

State of the University Address  
August 14, 2017

**Introductory video/slideshow with highlights from 2017-2018**

Wow, it was great to see those highlights of such a fantastic year! Give yourselves a hand for those impressive achievements.

The summer rushed by so quickly that it is hard to believe we are ready to kick off fall semester. But it is a great opportunity as we begin the academic year, to take stock of our progress and, equally important, to look toward our future.

First, I would like to recognize our Faculty Senate and Staff Council. These individuals provide invaluable leadership in university governance, and I appreciate their contributions to our work and their service to their colleagues. If you are a member of the Faculty Senate or Staff Council, would you please stand so we may thank you?

Allow me to take a moment of personal privilege and introduce my husband Glenn, who is with us today.

Recently, I was talking with a vice chancellor at the system office who reminded me that – in his words – “UNG is now a rock star” and also that I need to think big. We have advanced so much in recent years that it is sometimes easy to underestimate all we have accomplished and who we have become.

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 military colleges at last year's Cadet Leadership Course, where 32% of UNG cadets earned "top block" ratings, placing them in the top 15% in the nation. We should have this year's results soon;
- Our athletics department brought home The National NCAA Award of Excellence and they also won the Peachbelt Commissioner's Cup for

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 issues have an impact on our students and many of us in this room.

AASCU – the American Association of State Colleges & Universities – annually highlights key issues facing higher education. Funding tops the list and is an issue we face every budget cycle. Affordability is also an issue, and we are helping address it through textbook initiatives, reduced course fees, increased scholarships, and our Student Money Management Center. Economic and workforce development are also on the list, and this is very important as we support the diverse needs and opportunities of our region.

Undocumented and DACA students is also on the list, and, of course, this is a deeply challenging and emotional issue for our communities. Guns on campus is a new law for us here in Georgia and is also on the list. I appreciate the work that Chief Justin Gaines and others have done to educate our campuses about this new law. Other issues on the list include: sexual assault; institutional productivity and student success; academic freedom, civil rights and social issues; student debt management; and dual enrollment.

As we grapple with these issues, it is important that we focus on why we do what we do.

As we approach 20,000 students this fall and geographically serve as the primary institution for nearly 20% of Georgia's counties, we need to be thoughtful about the legacy we are building. How do we make it better? Are

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 far beyond classroom success.

I would like to take a moment to highlight some key faculty recognitions:

- Miriam Segura-Totten, who received the USG's most prestigious teaching award, the Regent's Award for Excellence in Teaching, in March, has just been recognized as a 2017 Inspiring Leader in STEM by *INSIGHT into Diversity* magazine.

- Lauren Johnson, of the College of Education, was selected to participate in the Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad Program and studied in Chile. She was also selected as a 2017 Governor's Teaching Fellow.
- Deborah Prosser and the UNG libraries earned the 2017 state Award for Excellence for their work to establish our Special Collections as a leading center of primary research in northeast Georgia.
- Finally, 26 faculty were awarded promotions or tenure this year. If you are among this group, please stand so that we can congratulate you.

Equally important is the role of our exceptional staff. Make no mistake, our staff makes a big difference for each of us and helps position the university and our students for success. I'd like to mention a few of them:

- Sandy Ott, director our Blue Ridge Campus, earned the 2016 Chancellor's Outstanding Service Excellence Award.
- Bill Moody and our facilities team earned an innovation award from the American Public Works Association for a creative transformation a parking lot at the Gainesville Campus.
- Wendy Estes and her team in Professional and Continuing Education won three national awards for their work.
- Tom Cantrell led our baseball team to the national championship playoffs and was named NCAA Division II Southeast Region Coach of the Year.
- DeEnna Walters, executive director of auxiliary services, received the 2017 Regional Rising Star Award from the National Association of College Auxiliary Services.

Let's give them all a round of applause for their outstanding work!

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 the region, and we are determining what programs and services are needed to serve that community, which like other rural areas is working to enhance educational opportunities, healthcare services and economic development.

In Cumming, our graduate programs are expanding and we are partnering with Forsyth County School's Career Academy. We are exploring whether four-year programs might be added, and we have hopes for additional space there in the near future.

The Dahlonega Campus is highly influenced by our military program, but we are also growing our programs in business, languages, STEM, healthcare, and education. Also, we have recently added programs in cybersecurity and strategic studies. The new convocation center will open in early spring and will provide an exceptional venue for the university and our region.

In Gainesville, we expect continued and strong enrollment growth. The good news is that much of our enrollment growth this year is due to returning students. Our Institute for Environmental and Spatial Analysis program – IESA – and the Gainesville Theatre Alliance continue to be signature programs, while our programs in communications, film and nursing are also growing. As an aside, kudos to Jeff Turk and IESA for its recent designation as a national Center of Academic Excellence in Geospatial Science... the only one in Georgia.

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 funds for renovations to the Lanier Tech campus. There are two more steps in the budget process before this is final, but I am very optimistic. We are in the initial stages of determining the best use of those facilities, which will be vital for the Gainesville Campus.

Oconee is positioned to be one of the best two-year transfer programs in the Southeast, but we must solve our space issues. Under the new leadership of Cyndee Moore, we are exploring creative ways to use external space.

As a growing university, financial resources have never been more critical. We have diligently articulated our need for additional funding resources, and I was thrilled that we received \$11 million in additional funding this year. I am grateful to the Board of Regents, the General Assembly, and Governor Deal for their support of UNG.

That funding enabled us to add 71 new faculty positions and 43 new staff positions this year. If you are among our new faculty and staff, please stand so that we can welcome you.

I remain concerned because we are stretching our staff thinly, because I have had to ensure that we first have enough faculty in the classroom. This is the first year we have been able to add such a significant number of staff positions, and we hope to add more in the near future.

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.

This fall we will begin the budget process for the fiscal year that starts next July. Governor Deal recently instructed most state agencies to keep budgets flat but has exempted education spending from that directive. This is encouraging and we will work closely with the chancellor and his staff as we request the resources we need.

Let me assure you, we continue to seek external funding to enhance our institution. Private, corporate and other government resources will be a greater part of our fiscal future than they have been in the past. Our research expenditures and our fundraising for scholarships are also on strong growth trajectories, and I will talk more about these areas in a moment. The bottom line is that I am committed to exploring all appropriate avenues for fiscal resources.

At the same time, it is important that we are as efficient as possible with our resources. UNG has agreed to participate in the first phase of the University System's Comprehensive Administrative Review this year. Kelly McFaden, president of the UNG Faculty Senate, was invited to serve as a representative on the USG committee leading this effort. The process aims to identify efficiencies and ways to better serve our students without decreasing successful outcomes.

UNG has a long history of efficiency and effectiveness and a strong focus on student success. I believe this exercise can only help us by documenting our efficiency and by enabling us determine our most critical areas for funding.

There is a lot happening this year that will touch your work in one way or another.

Provost Tom Ormond will lead the effort to review and revise the core curriculum this year. A 12-person ad hoc committee, under the direction of Co-Chairs Elizabeth Combier and Miriam Segura-Totten, will work with the campus community to recommend a new core curriculum for implementation in fall 2019. This process requires balancing many different interests, and I encourage us all to be patient as we work through what can be a challenging and emotional exercise.

In January, we will celebrate five years since our consolidation. To be sure that we don't lose sight of the traditions that support the unique culture and identity of each of our campuses, committees of faculty, staff, students, and alumni, under Richard Oates' leadership, have inventoried our traditions. They are recommending ways to strengthen these traditions and are working to encourage new traditions on our newer campuses. Their work will continue to unfold this year.

On a sad note, one of my favorite traditions has been to send you gift cards for Starbucks or the food court on your birthdays. Unfortunately, because of an IRS regulation, I am no longer able to do that. However, I am providing you with UNG refillable water bottles today in support of our

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 energy reduction and sustainability, and we can do much more.

This year we will also be assessing the progress toward the goals and objectives in our 2014-2019 Strategic Plan. Chris Barnes, Associate Dean of Academic Administration at the Oconee Campus, will lead a five-person team this fall, to collect information and report back to Tom Ormond. I encourage all faculty and staff to support this effort to assess our progress.

As our university has grown both in size and complexity over the past few years, the demands have grown and changed, and I want to be sure you are aware of some recent administrative changes.

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?

Kate Maine's role has expanded, and I have named her chief of staff. She will coordinate key administrative functions, including policy administration, state government relations, and economic development, in addition to university relations.

Allow me to introduce Ben Jarrard, who will be working with Kate as Director for State Government Relations. Ben is a UNG alumnus and most recently worked in Governor Deal's office. We look forward to his work on behalf of UNG. Welcome, Ben!

An important mission of a comprehensive university is to promote regional economic development and community engagement. Through our Regional Education and Economic Development initiative or REED, we have the

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

We are exploring opportunities for a regional summit that would connect current and prospective students with employers and career opportunities in disciplines identified through Governor Deal's High Demand Career Initiative. Stay tuned for more on that.

Also, to build on the work by Sheila Caldwell, who has served as advisor to the president on diversity in addition to her full-time role as our Complete College Georgia director, I will be advertising soon for a new position: Director of Inclusion and Engagement.

The heart of our university mission calls for us to prepare students to be leaders for a diverse and global society. To ensure that we fulfill that mission, UNG must foster an environment as an inclusive university that attracts, retains and supports a diverse workforce and student body. Sheila and the Faculty Senate's Diversity Committee have done incredible work over the past couple of years, but there is more work to be done. UNG is a community of individuals from many different experiences and perspectives, and this new position will promote an increasingly inclusive environment that welcomes, embraces, supports, and celebrates diversity in all forms.

UNG attracts students from nearly every state and more than 50 countries. However, we know that about 85% of our students come from a 30-county region in northeast Georgia.

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 that a liberal arts education is needed now more than ever before and that students must be prepared to apply their knowledge to solve unprecedented problems.

She recounted the history of land-grant universities and the development of extension agents who take knowledge from the campus to the community, thereby creating a powerful opportunity to share innovations and foster change. She wrote,

*It is becoming increasingly vital that colleges perform this latter role — service to both the local and national community. Students and faculty who engage in the real world, confronting immediate problems, ... gain the vital intellectual and social tools necessary to*

*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.

If we follow the extension agent model, we will engage the grass roots of our communities. We will share our expertise and we will heed the work force and research needs of our region. We will increase our impact in a very meaningful way. The extension agent model is one we can certainly embrace.

We are already doing important work in this area.

For example, our Summer Food Program. Through that program, our students in Human Services Delivery & Administration have provided more than 94,000 meals to at-risk students and their families since 2012 and developed important career and leadership skills along the way.

Similarly, doctoral students in our physical therapy program are treating indigent patients in a student-led clinic while gaining real-world experience. This relationship has resulted in a new partnership that resulted in the recent grant from the "Two Georgias Initiative" to increase health and wellness.

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 gained, the improved practices, and the resulting initiatives enhance the educational experience of our students.

Dr. Katayoun Mobasher, of our IESA program, is a case in point. She won a Presidential Semester Award last year to develop a virtual field guide for geology students who may have visual and physical disabilities.

She involved her students in the project, attended and presented at several national conferences, and presented at the Atlanta Geological Society. She said the award has also led to a strong National Science Foundation application that has great promise of being funded. Further, she uses aspects of the project in her geology classes to stimulate students' interest in STEM.

If you have previously received a Presidential Incentive Award, please stand so that we may applaud your work.

Because the number of applications for this program grow more each year, I have added another \$50,000 to the pot for a total of \$350,000 this year. The applications will be due in early October, and I encourage faculty and staff to think about participating in this competitive process.

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 more than \$1.78 million in total student scholarships last year. Scholarship fundraising has been one of my top priorities since taking office, and we have raised a total of \$7.6 million for scholarships since 2012. I am confident we will continue to grow those numbers. Congratulations to Jeff Tarnowski and his team for their great work!

Faculty and staff are an important part of this effort. Our development team has a handout today about the Blue & Gold Campaign, the Annual Faculty & Staff Giving Campaign for this year. As you are able, I hope you will consider making a gift.

In closing, as we consider our success in so many areas, it is clear that we do not operate on average. Maybe that is why we are making so much progress? I said a few years ago, during our consolidation, that we are greater than the sum of our parts. Today, I need an exclamation point to that. We are greater than the sum of our parts!

Our compass is set on a clear course: UNG is an emerging institution on the road to national prominence. We provides students with an exceptional education built on high quality academics, affordability, accessibility, and a commitment to student success and leadership development.

I met with the cabinet and college deans last week, and it was exciting to hear about all of the collaborations and multi-disciplinary projects they are developing. Their vision is not “business as usual” and neither is mine. We will not stand still; we must be committed to innovation while remaining focused on our students and their successes.

For our students and the university, we will continue our push for excellence, and I want to leave you with this word: significance. The term is derived from Latin *significantia* and denotes "meaning, force, and energy."

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.

If you need this document in an alternate format for accessibility purposes (e.g. Braille, large print, audio, etc.), please contact the University Relations department at [university.relations@ung.edu](mailto:university.relations@ung.edu) or 706-864-1950.

*If you need this document in an alternate format for accessibility purposes (e.g. Braille, large print, audio, etc.), please contact the University Relations department at [university.relations@ung.edu](mailto:university.relations@ung.edu) or 706-864-1950.*