

# President's Message

Ronald M. Zaccari



August 29, 2003

In this first President's Message of the 2003–2004 fiscal year, I am pleased to report on a number of outcomes. Included in this message is an open letter from Chancellor Thomas Meredith to all University System of Georgia employees recognizing their efforts and patience during these difficult financial times.

These are encouraging as well as challenging times to be at Valdosta State University. The campus is making significant progress in the five-component planning model that began just seventeen months ago. I continue to be impressed by the highly motivated faculty, staff and students, in addition to many community partners, who have embraced the planning model and are engaged in moving the process forward.

Through daily activities, each employee makes an important contribution to the overall planning model and VSU's broader vision. Although we face difficult budget cuts and financial constraints, your commitment and support are crucial to the success of our defined goals.

Your planning and hard work have helped achieve productive results. The partial listing covers strategic planning, academics, retention, community partnerships, housing, faculty and staff development, and athletics.

- **Strategic Planning:** In March 2002, we held our first planning retreat and defined eight major goals that serve as the foundation of our Strategic Plan. A follow-up retreat has been scheduled to examine outcomes, plan new action steps, and continue the self-examination and reflection so vital to the success of the planning model. The retreat is scheduled for September 15, 2003.

- **Academic Programs:** The Board of Regents is currently reviewing VSU's proposals for two master's degree programs, one in biology and the second in music performance. The College of Arts and Sciences held its Ninth Annual Symposium on Undergraduate Research, where more than 35 students presented results of their research. The department of Art underwent a successful accreditation review from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. The Langdale College of Business Administration received an \$8 million bequest from the estate of Rea and Lillian Steele. This gift will endow academic scholarships and establish three distinguished chairs. The College of Education, in partnership with the University System of Georgia, received two grants totaling \$4.4 million from the U.S. Department of Education to launch "Destination Teaching" initiative. The Division of Social Work's accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education was reaffirmed for eight years. The College of Nursing had a 17 percent increase in student credit hours taught last year and an additional 13 percent this year.

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- **Retention:** Student retention continues to increase. For returning second-year students, VSU's rate was 75 percent compared with 72 percent the previous year.

- **Partnerships:** VSU is actively involved in productive partnerships with the city and county, public school systems, medical community, Chamber of Commerce, and many other local and regional organizations that are committed to enhancing the educational and economic development of this region. In April, VSU hosted an Economic Development Summit, where 50 key business, government, education and medical community leaders from Valdosta and Lowndes County met to discuss the economic climate of our region. Through this summit, the Partnership for Metropolitan Development has been formed and partially funded through the Regional Economic Development Partnership. This group will serve as a catalyst for creative thinking to promote a strategic vision for our geographic area and build partnerships to enhance economic development. We are continuing our collaboration with South Georgia Medical Center to enhance educational opportunities for qualified health care professionals. The proposed North Campus expansion is an example of utilizing available space and facilities that may lead to the establishment of new degree programs as well as strengthen existing ones. The partnership will also open new opportunities with Valdosta Technical College. We are currently surveying area physicians and medical administrators to assess the educational needs of the medical community. The survey was distributed to physicians and chief administrators at South Georgia Medical Center and Smith Northview Hospital, and later this month it will be sent to Archbold Memorial Hospital.

- **Housing:** The lack of appropriate campus housing is a pressing problem at VSU. The last residence hall was constructed in 1969 and the average age of college housing facilities is 41 years. Carter and Associates, an Atlanta based firm, has been hired to assist with developing a comprehensive housing plan. We are proposing the creation of a diverse mix of on-campus housing options to include renovation of existing residence halls, and construction of contemporary apartment style facilities. Since Fall 2000, VSU's total enrollment has increased 12.4 percent and freshman enrollment is up 23.4 percent. According to a limited survey of incoming freshmen, who attended summer orientation, more than 50 percent of those students were from the Atlanta area, and 12 percent of the group surveyed lives within 25 miles of VSU. Although this is a small sampling, the information points to a shift in demographic data and emphasizes the need for increased campus housing. In an effort to support our mission as a regional residential university and address the increased need for campus housing, we must increase our percentage of students housed on campus from the current 17 percent to 25 to 35 percent. We will implement the proposed plan in phases that will include the renovation of existing residence halls, while concurrently constructing new housing at different campus locations. Phase I will include 550 new beds and construction should begin during summer 2004. The selected site is near the new student recreation center.

- **Professional Development:** This summer, Dr. David McFarland, former president at Kutztown University, conducted a three-day workshop for our deans and department heads. The workshop enhanced the vision of teamwork across campus and further engaged our academic administrators in the transformation of the University.

The Partners for Campus Excellence program experienced another successful year in building a service philosophy on campus. This program directly supports the objectives of strategic goals number three and six, as they relate to student retention, and the development and retention of quality faculty and staff. The first PFCE training was held in December 2001, and since this time 494 employees have benefited from this training model.

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Providing funds to support faculty development for travel, research grants, and upgrading equipment continues to be a top priority within our budget allocations.

- Athletics: A number of successes in Blazer athletics were recorded this past year with several sports advancing to NCAA Division II post-season championship play, highlighted by the football team playing for the national championship on ESPN. Other teams to make playoff berths were men and women tennis, softball, women's basketball, and baseball. A record eight different sports a average GPA of 3.0 or higher and 45 athletes made the dean's list.

### Budget Plan

- Funding within the public higher education arena has changed; thus, institutions must examine all aspects of their operation and look for creative measures to continue their mission. Doing more with less is no longer a cliché but a part of daily operations. Key decisions that reflect the current budgetary situation will be grounded in our strategic planning process.

- As we deal with the effects of increased enrollment, we are simultaneously reminded of the decrease in state appropriations. The state's commitment to public higher education in terms of percentage of the total state budget is strained due to lower tax revenues and competing demands for limited state dollars. In fiscal year 2004, the total state appropriations of \$1.67 billion to the University System of Georgia constitutes only 11.3 percent of the state's total budget—the lowest share since 1967.

- Earlier this year we implemented a new budget process, which has emerged as an integral part of the University's planning model. The computer-based process allowed each department to build its 2004 fiscal year budget, based on the University's strategic goals and input from individuals on campus. The process also allowed administrators to communicate with faculty and staff and prioritize new initiatives that are related to one or more Strategic Plan goals.

- Through this process, I am pleased to report that we were able to fund several one-time initiatives, such as the purchase of new computers for more than one-third of our faculty in the 2003 fiscal year and provide network upgrades in various academic buildings. This will enable our faculty to use the latest web-based instruction. We also added eight new faculty positions to assist with the growing enrollment.

- Given the current budgetary challenges and possible further reductions in funds, I challenge the entire VSU community to focus your best creative thinking to identify every possible savings and efficiency that can be achieved in our daily operations. All departments must be very selective in requesting authorization to fill any position and continue to closely monitor their own budgets.

- We must remain focused on our primary mission of providing a high quality education to every VSU student. Teaching, learning, and academic programs must remain our highest priorities.

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### Facilities Plan

- The \$4.8 million renovation of Nevins Hall is scheduled to begin this year and will include improvements on approximately 57,000 square-feet of classroom and laboratory space. When Nevins Hall was originally built in the late 1960s Valdosta State's enrollment was approximately 3,000.

- As student enrollment rapidly approaches the 11,000 mark, VSU must upgrade its existing facilities to meet faculty and student needs. The Facilities Plan allows us to strategically forecast these needs and request renovation funds.

- A full inventory of our facilities will be completed as part of our Master Plan process. This inventory began earlier this month.

- The Odum Library addition is scheduled for completion this year and will serve as a constant reminder of this institution's commitment to the academic needs of our students. The new addition will contain 95,000 square-feet that will double the size of the library and feature a 24-hour Internet café, a computer lab, a Georgia Library Learning Online (GALILEO) Technology Center, reading rooms, expanded study space, and a 100-seat auditorium. Space will be allocated to HUB, a concept that was conceived by creative thinking faculty members and initiated last year when faculty and administrators came together to seek creative solutions to new teaching and learning opportunities. I support this initiative 100 percent and hope others on campus will support this exciting work. We will have a ribbon cutting ceremony for this facility in October, when we host the Board of Regents meeting at VSU on October 7-8.

### Master Plan

- The fourth component of the planning process will involve the development of a new physical Master Plan for the campus. The Master Plan visually reflects our overall strategic goals by addressing new buildings, use of space, landscape, walkways, traffic patterns, and parking. Following an intensive review of proposals from 12 firms, John Portman & Associates of Atlanta was selected to assist VSU in the preparation of the Master Plan. Portman & Associates has extensive experience in designing master plans for colleges and universities across the country, including Columbus State University and Georgia Southern University. Vice Chancellor Linda Daniels, and her staff at the Board of Regents, have been instrumental in guiding VSU through the updated master plan process.

- Beginning next month, representatives from Portman will conduct meetings with various groups on campus and in the community, in an effort to help identify the physical needs of VSU. Within the next four weeks, I will appoint a broadly based master plan committee composed of faculty, staff, students, and members of the community.

### External Plan

The fifth strategic planning component is our External Plan, which involves fund raising and alumni relations. Two extensive national searches failed to produce a suitable candidate for the position of Vice President for University Advancement. VSU's Foundation recently hired Alexander

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Haas Martin & Partners, one of the nation's leading fund-raising consulting firms, to assist in building a strong advancement program and meet our current and future fund-raising goals. This firm will begin planning a capital campaign and the 100-year celebration of VSU's founding. They will also assist in identifying outstanding candidates for the position of Vice President for Advancement. Representatives from the consulting firm are busy moving forward with developing a viable planning format. They expect to complete the project by December 2003, and hopefully a new Vice President for Advancement will be appointed by January 2004.

### Enrollment

- Fall semester 2003 is poised to surpass last year's enrollment by approximately 6 percent. Our enrollment profile is ahead of estimated growth rates. Following current growth patterns, previous predictions placed VSU's enrollment at 11,500 by 2006; however, if enrollment continues to increase at the current rate, VSU will need to plan for 12,800 students for Fall Semester 2006. This represents 1,300 students above the 2002 Planning Retreat projections. With the expanding enrollment, it is imperative that we stay focused on directing our scarce resources toward the University's strategic goals and its primary mission of teaching and learning.

- Valdosta State University realized a record enrollment of 9,900 for fall semester 2002 and spring enrollment reached 9,636—the highest spring enrollment in the University's history. The University System of Georgia's 34 colleges and universities experienced an enrollment increase of 7.1 percent from fall 2001 to 2002, a gain of 15,552 students system-wide.

- Chancellor Meredith understands the struggle institutions are facing with enrollment growth and related shrinking state dollars. Capping enrollment is a serious decision that requires Board of Regents' approval.

### Appointments and Searches

- National searches were conducted to identify appropriate candidates for the position of Vice President for University Advancement and Chief Information Officer. After bringing several candidates to campus we were unable to identify acceptable individuals for either position.

- The Vice President for Advancement search will receive assistance from the firm of Alexander Haas Martin & Partners, who will lend their expertise and assist us in locating highly qualified candidates for this position.

- After completing three extensive national searches, conducting on campus interviews, and the related recommendations of Dr. Louis Levy, Vice President of Academic Affairs, I endorsed the appointments of Dr. Linda Calendrillo, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. John Gaston, Dean of the College of the Arts, and Dr. Philip Gunter, Dean of the College of Education. I wish each of these individuals success as they embark on new administrative responsibilities.

- The search committee for Dean of the College of Nursing will bring candidates to campus for interviews beginning September 8, 2003.

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### **Administrative Internships**

- With the success of last semester's administrative internship program, I am pleased to announce the selection of Dr. Brian Adler, Frank Barnas, and Dr. James Reffel as fall semester administrative interns. This group will play a pivotal role in the enhancement of our strategic planning efforts.

- I commend our previous administrative interns, Drs. Andrew Brovey, Paul Fadil, and Deborah Robinson. They engaged in activities that enhanced their leadership skills and had the opportunity to be involved in the central administration of the University.

- Andrew Brovey reviewed and consolidated the reports prepared by the eight strategic planning committees, and assisted the University Planning Advisory Council to refine and clarify elements of the Strategic Plan. He also convened focus groups of faculty and staff that addressed the action steps of strategic goal three related to service learning, ethics and integrity, and learning communities.

- Paul Fadil developed a research methodology to compare faculty workload at VSU to approximately 70 universities and doctoral institutions across the country. The study also looked at research and service hours. He presented his preliminary findings to the Faculty Senate in April, and will continue working on the study this semester, as it supports strategic goal three and six.

- Deborah Robinson reviewed VSU's faculty evaluation process in comparison to similar institutions. She focused on three areas of faculty responsibility—teaching, professional development, and service. Her findings will assist in recruiting and retaining quality faculty at VSU as it relates to strategic goal number six.

### **Board of Regents Meeting**

The University System of Georgia Board of Regents will meet at Valdosta State University on October 7 and 8, 2003. This will be an excellent opportunity to showcase Valdosta State University and share our vision for the future. I hope each of you will embrace this opportunity and give our visitors a true Valdosta State University and South Georgia welcome.

### **Thank You**

At the outset of the strategic planning process, we collectively identified a number of elements that would lead to a successful plan. As a result of your efforts, those pieces are coming together into the defined planning model we envisioned. Thank you for your role in Valdosta State University's continuing achievement. Best wishes for a successful academic year.

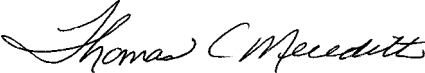


OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR  
270 WASHINGTON STREET, S.W.  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30334

PHONE (404) 656-2202  
FAX (404) 657-6979

## MEMORANDUM

TO: University System of Georgia Employees

FROM: Thomas C. Meredith, Chancellor 

DATE: August 20, 2003

SUBJECT: Thank You

On behalf of the Board of Regents, let me thank you for your extraordinary effort during these challenging times.

There are two primary challenges. One is a very lean budget. Without question, our funding from the state has significantly declined in recent years. Our current academic year appropriation is \$56 million less than last year's appropriation. Our System is \$87.7 million down from two years ago. Now state officials have announced possible reduction of \$42 million for the current year and an additional \$84 million for next year.

The second challenge is an increasing demand for our services. Reduced funding is in sharp contrast to record enrollments, which will continue for quite some time. When this fall's expected numbers are recorded, the System's enrollment will have increased by more than 30,000 students since Fall 2001. We added the equivalent of another Georgia Tech to the System last year, and we can anticipate at least the same this year. In addition, more students are now taking even heavier academic loads, as reflected by the FTE enrollment.

In response to these economic challenges, institutions have kept faculty and staff positions vacant, in addition to other strategies. This means our System family has had to provide more services with fewer resources and fewer people. The Board and I are extremely appreciative of your extraordinary commitment. We know you are working harder than ever for the good of Georgia and your students. Thank you.

Our record enrollment is good for Georgia, even though we are struggling to accommodate these students. Georgia has long been on the bottom end of the scale in terms of participation in post-secondary education.

Relief from reduced state funding will not come quickly. Even after the economic recovery begins, it will take a while for jobs to be filled, wages to be earned, taxes to be collected, and dollars to be appropriated.

It will remain important for us to continue our focus on serving students, as you have done so well. The Board of Regents is committed to "Creating a More Educated Georgia."

Thanks to you and your hard work, we all are part of the best system of higher education in the country. Thank you again for your continuing good work during these challenging times.

TCM/urm

cc: Board of Regents

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