

Welcome and thank you for being here today as we begin our 2015-16 academic year!

This is a special opportunity for us to celebrate our achievements, to assess where we are, and to talk about our vision for the future.

The rapid pace and challenges of our work over the past three years has been intense. We have taken on very difficult, complex work, and we have achieved great success with creativity, resourcefulness and integrity.

At this point last year, we introduced UNG's first 5-year strategic plan. In one year's time, we have drafted academic master plans for each campus, started the development of a facilities master plan to support our diversified, high-quality academic environment, and have begun drafting unit-level plans to support our work.

I have asked Eric Skipper, Interim Vice President for University Affairs, to take the lead in assessing our progress and in further guiding the implementation of our strategic plan.

Some of you will hear from Eric as he assembles an implementation team and workgroups to address the plan's goals, objectives and strategies.

Like the creation of the strategic plan, its implementation will involve the collective efforts of constituents across the entire University. I ask for your collaboration to build upon this work and to ensure our strategic plan comes to fruition.

The strategic plan identified four pivotal goals that are interwoven and support our mission and vision. I think it is important that we ponder those goals today. I believe our university must be clear about who we are and how our mission distinguishes us.

### **First, Promoting Academic Excellence and Innovation.**

Through our approach to academic engagement and our student focus, we create big, meaningful results that place us in a very special category. We have built a reputation that increasingly attracts talented new faculty and staff, and, in addition, bright, talented students.

- We continue to have the third-highest average high school GPA for entering baccalaureate freshmen in the university system, behind only Georgia and Georgia Tech.
- And, last year our average SAT average for entering baccalaureate freshmen was fourth in the university system.

- Our graduation rate for bachelor's degree-seeking students continues to be among the highest in the state system.
- And our completion and/or transfer rate for associate-degree students also remains among the highest in the state.

On the topic of academic excellence, please join me in thanking Richard Oates, interim provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, and Denise Young, associate provost for institutional effectiveness, and their teams for their work toward our upcoming SACSCOC reaffirmation. They have been working on this tirelessly over the past several months to ensure our success.

Two years ago, I announced a focused effort on preparing students for exceptional, nationally-competitive scholarships. Anastasia Lin has overseen a truly remarkable effort with many of you volunteering countless hours to coach and advise our students. It is obvious with so many faculty and staff stepping up to support this effort that we are a university that truly cares about students and their success.

Since the onset of this program, our students have received scholarships and awards valued at about \$300,000, no small amount for a beginning program.

- It is worth noting that TWO of our students were awarded Fulbright Scholarships for international study and research. Having two Fulbrights would be noteworthy for many seasoned programs, but this level of success with a newly focused effort is truly remarkable.
- Two of our associate degree students were awarded Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarships valued at up to \$40,000 each per year for up to 3 years. Both of these scholarships went to non-traditional students who found an educational pathway and the support they needed to be successful at UNG... how rewarding is that!
- Two of our students have earned one of 16 National Institute of Health Undergraduate Scholarships awarded annually and valued at \$20,000 each; plus each received a 10-week internship and full-time employment for one year.
- This is all in addition to the longstanding work by the Center of Global Engagement that, over the past couple of years has yielded 9 Gilman Scholarships, 3 Boren Scholarships, and 2 Chinese Government Scholarships from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

Beyond these awards, the value of our students' degrees is evident in their success in preparation for the workforce or continuation to graduate studies.

- Our annual survey of our most recent graduates indicates that more than 91% are employed or are enrolled in a program to continue their education.
- Our Clinical Mental Health Counseling pass rate has been 100% for past 3 years
- Our Family Nurse Practitioner certification pass rate continues to be 100%
- Our Physical Therapy program has a 3-year ultimate pass rate of 100%
- And the list goes on. Our students are getting jobs and doing well; they are being accepted at an impressive rate into graduate programs that are among the finest in their disciplines, including medical schools and law schools.

We can be quite proud of the demonstrated learning outcomes of our students that allow them to be successful post-graduation.

We know that part of that success is based in the scholarly pursuits of our faculty and the professional development of our staff. These opportunities have a direct and positive influence on the level of quality of our institution and ultimately on student achievement.

As I have discussed faculty opportunities with Richard Oates, I have been pleased that he shares a passion for providing an opportunity for faculty development.

Over the past two years, we have invested a half-million dollars through the presidential incentive awards program designed to provide increased opportunities for faculty and staff development and innovation.

Some of the more recent projects include:

- Six Presidential Semester Scholar Awards of up to \$25,000; one of these was awarded to Yong Wei, of computer science and information systems, for his research in para-spinal muscle segmentation in images used by surgeons. We look forward to seeing the impact of his work on the medical field.
- Six Presidential Summer Scholar Awards of up to \$10,000 each supported research and scholarly and creative activities. One of last year's awards went to Esther Morgan Ellis of the music department for "Unearthing the Roots of Community Singing..." a study of the music from May Garrettson Evans and the Peabody Preparatory Division in Baltimore during 1915 and 1916.

- Twenty Presidential Innovation projects received awards of up to \$5,000 each to support faculty and staff development and to provide opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborations, individual pursuits focused on innovations, or partnerships that promote implementation of best practice models.

We are seeing the development of peer mentoring programs, improvements in teaching and learning quality in mathematics, the development of new pedagogy in a variety of disciplines, efforts to improve the sustainability of Lake Lanier, new ways to embed content in eBooks, and a multi-campus Women's Leadership Initiative.

These projects make us all better – better teachers, mentors, researchers, and colleagues. They help us find new ways to mentor and encourage students to become better leaders and engaged scholars.

Clearly, your work is increasingly impactful and innovative. You have risen to the challenge to find meaningful projects that affect your academic discipline or your world of work. This year, we will stretch further toward new incentive projects that perhaps cannot be achieved in the limited amount of time we have previously allowed.

We will continue the awards this year but we will focus a large portion of the Presidential Semester and Summer Awards on multi-year and potentially cross-disciplinary projects that will impact innovation and engagement as outlined in UNG's strategic plan. We will also retain an opportunity within the incentive awards for a limited number of smaller, more individual projects as we have witnessed some significant work coming from those grants as well.

I look forward to seeing your ideas come to life! I am always quite impressed.

Innovation is also occurring in other ways at UNG. As we adjust to our new structure and larger size, many units across the university are adopting continuous improvement practices to advance their work and improve services and processes.

- For example, this fall, the Division of Student Affairs will launch an Innovation Hub to discover sustaining innovations that will inspire and engage all students to achieve their educational goals. There will be a series of innovation hubs involving wide-spread collaboration. The first Innovation Hub project will be announced next month, so watch for that coming your way!
- As I promised last year, we have worked to eliminate paperwork where possible and to make other forms electronic. We are streamlining routine HR and purchasing procedures so they can be handled online, and we are making significant progress. Unfortunately, we are unable to eliminate many forms as they are federally or BOR mandated but hopefully that will change soon.

- The Office of University Relations has been engaged in market and web research and recently implemented phase one of a web redesign to create a highly functional platform that is not just mobile-friendly, it is mobile-first, to display equally well on desktop, laptop and mobile devices. They will use this and other communications channels to share our success stories, build our identity, and distinguish UNG as a leading university.
- We are reducing text book costs thanks to our bookstores' rental programs and the free texts and open access textbooks developed by our faculty and the University of North Georgia Press. UNG is out front in the university system on this project – and reducing the cost of textbooks can make the difference in whether a student stays in school.

I am continually impressed with the number and level of innovative projects happening at any given time at North Georgia. We solve problems through innovation, and we do it well.

## **Goal 2 is to Enhance Leadership and Development of the Whole Person.**

At UNG, we know that student success is about the whole student. We are preparing students for leadership and service in a global society, and their experiences in the classroom and beyond contribute to their development.

Building community and enhancing developmental opportunities for students often include diverse, and seemingly unrelated (and some would say, competing), activities such as athletics, globalization initiatives and study abroad, student organizations, Corps of Cadets activities, service learning, and others.

These efforts have been widespread and increasingly more strategic and focused on outcomes. There are many ways to measure outcomes, and this year the recognizable achievements have been off the charts!

- First, we are excited that our UNG Nighthawks softball team won the NCAA DII National Championship! It is a great testament to the fortitude of these young women and their coaches, and the enthusiasm, positive media, and name recognition surrounding their championship will undoubtedly enhance UNG's reputation.
- Our Corps of Cadets set more academic and leadership performance records than any class in recent history. Last fall, there were 810 students in our Corps of Cadets. This is the largest number in our history, and we commissioned a record number of 83 officers this past year. Twenty-nine percent of our

eligible seniors were named a “Distinguished Military Graduate,” and that was the highest percentage among the senior military colleges.

- Cadet Chase Strickland, of Gainesville, was named the number-one Army ROTC cadet in the nation and was recognized on the floors of both the Georgia House and Georgia Senate, followed by a reception hosted at the Capitol by Governor Nathan Deal.
- In its inaugural year, the UNG Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl team was a semifinalist at the Mid-Atlantic Regional competition and went on to compete at the national against Clemson, Duke, and UNC-Charlotte.
- With now more than 30 partnerships across the globe, 325 UNG students studied abroad in 2014-2015. We are seeing that number inch upward and are hoping to add additional scholarships for study abroad in the near future.
- We also have an increasing number of students participating in international internships, and I am receiving many messages and statements about how prepared our students are and how well they are performing. That does not just happen. Our Center for Global Engagement, faculty, and staff do an excellent job prepping these students for international experiences.
- We enrolled more than 607 international students from 98 countries last fall and will host more than 100 new international students this year.
- Our Student Money Management Center experienced its first year of full-time operation, and opened offices on both the Dahlenega and Gainesville campuses. A state model for teaching financial literacy skills, it also hosted an inaugural financial literacy conference this year that had in attendance representatives from 18 of our thirty USG institutions.

### **Goal 3 is to Expand Engagement and Educational Opportunity.**

This goal leverages our mission through mutually-beneficial community partnerships that emphasize UNG as a driver of both social good and academic opportunity. When we look at enrollment and student success rates, particularly among Georgia's comprehensive and state universities, we lead in many areas.

- We will enroll nearly 17,000 students this year, making UNG one of the state's largest universities.
- In contrast to many of our peers, our enrollment continues to increase and we must be diligent in effectively managing an unprecedented growth.

- While we have students from 46 states, we know that about 85 percent of our students come from a 30-county area in northeast Georgia, so we need to understand what is happening in our region and how we can best serve the region.
- The data indicates that, not only are we in the fastest growing region of the state, but that the Georgia Mountains region had an 82% growth in the number of high school graduates in the decade from 2004-2014. Northwest Georgia at 52% and Northeast Georgia at 50% were the next highest growth regions. Every other region is showing half the growth, or even less, of what we are experiencing.

So, how do we manage our growth? We have limited facility capacity. We obviously must have funding to hire faculty and staff to support any growth in our student population. And, we need to maintain our rigorous academic standards and expectations of excellence. We will not lower our standards.

- We are, indeed, fortunate to have multiple pathways to accommodate a diverse group of student needs.
- However, our plan to limit our enrollment increase to 4% this year became problematic. We have a July 1<sup>st</sup> deadline for applications, and it was my intent to hold fast to that deadline. However, due to a lingering high demand for the Gainesville and Cumming campuses and a history of us accepting applications after the deadline, we ultimately reopened the application window through July 31<sup>st</sup> for those two campuses while also adding instructors to accommodate the growth. We added an additional 300 students during that time period.
- This was the right thing to do. We must acknowledge the significant growth in our region and we must anticipate the needs beforehand.
- We have added 78 new faculty positions and 53 staff positions since July 2014 to accommodate the growth, and our growth rate will be the largest we have ever experienced.
- I am concerned about the increasing need for additional faculty and staff to accommodate our growth and will be working to ensure we add critical positions as needed.

- I am pleased with the increase in financial support the University System of Georgia has provided us over the last three years, and I assure you that we are documenting our increasing needs.
- At the same time, we are being strategic about providing the academic programs that are needed for each campus. Each of our campuses has rich traditions (even our new Cumming campus is finding its own traditions!), and each campus has diverse student populations and differing community needs.
- For example, as you know, we increased the number of baccalaureate programs on the Gainesville campus from 8 to 20 in the first year of consolidation and continue to monitor the needs. We will add a second cohort of BSN students in Gainesville in the spring. You can imagine the effort it takes to accomplish this task – the nursing faculty and the Dean for certain, but it also takes effort from facilities (and they have done a spectacular job), enrollment management, academic affairs, core curriculum faculty, and others.
- We need to not fear the growth in our region but we absolutely must anticipate it and advocate for the resources needed to accommodate the growth. Without resources, we cannot continue to grow at this rate.

We all know that an increasing enrollment, particularly for lower income students, requires us to be diligent about scholarship funding.

Raising scholarship funds has been one of my top priorities at UNG, and I could not be more pleased to welcome Jeff Tarnowski as our new Vice President for Advancement. Jeff, will you please stand?

This year, we increased our scholarship fundraising by 35% to reach \$1.35 million; the year before that, we increased it by 56%. I anticipate that we will continue to make these significant strides so that we can help bright scholars with limited resources remain in school and so that we can be competitive in recruiting academic stars with multiple scholarship offers.

With our larger footprint, we continue to expand engagement with our partners – locally, regionally and globally – to enhance educational opportunities and strengthen communities.

We are one of only two public universities in Georgia to hold the prestigious Carnegie Classification as a Community Engaged Institution, and we take this seriously. We declared 2014-2015 as the Year of Engagement to highlight our strong sense of place and purpose.

Last year, Dr. Andy Novobilski joined us as Associate Provost for Research and Engagement, and he was charged with creating a more robust research structure that links engagement, scholarship and innovation. The results have been amazing – in terms of your interest and activity, as well as the funding we have secured in support of our efforts.

We have not considered ourselves as leaders in research expenditures because, simply put, we are not an R1 research institution, and do not strive to be one. However, as we begin to document our research totals, we are finding that we not only excel in our sector but that we exceed three of the four institutions in the next sector above us. We need to tell our story about how impactful your research efforts are to the region, to our students, and to our level of excellence.

It should be noted that the faculty and staff of UNG developed 61 proposals totaling \$12,330,044 during FY15. To-date, 35 grants have been awarded that are aligned with our mission, culture, leadership, resources and practices.

- The U.S. Department of Education awarded \$2.1 million over five years to UNG for a College Assistance Migrant Program to provide academic, financial and social support to help migrant and seasonal farmworkers and members of their immediate families to complete their first year of college and to continue in postsecondary education. The project is led by Harriett Allison of University Affairs.
- Natalie Hyslop, Mike Bodri, and John Holliday have just received a five-year, \$615,000 award from the National Science Foundation's S-STEM program to provide scholarship support to students at UNG studying in the STEM fields.
- April Nelms and Sanghee Choi from the College of Education and Mark Spraker from the Department of Physics have obtained a federal grant to support STEM initiatives. The grant, awarded through the federal Mathematics and Science Partnership program, for a project involving UNG, Hall County Schools, Lumpkin County Schools, the Dahlonega-Lumpkin Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce.

Our academic engagement extends far beyond our faculty and staff, to include course-based service-learning, which connects students to work directly with communities to become critical thinkers and problem solvers.

Our Center for Teaching, Learning and Leadership found that the total number of students engaging in academic service-learning since fall 2013 was 4,787 and that, in all, there are 31 different courses across all of the academic colleges involving service.

Some examples include:

- Our Clinical Mental Health Counseling department, which provided free care to North Georgians with more than 40 clinical visits this summer.
- Our nursing, biology and physical therapy students, who made an impact globally by treating patients in the Dominican Republic and Bolivia;
- Students in the Lewis F. Rogers Institute for Environmental and Spatial Analysis – IESA, who worked with the City of Gainesville to develop an online inventory of buildings in the downtown area to support economic development. The city was so pleased with the partnership that they presented us with a proclamation this spring celebrating UNG Day in Gainesville.

Clearly, we are engaging this region in a much more comprehensive way than ever before and partnering with our communities to address the needs of the region.

#### **Goal 4 is to Build Campus Identity and Institutional Unity.**

This is one of the most unique elements of our strategic plan and one that differentiates us from most other institutions. We represent different campuses, backgrounds and interests, yet we are bound together by a shared mission of academic excellence, student success and leadership development. Every unit across this university supports that mission in some way.

One of the things that presidents must do is to compare ourselves to our peers and to our aspirational peers. It is fairly easy to do in our System since we are divided into sectors. I have looked very closely at the data. When we compare ourselves to our aspirational peers, or the next sector up (note, this is not our current sector, but the next sector up), there is some interesting data:

- We are number one in student success factors -- SAT, HS GPA, retention, and graduation.
- We are number 1, 2, or 3 in every enrollment category.
- And, of course, we have more associate students than the others.
- Our endowment closed at the end of Fiscal Year 2014 with nearly \$49 million, up from \$26 million from the previous year. It nearly doubled in a one-year period and places us above every other school but one in the sector above us.
- Our alumni giving rate is tied for first and, again, we have come a long way in four years.

I am guessing that not many of us would have known how well we are doing in these areas without looking at the numbers. Our Goal 4 suggests that we have a story to tell and we must tell that story.

We have a strong reputation for producing graduates who comprise the civic, professional and military leadership of this region.

As we build on this reputation, we are developing new educational initiatives that are responsive to the emerging needs in the marketplace and opportunities to strengthen local communities and serve this region. For example:

- Our new four-year film degree will help meet the needs of the state's fast-growing film and media industry.
- The College of Health Sciences and Professions is launching an associate degree with pathway to health and two new certifications: Health Care Administration and Health Information Administration
- The College of Education is offering a new master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, with an option that results in certification for teaching in International Baccalaureate programs. UNG will be the first institution in the Southeast to offer this credential.
- Our criminal justice program has just added a POST certification option that enables students to earn this credential as part of their degree program. UNG is the only public four-year school in Georgia with a public safety academy and one of only a couple of institutions in the nation to offer law enforcement certification within a four-year degree program.
- UNG has been approved for the Doctor of Nurse Practitioner degree. We will collaborate with Valdosta State University, and we will be the lead institution.

With our obvious strength in so many professional disciplines and multiple campus locations, I believe we have significant opportunities to grow our graduate degree programs over time. This is one category where our enrollment is lower than some of our peers in Georgia, and I believe we can help meet the advanced educational needs of professionals in our communities. We have the opportunity to be creative.

For example, the MBA, traditionally offered in Cumming, is offered this year in both Cumming and Gainesville. The professor will be on one campus one week, and the other campus the next. During off weeks, students will have the benefit of real-time simulcasting. I applaud their creativity and know that we can find even more ways to utilize our multiple campuses as an advantage.

Across the country, organizations and communities are engaged in diversity initiatives and discussions, and UNG is no exception. More often than not, the concept of diversity is based on characteristics that we can see – race, ethnicity, age, and gender. Diversity also includes many characteristics that are not automatically identifiable – sexual orientation, religious faith, socio-economic background. For the university to fulfill its potential, we must foster an environment where everyone's perspectives and experiences are valued and accepted. Diversity initiatives are not the task of any one group or individual person. It takes us all to create this environment.

- Academic Affairs is developing a certificate program that would use existing courses to equip students with the knowledge and skills related to diversity issues.
- Student Affairs has begun the work of expanding Multicultural Student Affairs' Diplomats for Diversity program from the Gainesville Campus to Dablonoga.
- Also, Multicultural Student Affairs has implemented a student advisor program that pairs experienced student leaders with a student organization to provide leadership consultation and advice.
- This summer, I appointed Sheila Caldwell as advisor to the president on diversity to build on work that began last year through the Faculty Senate's Diversity Council. Sheila, will you please stand and be recognized?

I also appreciate the good work conducted by Sarah Mason and the council and look forward to Ester Morgan Ellis' leadership of the council this year.

### **So, what is ahead for us?**

One of the most critical endeavors we will undertake this year is the provost search, and I am sure you all understand the importance of this role. We will proceed with a national search for the provost position very soon, and I am confident that it will attract a robust pool of candidates, both internal and external. The search committee will include a wide representation of stakeholders, and I am pleased that Mark Spraker has agreed to chair the search committee.

This Thursday, we will celebrate the official opening of our new Blue Ridge Campus, and I am very excited about the opportunities this presents for students of that area. We know we have counties in that region with a low college completion rate. We know we can change that. But we also know that we cannot fund an additional campus with the limited resources we have.

You should know that every dime of the expenditures of that campus is coming from new funding specific to the Blue Ridge Campus.

- Our vision for Blue Ridge is to offer a variety of educational pathways that include dual-enrollment courses, a full-time cohort program for first-time freshmen with courses that will enable students to complete degrees in regional high-demand disciplines, courses for adult learners, and continuing and professional education programs for career growth or personal enrichment.
- We plan to develop a two-year program in Blue Ridge that will be the signature element for that campus.
- In concert with the Regional Education and Economic Development initiative we launched a couple of years ago, this new campus helps serve our mission as a regional university and increases educational opportunity that leads to economic development.

We also have facility projects in development at our other campuses.

- In Dahlonega, a new 540-bed residence hall will open next fall, and we are entering the planning stages for a convocation center.
- In Cumming, we are beginning planning for a second building and expect that to be in next year's capital budget.
- At Oconee, we will open a new addition this October.
- In Gainesville, we have added parking and moved the testing office offsite to create room for the expansion of the nursing program; we expect the addition for the library on the Gainesville Campus to be in the budget for Fiscal Year 19.

Over the past three years, we have been able to meet the goals of our three-year equity adjustment plan, and I am pleased that we have been able to bring faculty and staff salaries closer to competitive market levels.

Also, I am grateful that we have been able to award merit increases for two consecutive years, after several years of no pay increases.

As stewards of higher education, we share a responsibility to move this institution forward in a deliberate and thoughtful way. I am pleased to work with George Danns and the Faculty Senate, and Marianne Leidy and the Staff Council, and the presidents of the Student Government Associations to discern and address our needs as we grow. I am proud of our ability to work collaboratively through a system of shared

governance to discern and address our needs. It is through this shared commitment that UNG builds strong graduates and strong communities.

Looking further ahead, it is important that we all recognize that higher education landscape is in a period of major transformation as we balance technology advancements, funding sources, student outcomes, workforce needs, and, perhaps, most importantly, purpose. Periods of major transformation open enormous opportunities for doing well, and for doing good.

Many of us have family members or friends who did not attend or complete college, but who saw that higher education was a worthy investment in a bright future.

For those who question the value of higher education today, I am certain of this – there is no greater investment in our future, because our students, faculty and staff use their knowledge and skills not just for their own benefit but for the benefit of others.

It should not come as any surprise that our most successful efforts are those that require the most of us. Our successes were not given to us. Our successes had to be created. You are tremendously dedicated, we are truly in a very good position, and you should be proud of what we have accomplished. UNG's mission, vision and values are well aligned for continued success.

We have shaped a new institution that has a bigger voice and presence in the state, while retaining our student-centered focus on academic excellence. Through your commitment to our core values, UNG is – without question – among the best public universities in Georgia.

Let me remind you of our vision statement: UNG will be a regional and national leader for academic excellence, engagement, educational opportunity, and leadership development.

We are well on our way to achieving this vision, and we will keep the momentum going.

I've shared just a sampling of our successes today, and I want to thank you, all of you, not just for what you did in the past year, but also for who you are and what that will mean for UNG, for our students, and for the citizens of this state in the decades to come.

Best wishes for a successful academic year!