I bring greetings from President Sethna. He is currently in New York City helping his son make a successful transition from home to Columbia Law School—to help Shawn move into a city and a university where Dr. Sethna and Mrs. Sethna did their own advanced educational work some time ago. And while he regrets that he cannot be with us this morning, he has shared in his welcome letter at the university home page his perspective on some wonderful accomplishments by this faculty and its students. And the accomplishments were absolutely impressive.

Student Retention has improved dramatically in last 6 years (57.2% to 69.5%) 
Martha Monro and Adamson Halls will be restored
The Foundation Board has agreed in principle to move forward with 600 on campus student housing units, which, if goes as planned, will be ready for next fall.
Z-6 renovations are completed.
Largest participation ever in International programs and research and creative activities by undergraduate students
Millions of dollars in new grant support were received as a result of grant writing activities of our faculty

Please read this document—because it gives a clear sense of accomplishment to be shared by all our colleagues.

Four themes will be a part of campus conversations throughout the year, although the events of September 11 and the end of Federal Budget Surplus proved last year that predictions are not what they might be.

The first is the budget—there is bad news; there is good news, and there is uncertain news. We have already shared with all deans and directors all that we know so far, and pledge to do that with all new news on this issue—in sharing the information, we increase the chances of drawing on your wisdom in addressing challenging time. But I want to emphasize that none of us should act based only on our worst fears. Last year, there were rumors that as a result of budget reductions, the university would immediately eliminate all faculty travel. And while there were some reductions, departments and colleges were given the opportunity to protect travel funds where they perceived that this would be a greater priority than some other funds uses within their programs. It was rumored that the university would end summer school. But during the last summer, and with innovative budget strategies, we experienced the largest level of summer enrollments on record. We must all be concerned. We should not let that concern compel us to assume the worst.

The bad news is that we must identify 3% of our non-instructional budget for reductions. This comes on top of the 5% reductions which we already made in our base budgets, and amounts to an additional $515,000. Good news is that this amount already is far less than 3% of our base state budget, and our share was limited in part because of the high percentage of our budget devoted to direct instruction. That of course is little solace for an institution that is already, to quote Dr. Sethna, the most efficient institution in the university system. But the amount clearly could have been much higher. The uncertain
news is what the future will bring. Further reductions will be possible if state revenues continue to decline under current economic conditions. Our own institutional strategy for meeting budget reductions will have to include some hedge against such further reductions. And on those issues, I can assure you there will be further university wide conversations. But I retain my long term optimism for the university and the system—the Georgia Economy is comparatively strong, the institutional commitments to positive action give us chances for continued progress as the economy recovers. But there is no question that in the short term, we must work hard to continue what has been an optimistic view that the climate for learning at UWG can continue to get better. To our second theme:

SACS Self Study and Visiting Team visit. The current draft of the self study is available at the sacs web site. If you are a chair, a program director, dean, or vice president, then you understand that you are responsible for addressing recommendations and suggestions that have emerged to date. As a faculty member, please examine this information. Dr. Volkan’s leadership has been exceptional. Dr. Snyder’s editorial work has been excellent. The members of the steering committee have given a level of faculty participation to the review unprecedented at this university. And we believe that such reviews are of enormous value to this institution. This is not simply a large task, but a tremendous opportunity to improve the ways in which we serve ourselves and our students. Many of you will be called on to work on this effort until the visit of the committee January 27-30, 2003. And I thank you for the work that has been done to date, and thank you in advance for the enormous level of energy that must be directed to this task over the next few months.

The third theme follows logically from the second--

Creation of a Culture of Evidence

It is my firm belief that higher education has not always done well in providing evidence to support our own institutional beliefs of all we do for the society around us. In his role as senior vice chancellor for academic affairs for the system, Dr. Sethna used most effectively US Census Bureau data indicating the enormous lifetime economic benefits to society if more students complete a university education—literally millions per student. But we have not done very well in explaining what our students were actually learning from us—and thus what that learning would mean to them as individuals, as citizens, as human beings. We believe we know, we think we know, but we have not lived within a culture of evidence—an irony, given our usual attraction to paper.

Our work on transforming that culture has begun with our efforts to meet the requirements for proving institutional effectiveness so central to the SACS review. But that culture may manifest itself in at least three ways during the coming year:

Assessment—how do we know when we have accomplished what we have set out to accomplish, and how can we improve our chances of doing so in the future? Assessment often has bad connotations within university settings—ah, the bean counters
are at it again, I heard one colleague comment. But it is not this. It is absolutely essential that we be able to make a better case for our current activities—and have better evidence than we have had in the past when we decide to change the ways in which we make faculty and student learning possible.

Personnel Policies—how can we produce and evaluate evidence used to support the claims that various forms of activities should be evaluated with the same scholarly rigor as traditional forms of scholarship? And how can we ensure that assessment of traditional forms of scholarship will be reviewed in ways that include the reasoned assessments of our colleagues? How for example will we distinguish among forms of evidence that reflect affect toward a faculty member from forms that provide some evidence of things that students learned in those learning situations? Deans and chairs will be receiving correspondence for me this week which draws from the work of a faculty group last fall. The personnel policies of every department were examined, with an eye to the question—what will we gain if activities specified by current policies are rewarded. I am grateful for the work of Dr. Hunter and other colleagues. This is groundbreaking work, and will serve us well in the coming year.

Strategic planning and the university mission. How can we support the case that we are moving forward along lines developed and supported by a year long planning cycle, and a first year of implementation? How do we provide linkages among 300 individual agendas and the broader agenda of this university? The technology committee is currently in the process of developing a strategic plan for technology use on campus, again focusing on ways in which technology can be used as a means to foster student and faculty learning. All of this works with the theme of blending choices of our future with strategic directions to which we have already made commitments.

This leads to our final theme--Reinforcement of a culture of learning. We have made tremendous progress in this regard. Colleagues across campus have begun to explore this exciting but frightening transformation—from a focus on what we as faculty know to a focus on what our students and we as faculty can learn. And framing all of our future activities on a culture of learning will not be easy—but it will be right—telling ourselves as colleagues what we want our students to learn, what we ourselves as scholars hope to learn—and making this public, taking a risk with this public proclamation, but creating a contribution either in teaching or in traditional scholarship or creative activity to future work in our profession.

Each of these four themes create conditions for concern—for uncertainties about ways things will be, uncertainties about ways in which your activities and the activities of your colleagues and your students will precede. But in each instance, we believe that the compass that guides this institution will guide us during these times of uncertainty—a compass which points a route that values our interactions with our students, challenges us and them to create the conditions in which we become better each day with our own learning of how to learn in an environment of near infinite information, and reminds us that if we are committed to a culture of learning, we will succeed.
I conclude with two sources of optimism. One from a conversation with a UWG student in a café in Bayeux France—I went to visit our colleagues teaching there, but was without knowledge of their exact location. I went to a few cafes, assuming I would see some of our students. I was correct. There was one UWG student, and three other students from other system institution schools. The student—with a double major—was waxing eloquently about this neat thing called Big Night, and wondered if I knew about—that it was a really great thing because it allowed students whatever their major to show what they knew and could do. The other students remarked that they wished they had faculty at their institutions like those at West Georgia.

I have been fond of the work of Henry Rosovsky for some time. He concludes his often cited work The University: An Owners Manual with both optimistic and realistic perspectives on what the academy can or cannot do.

“…by ourselves we cannot change society or lead it out of the wilderness. Our leadership has to be circumscribed. We can produce new knowledge, teach professional skills, and liberal arts...(BUT) in a greedy society we will not be immune to temptation. We cannot be a paradise island in a sea of discontent. “

“But modesty and realism concerning the capacities of higher education do not in any sense imply that our role in determining the quality of society’s life is small. We are leaders in the development of ideas and alternatives….”

“To our critics I say: honi soit qui mal y pense (shame to him who thinks ill of it); what at first glance appears evil may be insignificant, innocent, or a reflection of wider social mores. To ourselves I say: do not risk self-satisfaction: strive for greater perfection; make the gap between ideal and reality as small as possible.”

It is an honor and a pleasure to serve here at UWG. We have great deans and colleagues. Academic Affairs is blessed with an extraordinary staff. Dr. Sandra Stone joins our staff this summer, following the great work of Dr. Randy Hendricks, Dr. Don Rice and Dr. Micheal Crafton. She has already proven herself to bring extraordinary perspective to our work. Patsy Barr, Lucretia Gibbs, and Teresa Ock are the envy of Chief Academic Officers across the state. They really are that good. And I thank each of you for all you do—in the main, by finding ways to help our students and our colleagues learn, and in your notes to me, to help me find ways to learn.