

UNG Presidential Update

President Bonita C. Jacobs [president@ung.edu]

Sent: Monday, June 24, 2013 10:19 AM

To: faculty-staff@gsc.edu; faculty-staff@northgeorgia.edu

Attachments: 130619 JACOBS report sent ~1.pdf (57 KB)

During spring semester, Dr. David Brown visited our campuses to conduct an evaluation of my presidency as part of the University System of Georgia's routine presidential evaluation system. Dr. Brown talked with a broad cross section of students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and community members, and I am very thankful to those who participated in this process. Chancellor Huckaby and I have received Dr. Brown's report, and I am sharing it with you.

The purpose of the evaluation was and is to help me be a better president for this great University. I take that responsibility seriously. Dr. Brown's insights and positive feedback will strengthen my ability to serve the University of North Georgia and our work together.

Already underway is a comprehensive strategic planning process that will take into account the individual strengths of our four campuses and the assets and opportunities we have as a larger university. We have a tremendous history of educational excellence and student success across the University, and we will continue to build upon these strong traditions and the values that help define UNG as a leading institution.

I am grateful to Chancellor Huckaby and his staff for their support and this opportunity for feedback. I am especially thankful to the trustees and alumni councils who have offered support, counsel, and a helping hand. Above all, I am grateful to faculty, staff and students for their contributions. Your commitment to UNG is strong, as is mine. I am excited about what we will accomplish together in the years ahead.

Sincerely,
Bonita C. Jacobs, Ph.D.
President

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To: Chancellor Hank Huckaby

From: David G. Brown

June 19, 2013

Thank you for the honor of assisting you in the performance evaluation of University of North Georgia President Bonita Jacobs. I visited the University and cities between March 25-28, 2013, and subsequently have had a number of communications (phone interviews, document exchanges, emails).

My role has been to interview a wide range of UNG stakeholders including faculty, students, staff, retirees, alumni, foundation, and community leaders. Most of these interviews were face-to-face, individually and in groups. By phone I visited with two USG staff members and the president of another USG university. About a dozen faculty members, staff members, and board members initiated contact with me by both phone or email.

The procedure that I followed included:

1. Pre-visit review of basic data, standard reports, and promotional materials.
2. Extended conversations with the President immediately before and after my on campus interviews. The “exit interview” anticipated the main findings of my report to you under the headings “praises,” “concerns,” and “ideas for your consideration.”
3. Two very full days of on campus interviews. At the beginning of each session I emphasized that my visit was routine and that all comments made would be kept confidential. The intent of my visit, I stressed, was to enable UNG’s presidency to be even more effective during the next five or so years. This augmentation of effectiveness was to be accomplished by (a) encouraging the president to self-reflect upon past successes and shortcomings as well as future objectives and desires, (b) collecting candid feedback from numerous stakeholders, (c) counseling with and coaching the president, especially during the exit interview, and (d) reporting findings and reflections to you (and other system staff members you choose to involve). Most interviewees were given a copy of the list of questions that former Armstrong State President Tom Jones had prepared (see attachment). Interviewees were encouraged to focus upon those 2 or 3 areas where they felt they might be most helpful. If it was not obvious from earlier conversation, I concluded each interview with a question such as “Is Bonita Jacobs the right person to serve as UNG president for the next five or so years?”

The numbers below reflect the (approximate) number of persons interviewed by category:

9 cabinet members (and direct reports)

20 other administrative officers (including 14 from Gainesville, Oconee, and Cumming)

7 faculty senate leaders (both D and G campuses)

17 staff council members (both D and G campuses)

4 deans

9 student government officers (D, G, and O campuses)

- 11 foundation board members (D and G foundations, separately)
- 12 alumni officers (D and G associations, separately)
- 13 community leaders (including 4 mayors and all 4 communities)
- 58 faculty & staff (open invitation sessions, face-to-face in D and G, and remotely O)
- 45 students (open invitation sessions in D and G)

The president's office was extremely helpful in arranging these appointments. A totally private location was provided for the interviews.

Now I turn to the main findings of this report.

1. All components of UNG are strong and getting even stronger. Healthy signs abound. SAT scores among incoming freshmen are rising (At Dahlonega where data are available for both Fall 2010 and Fall 2012, the increase was from 1114 to 1121 for civilian freshmen and from 1082 to 1105 for cadet freshmen. Comparable data are now being collected for all campuses.) Notable is the number and stature of faculty publications in scholarly journals, with an unusually large number of articles jointly authored by professors and their students. The percentage of alumni giving has increased by more than 25%. The \$40 million capital campaign goal has been exceeded by \$4 million, with the final \$8 million raised during Dr. Jacobs' first year. Membership in the athletic boosters' club has increased by nearly 40%. Student participation in co-curricular activities is high and increasing. Faculty/staff commitment and loyalty is high. At both Dahlonega and Gainesville (the only campuses I visited), students and faculty are "on task." Pride prevails. Real learning is taking place.
2. Even the most popular, long serving president would likely encounter high anxiety when tasked to merge two disparate academic cultures/missions, to broaden mission and double size almost overnight. The consolidation is going reasonably well. Consultation has been broad. The resulting administrative structure has selectively elevated some administrators from both D and G. The task of consolidation has, however, meant that your new president has not had time to develop deep personal ties throughout the university, has not been able to lead the university through a strategic visioning process that accompanies almost all new presidencies, and has not been able to "sell" the ultimate decisions to the academic community.
3. Transition tensions exist everywhere. President Jacobs has, frequently and effectively, articulated the ultimate advantages of a larger, more complex university. The stress upon "ultimate advantage" and "consolidation" has, however, increased both expectations and anxieties. Each program and each campus fears that its distinctiveness may be compromised, either by over-reaching policy standardization or by leaders who fail to understand the "special" mission/needs of each program and campus.

4. Answers to the summative question, “Is Bonita Jacobs the best person to serve as UNG President for the next five or so years?” have been a mix of “I hope so,” “no,” and “yes.” Bonita Jacobs is praised for her high integrity, strong character, boundless energy, articulate speech, and emphasis upon students. Most feel, however, that she has not yet become “one of us” with a full appreciation of the university’s distinctive cultures, assets, emphases, and missions.
5. To be fully effective President Jacobs needs (in consultation with USG leaders) to develop and implement a mid-course correction. The key and urgent need is for greater visibility on campus, especially unstructured but also structured. Also needed is strategic visioning that earns endorsement from all stakeholder groups.

In summary, this report has come much too early in President Jacobs’ tenure to assess her accomplishments. I have therefore focused on the early response to her leadership. The hard data available at the end of her first year represent decisions made largely by her predecessors. Hard data from her second year have not yet been generated. But there is no scarcity of opinion.

I suspect that my visit came at the nadir of President Jacobs’ popularity at UNG. The honeymoon was over. The anxieties of consolidation had not yet healed. People were tired toward the end of the academic calendar. As things stabilize, as the campus comes to understand better the achievements of President Jacobs’ cabinet and her leadership, as the data emerge, the university will be better able to applaud her leadership. You were wise, however, to provide counsel to the president at this stage because without mid-course corrections the breadth of concern would almost certainly have inhibited success.

Each of my three books on academic leadership includes “advice aphorisms” culled from the actions and advice of successful university presidents. In summary I highlight those that seem particularly appropriate for President Jacobs at this time and place.

- ***Consult and involve. We must accomplish most of our objectives through others. Build a quality team and give its members room to succeed! Consult widely!
- ***Build trustful relationships
- ***Walk the campus and listen a lot
- ***It’s better to spend your time on recruiting and training staff members than on supervising and dismissing them
- ***Provide a vision and a structure for implementing it
- ***An effective leader has, and consistently applies, education outcomes
- ***Don’t give all your heart to the institution---if you do, you may lose it.
- ***Know when not to leave and when to leave