

East Georgia State College
State of the College Address

09/18/2018 11am

Welcome

Good morning, East Georgia State College family. Thank you for taking your valuable time to spend a few minutes with me this morning discussing the state of the college. Your interest in the future of the special place is deeply appreciated.

Why do we have a state of the college address?

The “state of the college address” is a tradition at colleges and universities across the nation. Like graduation and convocation, the state of the college address is firmly woven into the fabric of higher education across the United States. It a day when the college community takes a deep breath and asks “how are we doing?” That is the question I will address this morning.

Reintroduce myself and Joyce to you

My wife, Joyce, and I moved to this great community almost 7 years ago following 23 years at the University of Georgia and, before that, about 12 years practicing law in Oregon. At the end of this calendar year, we will have

spent 30 years in Georgia pursuing our passion for student success. We believe today what we believed 30 years ago as we drove from Oregon to Georgia with our two daughters: it is a great privilege to be able to spend a lifetime helping students learn and pursue their dreams.

I come to you today exhausted, as many of you are, due to the efforts of our team to bring our dreams for this special place to reality. Although exhausted, I speak to you today with a sense of great satisfaction for what we have achieved together over the last seven years. There has been truly remarkable and positive change. I, also, come to you today optimistic about the future of this special place. My optimism is not Pollyanish. My optimism is based on the fact that **our mission matches the greatest need in higher education today in the county – access to high quality, affordable higher education.** My optimism is based on the fact that, at a time when the nation demands this affordability, we are among the most affordable in the nation. It is based on the fact, at a time when the nation demands accountability, we are financially solid. It is based on the fact that, at a time when the nation demands that higher education be creative and change to prepare students for the diverse digital modern workplace, we as a team have accepted that challenge. We sit today on over 400 acres of amazing

land which we can shape in any way we might imagine to meet the unique needs of this region.

I, also, come to you gratefully. Thank you for your dedication to these amazing students and this region. As I make this address to you, I recognize how much I ask of all of you. I know that we are all suffering from initiative fatigue. I demand each day that you respond the countless major external initiatives in which we are participating: our upcoming SACSCOC reaffirmation, Comprehensive Administrative Review, Complete College Georgia, the Momentum Year Initiative and so many more! I remind you each day of the compelling need to raise more private funds because of the changing financial model for higher education. I implore you each day to study and understand the dramatic changes in the way our students learn and the radically changing workplace they are facing and to, correspondingly, change the way you teach and administer. I beseech you each day to make even greater efforts to treat one another with the respect you all deserve and improve your communication with one another. I do all of this because I believe so deeply in the potential of our amazing students and in your talents and capacity to change to meet their needs.

My Plan for Today's State of the College Address

So, my plan for today is simply to speak to you from my heart about why we exist, what we have accomplished and where we are going. Thankfully, for all of you, I have abandoned my beloved PowerPoint slides. After my prepared comments, I invite your feedback and questions.

Who Are we?

So, who are we? If we stand together, look into a mirror and wonder about the identity of our college community, what do we see? First, we see a community which, over 45 years ago, identified a major need and a corresponding opportunity. The need was to increase educational attainment in the region in order to improve the lives of its citizens. The opportunity was to use this beautiful pine forest to build a vibrant, ever changing and growing college to drive economic and social growth. Luck Flanders Gambrell then donated this beautiful pine forest, the community issued the bonds needed to build, and a small passionate and committed band of faculty came to town determined to meet the learning needs of the small cadre of students who showed up for the first classes. As we look into the mirror together today, we see a group which has grown dramatically since that first day of classes at Emanuel County Junior College. We have grown to three campuses, over 3,000 students and over 300 full and part time faculty and staff. Yet, we see in the

mirror the same kind of community that existed when the college opened – a band of highly committed individuals passionate about student success. We see a community dedicated to every student in this region who has completed the required academic work to begin college and is willing to do the hard work necessary to earn a college degree and give back to this community. We see a community which takes pride, not in its selectivity, but in its openness.

I could, and probably should, stop right here. Judged by the standard of what we see in the mirror, the state of the college is indeed excellent.

- At EGSC, it's all about student access and success. Every decision we make is judged by that standard
- At EGSC, we know we are here because of the community we serve. This is truly this community's college.
- AT EGSC, we are three campuses but we are one EGSC
- At ESGC, we believe deeply in the capability of our students to succeed. We know that the fact that our students are typically first generation college students and often from families in lower socio-economic quartiles, does not mean that

they are any less deserving of a high quality college education or that they are less capable of achieving their dreams— our students are amazing and we believe deeply in their ability and are devoted to their success

- At EGSC, we know that accomplishing our mission depends on our ability to collaborate with, not compete with, our partners in education – the school district, the technical colleges, and the comprehensive universities in our region.

What have we achieved together in last 7 years?

So, Bob, those aspirations may be impressive --- but, what is the reality over the last 7 years? How has our team performed when we hold up these aspirations – our mission -- on one side and the reality of our work on the other side? How are we doing?

In answering this question, I readily admit that I am tempted --- it is an almost irresistible temptation --- to pull out scores of charts and diagrams to illustrate what all of you have accomplished together. Today, however, I think it best to simply talk about it. Let's do that.

- **Enrollment is strong.** This is a period of serious enrollment challenges for colleges and universities across the county. This is particularly acute at

institutions similar to East Georgia State College --- community colleges and state colleges. In this difficult enrollment climate, our enrollment for fall 2018 is currently a bit higher than fall 2017. I predict spring 2019 will be higher than spring 2018 as well. This prediction is due in large part to initiatives now underway to improve fall to spring semester retention. I congratulate our staff in enrollment management and at our external campuses for their hard work and persistence in recruiting. I congratulate our academic affairs staff and our faculty for their creative work to redesign everything from orientation to advising to curriculum in order to assure higher retention rates.

- **Our financial condition is solid.** For institutions like EGSC, there are 3 key elements which, together, provide the dollars available to carry out our mission: **state funding, tuition and private fundraising.**

Let's examine those three:

- The first element - **state funding** --has been decreasing as a share of the total cost of education across the nation. Despite this national trend, EGSC has improved in this area. In Fiscal Year 2012, our state funding for each full time

equivalent student was \$2598. For the current Fiscal Year, it is \$4111. As you have heard me say many times, we have a long way to go in this area. We still need to increase our funding by about \$1350 per full time equivalent student to bring us to the average funding level within the state college sector of the University System of Georgia. We have taken big steps forward, but we have much work to do.

- The second element, tuition revenue, is a contentious topic across the nation. As state funding for higher education has decreased in the U.S., the cost to families has soared as many institutions have increased **tuition** to cover the lost revenue. During this period, EGSC has remained among the most **affordable** colleges in the county. According, to the most recent official federal affordability rankings, EGSC is ranked #43 and #46 in the nation respectively on the lowest net price and the lowest tuition lists among all public colleges offering four year degrees. Also, our student loan default rate has dropped by about 11% over the last 6 years.

- The third element, private fundraising, has taken on a vastly increased importance due to decreasing state funding and pressure to maintain low tuition. Great strides forward have been made in **private funding raising** by the EGSC Foundation. From the end of fiscal year 2012 to the end of fiscal year 2018, the total assets of the foundation increased from about \$987,000 to about \$2,800,000. This has enabled us to increase our scholarships from about \$80,000 per year to about \$320,000 per year over that same period. I congratulate the trustees of the EGSC Foundation and our Institutional Advancement staff for making this possible.

- **We have taken East Georgia State College to the places where students need access.** We now serve the region by making access to an affordable education available at three campuses, by making dual enrollment available at all three campuses, by taking dual enrollment courses to high schools, and by making our courses and programs available online. For example, in fall 2017, 1040 of our students studied in Swainsboro including 102 dually enrolled students, 1077 studied in Statesboro

including 58 dually enrolled students, 435 studied in Augusta, 112 studied as dually enrolled students at 5 high schools, 105 dually enrolled students studied wholly online and 234 regularly admitted students studied wholly online.

- **Housing occupancy rates are high.** A few years ago we were a commuter college – no residence halls on campus. There was significant skepticism about filling even one residence hall with 200 beds. The college built that first residence hall. A second residence hall with 212 beds was then planned. Many doubted that we could fill all 412 spaces. Ultimately, more spaces were added this year to accommodate demand, creating a capacity over 425. Our residence halls are full this semester. I congratulate our housing staff for their tireless efforts to fill our residence halls and to build a sense of community in those halls.
- **Our menu of degree programs has expanded dramatically.** In 2012, we offered one associate degree program -- an associate of arts degree -- and one bachelors program -- biology. We now offer 16 associate degrees with disciplinary distinction, one academic certificate, a certificate in workforce development through our CHOICE program, a

bachelors degree in biology, a bachelors degree in Fire and Emergency Services Administration, and an RN to BSN nursing program. Intense preparations are now underway for a visit next week by ACEN, the body which accredits nursing programs.

- **Our beautiful Swainsboro campus has expanded dramatically and continues to be maintained beautifully.** In recent years, we have added two residence halls plus the Shot and Jean Strange Clubhouse, received a gift from the Morgan family of their family home now known as the Morgan House of East Georgia State College, expanded the Academic Building adding new classrooms and science labs, broken ground on an expansion of the Jean Anderson Morgan Student Center, and received a gift of land from the Gambrell family of about 140 acres of land adjoining campus. Capital improvements to the main campus alone have totaled almost \$29 million. All of this expansion has been accomplished without the college taking on debt. Long after all of us are gone, the college will have sufficient land to meet the expanding needs of this region for higher education. I congratulate our legislative delegation, Senators Hill and Stone and

Representative Parrish, our facilities staff and the trustees of our foundation for making this possible. These capital investments, combined with the growth in the number of faculty, staff and students has increased the economic impact of the college on the region from around \$67 million in fiscal year 2012 to around \$80,000,000 for fiscal year 2016.

- **Although our college is young, we have begun to establish traditions to assure that our college's core values are communicated to those who join our community.** Traditions are an essential component of a college community. They provide continuity. They assure that key values are communicated as new members of the community arrive. Academic convocation is one such tradition at colleges across the county. EGSC, just a few years ago, did not have such a tradition. Our first convocation was held in 2012 and has now become a fall tradition at EGSC. Some of you have attended all of these convocations, including the highly successful event with an overflow crowd last week. You witnessed how strong that tradition has become and how it has contributed to creating a Culture of Respect. I congratulate the convocation committee and the members of the Culture of Respect task force

for your tenacity and foresight and hard work in creating this strong tradition.

- **Our campus food services, non-existent just a few years ago, is now a point of pride.** Food is another essential component of any vibrant higher education community. A few years ago, food on campus consisted of a few scattered vending machines. We now have a dining hall, a campus café and a coffee shop. All of this is done in-house by EGSC personnel who are in every way part of our team. As demonstrated by fried chicken Wednesdays and our resulting struggles to maintain weight, this in-house approach to dining services has been a success. Thank you to our dining services staff for all you do every day to sustain us and contribute in a positive way to our learning environment.
- **Academic Success** is, of course, at the heart of any discussion about the state of the college. There are, as all of you know well, many different ways to measure success. Let's look at the number of graduates as one such measure. During academic year 2011-2012, there were 176 graduates of EGSC. During the last three academic years, there have been 359, 343 and 297 graduates respectively. The work of

every member of our academic community plays a role in producing graduates. I extend my special congratulations to our faculty and our academic affairs staff for their leadership in our Complete College Georgia and Momentum Year Initiatives which have led to this increased number of graduates.

- I am deeply proud of our **financial integrity, responsibility and stability**. This is particularly true in an era during which news reports of financial improprieties and instability at colleges across the country are far too common. Last year, EGSC carried out a plan of internal reorganization and budget reduction in order to respond to enrollment pressures and rising costs in areas such as health and retirement plan costs. We made deep and painful cuts resulting in savings over \$800,000 per year. Although cuts like this are painful, I am proud that everyone whose position was eliminated was given the opportunity to remain as part of the EGSC family--- and almost all did remain. Also, I am proud that our college leaders addressed these issues proactively, rather than waiting until a crisis to act.
- **Development of innovative approaches to meeting educational needs** has been a hallmark of our team's

work over the last few years. Let's focus on four of those programs – AAMI, CHOICE, Correll Scholars and dual enrollment.

- In 2012, although most colleges and universities in the state of Georgia offered an **African American Male Initiative** program. EGSC did not offer such a program. In the academic year 2011-2012, we awarded only 7 degrees to African American males. An African American Male Initiative Program, a mentoring style program, was then established. It is now considered a model in the University System of Georgia. By way of comparison, we awarded 43, 46 and 38 degrees to African American males in the last three academic years.
- The college introduced **CHOICE** in the 2014-2015 academic year -- a program to serve intellectually disabled adults. This program leads to a two-year certificate in workforce development. This innovative program was only the second of its kind in the state and is now recognized as a leader among the small number of colleges and universities serving these deserving and talented students. EGSC is proud

that over 20 students are now enrolled in our CHOICE program, many of whom are living in our residence halls, and that the program is recognized by the federal government as a certified transition program.

- Pete and Ada Lee Correll, who previously donated our beautiful Fulford Community Learning Center, envisioned a scholarship program to attract students with talents in leadership, service and scholarship --- and to prepare those students to stay in our region and help it prosper. They created the **Correll Scholars Program**. As a result of their generosity and vision, a new class of approximately 20-25 Correll Scholars enters the college each year. Take the initial class of Correll Scholars, the 2015-2016 entering class, as one example. That class performed over 1000 hours of service and maintained a GPA of almost 3.4. Seventeen members of that class have now moved on and are pursuing bachelors degrees at other institutions in Georgia. One more is completing an internship at a private employer.

- Our dual enrollment program, during the 2011-2012 academic year, offered dual enrollment opportunities to 23 students. The decision was made to expand this opportunity by reaching out aggressively to local high schools to make dual enrollment opportunities available where and how students in our region need those opportunities – on one of our three campuses, at their high schools and online. Many of these deserving students cannot afford to drive to one of our campuses to take advantage of this unique opportunity. This approach of providing programs when and how students need them led to an expansion of our dual enrollment program to 385 dually enrolled students last fall.
- I sincerely congratulate the staff of our AAMI, and CHOICE, Correll Scholars and dual enrollment programs for the innovative approaches they have developed to meeting unique needs of our amazing students.
- **Our athletic programs in just a few short years have become a force in Georgia.** They are a force on the field and on the court. I do not, however,

judge their success by win loss records. I judge their success by the academic success of the student athletes and by the way these highly visible individuals represent the college. Our student athletes maintain an overall GPA above that of the student body as a whole and send a positive message about what it means to be an EGSC student as they travel across Georgia. I congratulate our athletic staff for their commitment to success in life of our student athletes.

- **Our computing environment is a point of pride.** One of the big struggles for colleges like EGSC across the nation is to remain competitive while the digital world races ahead. Turn on cable TV tonight and watch for the flood of ads by out of state institutions touting the convenience of their on line programs to the same students we are recruiting. In your personal life, consider the frustration you experience as the cutting edge cell phone or mobile computing device you purchased one month is out of date the next. That is the challenge our IT department faces each day, except they are managing devices and a **computing environment** to support about 3500 users – students, faculty and staff -- every day. Our IT department deserves our sincere congratulations

for keeping our computing environment robust and competitive in this challenging environment.

- **Our campuses are safe and secure.** In 2012, we employed 4 full time certified police officers. In Fall 2017, we employed 9. I extend my sincere appreciation to our police department for assuring the safety of our community.

These are a few of the things we have accomplished together in the last few years. This brings me, as you would all predict, to the next major point. Take a deep breath and enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done, but hold on tight because the pace of change in higher education is going to accelerate dramatically in the immediate future.

Challenges and opportunities we face together now

Let me give you a few examples of forces leading to my conclusion that the pace of change is going to accelerate for EGSC in the immediate future. This is not change for change's sake. It is change because, simply put, failure to change will render us irrelevant. This does not mean that we abandon the values which make us unique and special – putting students first for example or emphasizing mentoring of our students as another

example. It does mean that we must innovate continually. Consider my top ten list of external factors demanding change.

- #1 - College enrollment overall in the US has flatlined. This trend is more pronounced in other regions of the U.S. experiencing overall population declines. Yet, Georgia colleges are not insulated due to the state's overall population growth. Colleges in states where populations are shrinking now see Georgia as fertile recruiting grounds. Those institutions are finding creative strategies to come to Georgia to recruit Georgia students. These include approaches such as offering in-state tuition rates to out of state students. As competition for students heats up, our recruiting strategies must be even more data-based. We must find even more ways to reach the many students in this region who are qualified to attend college, but are choosing not to attend.
- #2 - Many colleges and universities in the United States have already developed and implemented sophisticated and academically sound systems to award credit for prior learning to military personnel and working adults. As an institution whose reason

for being is access, we must become a leader in Georgia in this area.

- #3 - The trend towards even lower state funding as a share of the total cost of education is not going to reverse any time soon. Similarly, the corresponding demands for maintenance of tuition rates at affordable levels will continue. These companion trends will require us to continue to innovate.
- #4 - Employers needs are changing at warp speed due to technological changes, increasingly diverse workplaces and increasing competitive pressures. These employers are naturally demanding graduates with ability to work in these dramatically changing workplaces. They are demanding graduates with a combination of essential skills --- writing, communication, team work, analytical thought --- and technical skills unique to their specific industry. New degree and certificate programs must regularly and continually be developed to respond to these specific needs.
- #5 – Sophisticated data analytics are being used in virtually every segment of our society, sometimes in frightening ways. I suspect Amazon knows more

about me than I know about myself. Despite my fears about big data and data analytics, I know that any college which ignores the potential of using data analytics to reach potential students and to retain and graduate students once they arrive on campus does so at their own peril.

- #6 - Our region has unique needs and opportunities. On the opportunity side, we are just a few miles down the interstate from one of the biggest and fastest growing ports in the world. We have a robust timber industry. Yet, the population in our region has remained relatively flat and, despite strong high school graduation rates, the college going rate and the college degree attainment rates in our region are far too low. We must find even more creative ways to work with our K-12, technical college and comprehensive university partners to increase college expectations and then prepare these students to contribute to these industries.
- #7 – There is a national imperative to dramatically increase the percentage of our adult population with post-secondary educational credentials. This goal is simply not going to be attained if historical college enrollment patterns persist. Students from families in

the lower economic quartiles go to college and earn degrees at far lower rates than students from higher economic quartiles. Again, we must find even more creative ways to work with our K-12, technical college and comprehensive university partners to increase college expectations and then create clear pathways which enable these students to earn college credit while attending high school, gain access to higher education and transfer among institutions without loss of credit.

- #8 - Demands for efficiency and transparency are rising resulting in a wave of mergers and consolidations across the US and, particularly, in Georgia. In our own region, there have been two significant consolidations. This is not reason for fear about a consolidation of our own institution. It is reason to find ways to continually improve the pathways from EGSC to these larger comprehensive universities.
- #9 - Mobile computing devices, artificial intelligence, social media, gaming and similar forces are changing the way students learn. This does not render traditional teaching strategies irrelevant. It does mean that we cannot ignore the new strategies. We

must tap the potential of the new ways of learning while communicating to our students the value of the traditional approaches.

- #10 – Demands for online programs, particularly for adult learners who need to maintain their own relevance while working to provide support for their families, is skyrocketing. As demonstrated by our Fire and Emergency Services and Nursing program successes, we must develop even more high demand programs available online.

Where are we going in the next 5 years?

So, where do we go now? Simply put, **EGSC will become the model affordable, innovative, high quality rural access institution in the nation.** Some of the immediate steps we will take to achieve this are:

- Responding to all of these changes is, first, going to require that we reinforce our historically strong connection between college and community. Beginning Friday, September 28, 2018, we will begin a limited bus service from the Swainsboro Campus to Downtown Swainsboro and other main shopping and eating venues in Swainsboro. This will be a free service designed for members of the college

community. It will operate 3 hours per day on Friday evening, Saturday mid-day, and Sunday evenings. Details, including the exact route, will be announced soon. Hopefully, the demand for this service will be extremely high and will justify future expansion.

- We recently initiated two leadership development programs, one for students and the other for staff. The initial student leadership development program kicked off about 10 days ago with about 50 students. The inaugural staff leadership development program kicked off at about the same time with 13 of our talented staff members. The support and expertise of the UGA Cooperative Extension Service is essential to both programs. We will expand these programs in future years.
- Responding to these changes will, also, require investment in our faculty and staff. As you know, the University System of Georgia has given member institutions an option to offer a **limited raise pool** effective January 01, 2019. Some USG institutions have elected not to do this. EGSC will create a raise pool for all personnel earning less than \$60,000 per effective January 01, 2019. Consistent with USG

requirements, raises will be based on merit as determined by the supervisor and will be from 0-4%.

- I spoke about the importance of partnerships with other institutions of higher education. At its most recent meeting, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia recommended a minor capital improvement project for our programs in Statesboro in the amount of \$3,900,000. This recommendation will not be final until action by the legislature in 2019. If finally approved by the legislature, this will enable EGSC to work even more collaboratively with Georgia Southern University to increase access to EGSC, improve success rates of EGSC Statesboro students, further improve the pathway from EGSC to Georgia Southern and provide major economic benefits to the region as these graduates take their places in the workforce. We will continue to do the same with our partner, Augusta University.
- We will design new degree programs targeted to the needs of the region. A formal proposal for a Bachelors of Applied Science has already been presented to the University System of Georgia. This

BAS degree in organizational leadership will have five concentrations available to students: healthcare management; business; natural resource management and sustainability; IT and network management; and sports leadership. A decision by the BOR on this proposal is anticipated soon.

- Construction of our new student center addition will begin soon. We anticipate opening for the beginning of fall semester 2019. This will include an expanded bookstore area, an area for production of the student newspaper and, perhaps, a student run internet TV and radio station. A large multi-use space will dramatically increase the type and quantity of space available for student activities – everything from volleyball to social events,
- We are fully committed to the University System of Georgia's Momentum Year Initiative. Students who, in their first year of college --- their momentum year --- complete both their core math and English course, take at least nine hours in their academic focus area, and complete at least 30 credit hours are, quite unsurprisingly, more likely to ultimately complete a degree. Perhaps not surprising, but it takes

intentionality and simple hard work on a college wide level -- scheduling software, early intervention, intrusive advising, assigned schedules for new students and other techniques – to make this happen. We are doing all of this and more. I am confident that this will lead to higher course success rates, retention rates and graduation rates --- not by compromising quality, but by believing in the capability of our students to achieve --- and methodically implementing these degree completion strategies.

- We will become a state leader in prior Prior Learning Assessment and will enhance our online program offerings.
- Finally, I renew a call I made initially in 2012 for a highly-visible facility on campus devoted to the success of the youth of this great community. As I envision this facility, it would provide a cutting edge physical and digital location attracting young people to participate in art and science activities, play chess, compete in digital gaming, or just meet and hang out. This creation of a direct, tangible connection between young people and our campus would make the transition from high school to college natural. Young

people will come to expect that they will make this transition. It will pay dividends for our community. I believe that it is realistic to raise the funds to build this through private donations and to find the resources to operate it through collaboration among our partners in education in the community, government entities and private business. It would build dramatically on the outstanding work already done by the Fulford Center. It is time to make this happen.

Conclusion

Thank you for spending this time with me. Your support is what will bring these dreams to reality.

Questions and feedback

Thank you.