



PRESIDENT'S "WHITE PAPER" ON A NEW VISION FOR MIDDLE GEORGIA STATE COLLEGE

"THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY OF MIDDLE GEORGIA, LEADING GEORGIANS TO NEW HEIGHTS AND SIGHTS"

INTRODUCTION

Middle Georgia State College has a noble and ambitious mission statement, namely: *to serve the educational needs of a diverse population through high quality programs connected to community needs in a global context and to serve as a leader for the intellectual, economic, and cultural life of the region.* For this mission statement to be achieved, MGSC needs to re-evaluate its vision, direction and scope. Fortunately the time is right for the college to do this. It is now blessed with a moment of historic opportunity, resulting from its unification from two former colleges, setting forth on a journey of educational service to the region as a single institution providing facilities to students on five campuses and online everywhere. It is a moment in which we must embrace vision, courage and change. The issues below are offered to illustrate a broad picture of possible enhancements to our vision and work.

A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY FOR MIDDLE GEORGIA AND BEYOND

Middle Georgia State should build on the policy support from the Board of Regents expeditiously to become a public university, with a name that aptly signals its status as state university serving primarily the Middle Georgia region. Its multi-campus settings and diverse programs ensure that it is capable of serving traditional, non-traditional and online students pursuing a cadre of educational products and degrees across all stages of life and careers. It will commit to a vision of living and learning that truly exemplifies service to the common good and its public manifestation. To achieve this we must grow in size, but not because of the goal of simply increasing numbers, but instead to provide access to diverse educational experiences for people of all ages and aspirations in Middle Georgia. That is the true hallmark of a public university, where service to society equates to access and opportunity for learning.

Our five campus locations and our growing online presence will mean that we can serve local, regional and global audiences. To do so will require us to be a unified, integrated university that prizes the strengths, particular distinctions, programmatic diversity and breadth of facilities offered by five campuses, which united in mission ensure that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. That unified university brand will be achieved not by enforced uniformity on each campus, but instead by recognizing and strengthening the distinct strengths each campus can bring to our university life.

STUDENTS AND STUDENT OPPORTUNITY

The university's student body will comprise the talent, diversity, dedication and community-spiritedness that are emblematic of the people of Middle Georgia. It will honor student choice in the marketplace of higher education by providing a student-focused, customer-orientated culture of service in quality educational experiences and varied accessible support services that cultivate their sense of belonging to the Middle Georgia State community. It will honor the 21st century need for degree credentialing and will provide students with programs in which they will succeed and graduate with baccalaureate and master's degrees that sustain the development of personhood and careers. The university will seek to address the core learning goals of the 18-year-old graduating from high school, the transfer student from technical college, the working adult balancing career and family, and the leading professional seeking an advanced master's degree. It will prize students as the definitive reason for the university's life and work and will ensure that the best learning environments, social settings and pedagogical opportunities exist for traditional students, student-athletes and working adults alike, full-time and part-time. Our commitment to student welfare will support all the categories and diversities of our student body, and central to all of our students' experiences will be our dedication to their opportunities for "greatness": to think critically, understand globally, thrive personally, impact professionally and participate powerfully.

We will maintain a commitment to educational affordability and value in a marketplace where choice and price of higher education is diverse. Our students will experience learning opportunities for personal and career growth in an environment that honors the financial and personal investments they make in choosing to learn at Middle Georgia State. And our reputation in the region will be one where the connection of quality, flexibility, convenience and affordability is well understood and upheld. Every student will bring his or her own unique strengths and challenges for success. We will have the mind-set and thinking that will focus relentlessly on student success from initial inquiry to final graduation.

ACADEMIC QUALITY

The reputation and brand of a university is built upon the quality of its curriculum via its academic programs. That quality sustains student learning and success, and is evidenced by a multitude of inputs, experiences and outcomes. Consistent with the *Complete College Georgia* initiative from the University System of Georgia, we shall evidence quality through increased baccalaureate degree completion within six years, strict limitations on associate degree programs, and our entrance into the field of graduate education in several degree areas. Our capacity to deliver on the promise of education will increasingly rely on results-orientated thinking and outcomes accountability that will determine our levels of state support. We shall therefore identify those discipline areas where national accreditation is achievable and practicable in advancing our academic reputation and graduation rates. The curriculum will be need to be "segmented" for market potential around mission excellence and quality educational outcomes, that are built on a rich set of learning experiences and co-curricular activities for traditional, non-

traditional, commuter and online students. For this to be achieved, and especially since the gateways to the university will be in five locations as well as online, excellence will need to flourish in real time and space, hybrid classes, distance learning and online learning. In short, excellence will need to be coupled to convenience and efficiencies, while acknowledging that our university admissions standards and retention strategies will need bolstering as a state university.

FACULTY EXCELLENCE

This goal of academic excellence is only possible with a strong faculty that is enabled to develop and serve at the cutting-edge of their disciplines. The university will cherish the notion of faculty as knowledge creators, as well as deliverers, in a unique relationship with students and we will establish diverse pathways for faculty career development. Where the traditional model of faculty tenure pertains, the university will support and expect faculty scholarship alongside teaching. “One size fits all” will not work in a university, and so we shall provide a variety of faculty ladders to career growth. In terms of students, faculty will prize teaching as their primary responsibility, though engagement with students in scholarly activities will be a way of building student academic leadership. Faculty will provide the heart of the university’s schools, and will be the leaders in developing centers of scholarship and practice within their schools, seeking partnerships and grant support from external community agencies.

To ensure this we shall apply rigor and intentionality in our search for new faculty, develop processes for sustaining faculty excellence and accountability, and expect schools and colleges to recognize and enable those faculty members whose scholarship will lead the momentum toward university status.

RE-THINKING RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

Middle Georgia State is blessed as a multi-campus institution with a range of outstanding people, facilities and resources that provide a very solid environment for learning and working. Consolidation has brought many resources, but now requires a thorough review of efficiency and return on investments. As importantly, our recent enrollment dip and the resulting decrease in tuition and fees revenue threatens our financial stability at a time when state appropriations are just beginning to recover from recent cuts. In Fiscal Year 2013, due to the enrollment decline, only 45 percent of MGSC’s budget came from tuition and fees while 55 percent came from state appropriations, whereas in Fiscal Year 2012 it was a 50/50 split. So our need now to seek new revenues from enrollment growth, grants and alternative sources is pressing and real, and a new entrepreneurship is essential to provide long-term financial health and sustainability.

The challenges here are real. As examples, our current results in recruitment and fund-raising need enhancing if our university vision is to be sustainable. We will need to imagine a more diversified and performance-oriented budgeting model, that is less reliant upon state appropriations and sees enrollment, philanthropy and alternative revenues as essential to financial health. The resources that

will ensure our university strength are equally technological, in addition to fiscal. It is now essential that we develop strategic thinking in our technological infrastructure and the use of technology by faculty and staff. Moving from a “putting out fires” approach to a more planned model of technological integration is essential if we are to truly unite our campuses effectively and efficiently in educational delivery and service. This will take investment of time, talent and money, but is essential in the 21st century learning environment.

To achieve these results our most important resource, our personnel, need a new vision of professional development and customer-thinking. Systematically we must create more robust plans for the development, support and accountability for the work of our staff and faculty to ensure career opportunities and professional excellence as the norm. This requires improvement in our thinking and our operation: a rising tide that will raise all ships. For example, the college needs a high-quality web site, workshops on financial aid literacy, an informative and engaging orientation program, and monitoring and intervention programs that assist students before they err or withdraw. These are examples of a customer orientation that truly unites human, technological and financial services to support students. Similarly, administrative services such as an expanded food service, student life activities, athletics and intramural participation, personal counseling, employment services, inter-campus transportation and an integrated library are all hallmarks of a new vision of excellence in resourcing our university. These types of changes depend upon a new level of professional excellence in our work. Our university status will only be reached through the quality and output of our faculty and staff, and a greater commitment to excellence and accountability, in pursuit of a stronger service to our students. This approach is comprehensive, necessary, participatory and inclusive, at all levels, in all operations, for all personnel. It must be the core value system that drives a new vision.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As the regional public university of choice, the university will sustain a powerful cadre of relationships with businesses, public sector services, local and state agencies, non-profits, and community agencies. Since over 80 percent of our students live and work in Middle Georgia upon graduation, it is essential that we define our role as beyond simply training for employment but instead visioning education for growth and professional leadership. Hence the need for both baccalaureate and master’s level education that has direct bearing upon professional needs and opportunities. To achieve this we will build a robust internship program that connects campus and online learning to real-life professional experiences across our degrees and majors. This will require our schools to develop community and business partnerships, such as advisory boards. At the institutional level this commitment to engagement will be manifested in aspirations such as electively seeking the Carnegie classification of Community Engagement, taking to a new level the connection of our mission and vision to our regional community.

MARKETING AND EXTERNAL MESSAGING

If we take these steps and boldly move in this direction our brand message, “*United, we stand for greatness*”, will be evident in our practices, self-understanding and operations, and importantly in an internal and external set of communications and academic messages to drive public perception, appreciation, endorsement and volition to connect to our university. A clear confidence in our identity, our mission and our value proposition will need to flow to ensure that our students make Middle Georgia State their preferred institution, that our alumni maintain their pride and association in their alma mater, and that our donors and friends are keen to fund and advocate for our priorities. In short, an integrated marketing and messaging campaign will need to be consistently and coherently driven to raise the bar with enrollment, development and regional relationships. Our reputation will be built through our educational programming and delivery, but its perception and understanding in the region will require a clear integrated marketing strategy. What the public says about our learning programs depends on the messages we intentionally communicate. That perception will equally influence other institutional priorities, such as recruitment and development that were mentioned above. In short, we must find a robust and consistent external message that is powerful, evidenced, and strategic, and that emanates directly out of our mission.

LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

We will be a public university where leadership is prized and exhibited in all our stakeholders and constituents. We will aspire to bottom-up, top-down, and side-to-side leadership where professional and personal standards of excellence characterize our work and interactions. Ours will be a regional public university where innovation is embraced and the paradox of “dynamic equilibrium” – the need for balance with progress – is a norm of our lives and work. We will lead and manage change proactively, rather than be led and managed by it reactively. We will celebrate courage and boldness and be patient with failure when it emanates from that risk-taking basis rather than from passivity or inertia. We will celebrate intentionality and strategic decision-making, and will realize that if we are to expect our students to exhibit these qualities in their 21st century working lives, it is absolutely imperative that we as individuals and as a university esteem and model that capacity to them.

Middle Georgia State is presented with a responsibility and calling at this time to be a unified university that will enable Georgians in the region and others to reach new heights in their lives and set their sights on shaping the world for the better through their work. We must empower and have the fullest confidence in our students to be great, extraordinary citizens who can fulfill their educational promise to themselves and to society. Only our vision as a university will allow them to fulfill that noble promise.

Christopher Blake, President
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