State of the University Address 2004: "A Community of Learners"

The Chapel • Jan. 15, 2004

Thank you for that introduction, Professor Robinson, and my thanks to all of you for joining me this afternoon as we consider the previous year and look ahead to the next, and beyond.

I want to do three things in this speech today: First, I want to recount some of the very positive developments of the past year, and second, I want to remind all of us that the purpose of all that we do here – the personnel decisions, the building projects, the research efforts and the teaching – is to make sure that at the end of the day, or at the end of the year, this is a better community of learners. Particularly in trying budget times, it is imperative that we get back to basics. And third, I want to look specifically at what lies ahead in 2004.

This has been a challenging year on this campus. The continued cuts to the state budget have impacted the University of Georgia in ways that may not yet be fully comprehended. Many of our staff are doing more work because of unfilled positions, yet have not received a salary increase since October 2002. Staff are working harder and longer with less funding for supplies, for travel and for professional development and training. Faculty are teaching more students and more sections. These are hard times, and I and the senior administrative team deeply appreciate the work that is being done and the devotion to the good of the institution that is shown in that hard work. As we move into this new year, I remain cautiously optimistic that the future may be brighter.

As you may know, January derives its name from the Roman god Janus, who was distinguished by two faces, one which looked forward and one which looked backward, the significance being that the new year is a time for both reflection and anticipation. We are all better served by looking ahead to 2004 than back at 2003.

Almost exactly 219 years ago, the legislature of the State of Georgia ratified the charter for this institution authored by UGA's first president, Abraham Baldwin. Baldwin wrote that the need for an educated citizenry "should conspire to make us feel ourselves under the strongest obligation to form the youth, the rising hope of our land, to render the like glorious and essential services to our country." Five years later, George Washington, addressing Congress, spoke to the importance of education as a unifying force in a free society.

It was clear to both of these men that education was a public good. I have always been struck by the fact that the legislature of the young state of Georgia, among all the issues facing it, recognized and committed to the importance of education. This is the legacy we live today; this is the commitment we carry forward; this is the reflection and anticipation that the new year brings for us.

For the University of Georgia, 2003 was a year of challenges – the state budget and its impact on everyone on this campus, athletics issues, rising enrollment in a time of decreasing state support, campus disruption from construction. Every one of these issues, and many more that we face each day, require a great deal of detailed, time-consuming involvement and result in important decisions, some of which please, some of which do not.

While there have been challenges, much of the good that has occurred at the University of Georgia over the past several years continued in 2003. We have been about the business we are charged to carry out, doing those things that matter and that make a difference for this state. This is a strong and vibrant institution, committed to its mission to teach, to conduct research and to serve the people of this state.

From almost the first day I stepped onto the campus of Lipscomb College as a freshman more than 30 years ago, I fell in love with the feel of a campus, with its rhythm and cadence, its opportunities and experiences, its abundance and its resources. Karen Holbrook said it well when she spoke here last fall, describing campuses as places guided by mission, not profit. Disraeli said that "a university should be a place of light, of liberty and of learning." I sensed that what happened on campus was important both to individuals and to society.

I was involved last year in a project that helped me reconnect with those original motivations while simultaneously focusing me on the future of education in this country. As one of 35 college and university presidents and leaders in higher education, I signed a report last summer entitled "Building a Nation of Learners: The Need for Changes in Teaching and Learning to Meet Global Challenges." This report was issued last summer by the Business-Higher Education Forum in conjunction with the American Council on

Education. I will discuss more from that report later, but I am grateful to Georgia Power for making it possible for me to be a part of that group.

There was much to be proud of at the University of Georgia in 2003 and much that will propel us into 2004. The academic year that ended in the summer was the best academic year in the history of the University of Georgia, and that academic success continued into the fall. UGA students completed a sweep of the top national scholarships when the Rhodes, Marshall, Goldwater and Truman scholarships were won by Adam Cureton, Josh Woodruff, Laura Downs, Amanda Casto and Ginny Barton. UGA shared this honor with only three other institutions – Harvard, Yale and Brown – and just last month we announced our second consecutive Marshall Scholar, Joe Wolpin.

External funding for research, instruction and service was up 12.8 percent, to $230.7 million. This margin of excellence is funded entrepreneurially, not through state budget lines, and we must continue to find innovative ways to finance the upward trend in these and other programs.

Professor Eve Troutt Powell, a specialist in the history of 19th century Egypt, received one of 24 MacArthur Foundation "genius" awards, yet another recognition for the very strong history department here and an indication of the overall depth and quality of the UGA faculty. Please join me in congratulating her.

UGA also ranked sixth nationally in Fulbright Fellowships.

The friends and supporters of this institution, with interests ranging from student leadership programs to faculty positions to athletics, set another record for generosity with more than $72 million in gifts and pledges.

For the fourth consecutive year, the university was ranked among the nation's 20 best public universities by *U.S. News & World Report*. The perennial appearance of this institution in that ranking is a tribute to the collective good work and commitment of the students, faculty and staff at UGA. No single ranking is a complete measure of a university, but the totality of UGA rankings and the annual praise for this institution are significant.

There were other very positive developments:

- The opening of the Student Learning Center may have had the greatest impact on the intellectual climate of this institution since Old College was constructed. The residence halls and dining commons of East Campus Village rose from the ground and are on schedule to open next fall, increasing by almost 20 percent the number of students who live on campus. All the research in this area concludes that living on campus improves a student's academic performance, and that is, after all, what we are about.
- UGA's programs at the Gwinnett Center have been well-received and are allowing us to serve that rapidly growing community in ways that have a direct and positive impact. Enrollment was around 800 students there this fall.
- UGA is now ranked 10th in the nation for the number of students studying abroad, a critically important part of a student's education in a global economy. We have an obligation to prepare our students for the world they will enter when they leave here, and that world is one of international interdependence.
- Licensing and royalty revenue deriving from UGA discoveries and inventions increased 9.1 percent during fiscal year 2003, to a total of almost $4.2 million. Such revenue is a potent economic force for this state and is part of the land-grant mission of the 21st century.
- The researchers of the Complex Carbohydrate Research Center have moved into a new facility on Riverbend Road and preliminary work has begun on the Coverdell Center for Biomedical and Health Sciences. These two state-of-the-art facilities will help us continue the very strong progress in research funding and findings we have enjoyed over the past few years.
- The Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach is seeking new and innovative ways to serve this state in the

wake of the dramatic demographic changes taking place here. The ongoing study into the growing Hispanic population in Georgia is helping local and state governments manage the impact of the new Georgians while easing their transition. The Study on Persistent Poverty in the South holds the promise of developing real and lasting solutions to the chronic problems which plague 91 of Georgia's 159 counties and more than 240 counties across the Southeast.

- I want to compliment Art Dunning and his colleagues for calling our attention to the disparity of economic opportunity in Georgia. The best way to close that gap is education, starting with pre-kindergarten classes and extending through the higher education system.

Each year in August, about the time the fall semester starts, I try to take a trip around the state to spread the word about all the positive things that are going on at UGA. Each time I do so, I come away with this impression: The people of this state expect the University of Georgia to be engaged in the kinds of activities that have a direct and positive impact on their lives. They expect us to be doing research into the causes of cancer and Parkinson's and diabetes and AIDS. They expect us to be developing improved agricultural practices. They expect us to be teaching the best students at the highest level. They expect us to be producing a generation of leaders prepared for a vastly different and rapidly changing world. They expect us to be engaged in the kind of public service and outreach that is meaningful in the 21st century. They expect us to be preparing Georgia's teachers.

These expectations are invigorating to me. The people of this state hold us to a very high standard; I take that high standard as a solemn obligation. We are sometimes criticized, and perhaps we always will be. It comes with the territory; it's a function of being the object of the attention of so many people with different points of view and powerful loyalties. But despite the criticism, despite the occasional angry letter to my office or critical e-mail to one of you, the fact remains that virtually every parent in this state would be thrilled for his or her child to be accepted to the University of Georgia.

I read recently about a phenomenon known as the "Heiden Effect." Many of you will remember the great American speed skater Eric Heiden, who won five gold medals in the 1980 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid. You might think that the other skaters of his time would have avoided skating against him, for he rarely lost and often dominated the events he entered. But almost every skater who did race Heiden set a personal best time in those races. The challenge of facing the best pushed them to excel.

We, too, face similar challenges at the University of Georgia, but the response from the campus community has been overwhelmingly positive. We now compete with the best from across this country and even around the world. You have buckled down, you have recommitted to the mission of this place and you have found ways to do more with less. I am deeply grateful to each of you for what you have done for this institution.

Yet at the same time, we must all remember that the purpose of the research, the service, the instruction, the Student Learning Center, the East Campus Village, the CCRC, the Coverdell Building, the budget issues, the buses, the parking decks and everything that goes into operating this complex campus which functions like a city of almost 50,000 is to make sure that this is a better community of learners this year than it was last – and that it will be better next year than this.

A community of learners is a place which supports inquiry and generates ideas. It is a place which challenges notions and encourages exploration; it offers opportunities for academic investigation and social interaction. It is a place where people convene for the single purpose of education and where they pursue that purpose in multiple ways. At the University of Georgia, those people are our excellent students, our top quality faculty and our outstanding staff. The people of the University of Georgia are the equal of any in this country; they are the core, the very heart and soul, of this community of learners.

Above all, a community of learners must first have a constant and active student presence. I said in this address three years ago that we were dangerously close to becoming a commuter college, with far too many of our students living off campus

and little infrastructure in place to encourage them to stay on campus after their classes were finished.

That is why we are building new residence halls and renovating the older ones – to encourage (and require, as we will with freshmen starting in the fall) students to live on campus and become fully immersed in the myriad opportunities offered by a real community of learners. In short, park your car and engage here.

Second, a community of learners requires faculty who are committed to using every available method and technology to improve their teaching. I believe that is happening on this campus; the statistics on WebCT usage, for instance, show that more than 2,000 faculty and teaching assistants are using that technology in more than 3,800 sections. The technology we have in many of the classrooms on campus is being well-utilized. But there is more that we can do. This is why we are building facilities like the Student Learning Center, and why we are wiring classrooms in the School of Law and other places. It is also one of the roles that the Teaching Academy plays, as its members examine the scholarship of teaching in the new learning environment.

Third, a community of learners must have facilities where students and faculty can live and learn and meet and gather. The Myers Community is in many ways a model for residential life at UGA. Those residence halls – Myers and Soule, Mary Lyndon and Rutherford – are centrally located, close to academic facilities and campus transportation, and have a dedicated area of greenspace. These physical qualities are conducive to the academic environment that marks a great university.

The conversion of Herty Field from a parking lot back to its natural state several years ago began a process on this campus that now includes Brooks Mall, the Head Terrace and adjacent amphitheater on the north side of the Student Learning Center, and the improvements to the Baldwin, Jackson and Baxter Street corridors. In keeping with the campus master plan and the historic beauty of this campus, we have increased the amount of greenspace. We have done that because it de-emphasizes the tendency to be cocooned in a car and encourages individual and class academic activity in the physical spaces of this campus.

The Student Learning Center is the centerpiece of a new community of learning at UGA. We had high expectations for that facility, having carefully designed it to meet the needs of our students, but it has exceeded those expectations many fold. Former President Chuck Knapp played a crucial role in its conceptual planning, and three governors helped us fund and build it. My thanks to President Knapp and Governors Miller, Barnes and Perdue for this remarkable learning facility.

I am in the Student Learning Center several times a month, and every time I am there the place is alive with academic activity. The study rooms are full, the computer carrels are full, the lounge areas are full, the classrooms are relieving schedule and class availability problems, faculty and student groups are meeting, students are studying and reading and talking and, occasionally, napping. I do not know of another facility on this or any other campus where design so fully meshes with function. One *Red & Black* columnist proudly described herself as "a Student Learning Center nerd," adding that she was often one of those students rounded up in the final sweep before the building closes at 2 a.m. For decades to come, the Student Learning Center, with its combination of electronic library and classroom spaces, will be a defining experience for almost all UGA students.

The cumulative impact of these and other actions has been simply to improve the academic climate of this campus. We have all the tools – an engaged student body, a very strong faculty, a committed and talented staff – and we are creating an environment where they can flourish and which supports the very good work that they are doing.

And yet, there are other ways in which we can improve even further on the concept of a community of learners at UGA. First, this university needs to be a place of even greater academic rigor where virtually all students accept the challenge of a full course load – at least 15 units per semester. The statistics we tout on each incoming class, the quality of the applicant pool, and my contact with our students have me convinced that we are attracting students with the academic preparation and talent to do just that. But, as Robert Kibbee, former chancellor of the City University of New York, has said, "The quality of a university is measured more by the kind of student it

turns out than the kind of student it takes in." The obligation of a selective university is to challenge its students academically. A UGA degree should be a hard-earned prize. There must be a greater focus here on writing skills, critical thinking, human empowerment, internationalization and all of the attributes that describe a true liberal education in the 21st century.

UGA was one of 437 colleges and universities to take part in the 2003 National Survey of Student Engagement, widely recognized as the standard instrument in that field. While there is much in those results for which we can be pleased, there is also evidence to support the assertion that the academic rigor of the University of Georgia is not yet what it should be.

Students at UGA are generally more pleased with their educational experience than their counterparts at similar institutions, and would be much more likely than their peers to attend the same institution again. The national survey shows that UGA students also take more foreign language courses, participate in more study abroad programs and simply get along better with their fellow students.

However, my concerns about academic rigor are reflected in their answers to questions about study habits and class preparation. Our students spend less time on class preparation and on homework than their counterparts; they also produce fewer written papers. These are areas where our expectations need to be raised.

Second, just as George Washington and Abraham Baldwin believed that education was a fundamental component of early American society, we must commit completely to the idea that students ought to leave here prepared to be citizens of the world. We have taken great strides toward that goal – we now teach some 25 languages regularly, we are working across all fronts to increase the diversity on this campus, we have at any given time students from more than 140 countries, and we have an aggressive study abroad program which has pushed us into the top 10 nationally. Residential study abroad programs like Oxford and Cortona and Costa Rica, along with cooperative programs in Marrakech and Kyoto and other parts of the world are important components of preparing students for the 21st century. Continuing our progress in this area will probably mean going some places and taking some chances that we would not have taken individually, as a faculty or as an institution even 10 years ago – but that is exactly what great universities do.

Third, we need to continue our quest to move from an automobile-based to a pedestrian-based community of learners. The East Campus Village, the first residence halls on campus in more than three decades with its nearby dining commons, will help us accommodate the freshman residency requirement by providing bed space for 1,200 more students in suites that put my college dorm to shame. Students who live on campus are more likely to take advantage of the full range of opportunities a top-20 university offers, and therefore will have a fuller academic experience.

Other facility projects have been undertaken with the "community of learners" concept in mind. We did not make the improvements we have made to Baldwin and Baxter streets simply for the sake of spending construction money. While those projects were primarily motivated by safety concerns, they also fit perfectly into the campus master plan and support the goal of building a community of learners. The same is true of Brooks Mall on South Campus; while one of that project's goals was to boost the infrastructure capacity in advance of the Coverdell Building construction, it provided an opportunity to begin to make South and North Campus look and feel like parts of the same whole and become more pedestrian friendly.

Fourth, we must continue to support those efforts which expand research opportunities, as a strong and aggressive research program contributes greatly to the academic environment that fosters a community of learners. The Coverdell and Complex Carbohydrate Research Center projects facilitate a marriage of UGA's existing strengths with the clinical capabilities of the Medical College of Georgia and other research universities across this country and around the world. The Biomedical and Health Sciences Institute has organized the variety of UGA research in those areas under a single administrative structure which will facilitate great strengthening of that research agenda. The Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities makes it possible for UGA's undergraduate students to work with research faculty. Such opportunities make connections

between the instruction and research missions of a flagship institution and contribute greatly to the goals I have discussed today.

Fifth, we must carry on the UGA tradition of preparing leaders. I have been privileged in my time as president of this university to work with three governors of Georgia. All three have been graduates of the University of Georgia, and that is not a coincidence. There is something about the UGA experience that prepares people for leadership. The intensity of the UGA experience – the intellectual, the social, the physical and the spiritual – builds in young people the capacity to lead.

As I mentioned earlier, over the course of several months last year, a few dozen presidents of colleges and universities and other leaders in higher education sat down with leaders from the corporate and business community, and we talked. We agreed with the business leaders as we said, "For America to compete in today's global economy, we must ensure that students develop the skills they need to take them from the classroom to the boardroom. We must become a true 'nation of learners.' This will require systemic change. Our higher education institutions must adopt bold new approaches to learning and teaching. We must become more responsive to the needs and talents of both students and teachers alike, and more effective in cultivating America's leaders of tomorrow."

I am committed to the principle of education for its own sake. But we are naïve if we do not recognize that most of our students will take jobs when they graduate from the University of Georgia, that most of those jobs will be in the private sector, and that at least a portion of our responsibility is to prepare those students to function in the global economy.

So, how do we do even better as we move into the future? What will be our joint foci as we move through the next 351 days of this year? There are five goals which I hope to accomplish in 2004.

First, we must reverse the trend on faculty vacancies. You all know the numbers: Over the past two fiscal years, direct funding to the University of Georgia from the state has decreased some $50 million while enrollment has increased by some 1,400 students. Demand for enrollment at UGA continues to grow; we have hundreds of vacant faculty positions and more and more students to teach. This is a trend that simply cannot continue, and I pledge today that the first priority for any additional tuition revenue will be the hiring of faculty.

In particular, we must hire faculty in those areas that bear the greatest responsibility for undergraduate teaching. We will focus faculty hiring on instructional faculty to teach core courses to freshmen and sophomores.

While these core courses are taught across the campus, the bulk of them are taught in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences. It is hard to imagine that at this time next year, Wyatt Anderson will no longer be the dean of the Franklin College. Wyatt is the quintessential university dean – a respected scholar in his own right and member of the National Academy of Sciences who is also a voracious reader, music lover and theater patron. I will miss his counsel and measured approach to issues. The strength of any great institution is in the collective talents of the individuals who comprise it, but some individuals deserve particular recognition. Wyatt Anderson is one of those individuals; please join me in recognizing him and his wife Margaret for their service to this university.

There are two other former deans who are now serving this university in different capacities. David Shipley has returned to the classroom after leading the School of Law since 1998, and Bonnie Yegidis, after serving as dean of the School of Social Work since 1995, is now associate provost for academic affairs. Please join me in thanking both of them for what they have done and will do for UGA.

Second, we will move into the East Campus Village, a residential and dining complex near the Ramsey Center, a facility which will have the same transforming impact on the residential life of this campus that the Student Learning Center has had on its academic life, and which will for many years serve as a symbol of the commitment of this university to the residential experience of our students. The benefits of having more students living on campus extend far beyond those students and permeate the community, increasing the academic vigor of the institution.

As in any example of progress, there are many people who deserve the credit. Let me mention just a few of them who deserve credit for the East Campus Village: Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration Hank Huckaby; Jo Ann Chitty, president of the Real Estate Foundation, and the members of that organization's board; Danny Sniff, associate vice president for facilities planning; Jim Day, director of University Housing; Joyce Hardman Sniff, director of parking and transportation; and Mike Floyd, director of food services. Please join me in recognizing them.

Third, we will see construction on the Coverdell Center begin in earnest. This facility, financed through a combination of federal, state and internal funds in honor of the late Senator Paul Coverdell, will bring together the breadth and depth of UGA's research in the biomedical and health sciences. This university is involved in a wide range of research in this area, in the life sciences, the Colleges of Pharmacy and Veterinary Medicine, in communications and many others. We are doing far more in this area than most people know, and that is a story that I hope to tell in the coming year.

I must note that again we stand on the achievements of those who went before us, particularly former President Fred Davison, whose vision for UGA's role as a leader in the life sciences is now fully realized. Harry Dailey, director of the Biomedical and Health Sciences Institute, which will be housed in the Coverdell building, has demonstrated great leadership in bringing together the many faculty from multiple programs as we start this endeavor. Please join me in recognizing Dr. Dailey.

Fourth, we will complete the plans and accelerate the fundraising for an alumni and development center. Such a center will bring an elevated level of activity to the central campus area and become a home for UGA's increasingly numerous alumni and a locus for our development efforts, which generate critical financial support for the range of activities this institution undertakes on a daily basis. There are two people I want to recognize among the many who have played and will continue to play important roles in the progress of the center. First is Dave Muia, executive director of the UGA Alumni Association, who is retiring this month after serving this University in a variety of external affairs positions since 1975. Dave, I have enjoyed working with you and appreciate your lifelong commitment to the University of Georgia. Second is Dink NeSmith, president of the Alumni Association, who has also served UGA through the Fanning Institute, Leadership Georgia, the UGA Foundation Board of Trustees and the Athletic Association. Please join me in thanking them.

And fifth, departments, schools and colleges must work to increase the number of graduate students and graduate assistants in targeted academic areas, in keeping with one of the goals of our strategic plan. Great universities have strong graduate programs, and strong graduate programs benefit the state intellectually and economically. Graduate students are also the foundation of communities of learning both here and across the nation.

When completed, these five goals will continue this institution along the path of progress that it has followed for the past several years. And, just as the progress we have made is the result of collective efforts, any progress in the future will require the collective efforts of all of us. We are far, far greater than the sum of our parts.

And finally, a few personal words. Despite the successes at the University of Georgia in 2003, the past six months have been the most difficult of my professional life. The stress of numerous events on my family has been greater than I would ever have hoped. I have spent too much time too far removed from what drew me to higher education. It is particularly troubling that the attention paid to a personnel decision has shifted the focus from where it should be, on the students and faculty, the instruction and research and service, the internationalization and facilities and the impact that UGA has within and beyond the borders of this state. All that the institution and we personally have gone through has led me to think about what is most important and where we are going and how we should all spend our time.

I believe we are all still young enough to learn, and I believe I have learned from the challenges of 2003 in ways that will make me a better leader of this community of learners in 2004.

But it is now time to put 2003 behind us and focus on a future in which I truly believe the University of Georgia best serves the state of Georgia by becoming a better community of learners. I still know in my gut that what is most important for the future of Georgia is even better students, even better faculty, even better staff all working together in a better learning environment which promotes teaching, research and service.

When I walk this campus, I have the same feelings I did when I first walked on a campus more than 30 years ago. There is something truly special about a place built for the single purpose of learning. It is in those moments when I walk the campus that I most deeply feel that purpose – not in Cabinet meetings or University Council or admissions meetings or Research or Foundation board meetings or any of the other appointments and necessities which take up my days. Walking the campus, stopping on the sidewalk to chat with a member of the faculty or a student, seeing young people reading on the North Campus lawn or Brooks Mall, enjoying a choral performance on the Chapel steps, overhearing a botany professor take a class on a tour of the campus arboretum, dodging through the midday class change on Baldwin – these are the things that bring me back to our purpose. These are the times when I am most in concert with the community of learning. These are the times when I am glad that I chose this as my life's work.

For more than three decades I have loved the feel of a campus, and for 22 consecutive years now I have been privileged to work on three of America's great campuses. My singular goal for this year and for years to come is that the University of Georgia become a better community of learners. I ask that you join me in a renewed commitment to this place and its mission. The people of Georgia and the students at UGA deserve nothing less.

Thank you.