faculty who are serving on that committee for the hard work they have already done.

The general education requirements at UGA have not been reviewed in more than a decade. During that same time, the academic credentials of the student body have risen dramatically, as has the academic reputation of the university.

But there were three troubling indicators in the past 18 months or so that, taken together, indicate the need for some classroom soul-searching. The results of UGA's first participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement showed, among some very positive things, that UGA students spend less time preparing for class and writing than their counterparts at similar institutions.

In response, Dr. Dunn has organized a year-long "Campus Conversation about Teaching and Learning," inviting students and faculty to talk about expectations, about writing and about service-learning opportunities. This conversation is a good way to begin to address the issue of rigor and I encourage you to take part.

Once the faculty decides what the new core curriculum ought to be at the University of Georgia, I will work with the vice president for instruction and the provost to apply considerable resources to those courses. The budget cuts have most impacted faculty and education at the undergraduate instructional level, and I am committed to addressing that concern. We have learned during the past few years that the best stewardship of our funds is to apply them to those areas that we deem most critical, and there

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is no area more critical than the fundamental definition of a UGA-educated person.

A second, less-scientific but equally disturbing report from The Princeton Review seems to support what the NSSE found. The Review, which is not affiliated with Princeton University, surveys students at about 300 colleges and universities nationwide on a variety of topics. Last year's edition placed UGA at number eight on the party schools list and number two on the list of schools whose students "almost never study."

We must take this and, indeed, all lists and rankings with a grain of salt, but I am concerned that at least some UGA students feel that the academic requirements of earning a degree here do not require much time outside the classroom. Just as our reputation as an academic institution is beginning to climb to the heights we have long hoped to reach, there is too much being said about the party environment and the lack of academic engagement to dismiss it out of hand.

Third, the recent episode at the Lambda Chi house is of great concern to me, not only because a student was seriously burned, but also because some group had nothing academically pressing enough to do at 3 a.m. on a Tuesday morning to prohibit them from conducting a non-academic ceremony and playing drinking games.

Now, I am a realist about what happens on college campuses on the weekends, and I generally believe that students blowing off a little steam after a hard week can be beneficial if kept within reason. But I am not a fan, and do not intend to become one, of a place with multiple weeknight party invitations, alcohol use during the school week and Friday morning absences from class. If there is a growing belief here that Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday nights are no different than Friday night, then we have a problem, and we need to address it.

These two recent reports, and this additional fraternity incident, disparate as their methods and actions may be, create enough concerns that cause me to believe action is needed. So what do we do in response to these findings?

First, we must focus hiring for the next year or two on targeted undergraduate faculty positions where we can reduce class sizes and raise the intellectual rigor of lower-division courses. The provost has recently released an additional 20 faculty lines for that very purpose.

Second, we must ensure that the first two years of study here have the same level of academic rigor that we require in upper-division courses and that the highly qualified students who come to this place learn to think critically and to write thoughtfully with an elevated use of the king's English.

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, liberal in the classic sense of an education that is liberating—an education that frees one to pursue all that life holds. It is an education that is broad in scope and which prepares a student for the deeper study of his or her chosen area of emphasis. A liberal education prepares students for a career and, more importantly, for life. A liberal education makes a person

more nimble in adjusting to life as occupations and trends come and go. A liberally educated person is not simply "trained." He or she is educated, and prepared for a lifetime of learning.

As Carol Geary Schneider said when she delivered the McBee Lecture last fall, liberal education is "a philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates the mind, cultivates intellectual judgement and fosters ethical and social responsibility."

It is an education which prepares citizens for life in a rapidly changing 21st century.

Third, UGA students ought to write more, and one of the areas that Dr. Dunn's group is addressing is the need for more writing in more classes. Writing must not be confined to Park Hall. It is important, of course, to write in English classes, but it is also important to write in history and biology and agriculture and business and international affairs. Writing is the synthesizing exercise of an educated mind, and UGA students must leave here able to write well regardless of the degrees they have earned.

Fourth, I would like to see the freshman seminar program enhanced and strengthened. Last semester, there were almost 90 seminars offered on a range of topics. The program has been well received by both students and faculty, and I have very much enjoyed teaching a seminar every other year. I would like the faculty to consider increasing the credit for the seminars from one hour to two or three hours, and to accompany that increase with a significant writing component in each seminar. I would also like for us to consider a common unit of the freshman seminar program that would help students understand the history of this university and this state, as well as providing some guidance on time management in college.

Associate Dean Hugh Ruppensburg is due our appreciation for his work in building the freshman seminar program, as are all the faculty who have taught seminars. If you have not taught one, I ask that you consider doing so—it will be a rewarding experience.

Fifth, I want to see yet more students participating in residential study-abroad programs. In addition to the academic and cultural benefits I have spoken about often, study-abroad experiences help students grow and mature more quickly, becoming better students and citizens of the world. There ought to be more students in semester-abroad programs in their second year, not third, and we need curriculum at those sites that will make such opportunities possible.

Sixth, there must be a greater focus here on service learning, not just as an exercise for a class, but as the beginning of a lifetime of service. UGA people need to give back even more to the society that supports them.

Service learning involves applying academic skills to address or solve real-life needs or problems in the community.

There are many faculty who have long engaged their students in service learning through class projects that put what students learn in the classroom to work in the "real world." Under the leadership of Art Dunning, the vice president for public service and outreach, UGA is becoming more focused on what service learning is and how it can enhance the learning environment. During this academic year, we are piloting a learning communities project, in which 80 students in Creswell Hall live and study together, with their service-learning activities

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focused around such areas as science, social science, international affairs and education.

There is a core group of more than 50 UGA faculty currently discussing how service can best be integrated into the academic experiences of our students, and the work of this group is laying the foundation for future curricular development. Service learning, which will be the focus of this month's annual Public Service and Outreach Conference, moves beyond volunteerism to incorporate service into the academic setting. Both service learning and volunteerism can help strengthen this institution in the years ahead.

There is a long history of student volunteerism on this campus, and I am pleased to see that it continues into the 21st century. UGA is a member of Campus Compact, a national coalition of more than 900 colleges and universities committed to the civic purposes of higher education. Student Affairs has reorganized the volunteer office formerly known as Communiversity. Now called Volunteer UGA, it seeks to connect UGA students with volunteer opportunities in the Athens-Clarke community. There are currently nine programs, ranging from Adopt-a-Grandparent to Big Brother/Big Sister to Tutoring Our Tomorrows. The Clarke County Mentor Program, which UGA helps sponsor, provides opportunities for UGA students, faculty and staff to develop a relationship with a young person in this community.

It is incumbent upon us as a university and as individuals to return to this community some of what we have been given, and public service through Volunteer UGA is an excellent way to do that.

This is the model for the future—to be as institutionally intentional about service as we have been about learning and research, and to meld the two activities into one which complements and strengthens both.

Finally, I was heartened by a recent discussion at University Council about the need for a focus on academic rigor and a recognition that the quality of the UGA curriculum must keep pace with the quality of the UGA

student. I know that Student Government Association President Adam Sparks is right when he notes that many students are up late studying at the Student Learning Center and that many good things are happening here academically. I now want to extend this conversation to every faculty member and every academic department head. I hope you will ask, with particular emphasis on undergraduate requirements, whether or not you

have ratcheted up the quality of the curriculum and the reading and writing requirements consistent with the greatly enhanced quality of the UGA student body. I want to see every department hold a faculty meeting to ask questions about academic rigor.

I truly believe that in the next five to 10 years the University of Georgia has the capacity to become a premier American university mentioned in the same sentence with Berkeley and Michigan and Virginia and North Carolina.

But before we make these claims, we yet have work to do: better student-teacher ratios, better classroom rigor, better writing and speaking, better use of time throughout the week. We make these efforts to strengthen the quality and rigor of the curriculum not because of national surveys, but because we have a signal responsibility to the people of this state to do no less.

Let us not lose sight of the importance of our work here. More than any other institution or organization in this state, the University of Georgia bears the responsibility of preparing the next generation of leaders that will help determine Georgia's place in the world.

We have come a long way. We have made great progress. We are truly an institution of national stature. But it is now time to take this institution to the next level—with a greatly strengthened curriculum, an improved intellectual climate and a greater commitment to service.

It is time for UGA to move from being very good to being truly great. With your continued help and support, I know we can get there.

Thank you.