

The Engaged University and the Critical Issues of Contemporary Society
Public Service and Outreach Conference Awards Luncheon
January 27, 2005 • Georgia Center for Continuing Education

Good afternoon. It is indeed a privilege for me to have the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon.

Let me start by saying how much I appreciate what each of you do for the University of Georgia every day. In many ways, you are the face of this institution for the people of this state, and your dedication to the service mission is one of the great successes of UGA's history.

As you well know, the Georgia that we are called to serve is a rapidly changing place in this first decade of the 21st century. The Kellogg Commission call for engagement is particularly challenging in the fourth-fastest growing state in the nation, with a rapidly growing Hispanic population. It is challenging in a state which has had one of the strongest economies in the region, yet has the highest number of counties in the Persistent Poverty Belt. It is challenging for a state whose top industry is agriculture, but which must prepare young people for high-tech jobs in a global economy.

The question I have been pondering is this: How are we to be the people's university in the 21st century?

I have been looking forward to this speech, because the topic of this conference is one that has been on my mind for the past few years. In fact, I devoted a portion of the State of the University address two weeks ago to the topic of service learning, and I will share some of that language with you in a few minutes.

We are all faced with the challenge of putting the resources of this institution to work for the betterment of our community and, by extension, the betterment of society. Historically, that has been done through systems like the Cooperative Extension Service or the Small Business Development Centers.

Those delivery systems continue to be very effective ways of connecting our resources with particular needs in our communities and our states, and they have much to offer as we move forward.

But what has captured my interest in recent months is a nationwide effort to utilize what I

believe is the great untapped resource of our campus – our students. The service learning movement offers the potential for creating a cadre of students from institutions across this nation who have seen first-hand what service is and what it means.

Allow me, if you will to quote from the State of the University address:

There must be a greater focus here on service learning, not just as an exercise for a class, but as the beginning of a lifetime of service. UGA people need to give back even more to the society that supports them.

Under the leadership of Art Dunning, UGA is becoming more focused on what service learning is and how it can enhance the learning environment. During this academic year, we are piloting a Learning Communities project, in which 80 students in Creswell Hall live and study together, with their service learning activities focused around such areas as science, social science, international affairs and education.

There is a core group of more than 50 UGA faculty currently discussing how service can best be integrated into the academic experiences of our students, and the work of this group is laying the foundation for future curricular development. It is incumbent upon us as a university and as individuals to return to this community some of what we have been given, and public service through Volunteer UGA is an excellent way to do that.

This is the model for the future – to be as institutionally intentional about service as we have been about learning and research, and to meld the two activities into one which complements and strengthens both.

What I predict is that the legacy of higher education in the early years of the 21st century will be a generation of students who learned not only the subject matter they need to equip them for their lives, but also the vital role that service must play in making this a better world.

I am inspired when I hear about what is happening in service learning around the country

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and here at UGA. Those stories resonate with what I think land-grant universities ought to be doing. We ought to be looking outward, not inward. We have an historic, but simple, obligation: To help.

And there is no shortage of opportunities to help, whether it be economic development or agricultural assistance or money management skills or food preparation or any of the myriad forms of public service that those of you here today represent.

And there is no shortage of human capital, which I maintain is the capital of the 21st century, to apply to those needs. We have the expertise and knowledge of the faculty and staff, and we have the youth and energy of our students. In combination, they are a potent force for good in this world.

Walter B. Hill's portrait hangs in my office. I have long believed that he is one of the most important figures in this university's history, because he recognized that universities in the 20th century had to be more than shelters for academics and a few students.

You may have read in your program that Chancellor Hill believed that the university "should devise ways to apply university-generated knowledge to the problems and challenges of the state," and led a group of 100 Georgians to Madison, Wisconsin to learn about that university's program of public service.

Walter Hill recognized that UGA was on the verge of obscurity, and he understood that obscurity is anathema to service. We must be visible in what we do, intentional in what we offer and accessible to those who need our services.

If Walter Hill were with us today, I think he would tell us that we stand at another historic moment in this university's history. Just as the 20th century brought both challenges and opportunities, so does the 21st. The changes in this state that I mentioned earlier and with which we are all familiar offer the opportunity for us to serve our state in the grand tradition of the Office of Public Service and Outreach.

I believe that service learning is the best way to broaden the impact of our institutions on their communities. Both components – service and learning – are strengthened when combined in the classroom. That combined strength is a model for us as we pursue the goal of putting all the resources of this university to work for the betterment of our community and society at large.

This is the charge we take from this day – to involve everyone on this campus in the service mission of our charter.

This is an exciting time to be a part of one of America's great land-grant institutions. Thank you again for all that you do for the University of Georgia and the service mission of this institution.