

University Senate Retreat – Monday, August 8, 2022

Remarks of President Cathy Cox

- Welcome back !
 - I. Year ahead – strategic planning
 - Visiting aspirant peers to glean ideas, best practices
 - Important for everyone on campus to participate
 - Stronger strategic plan if it represents our common vision for the university
 - Effective strategic plans (1) set goals, (2) establish roadmap to reach goals, and (3) identify people who are accountable for reaching goals.
 - II. Let me back track and mention a few things that have happened since the spring semester ended:
 - A. New Vice President for University Advancement, Dr. Shelley Strickland; PhD Michigan, Higher Education; held concurrent appointments on the faculty there, and helped design a concentration in fundraising & philanthropy for a Master’s degree program there. She also has past experience at both Emory University and Kennesaw State.
 - B. Georgia College’s first fulltime Title IX coordinator – Shanoya Cordew – has been hired. She comes to us from Middle Georgia State University and is working on her doctorate at UGA. A fulltime Title IX coordinator will enable GCSU to devote time to the educational, preventive side of Title IX – rather than being reactive to complaints. We are also moving the Title IX office into the Office of Inclusive Excellence, as it seems to have moved around over the years.
 - C. Continuing search for a Chief Diversity Officer into the coming year; Dr. Jennifer Graham has agreed to continue serving as our interim director in the meantime.
 - D. We completed an RFP for our food service contract in late spring, and renewed our contract with Sodexo with much higher expectations for service and quality. You’ll very soon see a new Asian/Sushi food station on the lower level where the Subway has been, and you can expect to see

additional new food options in and around the Max over the coming year. West Campus will also get a new pizza and convenience store option by mid-year (with robotic delivery). We have a new general manager for Sodexo coming in later this month – he’s young, energetic, and we’re expecting big things from him and his team.

I urge all of you to eat in the Max from time to time. You’ll be amazed at what a positive impression it makes on our students for them to see you there and have the chance to interact with you.

- E. Chancellor Sonny Perdue made his first visit to campus as Chancellor on July 14, and brought his new Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Dr. Ashwani Monga. A faculty panel of Dr. Josie Doss, Dr. Nicolle DeCollete, Dr. Steve Elliot-Gower, and Dean Michael Stratton, and a group of outstanding students gave them an overview of the GCSU model of liberal arts education.

The Chancellor has not made any significant policy pronouncements so far. He has said that telecommuting is not on the table, and institutions should not authorize telecommuting unless it is for the benefit of the institution.

- F. I am working to assure that the Chancellor and members of the Board of Regents understand what our designation as the state’s liberal arts university really means. So in every meeting I’ve had, I am talking about our form of liberal arts education, and what it does to prepare students for today’s complex working world.

Many of the Regents also do not seem to know that we’re one of the three selective-admission institutions in the USG, or that we have a different model that is not seeking to grow our undergraduate student body by any significant amount. Those factors play strongly into the funding formula (circa 1983) that the legislature uses – based solely on enrollment growth/credit-hour production – and I am hopeful there is an appetite for refreshing or updating the formula to achieve better outcomes for the state.

- G. Tomorrow afternoon, Dr. Spirou and our Admissions leaders will have the chance to make a presentation to the Board of Regents on our admissions processes, especially in light of the SAT/ACT “test-optional” decision this spring, which has really whalloped our fall enrollment picture.

At the end of last week, we stood at about 1380 first-year students – down 120 from last year’s class of 1500. That represents a drop of approximately \$2.3 million in revenue from tuition, housing and fees – which we will see in the budget in two years because of the USG’s 2-year budget cycle lag.

We also learned last week that more students transferred out than we expected, which will also impact our budget in the coming years.

The takeaway? Bringing in new students and retaining the ones we have – has to be the responsibility of every one on campus, every faculty member, every staff member, every administrator. We exist in a very competitive environment in which our students have many choices – and we have to give them many good reasons to choose Georgia College, and to stay here once they enroll.

How do you do that? By doing what you do best! Helping to build a welcoming environment for all students. Challenging and engaging with them in class and outside class. Providing them with experiential learning opportunities they won’t get at institutions five times our size. If students feel connected here, they won’t leave. But it’s up to all of us to make sure students feel connected. I appreciate all you can do this year to help us turn this around.

- H. As you may have heard, we are already addressing budget cuts resulting primarily from the pandemic. Our enrollment and our credit-hour production – like almost every other USG institution – dropped somewhat during the pandemic. We’ve had an infusion of federal funds to tide us over last year and this academic year. But we will feel the pain next year – and that is why we are having to plan for budget cuts to get us through the next academic year (2023-2024).

We are mostly trying to address the budget cuts by eliminating a variety of vacant positions, and tightening our belts on operating costs like travel, supplies and the like. But given the enrollment issues of this fall, we felt the wise course was to impose a hiring freeze starting now – addressing critical hires as we need to – in order to prepare for the additional cuts that are expected to come our way.

Dr. Spirou may have more remarks to make about the budget when he speaks, but I'll tell you that his leadership in working with the Deans and with you to eliminate low-enrolled programs/majors is one reason we are in somewhat better shape than many of our sister USG institutions right now. The institutions that have not addressed low-enrolled majors over the years are now facing some serious and immediate personnel issues as a result.

No budget cuts are fun, that goes without saying. And we have been fortunate to avoid them for a long, long time. Our best way out of this ditch is to get our enrollment back up – especially in graduate programs – and we need all your help to do this.

I'll be glad to answer any questions you have about this – or other matters.