“I am convinced that when the history books are written 100 years from now, the University of Georgia will be held up as a model for how the American land-grant university transformed in the 21st Century to expand its impact on its home state, on the nation, and on the world.”

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RECENT UGA ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Created 200+ need-based endowed scholarships

Increased total annual research expenditures to $458M, up 31% over the past four years

Rose to 54th in NSF’s latest research and development rankings

Ranked #16 among public universities by U.S. News & World Report

Set record retention rate of 96%, with six-year completion rate of 85%

Raised a record $227M in private support, a 94% increase over four years

Launched hiring initiatives to promote student success and expand the research enterprise

Opened Phase II of the Business Learning Community and a new home for the Center for Molecular Medicine

Generated $5.7B annual economic impact on Georgia

Won SEC Football Championship and Rose Bowl and played for the national title
Good afternoon and welcome. It is a privilege to be here with all of you today to report on the state of the University of Georgia. I am pleased to say, with certainty, that the state of this institution—the birthplace of public higher education in America—is strong, and the University is growing stronger every month and every year that we carry out our important work together.

I want to begin with perhaps my most important message this afternoon: to all of our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends—thank you. Thank you for the important contributions you have made to this institution.

You are the reason and the inspiration for our success. You are the heroes of the great story I am honored to tell today, and you will see throughout my remarks that our story is one of profound transformation—of expanding knowledge and pushing boundaries. It, too, is a story of deep impact—of changing lives and serving communities. Indeed, it is a story of unyielding commitment—to each other and to our noble mission.

It all begins with a vision, the vision we embraced last January, in this same setting, to elevate, even higher, the role of the University of Georgia as a force for good in our state, nation, and world. This vision was fashioned around three strategic priorities:

1) to increase scholarship support for our students;
2) to further enhance our learning environment; and
3) to tackle the grand challenges of our time.

Over the past year, united and determined, we have moved these priorities forward, and the signs of progress are beginning to show. Celebrating this progress and outlining plans to continue it will be the focus of my remarks today. I will highlight some key accomplishments related to each of our three priorities and then discuss new ideas for building on our great momentum.

Before I continue, I want to take a moment to congratulate Head Coach Kirby Smart and his staff, our amazing student-athletes, as well as Athletic Director Greg McGarity on one of the greatest football seasons in our history. I stand with the entire Bulldog Nation in expressing my deep sense of pride in everything the team accomplished this year. Truly, it was a magical season.
Increasing Scholarship Support

I will now turn to our first priority, increasing scholarship support for our students. During my State of the University Address last year, I announced the Georgia Commitment Scholarship Program, a major endowment initiative to create hundreds of new, need-based scholarships to support students from low-income backgrounds.

Our alumni and friends responded with great enthusiasm. In just 12 months, they have established more than 200 need-based scholarships, a tremendous accomplishment, reflecting incredible generosity. These endowed scholarships will provide grants, every year, *ad infinitum*, to academically talented students with unmet financial need. Countless lives and countless futures will be forever changed by these scholarships.

It has been said that “from a small seed a mighty trunk may grow.” This age-old maxim captures the spirit of this program perfectly: From one gift, a generation of impact is born, and we are witnessing just the beginning. Our ultimate goal is over 400 of these new scholarships by the end of the capital campaign.

Let me pause to express my deep appreciation to every single donor who has stepped forward to create a Georgia Commitment Scholarship and to the UGA Foundation, which has matched their contributions, dollar for dollar. Thank you for opening doors for our students, for making the impossible possible.

I continue to be humbled by the growing support of our alumni and friends, not only for this scholarship initiative but for the entire campaign. Last year, the first year of...
the public phase of the campaign, private giving skyrocketed. More than 68,000 donors contributed over $227 million, setting a new record in annual fundraising for the fourth consecutive year and nearly doubling the fundraising total over that period. This certainly is an impressive achievement.

Even more impressive, however, is the three-year rolling average, which rose to $185 million last year—60 percent higher than the average from four years ago. This is a clear sign that the culture of giving is changing within the University of Georgia family as our vision for the future takes hold. I give my thanks to Vice President Kelly Kerner and his outstanding team for leading our fundraising efforts. Although much work remains in the years ahead, we certainly are on track to reach—and very likely exceed—our campaign goal of raising $1.2 billion by 2020.

Through the Georgia Commitment Scholarship Program, we are making great strides to ensure that students from low-income backgrounds have access to this University. But, is there more we can do to help these students graduate? I believe there is.

Each year, around 200 of our seniors, making steady progress toward earning degrees, struggle to stay in school because they cannot make ends meet. Some even withdraw. The shortfall, in many cases, is less than a thousand dollars—and so close to the finish line. Low-income students who withdraw in these circumstances are at a high risk of never returning to graduate, of never realizing the full promise of higher education. Unfortunately, this is a national problem, but at the University of Georgia, we intend to do something about it.

Today, I am directing $250,000 in private funds to the Office of Student Financial Aid to establish a pilot program that will award small completion grants, up to $2,000, to these at-risk students facing financial hardships. The program will begin this semester, and it has the potential to be transformative. I sincerely hope that it is, as the University’s support network continues to expand to help keep all of our students on the path to graduation.

Enhancing the Learning Environment

Let us turn to the second priority, enhancing the learning environment for students. This fall, once again, we enrolled the most academically talented class of first-year students in our history. I am proud to say that in the five years I have delivered this address as President, I have made that statement five times.

This year’s class, which also is the largest to date, enrolled with an average GPA of 4.0 and an average ACT score of 30. As impressive as these metrics may be, it is never enough simply to enroll great students. We must ensure that they learn, grow, and succeed at the very highest levels. That is our ultimate aim. That is what really matters. How is the University doing in this regard? Let us take a look at the data.
This year, our retention rate climbed to a record high of 96 percent. Our completion rates remain at record levels as well. Sixty-six percent of our students finish in four years, and 85 percent finish in six. Our career placement rate is at an all-time high, with 95 percent of our students employed or enrolled in graduate school six months after completion. Indeed, across the spectrum of undergraduate education, the key performance indicators are trending in the right direction.

Yet this University continues to demand even better results, to reach for new heights of excellence. This year, we launched the Double Dawgs Program to provide pathways for our ambitious students to earn a bachelor’s and master’s degree in five years or less. More than 100 Double Dawg pathways already have been established, with more to come. We also launched another major hiring initiative—the seventh in five years—this one aimed squarely at the student experience as we hire more faculty and academic advisors in leading areas of growth.

We also completed several capital projects to enhance the learning environment, from Phase II of the Business Learning Community to Baldwin Hall to Clark Howell Hall—each made possible by significant state investment. I remain deeply grateful to Governor Deal, the General Assembly, Chancellor Wrigley, and the Board of Regents for supporting our efforts to promote the highest levels of student learning and success at the University of Georgia. These efforts, I might add, continue to be recognized on the national stage.

In the fall, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked this institution 16th on its list of best public national universities, our highest ranking ever. We also landed at 12 on *Kiplinger’s* list of best values among public colleges, reflecting our dedication to raising quality without sacrificing affordability. *Forbes* placed the University at number 17 on its list of top colleges that dominate academically and athletically, and that was before our football team won the SEC Championship and the Rose Bowl and then played for the national title.
The University also received, for the fourth consecutive year, the INSIGHT Into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award. Working together, with common purpose, we are making strides to become an even more connected and welcoming academic community for all of our faculty, staff, and students. Initiatives such as the Women’s Leadership Fellows Program, now in its third year, and the Women’s Staff Leadership Institute, launched a year ago, exemplify our steadfast commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Our work in this area, however, is far from complete. More remains to be done. That is why, in the fall, I announced a grant program to spur the development of new initiatives geared toward the recruitment, retention, and success of underserved students. Interest in the program exceeded all expectations as numerous proposals were submitted to the review committee.

The initial funding for the program was $250,000, but given the strength of the proposals, it was increased to $300,000 to support the implementation of more than 20 promising projects. I would like to thank all of the colleges and units that submitted proposals, as well as the members of the review committee, led by Vice Provost Michelle Cook, for their leadership and service.

In the year ahead, as a campus community, let us continue to cultivate diversity and inclusion—remembering that these core values are essential to our future. Mary Frances Early, the first African-American graduate of the University and recent recipient of the 2018 President’s Medal, said it best in her Commencement address to our graduate students 10 years ago.

“Wherever your path leads,” she declared, “never lose sight of the humanity of others […] because education is not simply about achieving academically […]. Education also embraces the understanding and the acceptance of, and respect for, all people. Those qualities represent the conduit to peace in our world.” Her powerful words still ring true today, and they remind us not only of our individual responsibility but also of our collective potential as stewards of this great University.

When we look across all of these accomplishments—the performance measures, the academic initiatives, and facilities projects—it is clear that our priority to enhance the learning environment for students is moving forward with great force. So, where do we go from here?

That is the question I posed last February in my charge to the President’s Task Force on Student Learning and Success. The group, which was co-chaired by Vice Presidents Rahul Shrivastav and Victor Wilson, spent much of the last year developing a response. I want to thank publicly the members of the task force for their hard work and dedication to excellence in undergraduate education. Their final report is now available on the President’s Office website, and I encourage you to read it if you have not already.
The report provides a roadmap for how this institution, over the next three to five years, can strengthen the educational experiences of our students, inside and outside the classroom. There are several recommendations that we can—and must—move on immediately. I want to touch on a few of those today.

First, the task force recommended that the University place greater emphasis on writing in the curriculum. The arguments in favor of this recommendation are as numerous as they are compelling. Employers, for example, continue to cite writing as one of the most important competencies for their employees but an area where the average college graduate is underprepared. In one national study, only 27 percent of employers said that recent college graduates could write effectively.

Of course, the significance of this skill reaches beyond the workplace, into civic life. In the Information Age, engaged citizens must be able to write with precision and clarity across an evolving range of platforms and audiences. They must be able to adapt to emerging forms of information sharing, especially in the digital space.

We should ask ourselves: Is our curriculum sufficiently preparing our students to meet these challenges? Like the task force, I think we must strive to go further. So today I am asking Vice President Shrivastav to work with appropriate faculty committees to develop a proposal for strengthening the writing requirement. My hope is that the proposal can be approved through University Council and implemented no later than Fall 2019.

State support and private donations are helping to transform the learning environment with state-of-the-art academic facilities.

The task force also recommended making data literacy a core part of undergraduate education, and again the arguments are convincing. Once reserved for business and high-tech fields, the data revolution has expanded to all sectors of human endeavor. Consider for a moment that 90 percent of the world’s data was created in the last two years alone, a truly incredible phenomenon.
How we organize and interpret the massive data sets being assembled—how we use them to improve the human condition—these will be defining issues of this century. Data literacy is no longer optional for success in our democracy and our economy; it is imperative. Once more, I am asking our faculty and academic leaders to develop a proposal to ensure that data literacy is a cornerstone of undergraduate education at the University of Georgia by Fall 2019.

The task force also focused on teaching and learning, pointing to a growing body of research on the effectiveness of active learning pedagogy. This instructional approach has been shown to deepen student understanding, foster higher levels of engagement, and improve academic performance. The evidence is overwhelming, and it spans disciplines.

For these reasons, the task force developed plans to infuse active learning throughout more classrooms, and today I am announcing two initiatives to support this recommendation. First, I am allocating $250,000 to launch an intensive summer institute to help faculty incorporate active learning strategies into their undergraduate courses. Applications will be made available later in the semester, and summer stipends will be provided to encourage strong participation.

Second, I am designating $1 million to transform select traditional classrooms into active learning spaces. Many traditional classrooms on campus, especially those with fixed chairs and tables, are not equipped to facilitate interaction and teamwork, hallmarks of active learning pedagogy. This initiative will help to ensure that more of our faculty have access to instructional space tailored to this teaching method. Additional information will be distributed to the Deans in the first week of February to advance this important initiative.

Finally, I want to say a word about the task force recommendation to expand support for students from rural areas. This is a national issue concerning universities and colleges across America. You might not realize that many of our in-state students are from rural Georgia. Some of them come from low-income backgrounds and are the first in their families to attend college. They face unique challenges on campus, and they can benefit from targeted support.

Today I am accepting the task force recommendation to create the ALL Georgia Program, a cohort-based initiative for students from rural areas of the state. This new program, coordinated by the Vice President for Instruction and the Vice President for Student Affairs, will combine financial and academic resources with mentorship and leadership opportunities to provide a tailored web of support.

I am allocating $300,000 in private funds over the next five years to launch this important program. It represents another step to ensure that each and every student at the University of Georgia—regardless of background—is set up to be successful in the classroom and in life after graduation.
Again, I want to share my thanks with the members of the task force for their outstanding work. Plans related to the other recommendations will be announced in the coming weeks. Stay tuned. When it comes to our learning environment, we will never be satisfied with maintaining the status quo.

**Solving Grand Challenges**

Now I would like to discuss the third and final priority, solving the grand challenges of our time. The challenges before us are legion. They are complex. Some seem insurmountable, and they affect every person in this room. Indeed, they affect every person on this planet.

One of my favorite quotes comes from the decorated British statesman Winston Churchill, who said, “The price of greatness is responsibility.” That quote comes to mind when I think about the University’s role in addressing the many challenges we face as a society.

I believe the institution is bound by its history, by its mission, and—yes—by its greatness to be a leader on the world stage. I have found, time and time again, this same belief shared by our faculty, staff, and students. You might say it is part of our very nature, and it drives us into communities near and far to help tackle a range of major issues, such as cybersecurity, an area of increasing concern to our global community.

A recent report estimates that cybercrime will cost the world $6 trillion annually by 2021. This year, the University established a new Institute for Cybersecurity and Privacy, in part, to leverage our broad expertise and research capabilities against this global threat. The institution also was named a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Research to recognize the strength of our faculty in this area.
In addition, we launched the CyberArch program to help businesses and communities across Georgia protect against the devastating economic effects of cyberattacks. Hart County and Griffin/Spalding County will serve as pilot sites for this new initiative.

CyberArch is just one piece of a vast constellation of outreach initiatives supporting economic development across the state, and it should be a surprise to no one that the latest report estimates the institution’s annual economic impact on Georgia at $5.7 billion. That level of impact has come to be expected from us, and it should be. We are a land- and sea-grant institution with a foothold in all 159 counties in Georgia, from our rural areas to our urban centers. Yet, at the same time, our reach and our commitment stretch beyond state lines, and cybersecurity is just one of many global challenges the University is helping to address.

Our faculty also are seeking cures and treatments for a range of life-threatening human diseases. They are working to ensure our food supply keeps pace with the world’s growing population. They are striving to protect our precious natural resources and searching for strategies to promote international peace and prosperity.

These are big problems that require big solutions, but our University is up to the challenge. That is why our research enterprise is booming. Over the past four years, total research expenditures—a key measure of productivity—have surged by a staggering 31 percent, up to an all-time high of $458 million. In addition, we jumped seven spots to number 54 among all U.S. universities in the latest research and development rankings from the National Science Foundation.

These are very positive signs. To continue this upward trajectory, the University launched a $2 million initiative under Provost Pam Whitten to provide additional start-up funding to recruit more outstanding scientists and scholars to establish their research programs here.
We also dedicated several cutting-edge research facilities this year, including the Center for Molecular Medicine, the Food Technology Center, and the Turfgrass Research and Education facilities. Again, each of these capital projects was supported by the state, and the return on investment will be groundbreaking research to solve human health crises and advance the state’s vital agriculture industry.

The state also allocated funds for planning and design of a new facility to support the growing STEM-based research activity of our faculty. I now am making the case to our lawmakers to secure funding to begin construction this fall, and I am pleased that the Governor has included this project in his budget proposal to the General Assembly.

Of course, at the heart of each of these exciting capital projects—at the heart of our rising research productivity—is something more human, more personal. It is impact: impact on the lives of people here at home and around the world, impact on the planet that we all inhabit. Every research question and hypothesis, every sponsored project—they all represent opportunities for this University to make a difference.

With each year that passes, as the list of challenges multiplies over time, we are being asked to do even more. How do we remain relevant and responsive in the 21st century? That is a question that deserves our serious consideration. I believe the answer lies in the creative power of our faculty—their genius for innovation.

In November, I had the pleasure of serving on a national panel, sponsored by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, to discuss the future of technology transfer in higher education. A clear message emerged from that discussion. In order to overcome the range of challenges facing our society, the American public research university must evolve its innovation ecosystem to find solutions; to develop new products and ways of doing; and to create the jobs, companies, and industries of the future.

The University of Georgia is perfectly positioned to accept this responsibility. That is why, in December, I established a new presidential task force to develop a long-term strategic vision for an innovation district. This task force is co-chaired by Vice President for Research David Lee and Vice President for Government Relations Griff Doyle and includes faculty, administrators, and community partners.

The group is pursuing questions such as: How can we build a cohesive culture of innovation and entrepreneurship that permeates all facets of our mission? How can we better connect our creative endeavors to the broader innovation landscape to maximize the University’s positive impact?

The answers to these questions will point the way for the University of Georgia to play an even greater role in solving the grand challenges of our time. Once again, we will not be satisfied with the status quo. I am excited about the great work that I know will come from this task force, and I look forward to receiving its report later in the year.
Closing

I want to close today with a quote from Dr. Louise McBee. Many of you may know her as a state representative who ably served in the Georgia General Assembly for more than a decade. Others may know her as a distinguished administrator of this institution who, from 1963 until her retirement in 1988, served in a variety of important roles.

Dr. McBee was the chief academic officer when I arrived as a new faculty member in 1986, and today a lecture series and a professorship honor her legacy at the University of Georgia. During one of her many talks on campus, she declared, “Education—and the world—will change. They will be better, and we will help make them better. It’s a great time to be in the midst of the fray.”

This statement may be simple on its surface, but underneath, it is rich with meaning. It tells us of an interconnection between the fate of education and the fate of the world, and it does so with optimism, inviting us to play our part in creating a brighter future. I can think of no better statement to represent our work together over the past year.

One day at a time, hopeful, and focused on our vision for the future, we are making education better. We are making the world better, and we should take pride in our progress. If we rest on the accomplishments outlined today, however, we risk failing to meet the challenges that await us tomorrow.

Let us leave here with renewed commitment to our three strategic priorities: increasing scholarship support for students; enhancing the learning environment; and solving the grand challenges of our time. If we resolve never to let up, to continue charging forward at this thrilling pace, I am convinced that when the history books are written 100 years from now, the University of Georgia will be held up as a model for how the American land-grant university transformed in the 21st century to expand its impact on its home state, on the nation, and on the world.

While much hard work lies ahead, it is, as Dr. McBee said, “a great time to be in the midst of the fray.” It is a great time to be a part of the University of Georgia. Thank you for being here today, and thank you for all that you are doing for our beloved University.

Forbes ranked UGA 17th on its list of colleges that dominate academically and athletically.
NEW INITIATIVES FOR 2018

A presidential task force to develop plans for an innovation district at UGA

A completion grants program to keep highly at-risk students on track to graduation

A cohort-based mentorship program for rural students

Proposals to strengthen the writing requirement and make data literacy a core part of undergraduate education

An initiative to transform traditional classrooms into active learning spaces

A summer institute to help faculty infuse active learning strategies into their courses