Of the First year class accepted to UWG in 1994, nearly 3/4s would not have met the standards for admission required for the class beginning on campus Monday. We should not lose sight of the fact that in the last six years, we have had UWG students receive three Goldwater Scholarships, and Marshall Scholarship. Yet another student was a regional finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship Competitions. I believe it is only a matter of time before a UWG student receives a Rhodes. This, as much as any measure, indicates the kind of educational excellence this faculty provides our students. Over the last year the departments of Computer Science and Nursing, as well as the Theatre Program, received program accreditation—again providing external confirmation to our belief that truly impressive things are happening here academically.

In the interest of brevity—as well as the press of meeting, classes, and other pressing matters, I will ask consent to revise and extend my remarks in the test that we will publish on the VPAA website this week. With luck, my promise of a 7 to 10 minute presentation will not be timed at 17, as I understand was the case last fall. I shall make no timing promise this year.

Here I want to speak of two general areas: budget and its likely consequences for the year; and projects for the year to enhance areas of student and faculty learning and university effectiveness.

Concerning the first area, yesterday I had a brief yet pleasant conversation with a colleague who inquired: Is this going to be the usual speech tomorrow? And with great curiosity, I asked what that speech might be. The content, I was told, would include a report that things are really bad because of an array of budget issues, but that we are really appreciative of the extraordinary work of faculty and staff to help support faculty and student learning. Close. The report on the second item is true—we are appreciative. Based on the good, thoughtful, and hard work of our colleagues, we have been able to sustain and even advance our activities. But on the budget issues, I am here to report that the results of the work have made the conditions less negative than they might be.

Budget issues are either at the front or the back of all of our minds. It is clearly the case that without the work of faculty and staff over the last several months, we would have been required to cut programs—period. With nearly 90% of our budget associated with personnel campus-wide, the revenue generated by an over-realization of tuition dollars provided the small margin of safety we had. When the Board of Regents began to adjust allocations to institutions—a start, although only a start—we received nearly $300,000 that would have been required to be cut. With a greater reliance on tuition dollars to support our activities, 9 new tenure track faculty positions and a number of graduate assistantships—all of them targeted to areas either with persistent proof of student demand or in response to stated strategic goals. Largely from funds coming from the over-realization of tuition last year, we distributed more than a million dollars to academic programs at year’s end. More than $700,000 of that was used to support the university library, with the remainder sent to academic units to support projects given priority by deans and directors—we intend to post this information on our site along with the presentation (Divisional Allocation FY 04, FY 04 New Funding Allocation and End
of FY03 Funded Projects). But the point is, rather than program cuts, we could provide on-going program support because of your efforts and continued willingness to work well with students.

As President Sethna observed, we are all still puzzled about what the future budget environment will bring—but through careful conversation with the campus community, we will all do all we can to protect the portions of student and faculty learning that is so central to who we are as an institution.

It would appear that our colleague’s prediction of at least part of the presentation was close to the mark.

The second portion of the presentation will consider some university wide initiatives in academic affairs. This is in addition to conversations we will have about facilities master planning. Those conversations will provide a serious and detailed analysis of our future facilities needs and requirements, as well as options used to address those needs. But here I will mention six areas of concern for the year, beyond those noted above.

The first is the hope for shared enthusiasm for the American Democracy project. On a number of occasions, colleagues have told me that the single greatest act for change is to elevate the level of student engagement—to elevate the level of curiosity and the acceptance that engagement in ideas—whether they are the ideas of the academy, the broader civic and political society or even the broader world—engagement in ideas and in people and things that really matters. In fact, it would be great to see engagement in almost anything. As one of several Chief Academic Officers in involved in the American Association of State Colleges and Universities troubled by these issues of involvement, I have expressed a personal commitment to the American Democracy Project. The project was launched with an announcement in the New York Times—it is a three year project, involving approximately 150 regional public institutions, and reflecting a partnership of these institutions, the New York Times and the Carnegie Foundation. The first year of the project will involve campus conversations—what do we do now to support the civic and political engagement of our students? What academic strategies can be applied to enhance them? Who among us wishes to participate—either through our curriculum or other ways—to involve higher education in the task of preserving participatory values for another generation of educated Americans? Our efforts will be linked to the AASCU and the New York Times Websites as the semester progresses. It portends to use engagement among other strategies to provide another vehicle for increased student engagement in scholarly activities. It offers opportunities to obtain focus for the university’s existing efforts (centered in the library) to significantly increase voter registration among our students. Some of us see urgency in this project. As a task force of the American Political Science Association noted: “…current levels of political knowledge, political engagement, and political enthusiasm are so low as to threaten the vitality and stability of democratic politics in America.” I confess both a drive and an excitement for participating in such a project here. I am hopeful that many of you will share in that enthusiasm.
Second, and consistently, we must make progress this year in our campus conversations on an honor code—we must engage students in responsibilities not only to the broader society—but to themselves, their values, and those of this university. The groundwork was established well last year by the Academic Policies and procedures committee of the Senate—our hope is to bring this to a campus conversation this year, and establish written commitments for faculty and students alike to high standards of intellectual integrity.

Third, we must continue concrete efforts in managing our enrollments. We have come a long way in the last several years—we must continue to build on this process. We plan well in advance now—rather than exclusively in the summer—ways of matching new enrollment demands with course offerings. Much, much more of our enrollment growth is associated with enhanced retention of students and graduate enrollments than was the case even five years ago. Our budget process is more directed to program demonstrating either periodically or permanently enrollment or other strategic needs. It is now predicted that the high school class of 2009 will be larger than any previous class to enter college—including the baby boomers—means that we must have continued and thoughtful conversations about ways to manage carefully our enrollments, as well understand the importance of enrollments to our ability to have a meaningful budget, and to our ability to contribute to a well educated Georgia.

Fourth, we must continue to strive to improve the ways in which we lead under conditions of diversity—making quality decisions in the face of similarities, differences, and tensions created within any diverse environment. I have been influenced by the work of Roosevelt Thomas and his work on Diversity Leadership Management. Whether the diverse characteristics on which we focus involves race or gender or orientation or national origin or other characteristics that may bring tensions, we must find ways to focus attention on the requirements of our enterprise—student and faculty learning—and in ways that recognize the complexities that an increasing diverse environment bring to all of us.

Fifth, we must build on our gains in assessment and evidence of the good work of our students our faculty and our programs. Many of you know that SACS left campus, and that our response to the final report has been submitted—not only for the 10 year report but for the substantive change report for distance learning and the doctoral program in school improvement. This process left us with a foundation that can substantially improve the ways in which students and faculty learn. We heard considerable praise over the summer from students and parents alike about the access to syllabi and vitae—knowing what we expected students to learn and how we expected them to learn in, and who we were and thus how we could help in the learning process. On this we are have created a great foundation. But we will continue during the year. This will include Senate Committee review of general education review items associated with area B on basic concepts we desire of all students—and continued pilot research with student services to improve the effectiveness with which are students approach university life and study. And we will continue to push every program across the campus to continue this commitment to assessment. Assessment allows us to articulate how what we do is
making a difference for the learning of our students—requires us to publicly commit to our colleagues and our students that which we would have them learn, and allows us to have conversations both within and outside of the programs about our successes. What better way to support our activities than to have evidence—well gathered and well maintained evidence—of the success of our students. Our office and the Chancellor requested the documentation of the success of your students so that we can better tell make the case for support for higher education. And so we will be working with departments to streamline and improve the ways in which the success of student learning is assessed for all of our academic programs.

Carol Twigg in Change reports initial findings of a Pew Charitable Trust indicating how institutions like ours have improved student learning because of ways in which courses—large courses and across many disciplines—were redesigned to achieve dramatic improvements in student success and learning, in large class environments. Assessment allows us to maintain excellence in a personal environment under changing circumstances. We know on our own campus of assessment leading to improvements in student performance. Our Nursing colleagues oversaw a nearly 25% improvement in 3 years in student success in state licensing exams. Our Chemistry Department, using a combination of studio presentations and workshop support, has had dramatic improvements in student success for majors and non-majors alike. These are but a few examples of how we can do better for ourselves and our students—and ultimately our university and the state—with a continued focus on assessment and the use of those results to improve student success. It is also demonstration that assessment brings with it no punitive response—as long as the departments and programs embrace the use of this evidence as means for improving faculty and student learning. We will be publishing to our website in the very near future a series of measures of student performance—in general education, in a variety of other key indicators—to facilitate our conversations about ways to improve faculty and student learning.

Sixth, we must use traditional ways, and discover new ways, to communicate with one another. As I observed yesterday to new faculty, universities are accused of being hotbeds of rumor and innuendo, held together by inertia. And thus we must constantly find ways to explore the validity of rumors—to confirm, deny them or give them texture. Budget allocation process is one example for which openness continues—sharing with deans and directors and thus providing access to all chairs and faculty through them.

The need for communication is greater than ever. Efforts to create shared meanings are more important than ever because of the increasingly complex definition of who we are, and that evolving discussion of definition comes with increased size and relative importance of the university.

Projects of democracy, of SACS and review and assessment are all connected. Michael Sandal observes: “In an age of NAFTA, the politics of the neighborhood matters more, not less. People will not pledge allegiance to vast and distant entities, whatever their importance, unless those institutions are somehow connected to political arrangements that reflect the identity of the participants.” The need to be engaged in the discourse of
the academy and how we are connected to one another is more important than ever. There is an urgent need to adhere to a basic civility in the academy. We will be hard pressed to convince our students of a need for a civil society when we strain to be civil with one another. We will have disagreements, and those disagreements will find some outlet for expression—that in the end is both the essence of and the academy. Where we have strength is where we insist the critics of actions to advance workable alternatives. Students, colleagues, and yes, even administrators, do not advance our cause when those persons simply criticize the actions of others as wrong, as inadequate, as not thoughtful, or presumed to be inspired by bad motives.

I am honored to serve here, as I am happy to come to work each morning—whatever the reaction to the continued appearance may be elsewhere on campus. I must publicly thank Sandra Stone, Patsy Barr, Don Rice, Teresa Ock, and Lucretia Gibbs for all they do to help serve the institution. They serve this institution with loyalty and effectiveness that I can only begin to describe. And I am daily honored to be your colleague.