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## Message from the President

Georgia Southern University

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# Message to Students from the President – Dec. 11, 2020

Dec. 11, 2020

Dear Students:

As we finish up finals and prepare to honor our graduates at commencement, now is certainly the time to reflect on a milestone year, to applaud your resilience and resourcefulness, and to commend you for navigating through a semester unlike any we have ever experienced.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge what we have accomplished this year. You worked through classes, tests, projects, research and other assignments with masks, Zoom, social distancing requirements and a list of other precautions. You helped welcome in a record-breaking class of first-year students and an overall enrollment increase of 3.45% over fall 2019! Not only did we attract an unprecedented number of new students, but our faculty and staff's ability to excel in educating, preparing, and supporting our students contributed to a post-consolidation record-high 79% retention rate from freshman to sophomore year as well as record four- and six-year graduation rates.

Other outstanding accomplishments that come to mind include a \$2 million grant from the National Science Foundation to support training and experiences for underrepresented minority students, the work of our CARES Center to help monitor and prevent the spread of COVID-19 on our campuses, the resiliency of our student-athletes and athletics staff to adhere to strict public health guidelines so they can continue to represent Eagle Nation on the field/court, the launching of our first Inclusive Excellence Action Plan, the approval of new degree programs, the elevation of the Honors Program to an Honors College, and many more!

I am sure that each of you can share a story of a mentor, professor, or fellow student who went above and beyond for our students or our community. Those stories are the ones that have far-reaching impact and illustrate the transformative power of education here at Georgia Southern, and I am thrilled – but not surprised – that these occurrences have continued during a global pandemic that has changed the way we do almost everything. We have shown our ability to be nimble and responsive, while still working together to accomplish our goals. Please take a moment to congratulate yourself and thank someone who helped.

As we look to the start of spring semester, we do so with a plan to engage more with students and to increase the number of true face-to-face courses. Building on what we learned during the fall term, we have made some improvements to course scheduling and class descriptions as we continue to adhere to social distancing and health and safety protocols to ensure the safety of our learning environments.

Of course, we will continue to assess all business continuity measures and remain in communication with government and community leaders, GDPH, and healthcare partners to ensure we can continue to meet public health guidelines and our core mission of student success. As we learned during the fall semester, our protocols and precautions *do work* when followed. It truly is important for the safety of our entire community that each of us to continue wearing a face covering, remaining socially distance, washing our hands, staying home when sick, calling into the CARES Center, and following public health guidelines.

When we return in January, our new Engineering and Research Building will be open to students! This \$65 million learning center provides new opportunities for Georgia Southern to continue leading South Georgia in research and economic development. This three-story facility, encompassing more than 135,000 square feet of laboratory and collaborative learning space, will provide access to advanced technologies that will prepare our students to meet the changing needs of the industry and the training to meet the demands of the workforce of today and tomorrow.

As we finish this semester strong, I hope you will join me in cheering on our Eagles against App State at home this weekend!

I also look forward to honoring our graduates next week through five in-person commencement ceremonies, all with thorough health and safety measures in place! You can watch the ceremonies live on the university's Facebook pages or at [www.GeorgiaSouthern.edu/commencement](http://www.GeorgiaSouthern.edu/commencement).

Thank you again for a very successful semester. Jane, Lily, and I wish you a restful, safe winter break and a very Happy Holiday!

Kyle Marrero  
President