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### Message from the President

Georgia Southern University

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# Dear Colleagues,

Jan. 11, 2021

Happy New Year and welcome back to a new spring semester! I hope you had a chance to recoup, rest, and prepare and ready yourself for a continuation of serving our students and communities. I know we are all ready to say goodbye to 2020, and although 2021 has already started with some challenges, I look forward to a new year with greater hope and belief of a return to some degree of normal.

First, I want to start this message with recognition and gratitude to you – our faculty and staff! Together, we demonstrated that we are able to innovate, adapt, and continuously improve to provide a safe, quality educational experience. Last semester, we welcomed a record freshman class, managed through an early spike in positive cases with our CARES Center, celebrated Homecoming in new and innovative ways, competed in intercollegiate athletics (one of only two teams to play 13 games, finishing with a bowl win), and ended the semester with five face-to-face commencement ceremonies celebrating the success of our 2,100 graduates. Most importantly, we have learned so much and we are ready to engage our students in our Spring 2021 semester!

As we resume classes this week, it is critical that we remain vigilant in our safety protocols – wearing masks, social distancing, washing hands, etc.! With COVID-19 cases increasing in our region, it will be especially important that all our instruction, student activities, and events continue to follow all health and safety guidelines. We have worked to create more face-to-face opportunities in the classroom and student activities for the Spring semester but they will only be successful if we continue to practice what we know works.

We are preparing for first-phase implementation of the COVID-19 vaccine for campus individuals aligned with current DPH criteria for Phase 1a. We continue our plans to be a provider of the vaccine for our students, faculty, staff and immediate families in accordance with the phased approach established by the CDC and Georgia Department of Public Health. Further details of phased dissemination and timeline will be forthcoming. Until that time, the Southeast and Coastal health districts are offering vaccines starting this week by appointment, to select groups. We encourage members of

our campus community and family who qualify for a vaccine to take advantage of this opportunity. Read about Georgia's COVID-19 vaccine plan and see the Georgia DPH COVID-19 Vaccine Status Dashboard at <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine/>.

### **Additional updates and opportunities:**

**Federal Stimulus funding** has been approved and includes direct grant aid to students and much-needed recovery funds for lost revenue and expenses associated with COVID-19. Once we receive the guidelines from the U.S. Department of Education, we will work immediately to process the direct grant aid to our eligible students.

Last Friday, January 8, we officially cut the ribbon on our state-of-the-art, 140,000-square-foot, **Engineering and Research Building**. As the faculty and students of our Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Computing activate this building with its 21 labs, manufacturing bays, classrooms, and conference space, there will be a resounding call and acknowledgment that Georgia Southern is the regional leader in talent development!

Today, January 11, marks the beginning of the **2021 State Legislative Session** in Georgia. We are grateful to be supported by our local delegation and Governor and will closely follow our projects and interests – Convocation Center construction, expansion of the Logistics Technology Innovation Corridor map, and reauthorization of tuition carry-forward legislation.

**The Inclusive Excellence Climate Survey** remains open for our students for an additional week. Our goal is to match the same engagement percentage of our faculty (40%) and staff (30%). We will share the results, analysis, and improvement actions aligned to our Inclusive Excellence Action Plan later this semester. Please encourage your students to complete this survey.

**The Performance Excellence Employee Engagement Survey** will be launched March 1-15. The University Strategic Planning Committee has been hard at work preparing for this assessment and improvement tool. As part of our vision statement — Growing Ourselves to Grow Others — I believe that becoming a great place for faculty and staff to work and grow will help us produce results such as better faculty and staff retention, student experience and improved student retention and graduation. The employee engagement survey is designed to measure our employees' current ability and desire to engage with the institution and to determine how well the university provides an environment and culture in which employees want to engage. More information will be shared about this important improvement effort in the coming weeks.

With the events and historic impact of last week's rioting at our nation's capital, I am reminded of the importance of our shared commitment to upholding the laws of our nation and the American ideals we hold so dear. As educators, moments like this underscore the vital role we play in preparing students through civic engagement and public service opportunities, like those offered through the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement. It is also why we continue to take actionable steps toward achieving Inclusive Excellence at Georgia Southern. Our values, mission, and vision at Georgia Southern demand that we collaborate, respect, and care for each other even when we may have differing opinions and/or beliefs. Together, we will achieve transformative success through modeling the very ideals we so desire for our nation.

As you can see, we are growing and will continue to grow and improve – not for our own sake, but to impact others! This is, and must continue to be, our goal even during challenging times. During this break, I was able to do some reading and was reminded of a quote by Viktor Frankl: "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." With 2020 behind us and 2021 still representing challenges...we will continue to change, adapt, innovate, and learn from each other!

I am renewed, ready, and thankful to be part of the Eagle Nation in this New Year, 2021!

Sincerely,  
Kyle

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*Growing ourselves to grow others*

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