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Message from the President

Georgia Southern University

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Dear Colleagues,

July 6, 2020

I hope everyone enjoyed the July 4th weekend! I have been looking forward to taking a few days off to be with family.

July marks the last full month of preparation before our “new” fall semester begins, and it also marks the beginning of the new fiscal year. To that end, I have a few updates to share with you.

Last week, the Governor signed the **Fiscal Year 2021 budget**, and on Wednesday (July 1), the Board of Regents approved our budget. As I noted in my email last week following legislative passage of the state budget, the University System of Georgia will realize a 10.8% reduction in its state budget allocation, which represents a lesser reduction than the 14% that we were asked to model.

Within the budget, the legislature provided funding for two capital projects at Georgia Southern: renovation of the Memorial College Center on the Armstrong campus and renovation of the Williams Center on the Statesboro campus. Both of these facilities will be remodeled to allow a more efficient use of collaborative space for various student life and student activities departments, including, but not limited to, Inclusive Excellence programs and veterans support services. I am incredibly grateful to our legislative delegation for their hard work in advocating for our capital project requests!

The USG did not receive new formula funding for enrollment growth, increased square footage, or health insurance increases in FY 2021, which means that we, as institutions, carry the responsibility of supporting these adjustments from our existing budgets. Additionally, as welcome news, the Board of Regents announced no furloughs for USG employees for FY2021.

When accounting for the credit hour budget reduction based on enrollment decline and our responsibility to fund the cost increases noted above, we were left with approximately \$1.6 million in unallocated reserves to fund critical needs as they arise. We will continue to assess our enrollment and the revenue forecasts of the state as we head into the fall before making any recurring commitments of these funds.

I will provide a detailed update on the budget and the continuation of our plans to welcome back students this fall during **our next virtual town hall meeting on July 13 at 10 a.m.** Feedback from our first session was very positive, so I'm hopeful this will become a regular event for us. I will make sure and keep my updates short and to the point. Look for an email Monday morning (July 13th) for instructions on how to log in to the town hall meeting.

Once again, the president of faculty senate and the chair of staff council will be moderating the questions, but this time new faces fill those positions. Trina Smith, Executive Assistant to the Provost, is the new chair of staff council, and Dr. Trish Holt, Professor of Leadership, Technology and Human Development, is our new president of faculty senate. I look forward to working with them both this upcoming year.

I want to thank Ava Edwards (former chair of staff council) and Dr. Helen Bland (former president of faculty senate) for guiding and supporting me through my first year here at Georgia Southern. I could not have asked for better colleagues and advisers. Their concern and passion for Georgia Southern and the groups they represented was evidenced every time we talked, and this institution is fortunate to have them as leaders. Thank you both!

As we continue to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and **prepare for the next phase of our return-to-campus plans**, Cabinet leadership and I have been meeting with staff council and faculty senate executive committee every two weeks to ensure we are addressing concerns and updating campus leaders on the latest information we have available. To establish a regular flow of valuable information sharing, University Communications and Marketing (UCM) has begun sending out a weekly email update, HR is developing a regular newsletter, regular messages will continue to go out to students through various channels, and we are frequently updating our online FAQs.

Around our campuses, we have:

- Installed more than 7,600 new signs to remind everyone about public health best practices and encourage social distancing
- Ordered almost 70,000 cloth face coverings (two for every student and five for each employee)
- Installed 1,000 new hand-sanitizer stations
- Delivered approximately 3,300 bottles of personal hand sanitizer to employees
- Begun the process to ensure each of more than 5,000 classes scheduled for this fall can be done safely. Some will be reconfigured or moved to a larger room to allow for social distancing; some will meet online part of the time, some may meet entirely, or almost entirely online, and certain lab and studio classes will require face coverings/masks due to limited social distancing.

We will continue to work our plan and keep a close eye on updated public health advisories and guidelines so we can ensure the health and safety of our people and our communities. We are also closely monitoring our public school systems' opening plans, as we know that may have an impact on our staff and faculty.

Another major project underway is the development of our new **Inclusive Excellence Action Plan**. Led by Dr. TaJuan R. Wilson, our Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Chief Diversity Officer, this Inclusive Excellence Action Plan focuses on impactful, achievable actions that Georgia Southern is taking and will be taking to become a welcoming, inclusive environment where everyone can thrive.

The plan is being reviewed with various constituencies across campus and should be finalized and shared in the coming weeks. I can tell you now that the plan will call for widespread education and training opportunities for employees and students and will provide for increased support for Inclusive Excellence initiatives such as the establishment of inclusive excellence grants and faculty and staff fellows.

This plan has four main goals:

- Create an equitable and inclusive environment for all.
- Increase the representation of diverse students, faculty, staff, and community partners at all levels of the University.
- Facilitate access to achievement, success, and recognition for underrepresented students, faculty, staff, and alumni.
- Implement strong, genuine, and consistently communicated culturally inclusive practices that reinforce the strategic plan and the Inclusive Excellence Action Plan.

Tenets of our Inclusive Excellence Action Plan will be embedded within the annual goals and actions of each of our divisions, departments, and employees. Progress toward these actions will be measured and each one of us will be held accountable to achieve these goals.

Two immediate examples of actions included in this plan are:

- The creation of Faculty and Staff Fellows for Inclusive Excellence. The Fellows, under the direction of the Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Chief Diversity Officer, will lead the development and implementation of inclusive excellence initiatives. Look for an email soon with more information about the Fellows program.
- The development of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to foster community and greater support for our employees. The development of ERGs is just one example of how the University is continuing its focus on cultural diversity, aimed primarily at recruiting and retaining diverse individuals within our workforce. Prospective Employee Resource Groups include, but are certainly not limited to, networks for the following communities: African Americans, LGBTQ+, Military/Veterans, Latinx, Women's Leadership, Young Professionals, and International. If you are interested in joining a group or multiple groups, please complete the following form [Employee Resource Group Interest Form](#).

Developing and committing to an Inclusive Excellence Action Plan is not only critical to meeting the priorities of our strategic plan, I fully believe it's part of our commitment to grow ourselves, to grow others, and to transform lives. Quite frankly, it is also the right thing to do.

We are certainly living in unprecedented and difficult times...I want you to know how much I appreciate your hard work and commitment to helping Georgia Southern grow and improve!

Sincerely,

Kyle

Georgia Southern University

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"PEOPLE...PURPOSE...ACTION:
Growing ourselves to grow others

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