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Convocation 2006

Welcome to our second annual Faculty-Staff Convocation. At the inaugural convocation last August, we proposed a vision for the university's future. [Slide 1]

That vision was based on our mission-designated identity as a Leadership Institution. It called for us to strive for national distinction by pursuing four aspects of leadership that fit our distinctive traditions and identity:

- First, innovation in teaching and learning,
- Second, educating engaged citizens,
- Third, involvement in our region's development,
- And fourth, living our values within our own organizational culture.

Many of you responded to this vision with new ideas and initiatives. The slides on the screen document examples. The activities now associated with the four leadership themes enhance our prospects for realizing the vision. [Slides 2-4]

We have made a promising beginning, but much remains to be done if we are truly to achieve national distinction in these areas. The competition is fierce. The playing field is changing fast, and we are chasing a moving target. We have more

A VISION FOR NORTH GEORGIA'S FUTURE 1

A university of *national stature* distinguished for its leadership in:

- *Innovative teaching and learning*
- *Educating engaged citizens*
- *Contributing to regional development*
- *Living its values within its organizational culture*

LEADERSHIP FOR INNOVATIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING 2

Freshmen learning communities

Core curriculum changes

Learning outcomes

Innovative use of technology

- WebCT (Education, Nursing, Physical Therapy)
- iPods and Podcasting (Modern Language, Teacher Education, Nursing)
- Blogging (Psychology, Mathematics, Computer Science)
- Mobile computer labs (Psychology and Sociology)
- SmartBoard technology (History, Modern Language)
- Online courses (Pharmacology)
- Online student evaluations (School of Education)

Students assisting faculty with technology (STARS)

resources and traditional advantages in pursuit of some of these leadership domains than others. In some instances we are constrained by our own past and practices.

LEADERSHIP FOR INNOVATIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING	3
Biology lab shift from instructional to investigative pedagogy	
School of Education experiments for instructional improvement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative teaching • Differentiation of pedagogy • Peer observation 	
Early Childhood/Special Ed Spanish immersion	
Faculty Development Advisory Council innovation awards	

LEADERSHIP FOR INNOVATIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING	4
Participation in AACU’s Greater Expectations Institute	
Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence faculty orientation	
Business School Advisory Council assessment of student skills	
Early alert – early intervention program	
Peer review of teaching program	

I want to concentrate my remarks today on those self-imposed constraints. [Slide 5] In doing so, I recommend that we focus our attention this year on strengthening our capacity to achieve the fourth leadership goal: Living our values in our own organizational culture. [Slides 5-6]

That, in turn, requires that we identify our weaknesses as an organization and work together to address them. This is necessary if we are to build an institutional foundation through which we can best achieve all our leadership goals. My comments are intended as a call to action, not an attempt to fix blame or belittle the past. I hope you take them in that spirit. [Slide 7]

LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATING ENGAGED CITIZENS	5
Arts and Letters Study/Teach Abroad programs (Spain, France, England, Greece)	
New International Affairs degree	
Center for Global Engagement	
Political Science Association’s “Crossfire” lunches	
American Democracy Project	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution Day essay contest • Honors Day showcase of student projects 	

LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATING ENGAGED CITIZENS	6
Leadership minor and professorships	
Pre-North Georgia program to start academic year	
Required service learning activities (School of Ed)	
Expanded student participation-professional associations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgia Athletic Trainers Association • Student Council for Exceptional Children 	

LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATING ENGAGED CITIZENS	7
Biology faculty sponsorships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local organization for pre-medical professions • Regional Science Olympiad • Annual regional State of the Art in Biology meeting 	
Environmental Leadership Center studies	
Appalachian Trail Preservation and environmental organization participation	
Planetarium shows for students and the public	

LEADERSHIP FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT	8
Center for Appalachian Studies-Georgia Appalachian Center for Higher Education	
Citizen’s Leadership Alliance; Leadership Lumpkin	
Collaboration with Dahlonega on parking deck	
Entrepreneurial Leadership Center (Business)	

LEADERSHIP FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT	9
Department of Modern Languages K-12 Language Initiative	
Math and science instructional improvement services for area public schools (partnership w/Pioneer RESA)	
K-12 educator professional development through Nora and Joe Richardson Society for School-based Leadership	
School of Education promotion of democratic classroom models for on-campus programs and area middle schools	

LEADERSHIP FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT	10
Regional workforce oriented degree programs (e.g. Forsyth nursing program; MS in Nursing Education)	
Physical Therapy’s Ergonomics and Injury Prevention program with Timkin Industries	
Nursing mobile health unit	
Physical Therapy-Equestrian Team hippotherapy camp for disabled children	
Middle school wellness testing program	
HNS physical therapy community practice	

Our self-constraints were highlighted by two projects we undertook last year – an assessment of our institutional identity and a consultation on enrollment management. [Slides 8-10] Although these were separate inquiries, they produced remarkably similar results. These results were summarized in my January 2006 letter to the North Georgia community.

Research done by the institutional identity task force documented a widely shared consensus on our institutional image. [Slide 11]

We see ourselves, and many others see us, as an academically distinguished and

LEADERSHIP IN LIVING OUR VALUES	11
Quality service initiative (institutional and USG)	
Student affairs initiative to enhance quality and improve productivity of services	
Research and collaborative publication on innovative practices (School of Education)	
Base pay salary equity study and funding	
Employee assistance program	

demanding university; committed to a residential undergraduate experience that educates the whole person; offering personalized education in a supportive, caring community; with strong interpersonal relationships among students, faculty and staff; guided by an ethos of shared values and of service beyond self. [Slide 12]

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE NORTH GEORGIA EXPERIENCE	12
Rigorous academic programs	
A focus on undergraduate education	
Personalized attention to student needs	
Holistic, residence-based education	
A caring, supportive community	
Strong bonds among faculty/staff/students	
Students committed to public service	

The work of the task force and the consultants also documented some revealing gaps between our self-perception, the larger reality, and student perceptions of their North Georgia experience.

These gaps were particularly telling when we were judged in comparison to

GAPS BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS AND REALITY	13
The North Georgia experience	
Quality of students we attract	
Competitive standing vis-à-vis our system peers	
Image and reputation as a residential college	
Level of academic challenge we provide	

institutional peers within Georgia and nationally. The findings raised questions about the quality of our academic experience, our living and learning environment, and our support for students. [Slide 13]

In some respects, these are familiar gaps for institutions of higher

education. We all seek academic excellence, for example, but face challenges to achieving it. These challenges range from the quality of student preparation and motivation to resource limitations that make it difficult to offer a full complement of inspiring educational experiences, faculty and staff. [Slide 14]

Nearly all of us fall short of ensuring all students' success, as witnessed by low rates of student retention and graduation nationally-- half of all college students in America never complete a degree.

GAPS BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS AND REALITY	14
Extent and quality of student-faculty interactions	
Active, collaborative and experiential learning	
Quality of first- and second-year experience	
Retention-graduation rates (student success)	
A supportive environment	

But shared shortcomings are not a reason for complacency — in fact, quite the opposite. We are witnessing a troubling and unprecedented response to the performance of higher education from the American public. It is no exaggeration to call this response an assault. The criticisms take many forms and are voiced by diverse constituents, from parents and officials concerned about rising costs to business leaders questioning our productivity and the quality of our graduates.

Two recent occurrences illustrate my point. Nationally, the draft report of the U.S. secretary of education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education has just been published. [Slide 15]

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION 15

“Our [inquiry] has brought us to the uneasy conclusion that the sector’s *past attainments have led our nation to unwarranted complacency* about its future... We remained so far ahead of our competition for so long...we began to take our postsecondary superiority for granted. The result of this inattention...is sobering... *Our nation is now ranked ninth* among major industrialized countries in higher education attainment.”

“A troubling number [of students]...never complete their degrees at all, at least in part because most colleges and *universities don’t accept responsibility for making sure that those they admit actually succeed*. As if this weren’t bad enough, there are also disturbing signs that *many students who do earn degrees have not actually mastered the reading, writing, and thinking skills* we expect of college graduates.”

The Spellings Report, as it is being called, has been described as “28 pages of searing critique detailing the ways in which America’s colleges and universities are failing us.” The commissioners state: “what we have learned over the last year makes clear that American higher education has become what, in the business world, would be called a mature enterprise: increasingly risk-averse, at times self-satisfied and unduly expensive. It is an enterprise that has yet to address the fundamental issues of how academic

programs and institutions must be transformed to serve the changing needs of a knowledge economy.” The commission concludes that “...funding for higher education will not grow enough to support enrollment demand without higher productivity, transparency and accountability clearly and successfully documented.” Tough language — and this from people who are friends of higher education.

Closer to home, the Georgia Board of Regents has appointed a “corporate chancellor,” as one journalist termed him. The chancellor’s words and actions strongly suggest that he was recruited as a friendly critic of higher education, not simply an

advocate, and that the board (and the public officials who influence that board) believe that higher education should adopt business practices to improve and assess its performance. The governor’s agenda for higher education, for example, has been called a “new era of responsibility and accountability.” His recently celebrated Customer Service Initiative singled out the University System of Georgia as a key to this program’s success.

The criticisms directed at higher education are part of a broader social phenomenon — a demand that all institutional sectors reform and restructure to meet the challenges of a changing world. The professions have been especially vulnerable to public condemnation. Historically, the professions have been exempt or protected from the most virulent consequences of social change. In fact, the very idea of a

profession implies some insulation — from the vagaries of the marketplace, the intrusions of uninformed lay people, the crass values of commercialism.

[Slide 16] In return for this protection, the professions were expected to provide a valued service to society, to contribute their expertise guided by principles rather than personal gain. Classically, members of the profession took an oath of practice tied to a specific code of

ethics. Some even offered service guarantees that reflected their commitment to accountability. As self-governing organizations, they also regulated their membership and disciplined those who failed to meet standards of quality.

In recent years the social contract between the professions and the public has been broken or badly damaged. Concerns have been raised about some professions’ ability or interest in providing access to services, or their willingness to censure incompetent or unethical colleagues. Observers are suspicious that professionals are pursuing self-

MARKS OF A PROFESSION

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Being a professional requires affection for the subject matter, love of craft, and a disposition to serve – William May, author of *Beleaguered Rulers*

The idea of a profession involves higher-order learning, deep understanding, complex practice, and ethical conduct – Lee Shulman, President, Carnegie Foundation

“Our value is not given to us because of our technical abilities; our value is attributed to us by the way we practice our profession and live by a code of ethics in all aspects of our daily lives.”
– S. Scott Voynich, American Institute of CPAs

“Integrity is never a given, but always a quest that must be renewed and reshaped over time.”
– William Sullivan, author of *Work and Integrity*

interest to the exclusion of public goals. Clients and patients have lamented the loss of professional care and trust on which they could count.

The scandals associated with Enron are a familiar example. Less remembered is the demise of Arthur Andersen, a major international accounting firm linked to Enron — a dramatic reminder that even prestigious institutions are vulnerable to self-destruction.

William May (author of “Ethics and Higher Education”) describes professionals as “beleaguered rulers” sitting on “the[ir] wobbly throne,” feeling marginal and unappreciated. As an alternative to this self-pity, May appeals for a renaissance in the professions. He advocates that professionals, both individually and collectively, pay more attention to nurturance, service and accountability. His aspiration is to resurrect the moral and ethical dimensions of the professions.

May offers a powerful image of the professional relationship, a bond he associates with the biblical notion of a calling. This relationship, in his view, is not a market transaction between salesman and customer, but a transformative connection between professional and client. It is devoted to understanding and meeting client needs, not necessarily their desires. It is disinterested and built on trust.

May also reminds us that the professions are fundamentally social. Those who practice are not just individual professionals but members of a profession who share obligations to improve and ensure quality. These members are expected to be answerable not only for their own but also for each other’s actions.

I believe the recent attacks on higher education are part and parcel of a broader assault on the professions as a valued form of work life. These callings are threatened by what William Sullivan (of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) calls “the pursuit of the main chance” associated with unbridled entrepreneurship, and by the stultifying bureaucracies and anonymity associated with the large-scale organizations within which modern professions tend to be housed.

Colleges and universities have much at stake in this battle. We are the key profession in modern society. We play a dual role: we provide the formal education of all the other professions, and we are ourselves a profession, offering expertise in a discipline and the practice of teaching and learning. In this sense, we are doubly responsible for the

outcome of this attack. Higher education can, by its actions, help determine whether the professions are able to reclaim their eminence.

To do so, it must profess values. It must teach future professionals the intrinsic worth of moral and civic principles in their profession. And it must model these principles in the profession. It must reaffirm a commitment to service and responsibility, both individually and collectively. And it must be attentive and responsive to public concerns and client needs.

We may not agree with the assessments made of higher education, but we must acknowledge the legitimacy of the apprehensions and the powerful reality of the negative perceptions. We also must recognize that some of the criticisms are on the mark. A defensive posture is unproductive and violates our professional obligation to seek improvement vigilantly.

What does all this have to do with North Georgia? Strikingly, the qualities to which we aspire as an institution correspond directly with the core features of an admired professional. We seek to be known for the care we give our students, for humane relationships between professional and student-clients. And we ground our work in adherence to compelling values and service to society. [Slide 17]

CORE VALUES		17
North Georgia	U.S. Army	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Courage• Integrity• Loyalty• Respect• Service• Truth• Wisdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loyalty• Duty• Respect• Selfless Service• Honor• Integrity• Personal Courage	

In addition, all of us here – academics and administrative staff – are representatives of the profession. Our actions locally help to shape not only our own reputation as professionals but also the collective image of higher education.

We at North Georgia are, I think, vulnerable to the charge of complacency cited in the Spellings Report. For example, we take excessive pride in claiming our place in the hierarchy of USG institutions. It took us by surprise to learn that others have closed the gap in their ability to attract good students. Another example: We detect a tone of smugness in the often stated claim that “we have always done it that way at North Georgia” as a rationale for a questionable practice. We also hear the claim that we cannot take action on changes until we are presented with a vision – a version of inaction akin to

Waiting for Godot, and one that violates first principles of being a responsible, autonomous professional.

It is time to heed the wisdom of that great cartoon philosopher Pogo, who said, “We have met the enemy, and it is us.” The gaps identified between our self-image and student perceptions of North Georgia offer clues to areas where we need to improve our professional performance. They should serve as a wakeup call, exposing fault lines that threaten dire consequences if unattended.

We can start to respond by revising our admissions and residency policies and procedures. Our practice of first-come, first-served admission to those who meet baseline requirements – with the limit defined by the number of beds available – is not serving us well. We have asked Jennifer Collins to chair a group to recommend changes in the admissions process. Another group is examining alternative residency requirements. We are fast-tracking the development of Radar Ridge to increase the proportion of students in residence. And we are adding capacity to Forsyth County programs so that we can maintain our enterprise in Dahlonega at appropriate scale.

The fundamental process of our profession is, of course, teaching and learning. The course, taught by an individual faculty member, has been the historic context for our practice. Professional ethics dictate that we continuously examine this process to enhance learning. We need to ask all who teach to reassess the practices they employ in each course – to seek ways to strengthen course content, pedagogy, interaction with students, and assessments that result in verifiably greater student learning.

We also should affirm that teaching is a public act, subject to evaluation by peers representing the profession. Each department has a joint responsibility to ensure that its members meet professional standards or to help them make changes to restore those standards.

Departments and schools also share responsibility for organizing courses into coherent curricula, and for offering those courses on a timely basis to students pursuing each curriculum. We must fulfill our obligations to help students understand the connections among courses, to teach courses that fit student needs as defined by university and departmental requirements, and to schedule courses so that students are not delayed in making progress toward their degree.

GOALS FOR “THE YEAR OF THE SCHOOLS” 18

- **Recognize the importance of academic communities**
- **Increase opportunities for self-governance**
- **Strengthen the role of deans as leaders**
- **Assign responsibility, authority and accountability**
- **Promote school-based assessment of effectiveness**
- **Create a stronger sense of intimacy and community**
- **Stimulate faculty collegiality to set new directions and support each other’s work**

We have called this “The Year of the Schools” in part to highlight these and other shared professional responsibilities. [Slide 18] Schools are a relatively new phenomenon at North Georgia. We have not yet fully developed their potential as self-governing agencies within our university. I believe the schools can be an effective locus for academic

affiliations, responsibilities, authority and accountability. If they are to do so, each school must have a sound basis for working together, must agree on common purposes, must be ambitious to achieve mutual goals, and must be willing to support all its members while holding each accountable for his or her professionalism. As we have grown in scale, I believe the schools can be the primary home for the intimate, nurturing communities to which we aspire.

We have asked the deans and the vice president for academic affairs to take the lead in revising the university’s strategic plan, including the process by which we develop that plan. This endeavor should offer a chance to determine the extent to which the

WISDOMS OF A PROCESS APPROACH 19

- **Processes are the vehicle by which work gets produced. The ability to meet goals is a function of effective processes.**
- **Processes that are not monitored (“unattended processes”) tend to degrade over time.**
- **In the absence of a search for the unnecessary, complexity drives out simplicity.**
- **“Insanity is doing the same thing, the same way, and expecting different results.” (Alcoholics Anonymous)**
- **People who work in processes are the ones who should work on the processes.**

– From Daniel Seymour, author of *Once Upon a Campus*

schools as currently structured and operating can contribute to the university’s future development – or to make the changes needed to fulfill their promise.

You have no doubt noticed my emphasis on processes as the key to improving our professional performance. [Slide 19]

How we do our work is a central issue when practicing a

profession. In our case, while the primary educational process is teaching and learning, all administrative processes are intended to support that central process. If they fail to do so, we fail our profession.

Work processes are where our theories, beliefs and goals are expressed and become reality. They are the place where our workload is evident, where and how we spend our time. The processes we design and implement, in fact, define our everyday work life.

At North Georgia, I believe we work extremely hard, with devotion. I also believe that the processes we create and maintain impose an undue burden on our work and on our students. Our people are not usually the problem. Our processes are. We work hard, but not always smart. As a result, we are susceptible to the charge of being exceedingly bureaucratic.

Here are a couple of examples:

In order to graduate, our seniors have had to obtain signatures from fifteen departments to become eligible to receive their diplomas. Thanks to Jason Pruitt and some colleagues working to redesign administrative processes, all these signatures have been eliminated.

Another example: at Intro, students wanting to change their majors have been asked to line up in the morning and wait to make the change with a representative from the registrar's office. A team of folks reviewing intro bottlenecks such as this solved the problem. The day before registration, students wishing to change majors are given a card to fill out. A staff member gathers the cards and enters the information into the computer before morning, eliminating the line.

The Noel-Levitz consultation last spring resulted in several action teams to rethink processes associated with enrollment management, including advising, feedback on student performance, the first-year experience and student engagement. Their efforts have already yielded some results – for example, the Pre-North Georgia orientation program, the early alert/early intervention initiative, and several learning communities. Work continues on other processes that have been identified by students as impediments, such as course scheduling and availability and the so-called North Georgia “runaround” when seeking information or assistance.

Other candidates for scrutiny include space allocations, where we perpetuate the medieval notion of fiefdoms rather than treating space as a university resource; and committees, which proliferate, consume precious time, and survive long after their useful life.

When we hired Charles Schroeder as interim vice president for Student Affairs, we also recruited him to lead a comprehensive assessment of administrative processes and organization. He has tackled this issue with gusto, establishing within Student Affairs a focus on quality service standards and practices. He also has assembled cross-functional teams to examine current processes, to identify bottlenecks and barriers to smooth workflow, and to eliminate or redesign dysfunctional processes. He is working in collaboration with Staff Council on this issue, seeking to involve those who know best how each process functions because their work is an integral part of it.

I believe that this full-scale attempt to reform and refine our administrative processes can simplify our work, improve the support provided to the primary process of teaching and learning, and address concerns expressed about our profession both locally and nationally.

It is a privilege to be associated with the venerable profession of higher education. The scrutiny to which we are being subjected affirms the potential for this profession to be a central feature of our society for the foreseeable future. But no profession is secure if it neglects its mission of service. Let us work together to be worthy of the public's trust and to fulfill the social responsibility entrusted to us for higher learning. Let us do so with a "positive restlessness" – a sense of urgency, energy, and determination to take actions that will enrich our own professional lives and restore the standing of our great profession. Thank you.