

State of the University Address

Consider this:

- For the second year in a row, *Forbes Magazine* named UNG as one of the nation's top higher education institutions in its annual "America's Top Colleges" ranking, and we are ranked third among only five public universities in Georgia to be included on the list;

While one-third of the USG institutions are experiencing declining enrollment, our enrollment growth and credit hours have steadily increased. We will continue to manage our growth while also serving the needs of our region;

- Indicators are that our retention rate will be up again this year, and our graduation rate remains among the highest in the system. We have conferred some 3,000 degrees in the past year, and I am confident these students are regionally and globally competitive and will enhance the communities they serve. Our graduation rate is one of the most significant measures of our success;
- Our incoming freshmen – in both associate and bachelor's programs – remain among the most competitive in the University System, and our incoming baccalaureate students consistently have a high school GPA above 3.4 and an SAT average above 1100;
- Our cadets continue to excel and they outpaced the other senior

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the first time ever, and our baseball team made it to the college World Series. It should be noted that the first award recognized service, the second recognized academic and athletic achievements, and the third recognized individual team performance. Our athletes are very well-rounded;

- Our recent graduates in teacher education, physical therapy and clinical mental health counseling had a 100% pass rate on their required licensure examinations.
- Nine students won Fulbright awards, which will likely place us among the top-producing universities in the nation this year.

This just scratches the surface of the recent accomplishments that enhance UNG's national reputation as a leadership institution, and I think we can all agree... we are doing really well!

These recognitions have not been a goal for us but, rather, a byproduct of our work. Most importantly, our success has been the result of incredible teamwork – from recruitment through graduation and beyond – we teach, mentor, coach, and inspire the best in our students. We also support and inspire one another.

Accomplishments like this do not just happen; they happen because things are being done consistently well and with heart. Thank you for a job well done!

However, at UNG, as at other universities around the country, we have real challenges. These

we turning out educated people in every sense of the word? We must reinforce our values of leadership, integrity, and character in addition to high academic standards and critical-thinking skills in a changing world.

Our success begins and ends with our students. At UNG, we embrace our students, whatever their backgrounds. Perhaps they are honors students and among the best and the brightest. Sometimes, they are students who need more personal attention. Whatever their beginning, UNG helps them become learners and leaders so they can fulfill their unique potential.

Consider the story of Sonia Alcantar, who is the first member of her family to attend college, was an outstanding biology major, and is now on the pathway to become a doctor. A scholarship recipient and member of our Honors Program, Sonia shadowed a physician for an entire year, participated in our undergraduate research program, and recently earned a prestigious internship with the Department of Energy.

Sonia graduated this year and will soon be applying to medical school. Without a doubt, her UNG experiences have put her on a path for success and her life has been changed. Additionally, she has set a strong example for her younger siblings, who are now following in her footsteps.

There are many, many other remarkable student achievements, and I want to add a footnote about our Fulbright winners.

This year 10 of the 14 UNG students who applied for the Fulbright program were selected as semifinalists and nine of those were selected as finalists.

When I launched a focused effort to prepare students for nationally-competitive scholarships in 2013, I had hopes that some of our students would have a chance to participate in some of these incredible opportunities. Perhaps, I did not think big enough! Since then, our students have received scholarships and awards valued at more than \$800,000, including internships with the National Institutes of Health and Gilman, Boren, and Jack Kent Cooke Scholarships.

This success would not have been possible without the leadership of Anastasia Lin, Assistant Dean of Student Research and Scholarship, and Billy Wells, Senior Vice President for Leadership and Global Engagement. Additionally, our faculty and staff have stepped up in remarkable ways to coach and advise students.

I am hopeful that even more of our students will receive these life-changing scholarships and awards.

I would like to thank all of our faculty and staff for the extraordinary work you do to inspire and mentor our students. You nurture a student-focused learning and teaching-centered culture that goes -

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Each month our Staff Council recognizes staff contributions through the Staff Member of the Month program. If you were recognized as a Staff Member of the Month this past year, please stand so that we can thank you.

The North Star Award recognizes Staff who embody the university's standards for excellence, efficiency, and outstanding customer service. If you were recognized with a North Star Award this past year, please stand so that we can thank you.

The Presidential Excellence Award honors staff from various categories who have demonstrated excellence through outstanding performance in accordance with the strategic goals of the university. Last year's awardees:

- Gail Barksdale from learning support
- Tony Fritchle from the Center for Global Engagement
- Valerie Fambrough, from the Department of Biology
- Charles Wood, from Grants & Contracts Administration
- Rob Peerson and Jeff Boatfield, both from Facilities

If you are with us today, please stand so that we may congratulate you.

Let's talk about where we are headed. Each of our campuses is evolving differently and we must determine the appropriate programs and services for them.

For example, Blue Ridge is still a work in progress and the picture is yet to be painted. Since it opened in fall 2014, the campus has grown from 21 students to about 140 this year.

This campus will be a game-changer in our ability to serve that portion of

I am happy to report that the capital projects budget proposal approved by the Board of Regents last week includes \$3 million for planning and design

Through equity adjustments and merit pay, we have invested more than \$10 million in faculty and staff salary increases since 2013. We know we are still not where we need to be, and improving salaries for faculty and staff will remain my highest budget priority.

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Nighthawks Wellness Program and our new Sustainability Initiative. Happy birthday!

It is noteworthy that 463 UNG employees participated in HealthTrails and walked more than 229,000 miles last year! Of course, we all need to be attentive to our health and fitness needs, and I encourage you to take a look the program's incentives and opportunities this year.

A Steering Committee on Environmental Sustainability is forming this year, in support of a Faculty Senate resolution. It will be co-chaired by Ken Crowe, Assistant Vice President for Facilities, and Justin Ellis, Director of UNG's Environmental Leadership Center. This group will spearhead and implement campus-level sustainability initiatives. These will build on our previous achievements in energ

You may know that Janet Marling has stepped down as Vice President for Student Affairs to focus on her additional role as executive director of the growing National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students and to teach in the College of Education's new Ed.D. program. Under her leadership, Student Affairs has accomplished many important tasks and she leaves the division stronger than when she began. Thank you, Janet.

We will conduct a national search for this important position, and I will announce the details soon. In the meantime, please join me in welcoming Dr. Gary Biller, who has joined UNG as interim Vice President for Student Affairs. Gary has served as Vice President for Student Development at three different universities and brings tremendous experience to the position. Gary, will you please stand?

opportunity to leverage university expertise and resources to help communities across northeast Georgia and beyond

UNG is a higher education choice that creates brighter futures for all of the region's students. As an economic, cultural and social driver for Georgia, UNG has never been more important to our region and our state's future. I take that responsibility seriously.

We are committed to keep costs low and quality high for students and families. As one of only three public universities in Georgia on *Kiplinger's* annual list of the Best Values in Public Colleges, we are among the nation's leaders in providing an exceptional education at an affordable cost.

One of the ways we add value to our students' education and to our communities is through community engagement. Allow me to share part of a recent commentary in *the Chronicle of Higher Education* by Dickinson College President Margee Ensign. She first noted in her commentary that UNG is a higher education choice that creates brighter futures for all of the region's students. As an economic, cultural and social driver for Georgia, UNG has never been more important to our region and our state's future. I take that responsibility seriously.

solve current and future problems. Through these experiences they can become our new "extension agents," and our newly engaged citizens.

In Georgia, we know the value of extension agents. We know that academe can bring intellectual capital to the community to address needs and solve problems.

Because of many, many ongoing efforts like these, UNG is one of only a few universities in Georgia to be designated as a Carnegie community-engaged institution.

With work like this underway, I am positive we are going to increase opportunities for our students, faculty and our communities to become stronger through mutually-beneficial collaborations that enhance the educational experience and serve our region.

Our Strategic Plan recognizes UNG's capacity for research, scholarship, and creative activity, and, in fact, much of our research is designed to solve regional needs.

We have made research an institutional priority, and the results have been impressive.

Undergraduate research is well entrenched at UNG as a high-impact learning practice, and UNG is engaging a growing number of corporations, foundations, government agencies and private donors in support of research and program funding.

Our research activities generated more than \$3.3 million in externally sponsored project expenditures last year. Additionally, our submissions and accepted rate of external grants and contracts is rapidly rising.

Based on our growing success in this area, I am confident that we will leverage our research strengths and academic engagement opportunities to increase our research expenditures by 10% this year.

Additionally, since launching the Presidential Incentive Awards in 2013, we have awarded about \$800,000 in support of more than 125 professional development, research and innovation projects across our campuses. These awards are a key investment in UNG faculty and staff, and the knowledge

None of what we do as a university is possible without the support of alumni and friends.

If you ever questioned the impact of UNG on its students, consider this. This year, UNG received an extraordinary gift from John Lamb, who attended the university for only one year, in 1946, and went on to graduate from a prestigious university. Nearly 60 years later, he shared with some of our development officers that it was the "happiest time of his life." Mr. Lamb died in December and left his entire estate, appraised at \$4 million, to the UNG Foundation. The estate included 87 acres of prime land, a farm, more than 40 head of cattle, two donkeys, and two rabbits... yes, rabbits.

An unusual, but profoundly generous gift to be certain.

Mr. Lamb instructed that the estate be liquidated and that the funds be used by UNG for capital improvements, including construction of new buildings, or acquisition or renovation of existing buildings. We will forever be grateful to Mr. Lamb.

The Foundation's endowment has grown to more than \$50 million and awarded by U(T)2.676104 Tw 7.188 0 Td [(.)03d4i e30.004 T8o,7.163.2(10

The work we do through UNG has meaning; we are a formidable force; and our energy helps give flight to our students' dreams and to the future of north Georgia.

Thank you and best wishes for a significant year ahead.

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