

State of the University
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President, Georgia State University
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Thank you, Sebastian and Teara, for that warm introduction.

And thank you all for being here today.

And thank you most of all for the hard work, dedication and commitment each of you brings to our campus each and every day. Because of you, Georgia State is a university with incredible momentum, a university on a steep upward trajectory, a university whose accomplishments are increasingly recognized by some of the most respected observers of higher education across the nation.

According to a growing number of these observers, we are now the national leader in introducing and implementing effective new programs and services to help students from all backgrounds earn their degrees at rates unseen before in history. We are widely acknowledged as the central catalyst for the revitalization, growth and development of downtown Atlanta. We are viewed as one of a small number of colleges and universities with the courage and energy to lead, to take risks and pursue new ideas and directions to create a new model university for the 21st century.

We have implemented our strategic plan with vigor and the world is noticing our success. This fall we were named one of the five most innovative universities in the country by U.S. News and World Report and one of the best in the nation for our commitment to undergraduate education. The Washington Post called us a "hotbed of innovation" and praised us for our willingness to take risks. Again last Friday, the Washington Post spotlighted Georgia State and reported on our increase in graduation rates and the advising and financial initiatives we have introduced to achieve that increase.

Money Magazine ranked us alongside the University of California at Berkeley as one of the top 10 universities that provides a world-class education with the reduced cost afforded commuter students. PBS News Hour highlighted how our Panther Retention grants are making a huge difference in getting Georgia State students to graduation. And in recent months, U.S. Senators from both parties and the President of the United States have all singled out our efforts, citing the remarkable difference they are making nationally.

We have every right to be proud of this recognition from the news media, federal, state and city leaders, philanthropists, foundations and others. We should be even prouder, though, of the fact that we have earned it. We are not just saying the right things. We are doing them, and what we are doing matters for the good of our state and nation. Our innovations are helping to set the national agenda for the future of higher education.

Each year, we're graduating a higher percentage of students, and that has translated into nearly two thousand more students graduating from Georgia State annually than just a few years ago. Each year, we're seeing fewer students have to cut their college careers short because of academic or financial difficulties. And each year, we proudly support and educate one of the nation's most diverse student bodies. Think about all of this! Because of the work we do at Georgia State thousands of people who in the past would have been saddled with college debt and no degree, are now graduating and have the opportunity for better and more prosperous lives for themselves, for their families and for generations to come. Those are the true metrics for success at Georgia State.

So it is a great pleasure for me to share with you some of the highlights of another year of growth, change, innovation and leadership at Georgia State.

You'll remember that last January the Board of Regents announced the consolidation of Georgia State University with Georgia Perimeter College, thereby creating a newer, larger Georgia State going forward.

Georgia Perimeter is an institution with whom we have had a longstanding and mutually productive relationship. In fact, more than 20 percent of students pursuing bachelor's degrees at Georgia State today started at Perimeter, and they are some of our best and brightest students.

Since last January, dedicated faculty and staff at both institutions have been working tirelessly to prepare for the consolidation, which we expect will become official this January with a vote of the Board of Regents.

I give special thanks to members of the Consolidation Implementation Committee who have worked through hundreds of recommendations from operational working groups to ensure the transition is a smooth one. And to the hundreds of faculty, staff and students who have worked diligently to produce those recommendations, thank you.

The logistics of adding four new campuses, expanding our Alpharetta campus, adopting a fully online associate's degree program and adding more than 20,000 students to the Georgia State family have at times been daunting, but they will come with great reward for our students and community.

Our first priority is to make certain that three goals are accomplished at the time of consolidation. Specifically, students must be able to register for courses, must be able to get their financial aid and employees must be paid.

Once those basics are working and the consolidation is fully operational we will turn our attention to the future of a new, significantly larger Georgia State University. The nation is watching this consolidation. With our hard-earned reputation for innovation and leadership, great things are expected of us. We will not let our students nor the nation down.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to announce the next important step in the implementation of our consolidation plan, the appointment of Perimeter College's first vice provost and dean. It is my pleasure to announce that Peter Lyons, Georgia State's associate provost for institutional effectiveness and a professor of social work in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, will become the first vice provost and dean of the new Perimeter College when the Board of Regents votes to finalize the consolidation.

I look forward to working with Peter in his new role. He is passionate about Perimeter's mission and looks forward to working with his colleagues to make this consolidation a stunning success.

I want to thank Peter and for his willingness and commitment to take on this important role of leading Perimeter College as it becomes an integral part of Georgia State. Please join me in congratulating him.

On October 22nd we officially embarked on the second major capital campaign in our history - Burning Bright, The Campaign for Georgia State University. Our goal is to raise at least 300 million dollars by the end of 2019. We are focused on fundraising that will continue to support our distinctive mission and propel Georgia State to higher levels of achievement.

So far we have raised more than 197 million dollars in this campaign, a reflection of the support our work has received in the philanthropic community and among alumni and other members of the Panther family. Our first capital campaign, the Results Campaign, concluded in 2004 having raised more than 127 million dollars. Clearly, the Burning Bright Campaign is off to a strong start, and we look forward to a successful conclusion four years from now.

The Burning Bright Campaign is about raising funds to support Georgia State students, faculty and programs, but that is not all that it is about. Just as important, with Burning Bright we seek to significantly grow the community of people and organizations who entrust Georgia State with their contributions to make a major difference in this world. Last year alone contributions and support were received from nearly 1,000 new donors. Growing our base of support is critically important to the future of Georgia State as we continue our rise as a premier public urban research university.

Funds raised through the Burning Bright Campaign will be used primarily in four areas: expanding and improving our student success initiatives; recruiting the best and brightest faculty and scholars; building on our rapidly growing research portfolio; and expanding and improving our campus.

At the kickoff event on October 22nd we announced that The SunTrust Foundation has awarded Georgia State a 2-million-dollar grant to create a first-of-its-kind Student Financial Counseling Center to help students address financial issues that can be obstacles to earning their degrees. This center will build on our nationally recognized efforts in providing students with proactive counseling to help them achieve academic success.

A highlight of the kickoff event was the premiere of a video that vividly explains and shows why Georgia State is worthy of philanthropic support. In the second half of that video viewers are given a glimpse into the future, when we will convert the Kell Hall site into a grassy quad, a new campus centerpiece. Here is part of the video we showed:

(VIDEO)

Before I talk about other facilities developments that are part of our university's bright future, I want to point out several milestones we reached in the past year.

Earlier in the fall, we gathered in this room for an update on the university's 10-year strategic plan. Here at the halfway mark of the plan, we have made major progress in each of the five goals. Of course, we still have much further to go in the next five years, and so I look forward to the work of the committee leading our campus-wide midpoint update.

Over the first five years we have demonstrated the ability to achieve goals initially thought to be a stretch, so we look to the future with heightened expectations.

In the last fiscal year we raised more than 43 million dollars in philanthropic contributions and support. That is the first time in Georgia State history that philanthropic giving has exceeded 40 million dollars, and it is this kind of growth that will propel the Burning Bright Campaign to success.

The past year was a record for sponsored research funding, as well. We broke the 100-million-dollar mark for the first time in Georgia State history. Over the past seven years our sponsored research funding has grown nearly 80 percent, and at greater than twice the national average for research universities.

Kudos to Dr. James Weyhenmeyer, our extraordinarily talented vice president for research and economic development, who has provided the leadership and faculty support necessary to significantly increase sponsored funding across the university. Jim and his team have been instrumental in working with faculty to submit larger and more competitive grant proposals.

Long-serving faculty, as well as new hires through our enormously successful Second Century Initiative and other recruitments, all have had a role in achieving this major research milestone. Georgia State had long sought to achieve the 100-million-dollar mark, and doing so with a rapid rise is an impressive accomplishment by our faculty. Thank you and congratulations.

This fall we enrolled our largest and best prepared freshman class, as Georgia State continues to rise as a destination-of-choice university.

Our Honors College, established just a few years ago as recommended in our strategic plan, now boasts more than 250 freshmen and more than 1,600 students overall. Moreover, our Honors College students are earning important national scholarships, from Fulbrights to Goldwaters, under the guidance of Dean Larry Berman and his outstanding team of faculty and staff.

Georgia State is a catalyst for change in our students' lives and we also continue to be the major catalyst for change in downtown Atlanta.

New private housing units continue to rise up around us and new stores and shops are opening around us.

With a November 20 deadline for submissions, we are hard at work, with our partners at Carter and Associates on our proposal for the re-development of the Turner Field property. The proposal will be submitted to the Atlanta Fulton County Recreation Authority, and we are expecting them to make their decision on future site development in early 2016.

This video presents a vision of what we hope to achieve with this dynamic property:

(VIDEO)

Construction of phase two of our science park is well underway. Work on the exterior of this building along Decatur Street is expected to be complete in January, with move-in slated for next summer once the interior work is completed.

If you've driven up Piedmont Avenue lately, you've certainly seen the rapid progress being made on our next residence and dining hall. The 11-story building under construction is nearly half-way toward completion, and it will be fully operational and ready for students to move into next August.

This fall, we opened our first stand-alone law school building at the corner of John Wesley Dobbs Avenue and Park Place. The facility is receiving rave reviews from the legal community and all who visit it.

Renovations of 55 Park Place will soon begin, and eventually the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies and the J. Mack Robinson College of Business will move into this facility. Likewise, renovations of 25 Park Place continue, with major components of the College of Arts and Sciences already being housed in renovated spaces. Adjacent to this tower will be our Creative Media Industries Institute. That renovation is beginning now and will be completed late next summer.

As you can see, we are creating an academic hub along Woodruff Park, with work underway so that four of our colleges will be housed along Park Place between Edgewood and John Wesley Dobbs avenues. This strong presence along the eastern boundary of Woodruff Park, and with the Atlanta street car passing by on both Auburn and Park Place avenues, will provide our university a prominent presence in downtown.

This fall we also opened our International Center, housed in Dahlberg Hall. The center allows us to bring greater visibility and coordination among university international offices and programs.

Finally, any review of the past year for Georgia State University would be incomplete without recalling the thrill and excitement of our victory over Baylor in the second round of the NCAA men's basketball tournament. Let's re-live that moment yet again:

[VIDEO]

Thanks to all of you, we have had a remarkable year of achievement, growth and development. As I noted at the start of my speech, we have incredible momentum and are on a steep upward trajectory. Yet, there is so much more to be done. With your help and the help of our supporters in and outside the Panther family, we will continue to build Georgia State into a national leader. We will continue to have the courage to take risks, to pursue new directions, to find new ways to serve our students. We will continue to live up to the reputation for innovation and leadership we have worked so hard to earn.

Thank you again. For all you do. Every day. For Georgia State.
Thank you, and Godspeed.