

East Georgia State College
State of the College Address
Bob Boehmer (09/19/2017) 11-11:50am
As of September 19, 2017

Good morning.

East Georgia State College students,
esteemed faculty and staff, members of our
treasured local community:

It is an honor to serve all of you and the
citizens of this region as president of East
Georgia State College.

This morning, the time for the annual state
of the college address, is not a time for

surprise announcements. Instead, the state of the college address is the beginning of a week set aside each year to reflect on what we have accomplished together and to think about what we need to do to keep moving forward. This year, we have selected the theme of “civility” for this important week of reflection. This morning, in addition to talking with you about the college’s accomplishment and future plans, I will share with you my thoughts about what civility has to do with those plans. All of this will take some time, but I will do my best to get all of this wrapped up by 11:45 so that you can all move on to classes and your workplaces.

First, please know that I appreciate all of you for taking your valuable time to reflect

with me about a place which is very special to all of us – East Georgia State College. I consider it to be a privilege to spend time with this group who cares so much about the college and to have a chance to share with you my thoughts about the climate in which the college does its work, how we are doing in that challenging climate, and where we are going in the future – in other words, to share with you my thoughts about the “state of the college.”

As an undergraduate student at the University of Oregon during the turbulent 1960’s and 1970’s, I recall hearing in a class about the president’s annual “state of the college” address. I would like to claim that I attended due to my sense of responsibility and intellectual interest in the topic. In fact, I

quickly computed whether I really needed the extra points to retain an A in the class, determined that my attendance was essential and attended with a good deal of skepticism. How could the state of the college really be anything other than “splendid?” There was a football game coming up in Autzen Stadium on Saturday, my beloved chili and coffee were both plentiful in the dining hall, classes were meeting regularly, and it wasn’t time to cram for exams yet. Yes, splendid.

So I attended the state of the college address and was more than mildly surprised to learn that the university was facing some major challenges, ones which were far more serious than the fact that the Ducks were underdogs in Saturday’s upcoming game with the Washington Huskies. The need for

the university to change in order to thrive was the president's central theme.

As I prepared to talk with you today, interestingly enough, I realized that the University of Oregon president's theme on that day about 50 years ago is eerily similar to my theme today. However, if his theme was about "change," my theme is "change on steroids." The world you are facing, students, is changing every day while mine was changing at most every year. Yes, you are facing change on steroids in your lifetime.

So we need to talk about that change candidly because we, as a college community, must decide whether to be frightened by this changing future and

retrench or be excited about it and embrace the opportunity. Not really a tough choice is it? Of course, East Georgia State College chooses to seize the opportunity.

For the group assembled here today --- students, faculty and staff, community leaders -- this “change on steroids” likely means something very different to each one of us.

Students, change on steroids means that your working world following your graduation is going to be filled with robotics and tools of artificial intelligence; you will be confronting daunting challenges like global warming and digital warfare; you will be computing your financial choices in bitcoins not dollar bills. So if you don't

finish what you have started here at East Georgia State College ---- i.e., earn your college degree --- you run a very real risk of simply being left behind in a cloud of dust.

East Georgia faculty and staff, for all of us, this change on steroids means that many of the teaching tools and techniques and administrative strategies we have practiced so hard to perfect for so many years are now being challenged and changed. Yet, our mission is to prepare these amazing students for the rapidly changing world which they face. These students learn in fundamentally different ways than we learned when we attended college. If we fail to adapt and succeed at our mission --- assuring that these students graduate and are prepared for a changing world --- our beloved college will

not continue to grow and thrive. We don't have the luxury of saying "I wish the college was like it was during its first 20 years when we had only a few hundred students and we didn't have so many annoying plans and reports to prepare and meetings to attend." We can't just begrudgingly adopt new learning technology and new programs of study and new approaches to administration, we must embrace these and convey our excitement and passion about these changes to our students.

Last week, I encountered an impressive student from the college's very first class in the 1970s while shopping at Walmart. I had not met her previously. She stopped me, introduced herself and told me her East Georgia story. It was Emanuel County

Junior College --- ECJC when she was here. She told me about her time at the college and about her long and rewarding career as a teacher which followed. She told me about being the first in her family to go to college; and about the expectations she faced from those closest to her as a high school student --- the expectation was that she would go to work immediately after high school and contribute much needed money to the family. She told me how she would not have had the courage to go to college had it not been for the relentless determination of a high school teacher who told her she needed to do this to prepare for the future; and how she would not have graduated from college had it not been for the passion for her success demonstrated by the East Georgia faculty and staff --- the excitement they transmitted to her about her need to change

in preparation for a changing world. They simply would not allow her to quit -- would not allow her to fail in reaching her potential. Faculty and staff, we can never lose that passion and we can never fail to transmit this passion and excitement to our students. We cannot fail to change and adapt because that would allow amazing students like this one to fail.

Community leaders, change on steroids for you means dramatically changing the attitudes in our region about higher education. As in most rural areas of the United States today, a key to our economic survival is to increase the number of our community members who understand and value a college education; and who take action to assure that their family members

get a college education in the manner best suited to their talents and interests. The best fit for a particular student may be our partner in education, Southeastern Tech, while for another student it may be a comprehensive university like Georgia Southern or Augusta University, while for another student the best fit is often East Georgia. When we have so many choices available in our region, we simply can't continue to allow so many of our community members to miss the opportunity for an education which suits them best. A well-educated population is what will bring new employers and increased quality of life to our community.

All of this, of course, means that I am going to try to wax eloquent about change today:

First, how we need to change and update our strategic goals, next how we have changed over the five years we have spent together and finally about how we need to change in the next five to continue to thrive. That's a lot to get done and still get you out of here by 11:45, so let's roll.

In order to begin, let's first remind ourselves about who we are and the region we serve. We are one of 28 institutions of higher education in the University System of Georgia --- soon to be 26 after the consolidations of Georgia Southern with Armstrong and Abraham Baldwin with Bainbridge are completed. Our great community is home to one of these institutions because this community stood up and made this college possible over 40

years ago. Accordingly, the driving force behind our college's decisions is always how to make life better for the community which gave this college life.

If we look at the 27 counties surrounding our campuses in Swainsboro, Statesboro, and Augusta, the importance of this college to that region becomes immediately apparent --- both from the viewpoint of need and the viewpoint of the contribution of the college to meeting that need. From the point of view of need, for example, our region has a median household income which is about \$10,000 below the state median, a poverty rate which is 7 percent higher than the statewide poverty rate and a bachelor's degree attainment rate which is over 12% lower than the statewide rate.

From the point of view of contribution to meeting those needs, East Georgia State College continues to be a positive, driving and growing economic force in the region. In the last fiscal year measured by the Terry College of Business of UGA, the economic impact of East Georgia State College on Emanuel and immediately surrounding counties had risen to over \$80 million and almost 1000 jobs.

Those numbers, and many more which tell the same story, are why East Georgia State College has chosen to focus on reaching three strategic goals: College completion --- i.e., higher graduation rates; economic development; and innovative performance which keeps our tuition costs low. These three goals are not just words on a piece of

paper in a binder in my office. Achieving these specific goals really makes a difference in the day to day lives of citizens of our region.

As we look at these goals, we do have to remind ourselves that, perhaps unfortunately, the college does not exist in a bubble sheltering us from the world in which we are preparing our students to live. The tragic recent events in Charlottesville and the impact of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma provide vivid reminders.

As I study these three strategic goals, it reminds me that these goals must change continually to adapt to the world in which our students will lead. We do not want them simply to complete college – to graduate.

We also want them to graduate with specific attributes which will make all of us proud and which will make our community – our region – one of the best places to live in America.

If we want that to happen --- want our students not only to graduate but to lead a community we want to live in --- we must intentionally foster a culture at East Georgia which builds that leadership capacity in each of our students. We must foster a culture of respect, service and integrity at East Georgia.

That culture of respect is not an empty catch phrase. It requires that we collectively adopt a commitment to civility. Civility demands that we respect one another regardless of our

particular position or power. Civility produces a community in which all community members have a strong sense of service to their community. As stated in the book, *Choosing Civility*, which we are all reading for this Thursday's convocation:

“Being civil means being constantly aware of others and weaving restraint, respect, and consideration into the very fabric of this awareness. Civility is a form of goodness; it is gracious goodness. But it is not just an attitude of benevolent and thoughtfulness relating to other individuals; it also entails an active interest in the well-being of our communities and even a concern for the health of the planet on which we live.”

Hurricane Irma, for example, has created hardships for people in our own region. That

is why the college has already begun a project to serve members of our own community who need assistance in cleaning up after the storm. I am so proud of the efforts over the weekend and early this week by our faculty and staff, our art club, our student ambassadors, our Correll Scholars and our student athletes in the clean-up process in our own community. And that is why this project will continue throughout the entire academic year and will include a spring break of service in which some of our students will use their spring break to travel to a community in need to assist in recovery efforts. I hope you will all allow Joyce and me to join you in that effort.

A culture of respect also means that we treat every member of our community with

civility without regard to their position, their race, their gender or economic status. Again as stated in *Choosing Civility*:

“Today the possibility of cross-cultural misunderstanding and conflict is always present. The more civil the members of society, the less likely for this possibility to become reality.”

A community can't be successful unless the talents of each and every member of the community are respected. Our students can't become effective leaders who will transform our community unless they understand that you can't lead unless you have a real and deep respect for each and every person whom you ask to follow. This seemingly obvious concept appears to be falling out of fashion nationwide. It will not fall out of

fashion at East Georgia State College. That is why the keynote speaker at our convocation this Thursday will talk with us about the importance of civility in a successful society. That is why our strategic plan --- a plan which states our most important and guiding principles --- will be amended to include the importance of a culture of respect.

If that is where our mission calls us to go – to a college with more graduates better prepared for life following a college experience characterized by a culture of respect, to a college which drives economic growth in the region, to a college which remains among the most affordable in the nation --- how have we done the last 5 years?

Economic impact on Emanuel County and the immediately surrounding counties has grown substantially;

Enrollment has grown steadily;

Housing occupancy in Bobcat Villas is over 100%;

The number of degrees offered at the associates degree level and the bachelor's degree level has increased;

The number of students in each of our bachelors degree programs has grown – biology now has over 50 declared majors;

Fire and Emergency Services now has 20 declared majors; and our new RN to BSN program now has its first 10 students;

Our Move on When Ready Program, just renamed by the state as Dual Enrollment, has grown dramatically;

Our CHOICE program for intellectually disabled students has become a state leader in serving these amazing and uniquely talented students;

Our rates of academic success have steadily increased. Yet, far more improvement is needed. This is demonstrated by our one year retention rates which still lag behind our peers;

Our number of graduates has increased steadily and dramatically;

Our faculty has grown and we have improved in the number of faculty who have been retained and promoted to the level of associate and full professor;

Our staff has continued to grow;

The total cost of a college education at East Georgia has remained affordable. East Georgia is included on the most recent list of the most affordable colleges in the county;

We have made significant strides in reducing our student loan default rate;

Our state funding has grown steadily.

Our physical campus has grown dramatically thanks to the leadership of the best legislative delegation in the state – Representative Butch Parrish and Senators Jack Hill and Jesse Stone – and the generosity of our donors. In the last year, the Gambrell family made a generous donation of 138 acres of land to the foundation, the Morgan family has given us the Morgan House, our second new residence hall has been constructed, an addition to the academic building has been completed and the process to build an addition to the student center is underway.

Assets of our foundation have grown dramatically. The vision and generosity of Pete and Ada Lee Correll in creating and funding our Correll Scholars program has led this effort; and the leadership of our foundation trustees has anchored this effort. These efforts have enabled us to dramatically increase the scholarships awarded to the amazing students with us today.

So we have done a great deal together in the last 5 years. Yet, as I said at the beginning of my remarks today, change on steroids faces us in the next five. Why? State funding as a share of the total cost of providing the education these students deserve will continue to decrease as it will across the

nation. Despite the gap this creates, there is simply no appetite in the country for increasing tuition as a way to manage that problem. This means obviously that we must become even more efficient. And employers across the country are demanding that students who come to them from colleges and universities be prepared for the radically changed and competitive work environment of a modern, internationalized, high-tech workplace. They want students who can critically analyze unimagined problems, work well in teams with co-workers who come from many cultures and speak different languages, who know what hard work means and are willing to do it and who are not intimidated by constant changes as new technology including robotics and artificial intelligence are added to their workplace.

In order to prepare for this new world, the following are ten strategies East Georgia State College will need to adopt to survive and thrive.

1. Our regions's college attendance rates and college degree attainment rates are simply too low to be competitive. East Georgia must lead in partnership with K-12 and other institutions of higher education in raising expectations about college attendance and completion;
2. We must develop new degree programs – at the associates degree level and bachelor's degree level as well as new certificate programs. These must be developed to meet emerging issues in

our nation such as environmental management, electronic security, and health care for an aging population. Our graduates need to be able to earn credentials which send a clear message to employers that East Georgia graduates are prepared to meet their emerging needs.

3. The number of these programs available online must increase. Many potential students in our region are bound by economic circumstances to a job or have family responsibilities and need this online option to have a chance to compete;
4. Many of our students are the first in their family to go to college. They are

every bit as bright and motivated as their contemporaries at more selective institutions. Yet, they often need intrusive academic support to assure they are successful and reach their full potential. We must dramatically increase resources devoted to tutoring, advising, and library assistance so that they have the same opportunities to compete as their contemporaries;

5. Our students, of course, need cutting edge academic courses to succeed in a modern world. We must also develop internships, leadership development programs, cultural diversity programs and career placement programs to assure that they have the skills necessary to enter the modern workplace;

6. Our tuition must remain at a level which retains our place as one of the most affordable colleges in the country. This means we will have to develop even more efficient business and operational processes;
7. Our scheduling of courses must become more creative and flexible to meet the needs of students who are working and meeting family responsibilities while pursuing a college degree;
8. We must be willing to develop alternate forms of credentials to meet the needs of the modern workplace. The traditional choices – an associate's

degree or a bachelor's degree – are simply not enough to meet emerging needs. Rigorous programs of study giving our students the additional chance to earn specialized badges and certificates are needed;

9. Many students who need an East Georgia degree are not recent high school graduates. Many have served our nation in the armed services, or have worked for years in a specialized occupation and are now preparing for a new stage of their life. In many cases, institutions across the county are awarding academic credit to recognize what these individuals have already learned. It is, of course, challenging to evaluate what these people have

learned and mastered during their work lives to determine what college credit they deserve. It is challenging, yet it is imperative that we do it.

10. And finally, we must decrease our reliance on state funding and tuition. As larger institutions have done for decades, we must now embrace a culture of fundraising and grant writing to obtain the external funds necessary to thrive and survive.

In closing, I reflected on my own working life as I wrote these comments. It has been about 45 years since I completed my formal college education. During that time, I have been an army medic, a banker, a partner in a law firm, a college professor, an associate

provost at a large university and it is now my honor to serve as your president.

Students, what might those 45 years have been like had I not been able to finish my college education. Would I have had the opportunities to meet so many interesting people, travel to so many great places, take on exciting projects and serve you as president today? Undoubtedly, no. I want all of you to have similar opportunities to choose the life you want to lead. So I challenge you today to accept the reality that your working world is going to change dramatically from what people in that world face today; and I challenge you to complete your college degree so that you will be the one in control of your future.

Faculty and staff, our mission is to prepare these amazing students for the success they deserve in the exciting new world which awaits them. I challenge you to accept that all of us must continually change the way we teach and administer in order to meet that challenge.

Community leaders, I ask you to imagine what this region could become if we dramatically increased our educational levels. We are located only miles from one of the major ports in the world, we are located on an interstate leading from that port to major metropolitan areas, we have the infrastructure in place to support business development, we have great K-12 schools, and we have institutions of higher education of all types committed to

preparing a highly educated workforce. I challenge you to help your partners in K-12 and higher education as we dramatically increase the expectations about higher education in this region.

Let's jointly commit today to get up tomorrow morning and every day during the 2017-2018 academic year fully committed to giving every deserving student in this region --- high school students and working adults -- the chance to succeed and give this region the economic boost it needs.

Thanks for all you do!