

April 15, 2014

Bonita C. Jacobs, Ph.D.

President, University of North Georgia

Opening remarks

Years ago, one of our retired history professors, Bill Roberts, published a book called “Georgia’s Best Kept Secret.” In it, he wrote about the university’s growing, but quiet, reputation for academic quality and affordability.

One of my goals has been to ensure that we are no longer, “Georgia’s Best Kept Secret.” I want everyone, including you here today, to know that the University of North Georgia is one of the finest universities you will find anywhere, and we are gaining momentum to become a university of national distinction in multiple areas.

Enrollment

With nearly 16,000 students, UNG is now the sixth-largest university and seventh-largest institution in the University System of Georgia.

- Enrollment was up on every campus this fall and grew by 2.5% overall.
- Cadet enrollment was up 8%, despite the fact that some worried that consolidation could have a negative impact on the corps. It did not.
- Graduate enrollment grew by almost 11% last year.
- We are serving more students through flexible delivery models than ever before. Our online credit hours increased by 9% this fall, with the largest jump occurring in graduate hours.
- This spring, we became an eCore affiliate, and UNG students enrolled in 555 courses through eCore this semester.
- Our students are also geographically diverse. For fall 2013, UNG students represented:
 - 139 Georgia counties
 - 46 states, plus District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico (*Missing: Montana, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming*)
 - 67 countries

Also, in support of our Complete College Georgia plan, we have significantly increased dual enrollment for high school students through the Accel program – by

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18% last year and 24% this year. This year, UNG will pilot the state's first summer Accel dual enrollment program in critical languages and STEM areas with \$100K in funding from Georgia Student Finance Commission.

Campuses

We have 4 campuses in northeast Georgia, and have delineated a 30-county area as our immediate service region, as it accounts for about 85% of our enrollment.

Our Dahlonega Campus serves about 6,400 students in baccalaureate and graduate-level programs. Dahlonega is our only residential campus and is home to UNG's Corps of Cadets and NCAA athletics.

Our Gainesville Campus serves about 6,500 students with numerous associate degree programs, and we have increased the number of bachelor's degree programs from 8 to 20 since consolidation.

We opened the Cumming Campus, located just off Highway 400, in fall 2012 with about 500 students and grew to more than 700 this fall. In Cumming, we serve a diverse student body that includes Accel students, undergraduate students, and graduate students.

Our current strategic planning process will help inform the future direction of this campus. And, it is not just any strategic planning process. I have asked the process leaders to ensure that no one can say, "I did not have a chance to participate." This extensive process is laying the groundwork for our future.

For example, the Gainesville and Cumming communities are experiencing tremendous growth in medical and health services, and our academic master plan will examine the need to expand targeted health profession programs at these campuses.

UNG's Oconee Campus serves almost 2,500 students and has one of the highest space-utilization rates in the system. The annex project that you approved will add valuable classroom and office space to meet existing student needs.

Oconee serves the system well by preparing associate degree students to transfer to bachelor's degree programs at North Georgia and at other USG campuses, where they perform very well. Each year, approximately 600 students go on to complete their undergraduate studies at the University of Georgia, while large numbers of others continue their enrollment on other North Georgia campuses or transfer to other USG campuses.

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Learning more about the transfer success of these students will support our Complete College Georgia efforts.

Our mission and identity are grounded:

- in academic excellence in a student-centered environment that includes service, inquiry and creativity...
- in educating globally-prepared leaders...
- and in our role as one of the nation's six senior military colleges.

Academic Excellence

We stand on the shoulders of a truly dedicated faculty who are committed to student success. Our faculty members are experts in their fields who mentor students and promote their personal and professional development. They know their students by name and generously share their time and expertise. That type of instruction and relationship defines the academic experience at all University of North Georgia campuses.

To support our faculty's professional development and continued scholarly engagement and to encourage innovation in teaching and learning and student success, we launched an internal grants program this fall.

Through a competitive, peer-reviewed process, we awarded more than 80 grants that are supporting research, professional development and publications to further faculty expertise and to enhance students' academic experience.

It is one thing to say your institution is academically excellent, but the rubber meets the road in the success of our students. Allow me to brag on a few of their achievements:

- Our education majors have a 97% pass rate on the Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators exams.
- Our nursing students have a 91% average pass rate over the last 4 years on the National Nursing Licensure Exam.

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- On the Doctorate of Physical Therapy Licensure Exam, our PT graduates maintain a consistent 100% pass rate.
- Our most recent graduate survey shows that 93% of our business school graduates are working or in graduate school.
- Our cadets excelled at this year's Leadership Development and Assessment Course, outperforming the five other senior military colleges in the most key areas.
- Our honors students earned 3 of the 8 awards at the recent Georgia Collegiate Honors Council Conference.
- Our debate team placed second in the nation in a recent competition.
- And, UNG basketball players Travis Core and Stephanie Huffman were named to 2013-14 Capital One Academic All-District teams, for their combined academic and athletic performances.

Within the last two weeks, we have had several students win nationally competitive scholarships...

- Mark Stiles and Cody Bijeaux each received a \$10,000 scholarship to study in China for one year. The award is presented to only 10 students each year and is given by AASCU and the Chinese Scholarship Council under China's Ministry of Education.
- John Dees, a junior in UNG's Institute for Environmental & Spatial Analysis, has been named a Udall Scholar, and will receive one of only 50 scholarships awarded annually to students interested in careers involving the environment or Native American policies.

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Undergraduate Research

Undergraduate research continues to be a strategic emphasis for UNG because of the impact it has on our students' success.

- Their work is highlighted through our interdisciplinary Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities, through our Faculty-Undergraduate Summer Engagement program, and through our annual research conference.
- 75 students presented their undergraduate research at state and regional conferences this year.
- At the 2014 Georgia Undergraduate Research Conference, Jimma Blackwell, a biology student, earned 1 of 4 awards for her research in salmonella detection.

Community engagement and regional partnerships

UNG is one of only two public universities in Georgia to earn the Carnegie Foundation's classification for community engagement. This designation highlights our numerous partnerships that enhance the development and strength of our communities while also providing our faculty and students with opportunities to apply academic knowledge to practical community needs and develop valuable skills and experience.

Our K-12 partnerships are a great example of this. We have created Professional Development Communities that embed our teacher-education majors in local schools during their junior and senior years. UNG students and faculty are fully integrated and partner to create an innovative model for teacher education. Many of these students are offered jobs prior to graduation as a result of this experience. Additionally, their successful transition and high retention in their new professional role support the effectiveness of this innovative approach to teacher education.

Also notable is our Human Service Delivery and Administration program in Gainesville, through which students have contributed more than 53,000 hours of service to community agencies, with an estimated local economic impact of almost \$1 million. Our HSDA program became the first accredited four-year program in the Southeast when it was nationally accredited this year.

We take regional education & economic development very seriously, especially since 14 of the 30 counties in our immediate service area have a college completion rate

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under 20%. We have initiated the Regional Education & Economic Development, or REED, effort to help address this, and I'll share more about that tomorrow. We simply must look at the north Georgia region in a comprehensive way.

Global preparation

Our internationalization efforts are rooted in the belief that to be competitive and relevant in today's society, our graduates need to develop an understanding and appreciation for other cultures.

We offer studies in 10 languages and have developed a very successful immersion model to teach strategic languages. In 2011, we became an ROTC Flagship Institution for Chinese.

Over the last several years, we have created amazing opportunities to study abroad with one of our many international partners and to complete internships with international organizations.

This year alone, we initiated seven new international partnership agreements with other institutions in Germany, Peru, Oman, Latvia, Italy and Taiwan.

We have also renewed a \$1 million contract to manage US Army cadet international programs for the entire nation. This program supports service learning projects for 1,400 cadets in more than 40 countries worldwide.

Military Education

Military education has had a defining role at the university since 1873. Today, the Corps of Cadets has nearly 800 students and is at its strongest point in our history. UNG is known for producing some of the finest Army officers in the country and we are proud to have produced nearly 50 generals.

In addition to educating students who are preparing to enter the military, UNG has developed a sound reputation for supporting military veterans and their families. Military Times, the leading publication for service personnel, designated UNG as a 2014 Military Friendly School and recognized our Mike Cottrell College of Business as a Best Place for Vets.

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Affordability and Value

As I noted earlier, we have a long history for providing an affordable, quality education. That commitment to our students continues today.

- For four years, we have been recognized by Kiplinger's magazine as one of the 100 Best Values in Public Colleges in the country for academic excellence and affordability.
- The University Press of North Georgia has developed low-cost, faculty-authored texts and digital texts locally and in partnership with the System to reduce students' costs.
- Our Student Money Management Center teaches students strategies for managing their personal finances during and after their college years.
- Most importantly, we have been very intentional about increasing student scholarships. When I arrived in 2011, I was concerned about the small amount of scholarships we were able to award. This year, we reached a major milestone and raised more than \$1 million in support of student scholarships... a 56% increase over Fiscal Year 13.

Conclusion

During consolidation, I issued a challenge to our campus communities to "imagine what we could become... to imagine the educational, cultural and economic impact on our region... and to imagine the legacy for generations of students." And imagine they did.

Over the past 15 months we have created a new model in higher education. Through the scope of our degree programs, leadership development opportunities, and multiple campuses, UNG offers a rare educational experience.

I could not be more pleased with our accomplishments, and I think you will agree that we are no longer "Georgia's Best Kept Secret."

Thank you.