



**University System of Georgia**  
Creating A More Educated Georgia

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Overview

Campus Visits

**Speeches**

Biography

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## Chancellor Huckaby's Report to the Board of Regents

Print friendly Email or share Modified September 14, 2011

**Wednesday, September 14, 2011**

Thank you Mr. Chairman. The past ten weeks have been very busy as I visit our campuses, and well as meeting with board members and legislators and others. To date, I have visited eight institutions. My ninth campus will be to Valdosta State University this Friday.

Visiting our campuses is one of the perks of this job. It is on the campuses that what we are about comes to life. It is on the campuses that faculties teach and students develop the habits of the mind and the values that will serve them throughout life.

As a business member of one of our presidential search committees commented recently, the most important thing we can do in the University System is to teach students to think critically and to be analytical. I am sure we all agree with him. And as I visit our institutions, I never fail to come away impressed and energized by the very bright and committed people – whether our presidents, our faculty and staff, and especially our students.

We have a great story to tell – in fact, we have thousands of good stories to tell – and they unfold each and every day in our 35 colleges and universities. Here are just two examples: Georgia Perimeter College receiving \$2.6 million in state and federal funds for STEM projects. Also, another example is the nursing training occurring at Gordon College in their state-of-the-art nursing simulation clinical suites. Great teaching and training and research happen every day throughout our System.

But now I want to talk about a few changes we recommend to assure that we keep the System moving forward.

The theme of any good story is change. Change is what drives us forward. Failure arises because organizations become victims of change – that is, they don't adapt to the changing climate or a new environment. They cling tenaciously to the status quo.

As I travel this state and meet with our presidents, legislators, and others I am stressing over and over, again and again, that we in higher education need to embrace change and work to be its active agents – and not its victim. A recent article in, appropriately, Change Magazine, speaks to the need for higher education to recognize that colleges and universities are operating in a different environment and why change is essential. The article observes that our contemporary higher education model is a product of the challenges faced after World War II when millions of G.I.'s went to college. Our predecessors met those challenges with a growth formula: build the buildings, add the faculty, initiate new degree programs, enroll the students – and do it as fast as possible.

Today is different. While we as a System continue to grow along with the state, the political climate, the economic realities and the budget constraints mean that the "old growth equals rewards" model no longer works as well. Not only has the climate changed, but so have societal needs and citizen expectations.

However, the responsibility of governing boards today has not changed. The imperative to champion the value of public higher education is paramount today more than ever. We must focus on this: we must act in ways that underscore its value. This is why I have stressed the need to focus on performance: how well we use our resources to educate students and encourage faculty.

So let me address three areas in which we are going to seek to change our current model. Let me also stress that we are not advocating change for its own sake – we seek change to improve our performance and our outcomes. Each of these three areas considers performance from the perspective of what is best for the System and the people of the state. These are: space utilization, new procedures for building design and the potential for consolidation of institutions.

There are growing concerns about the cost of construction. But the real costs are those that come once the ribbon is cut and the doors are opened. Over the life of a building, the operating costs are ten times the initial construction debt. We are going to continue to build buildings – but we must build based on a clearly documented need.

In this new environment, the major challenge is not building capacity: it is first to ensure the existing capacity is used as efficiently and effectively as possible. Accordingly we must ensure that we are utilizing our entire space well before new buildings are approved.

Let me acknowledge the leadership and foresight of Regent Larry Walker on this issue. He has been a key champion for change in how we look at our space needs. Let me also note that Chairman Tarbutton shares our belief that this is an urgent priority for us.

As I noted in my August remarks to you, in order to ensure we are good stewards of the System's physical assets, we will evaluate capital projects more closely. We will ask what long-term strategic academic need the facility meets and look more closely at design features to assure we are optimizing our scarce capital resources.

Consequently, I am announcing today that we are embarking on a space utilization study. This study, conducted in conjunction with our campuses, will allow us to have a better understanding of how efficiently we use current space. It will help us in the future assess if we really need to build new space. We need to determine what we have, how well we use it, and what else we need.

We are going to collaborate with our campuses as they develop proposals for new programs and facilities and ask them to consider every alternative before sending a proposal to build new space. We must carefully balance the need to construct new facilities with the need to rehabilitate, modernize and maintain existing facilities. In the future, you will see our Facilities, Academic Affairs and Fiscal Affairs offices evaluating proposals for new programs and facilities in an integrated way.

This will mark a significant change in how we approach our capital needs and requests. This fundamentally changes our model to meet current realities. You received a copy last week of a memo I sent to all presidents outlining this space study and we will get it underway immediately.

Efficient use of space needs to be complemented by an effective, functional design process. Today I announce that we will change our current procedures with respect to building design. Going forward, our Facilities staff and senior leadership will meet with architects before any design work is undertaken to ensure that we all share the same philosophy about a building's character, its functionality, and the materials used in it.

To the campuses, I want to assure you that we are not going to micromanage projects or interfere with legitimate and unique design needs. Our purpose is simply to have a clear understanding at the outset of the design process so that we maximize our resources in every way.

Facilities must meet the needs of students and faculty in ways that allow for future reuse and accommodate changes without requiring extensive renovation. Every facility should directly advance the institution's core academic mission.

Looking ahead, we must ensure that our System has the appropriate number of campuses around the state. We need to be organized in ways that truly foster service to our students in the most effective way and that ensure our faculty are properly deployed and supported.

Therefore, I believe it is time for the system to study if campus consolidations are justified and will enhance our ability to serve the people of Georgia at less cost. Our staff will begin right away to assess if any campus consolidations would further our teaching, research and service missions in a more fiscally prudent way.

Let me be clear: no plans have been made for specific institutional consolidation. Our task at this point is to develop the evaluative criteria and processes to be used in identifying any potential consolidations. Chairman Tarbuton has already indicated to me that he will appoint an ad hoc committee to work with this group. Our emphasis must be and will be on the greater good.

I understand that this is potentially a significant change. I need your support. I would urge campuses and communities around the state not to panic – we will be deliberate and objective about our work and this Board will have substantial input and every opportunity to discuss final recommendations. Our current reality demands that we not only adjust to changing times – but to lead through them. We in the university system should be the first to ask questions of ourselves to make sure we are serving the State in the best way.

These three activities will be important to our efforts to reset the higher education model – but they will not be the only ones. Everything we do is geared toward improving higher education.

When I visit our campuses, I appreciate the beautiful landscaping. I go to the football games and root for our teams. I marvel at the residence halls and how different they are from my college days. I listen to the concerns of administrators and faculty. I hear the hopes and dreams of our students. I receive all of the detailed strategic plans from our presidents. We are here to create a more highly educated Georgia. Our energies must be focused on our teaching, research and service mission – as each in its own unique way fulfills that primary education mission.

As I stated at the outset, there are thousands of stories unfolding on our campuses about rich student experiences and the extraordinary achievements of our faculty. The purpose of the three initiatives I announce today is to assure that the University System of Georgia will be well positioned to serve the citizens of this State for the balance of the 21st century. We want to encourage the creative genius of our campuses, and I am confident they will respond.

We have a great University System that is equal to the challenges ahead and ready to make the changes needed. We have a strong Board empowered and ready to fulfill its governing responsibilities. Georgians are counting upon us to change and prepare them better for a productive and fulfilled life.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my report.

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[USG Home](#) > [Office of the Chancellor](#) > [Speeches](#)

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270 Washington Street, S.W.,  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
U.S.A.

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