

University of North Georgia

President Bonita C. Jacobs

It is so great to see all of you today and to celebrate the beginning of the new academic year.

Before I go any further, I want to thank the leaders and presenters from units across UNG who have planned today's events. UNG LEADS Day is a wonderful way for us to come together to learn, to celebrate our achievements, and to connect with one another. Would all of the organizers and presenters please stand to be recognized?

I also want to recognize Jamie Mitchem, CEO of the Faculty Senate, and Kasi Ives, chair of the Staff Council. They are strong representatives of their groups, and I appreciate their leadership. Jamie and Kasi, would you please stand.

Finally, I would like to recognize and thank my husband Glenn who is with us today.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the walk on the moon. I may be showing my age, but I have vivid memories of watching the walk on a large screen on the main plaza in Monterey, Mexico, during a study abroad trip. I don't think I was as impressed as a college student as I am now with the magnitude of that walk.

The space race, as it was called then, began with a challenge from President John F. Kennedy to go to the moon, not because it was easy, but because it was hard. He called it a goal that would serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, and he described it as a challenge that we were willing to accept and one that we were not willing to postpone.

That endeavor to go to the moon – that goal – spurred unprecedented exploration, discovery, and technological advancement. It also galvanized our nation and became a point of national pride.

While we have not walked on the moon, we have demonstrated that same determination for doing something impactful, and what we have accomplished as a university is remarkable. Simply put, we have become a more comprehensive and dynamic institution.

Let me be clear, a traditional two or four year degree is not the right choice for every student. However, the value of higher education – and the value of the UNG experience – are much greater than a diploma.

We prepare students to think critically and to serve and to lead in their communities – to be problem solvers. As a result, our graduates have a competitive edge that leads to unique job opportunities and higher learning (va)R5h3g6e2 (g)10 (h)-10 (e)]TJ -0.004 T1eea1 Td [(r)-11

expect it to impact UNG. However, we will be cautious in managing our budget this year in case that e tpfu dcaatg

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Also for several years, Gainesville students have requested health services on that campus, and I am excited to share that in January, we will open a new Student Health Center in Gainesville.

Another new facility coming online soon is ~~our~~ new standalone Blue Ridge Campus. We opened our current site in Blue Ridge in 2015 with about 20 students. This fall, we are expecting more than 180 students!

We are very grateful to Speaker David Ralston, Senator Steve Gooch and the General Assembly, and the USG for their support of this new facility, which will open next fall.

Sandy Ott and the team in Blue Ridge have done an amazing job. While we welcome our part

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Like going to the moon, I believe higher education is an investment in the power of ideas and an investment in human potential. Our students are exceptional and they seek a degree that opens new doors and an experience that broadens their horizons. I am proud that we are providing those opportunities.

As an example, John Blessing, a first generation student at our Gainesville Campus, initially did not believe he would be able to go to college. Last year, he became our first ever Truman Scholar, one of the most prestigious nationally competitive scholarships for graduate school.

Caroline Brown won the NSF graduate research fellowship worth \$134,000 and has been accepted to the biochemistry program at Yale.

I'll give you one more example – Melissa Silva came to UNG through the Realizing Inspiring Successful Educators, or RISE, program, a partnership between the Hall County Schools and our College of Education to help develop more Spanish speaking teachers.

As a RISE student, the Hall County School System paid Melissa's tuition while she worked as a paraprofessional with elementary school English learners. She became the program's first graduate a few days ago and is receiving a job offer from Hall County. But first – as a Fulbright recipient she is going to the Kyrgyz Republic for a year as an English Teaching Assistant.

UNG students earned over \$482,000 in nationally competitive scholarships last year and we remain a national top producer of Fulbright and Gilman award winners.

Several of those students are members of our Corps of Cadets, and these awards and international internships help prepare them for global leadership opportunities. As The Military College of Georgia, the Corps of Cadets is a signature part of UNG and who we are.

We commissioned 107 cadets as second lieutenants this year, making a significant contribution to U.S. national security. We are also the primary provider of officers for the Georgia Army National Guard. Our graduates serve all over the world, including Afghanistan and Iraq.

Notably, alumnus General Stephen J. Townsend, who is a four star general, assumed command of U.S. Africa Command in July.

Closer to home, our Ranger Challenge Team competed at the International Sandhurst Military Skills Competition at West Point in April. The team finished third in this world competition out of 49 teams and was the #1 ROTC team in the nation.

This week, we have more than 200 new cadets in training through "FROG Week," as they assimilate into the Corps of Cadets.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome Col. Joe Matthews, a 1994 graduate, as our new commandant. Welcome back to UNG, Col. Matthews.

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Our athletics program had great success this year, too. We won conference championships in women's basketball, softball, and baseball and individual conference championships in rifle and track and field.

Women's basketball went on to its first NCAA Southeast Regional Championship and advanced to its first-ever Elite 8 appearance.

Women's tennis also advanced out of the regional round of the NCAA tournament and advanced to the Elite 8 for the first time in program history.

With 59 Peach Belt Conference Academic honorees this year, it is clear that our scholar athletes have the determination and leadership to excel in the classroom, as well as on the field or on the court.

As talented as our students are, they don't achieve these sorts of outcomes alone. You have heard me say many times that our employees are the best you will find anywhere. Our facilities and grounds are beautifully landscaped and maintained, our campuses are safe learning environments, we have a wonderful commitment to customer service, you lift one another up, and you serve as amazing mentors to our students –

Northeast Georgia is a fast-growing area of the state that includes some of the most affluent, high-population counties as well as very rural communities where the college attainment levels are lower than 20%.

We know that increased educational attainment contributes to healthier communities, higher levels of civic engagement, and higher lifetime earnings.

The research shows that associate degrees pay bring 18 percent more in wages than a high school credential and that bachelor's degree have an even higher wage premium — 71 percent more than a high school credential.

To emphasize the growing career opportunities and educational requirements in our region, our 2nd annual Regional Education and Economic Development Summit in September will feature Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan as the keynote speaker. The event brings together students, educators, and industry and community leaders to highlight the high-demand skills and bright future of our region. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, please contact the Office of Economic Development at oeconomic@ung.edu or call 706-864-1950.