

State of the University address

August 13, 2018

Welcome... it is a great day to be at the University of North Georgia. Congratulations to each of our award recipients. Any success of our university is possible through the talent of our faculty and staff. UNG is supported by more than 2,000 employees who work hard to fulfill our mission with enthusiasm and heart, and I appreciate each of you very much.

Before going any further, I would like to recognize our Faculty Senate, led by Kelly McFaden from the College of Education, and the Staff Council, led by Kasi Ives, the language lab coordinator in Modern & Classical Languages. If you are a member of either the Faculty Senate or the Staff Council, please stand so that we may recognize you.

Thank you for your important work and contributions to UNG and a special thanks to Kelly and Kasi for their leadership.

I want to begin today by focusing on one of our most significant challenges and a top priority for me – retention and recruitment of high-quality faculty and staff. We are working to close the gap in faculty and staff salaries, as compared to peer institutions.

Over the past five years, we have successfully secured additional resources to help address this need and have invested \$12 million in merit raises and equity adjustments, while also adding 227 new faculty and 225 staff positions to serve our increased enrollment.

This year, we faced a conundrum. Unlike previous years, this year no state resources were provided for merit raises. I have stewed more over the lack of salary increases than anything else in recent memory. I asked Senior Vice President for Business & Finance Mac McConnell dig deeper and to scrub the budget even more. It seemed like a hopeless situation, but today I have an exciting announcement to make. We are awarding merit!

We have managed to create a 2% merit pool for eligible employees that will take place in January!

Please note that this is not an across-the-board increase, but one based on merit. Also, remember that due to budget constraints, none of the USG institutions were authorized to award merit this fall. We are able to award in the spring in large part because of our strong projected tuition revenue. Very soon Business and Finance will be sending information regarding eligibility and implementation to all supervisors. I would be remiss if I did not give a shout-out to Mac and his cracker-jack team for sharpening their pencils a little more than usual to make this happen. I could not be more pleased with this turn of events.

To further address faculty salary issues, Mark Spraker is leading a committee that is analyzing faculty salary data to inform our next steps. Their preliminary results indicate that while we do have a troubling gap in many of our disciplines, it is not as severe as we initially believed.

I look forward to receiving their full report in the spring, and we will develop a plan to implement equity adjustments as we are able.

We will also be looking closely at staff salaries this year to ensure they are as competitive as possible.

I mentioned the number of new staff and faculty that we have added the past five years. Last week, I had the opportunity to greet about 80 new faculty during their orientation, and I was very impressed with the experience and excitement they bring to UNG. If you are new faculty or staff member who has joined UNG in the past year, please stand so that we can officially welcome you.

Thank you; I am confident that you will enrich our community, and I look forward to hearing about your work.

While he was introduced earlier, I would also like to welcome Jim Conneely, who is our new vice president for student affairs. (Jim, please stand.) Jim brings a wealth of experience to this position, including an impressive record as student affairs VP at Eastern Kentucky University. I am confident that he will continue to build on the strong foundation that the Student Affairs division has created.

In case you haven't noticed, our faculty and staff are consistently receiving more accolades, winning more grants, and tackling new and creative ways to add depth to our institution. I particularly want to congratulate four individuals who earned the University System Chancellor's Service Excellence Awards.

Terri Carroll and Nick Kastner received awards for process improvement, for our new academic advising model and a marketing initiative for the Mike Cottrell College of Business, respectively. Bryson Payne and Katie Simmons received outstanding leader awards for their leadership with UNG's Center

for Cyber Operations Education and the Mike Cottrell College of Business, respectively.

UNG has become a leading regional university and a driving force for educational attainment and economic development. We are responsive to the region's increasing complexity, workforce demands, economic development needs, and community diversity, and we are expanding opportunities to make students regionally and globally competitive.

It all started with a vision, the vision we established five years ago during consolidation, to be a regional and national leader for academic excellence, engagement, educational opportunity, and leadership development. Over the past five years, united and determined, we have made significant achievements in academics, scholarship and research, enrollment, fundraising, military leadership, and athletics.

Last year was a particularly impressive year!

- We made Forbes' national list of Top Colleges for the second year – along with UGA, Georgia Tech, Georgia State, and Georgia Southern — and we are in the top 25 of public regional universities in the South in the U.S. News ranking. I am quite proud of the fact that U.S. News also ranked us number one in graduating students with the lowest amount of debt-load at graduation.
- Also, UNG was one of only three public universities in Georgia, along with UGA and Georgia Tech, named by Forbes Magazine to its 'Best Value College' list and to Kiplinger's list of Best College Values. Best value does not necessarily mean the least expensive; it means the most value for the cost to include

academic excellence and student career success post-graduation.

- Two of our cadets placed in the top five in the nation and our Ranger Challenge team was the top Army team in the U.S. That allowed us to compete in the international Sandhurst Competition, where we placed as the number one ROTC unit in the nation and fourth in the world. We even beat out West Point.
- We were recently named a Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Education and a Center of Academic Excellence in Geospatial Sciences. Each of these presents an opportunity to build upon specialized programs to support national defense needs. Further, under the leadership of Billy Wells and with help from our academic deans, we have pulled together a dynamic trio by marrying cyber, language superiority, and leadership development, and that will serve us well.
- Our softball team made a return trip to the College World Series, our women's basketball team made it to the Elite Eight, and the rifle team earned its second consecutive Southern Conference championship. In all, UNG claimed 11 conference championships and six NCAA postseason appearances, and our student-athletes posted the highest-ever GPA in an academic year.
- Our nationally competitive scholarship efforts have helped students secure about \$1.2 million since 2013 and continue to be a transformational opportunity for our students. Last year we were nationally distinguished as a top-producer of both Fulbright Students and Gilman Scholars. Also, Anastasia Lin

shared with me that this year UNG has more Boren winners than any other USG institution: we had 6, Georgia Tech - 4, and UGA - 3.

- We are thrilled that we also had our first Goldwater Honorable Mention this year. The Goldwater is arguably the most prestigious undergraduate scholarship given to students in the sciences and engineering.

This all could not, and would not happen without the countless hours that our faculty and staff volunteer of their time to coach our nationally competitive scholar candidates.

My niece and her friend, while in junior high school, became the winningest team in national Destination Imagination competitions. When the local newspaper interviewed them and asked why they continued to win, my niece responded: "We are just good that way!" I think that applies here. It is why our students achieve so much. It is why faculty and staff go out of their way to help students succeed. We are just good that way!

It is impossible to recognize every achievement, but it is telling that in almost every metric or ranking, UNG places in the top three, four or five among public universities in Georgia. This is a dramatic difference over our past.

While we know that rankings are not absolute, our performance is unquestionable, and our consistently high rankings are a tribute to our high-quality students and to the work you do every day to help them fulfill their potential.

As you know, financial support for public institutions of higher education has dwindled, and we are faced with a mandate for increasing efficiency all while increasing graduation rates. Many of our sister institutions across the country have succumbed to the challenges we face. An increasing number of private institutions are closing their doors each year, and some public institutions are struggling. There is a rise in shared services, partnerships, and, yes, mergers, all increasingly selected as an option for survival.

We have had strong enrollment growth and, while that can sometimes become a challenge, enrollment does not grow at universities that are stagnant. We are blessed to be in a rapidly growing part of the state, and our brand is strong.

We take seriously our role as a large, public university to serve the students of our region. We are fortunate that we have the range of associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees in hand, allowing us to blaze new pathways as an evolving university.

This fall, we will enroll about 20,000 students across our five campuses and online, and we can be proud that we are one of the largest and fastest-growing public universities in Georgia. And, while about 80% of our students come from 30 counties in northeast Georgia, we enroll students from all 50 states, every U.S. territory, and 97 countries.

UNG's student success programs and strategies are promoting a community of learning that is positively impacting student performance.

For example, UNG's Quality Enhancement Plan, which uses a blended model of intentional advising and faculty mentoring, saw

impressive results, including a 7% higher one-semester persistence rate and an 11% higher one-year retention rate.

This fall, the advising model will expand to about 40 majors, and by next fall it will be integrated across all programs.

Further, with a focus on timely degree completion, our graduation rates for both associate and bachelor's degree students are among the highest in the state. Nonetheless, given the quality of students we attract, I am convinced that we will continue to inch those numbers upward as we identify new, high-impact practices that will move the needle.

We have an increasing demand for our graduate programs, and they do continue to grow. With a number of new and revamped programs that are responding to regional and disciplinary needs, we increased graduate enrollment by more than 18% last year, and we expect to enroll approximately 2,000 graduate students by 2020.

We will base our graduate program growth on capacity and demand, and with an eye toward serving our region. We know that we need to begin thinking about additional graduate assistantships, and we will do so when we are able.

To meet the current demands associated with the growth we have experienced, we have continued to advocate for and invest in our physical infrastructure. We are well along in the planning process for the Lanier Tech campus in Gainesville, and we look forward to moving into our new buildings in 2019.

Last year, we opened the new Convocation Center in Dahlonega, and it has had a transformational impact on our ability

to have large-scale university and regional events. We will also begin planning soon how to best use the former Chestatee Regional Hospital when we take over that facility two to three years.

Our enrollment in Blue Ridge has grown 800% in four years, from 21 students in fall 2014 to about 170 this fall, and we are delighted that we received funding this year for a standalone facility.

In Cumming, we have renovated space at our City Hall site to locate the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program there, and we will seek funding again next year for facility expansion to accommodate the Cumming Campus growth.

In Oconee, we have recently completed renovations to biology labs and student life spaces. The demand for that campus is high, and I commend the faculty and staff for the creative ways they have managed to orchestrate a student-friendly environment. We know that facility expansion will be needed, and, hopefully, we can move forward in the not-so-distant future.

We have also paid a lot of attention to parking and transportation, and improvements are occurring in various ways at most of our campuses this fall, including a new loop road in Gainesville.

You received a message last week outlining the changes; in some cases, more parking spaces and in others an increase in the availability of shuttle service.

Another area of focus for UNG is increased scholarship support, and I am very proud of what we have been able to

achieve. While we are one of the most affordable institutions in Georgia, it remains vitally important to be able to offer both merit-based and need-based aid to our students.

And, remarkably, the UNG Foundation continues to increase fundraising for need-based and merit-based aid in double-digits annually. Also, we have had a significant increase in planned giving commitments from our alumni and friends.

Further, we are increasing the number of new donors each year to support university needs and student scholarships.

Student scholarships matter. The data indicate that students who leave for financial reasons frequently do not return to complete their degrees.

Under the direction of Richard Oates and now Enrollment Management, we have been working with students who left with debt and have had success with helping some of them find ways to return, but the more important point is that we need to help prevent student stop-outs.

Faculty and staff are also an important part of scholarship success. Vice President for Advancement Jeff Tarnowski shared with me that last year's Blue & Gold Campaign annual fund campaign raised nearly \$211,000 and over 500 faculty and staff contributed. You are clearly making a difference!

I am also pleased to share that we just received a \$10,000 gift that will support a new student emergency loan program that will be operated through our Student Money Management Center. While this certainly is not our largest gift this year, it ranks among our most impactful.

The Money Management Center, under Erick Jones's leadership, will take the lead in developing the best way to assist students who need help in the way of very small loans – loans for gas money home, to buy food until they are paid at the end of the week, etc. Hopefully, we can continue to add to that fund.

By the way, this is also an opportunity to help students learn how to manage their finances, as failure to repay promptly will make them ineligible for another loan for a specific period.

Our Strategic Plan recognizes UNG's capacity for research, scholarship, and creative activity. We have made this an institutional priority, and the results have been impressive.

We have awarded more than \$1.55 million in support of 168 projects through the Presidential Incentive Awards program. You have used this program for unique professional development and research opportunities that enhance your teaching, develop innovative new practices and support undergraduate research.

For example, Shawn Rice in the College of Health Sciences and Professions is using his award to purchase two stereoscopic 360-degree video cameras to improve instructional video simulations for students.

Zechariah Pierce used his award to participate in a master acting program and will bring the technique and experience back to enhance instruction in our award-winning theatre department.

These are just two of many exciting examples.

Furthermore, many of you have used your research funded by this program as a basis to secure impressive externally funded grants including NSF grants.

If you have received one of the Presidential Incentive Awards since the inception of the program, please stand so that we can congratulate you. Thank you.

This program has contributed to a culture of scholarship at UNG that is producing significant resources for your work. We created an Office of Research and Engagement a few years ago, and we have had an intentional focus on increasing grantsmanship.

Over the past four years, total research expenditures, the primary measure of productivity, has risen 39% from \$3.3 million in FY16, to \$4.6 million in FY18. As a result, UNG was invited this year for the first time by the National Science Foundation to participate in the Higher Education Research and Development Survey.

Importantly, these projects are aligned with our mission, culture, and leadership, and are helping to meet regional needs.

I want to pause a moment to discuss the incredible strength of our three smallest campuses. They are led by Cyndee Moore at Oconee, Jason Pruitt at Cumming, and Sandy Ott at Blue Ridge.

Oconee is a vibrant campus with a student population of about 2,500 and serves as a model for successful transfer student services.

Cumming reached 1,000 students in five years and continues to grow in double digits as an increasing number of students opt to remain on that campus.

Blue Ridge has promulgated the mountain region of our state with enthusiasm for the opportunities they provide. As I visit each of those campuses, one of the striking things I have noted is the level of student satisfaction and enthusiasm.

It is all too easy to overlook their incredible contributions to our university and our region.

I also want to thank Richard Oates, VP, Gainesville, for leading these efforts with heart and enthusiasm. Will Cyndee, Jason, and Sandy, and Richard, please stand and be recognized.

Building on our network of regional campuses, UNG is partnering with a variety of educational, business, and community organizations to enhance college access and degree attainment. Five years ago, we launched the Regional Education and Economic Development—or REED—Initiative designed to strengthen the bridge to our communities.

This fall, we will host our inaugural REED summit to feature the wide variety of career opportunities in the rapidly growing healthcare industry. We will highlight the educational pathways available for current and prospective students and involve community leaders, businesses, students, and prospective students. We will partner with Lanier Tech and with the outstanding hospitals in our region. We will focus on various careers in ensuing years.

These accomplishments and activities reflect just a few of the many reasons I am optimistic about and confident in UNG's future. It is clear that we have strong momentum, and we are able to look forward from a position of strength. As we approach our next strategic planning cycle and in five short years, our sesquicentennial, celebrating 150 years as an institution, we need to ask ourselves, "What is ahead and how are we going to get there?"

In a recent meeting with the cabinet and academic deans, we discussed many of the achievements I have already noted and opportunities for the future. The conversation highlighted opportunities to break down academic silos to create more interdisciplinary programs, to engage the business community to strengthen academic programs, to set the standard for STEM education in comprehensive liberal arts universities, and much more.

Overall, there is great pride in what we have achieved, and the theme that emerged from our discussion was the passion we share for student success and leadership development—across all campuses and disciplines. It is who we are and what we do.

Dr. Stephen Pruitt, the former Kentucky education commissioner and now head of the Southern Regional Education Board, was our summer commencement speaker. He is also a UNG alumnus and attended both Gainesville College and NGCSU. Like many of our students, he is originally from a small town in this area of the state.

He spoke proudly of how our faculty and staff had changed his perspective on the world, how he had opportunities here that he wouldn't have had anywhere else, and how we prepared him for a career he couldn't even imagine at the time of his graduation. This gratitude to UNG is a sentiment shared by so many of our graduates, and that is the impact we must have on student lives on a daily basis.

Provost Tom Ormond initiated a conversation last year concerning our progress toward the goals of our current strategic plan. It will be important over the next couple of years, as we

prepare for the next strategic plan, to study how we have evolved and continue to adapt and assess our mission within the University System and as the largest institution of higher education in this region.

We know that we are accomplishing great things and having a positive impact on the lives of our students and on the communities we serve. We need to be sure to tell our story broadly.

Our University Relations team, under the direction of Kate Maine, Chief of Staff, helps strengthen our reputation through communications, marketing and advocacy efforts with the media, government officials and community stakeholders.

But we each can share the UNG story with our neighbors, our friends, prospective students, and our colleagues at other institutions. We have a great story to tell!

Sustaining and increasing our momentum requires continued energy toward building our identity and helping ensure everyone knows the impact that we are making and the value that we offer, and everyone at UNG plays a part in that.

In addition to being the energy behind UNG's identity of academic excellence, student success and leadership development, you are among our greatest ambassadors. So, today, in celebration of our momentum and the year to come, we have a t-shirt for each of you. Please wear them with pride as you tell the North Georgia story.

The future is bright for UNG, and this is going to be a great year! Thank you for being here today! Have a great semester.

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