

August 19, 2011

Dear Colleagues:

The University of West Georgia has a Vision Statement which we developed with extensive faculty and staff participation and approved by the Faculty Senate in 1994 (it was West Georgia College at the time). It is a very well written statement, and it has served us well. It is published in our Catalog, and is on our website. I have requested the Chair of the Faculty Senate to forward it to the appropriate committee to review it – again with extensive faculty and staff participation, as well as external input – to see what changes need to be made. (Additionally, we might do a similar review of our Mission Statement as well, but that is a topic for a later day.)

The following statement is not intended to substitute that statement or the process of creation of a comprehensive Vision Statement for UWG. It is simply to put in writing, largely at the request of colleagues who have heard me speak of it, what I will refer to the “Destination University” vision. This was the major theme of my remarks at the Fall, 2010 Meeting of the General Faculty, and has been the major theme of my remarks at various meetings of College and School Faculties and at informal luncheon meetings in the Spring. Colleagues who have participated in such meetings have recommended that I disseminate a written version of my talks on this topic, and this note is a direct result of those requests.

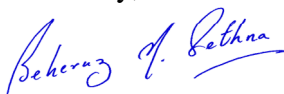
On April 11, 2011, we posted the draft version of this statement, and received supportive feedback and excellent suggestions for its enhancement which I have, in the main, incorporated, and then, on May 5, 2011, we removed the “Draft” watermark from the document. I thank those who reviewed the original draft and those helped me improve it. On July 29, 2011, I proposed the addition of a fourth point in our plan to achieve this vision, and on the basis of excellent feedback received, have revised the document accordingly today.

Part of the role of a President is to state his or her Vision. Having done that, it is clear that such a vision will not become reality unless and until a substantial proportion of colleagues embrace it and feel that they not only support it, but are energized by it. I will continue to be available to meet with colleagues with a view to enhancing it, and I believe that we are indeed achieving such support and energy.

Please read of this “Destination University” vision on the following pages. The first page provides the essence of the Vision, and the other pages provide details of the plan and the progress towards that plan.

Thank you for all you do for The University of West Georgia!

Sincerely,



Beheruz N. Sethna, Ph.D., C.C.P.

Professor of Business Administration, and President of the University

“Destination University” Vision for the University of West Georgia

We are building a “Destination University” at the University of West Georgia.

What does this phrase mean?

- It means being able to attract excellent undergraduate and graduate students to UWG, who choose to come here, stay here, and graduate from here. For example, our Enrollment Management colleagues define a “right fit” undergraduate student using criteria such as GPA and SAT scores. The same exercise can be done for graduate students as well, driven by college and departmental definitions and activities.
- It also means attracting excellent faculty and staff colleagues who feel pride in UWG and want to contribute to it. We do very well on this dimension already. Our outstanding faculty excel in Teaching, Research & Scholarship, and Service, and we must preserve that – indeed, we cannot be a Destination University without those elements, as a goal unto themselves and because excellence in these areas will attract excellent students.
- It means acquiring external recognition and stature. One such opportunity is to strive for the next level of Carnegie classification – that of a Doctoral University. We may be about five years away from that, but we might be able to beat that time estimate. We are already considered a “Robust Tier” University by the Board of Regents, and are sometimes referred to as a Doctoral Comprehensive University. These classifications are internal ones (internal to the University System of Georgia, that is), while the Carnegie classification of being a Doctoral University would be an external/national one.
- It means understanding that external recognition and stature comes from a wide range of activities – from winning national competitions to making an impact on the local and regional community, and everything in between.
- It means getting there on our own terms – when we refer to *Educational Excellence in a Personal Environment* or when we refer to the “Go West” theme which says: *We are blazing trails to new possibilities for scholarly achievement, creative expression, and service to humanity*, it means that as we seek national recognition in selected areas of our choosing or Doctoral University status, we will **not** abandon our core values of respect for teaching and learning.
- Sometimes, it helps to have examples of such institutions, just so one can have a mental picture, so here I offer two, one from another state and the other from Georgia: Appalachian State and Georgia Southern. These are Carnegie Doctoral Research institutions which still value teaching. These are shared, not to copy or clone, but to look at from time to time to examine what characteristics of those institutions we like.

Where are we now, and how do we get there from here?

We have a four-point plan for achieving this vision:

1. Academic Excellence
2. Vibrant Campus Life
3. Facilities to support the above two
4. Sharing the UWG Story

Detailed explanations of each of these elements follow.

1. Academic Excellence:

Academics will lead the way to our ultimate goal of being a Destination University.

We already have much to be proud of in terms of academics at the University of West Georgia. Let us take as given, the “good,” and even the “very good,” and chart a journey to the “great.” Let us take as given, the many wonderful things our faculty, staff, students, and alumni do in our communities, schools, and region. This area of the state is richer because of the work done by all our constituents.

As we talk of national recognition in selected areas of our choosing, let us understand that we are not abandoning our local anchors, and also that we cannot be nationally recognized for everything we do.

Before proceeding, it is useful to take stock of where we have been and how far we have come. In 1994, when I arrived at what was West Georgia College at the time, we already had many great faculty, some of whom are very much part of our lives today, and they had and still have their passion for quality teaching. Much of the student body, however, was not ready for college success. In fact, 51 percent of the entering class (first-time, full-time freshmen) was on what was known as remedial education; this meant that they were not ready for college, and had “deficiencies” in their college prep work. In recent years, that ratio among first-time, full-time freshmen is approximately one half of one percent, which may be considered a one-hundred fold change. Another data point of note is that, if the admission standards of today were overlaid on the entering class of 1994, more than 75 percent of the class could not be admitted – and yet, our FTE enrollment has grown by approximately 50 percent during that period. Finally, our retention rate was 57 percent at that time, and is approximately 75 percent now. So, we have come a long way, but still have considerable ground to cover.

Let us be clear that we had then, and even considerably before then, outstanding students at West Georgia – some of those students have risen to the top of their professions, and some are on our Faculty today. Our alumni include Dr. Willis Hurst, the author of “The Heart” – perhaps the best known and read Cardiologist in the country (who served as cardiologist to President Lyndon B. Johnson), Paul Cadenhead, recognized as being one of the best attorneys in the history of Georgia, Dr. Julian Stanley (now deceased), national authority on Gifted Education and Professor at Johns Hopkins, and many others, some of whom we are proud to count among our faculty and staff colleagues.

However, we have not entirely escaped from the perceptions of the time when most students were not really ready for college. The implication of 51% of the entering class being on remedial education is not trivial. Consider, for example, a good student who walked these academic corridors in the 1970s, 1980s, or early 1990s. Let us assume that this student liked his or her experiences here, did well at West Georgia, did well after graduation, and has fond memories of the faculty and staff here. This alumnus still remembers that the person sitting on either side of him or her was not even ready for college – and so, sometimes refers to us as a nice place for a mediocre student but not worthy of the best of the high school graduating class. We must do more to educate these fine alumni that we have moved far ahead of those days and now do attract several students from the upper echelons of their graduating classes.

Coming to the present, and continuing with the theme of first-class educational experiences, UWG students have earned offers of admission at some of the best private schools in the world such as Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England, Brown, Cal Tech, Carnegie Mellon, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Emory, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, MIT, NYU, Rice, Stanford, Vanderbilt, and Yale, and excellent public schools such as the University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, Maryland, Michigan, Washington, UC-Berkeley, UNC-Chapel Hill, and UWG.

The University of West Georgia has established a national presence in Undergraduate Research, having topped the nation in eight out of the past 13 years in terms of papers accepted at the National Collegiate Honors Council. Three UWG student teams have won the #1 prize in the nation at the National Social Sciences Association in the past six years. This happens because of a major emphasis on teaching and learning with our most senior faculty and administrators being in the classroom. UWG Debate continues to perform exceptionally well at the National Association with a qualifying track record that has only four universities ahead of us, and has won two back-to-back national championships at the Cross Examination Debate Association.

In addition to our national accomplishments, it is very important to note that our faculty and students in the Sciences and Mathematics, in the Arts and Humanities, in the Social Sciences, in Business, in Education, in Nursing, and those who serve as faculty in the Honors College and Library, continue to make a local and regional mark for themselves – at the graduate *and* undergraduate levels. In many senses, these contributions are every bit as important, if not more so, to our audience, than our national accomplishments.

UWG is also establishing a national and international presence in on-line and distance education with our WebMBA being nationally ranked No. 1 in student satisfaction, and second in public perception, our Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, our Ed.D. in School Improvement, and other similar initiatives. UWG accounted for 49 percent of eCore[®] enrollment across the University System of Georgia, before the USG turned the administration of eCore[®] over to UWG.

So, in view of the preceding four paragraphs, are we there yet?

No; we are not – not yet. We have faculty of excellent caliber, and while some of the students we have can and do go to the best universities in the world, they still constitute a small proportion of our student body – approximately 4 percent of our undergraduate entering class is at the 80th percentile of SAT scores. If we can multiply that proportion by a factor of 5 to get it to 20 percent, we could be where we need to be.

We are not there yet in the area of sponsored research – but we have started work on it in right earnest with a vastly enhanced Office of Research and Sponsored Operations. And, we will continue to make progress on our Retention, Progression, and Graduation rates through the efforts of a faculty-driven Special Commission and ultimately of the faculty themselves.

So, the academic part of the plan will be to build on our exceptional strengths (a few examples of which have been shared above), shore up our soft spots, and identify resources for faculty support and development as well as enhancement of the teaching-learning environment.

2. Vibrant Campus Life:

The second part of the plan is to have a vibrant campus life, in the broadest sense of the word. This is consistent with our “Best Campus Ever” theme that the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management proposed.

Before we talk of the “how,” let’s talk of the “why.” Why make this element a key part of our plan, second only to Academics? Very simple: National research is very clear on this point – student engagement is a major determinant of student success and graduation. In addition, fun and enjoyment are also determinants of a Destination University.

A vibrant campus life includes an environment that supports a wide variety of activities.

UWG celebrates opportunities for enjoyment (as participants or otherwise) of the arts, music, theatre, cultural activities, athletics – intercollegiate and club sports, fraternity and sorority life, and 150 clubs catering to a variety of interests and activities.

UWG also celebrates opportunities for intellectual stimulation. For example, we have had two Nobel Laureates on campus in the past two years, and have excellent programs of our own that challenge students and faculty to think on such topics as the interaction of Science and Religion, and educate us on the many nuances of Diversity.

Another interesting “factoid” which supports both the Academic component and the Campus Life component, refers to the “full-time” nature of our undergraduate student body. Our ratio of Full-Time Equivalent Students to Headcount is approximately **94 percent** and has modestly *increased* over the past 17 years, in contrast to Peter Drucker’s claim that the “traditional” student body would be a thing of the past in 30 years. Our undergraduate student body is very much a “traditional-aged” body (on average), one of the “younger” student bodies in the University System of Georgia. (In contrast, the graduate student body is one of the “older” populations within the USG, with the average age being in excess of 35 years.)

The changes have been very positive. Recognizing that UWG is saddled with a legacy of having the *perception* of being a “suitcase college,” it is appropriate to share a couple of data points that refute that image. UWG's basketball attendance in 2011 was 25th highest in the nation among NCAA Division II schools (approximately 280 in number), and ranked highest in the Gulf South Conference. UWG's football attendance was 26th in the nation among Division II schools in 2010.

This section illustrates the importance of sharing a comprehensive Vision statement. Without the anchor of building a Destination University, expenditure on a stadium or a Greek Village seem irrelevant at best and wasteful at worst. With this background, and repeating the case for student engagement, it makes sense as an integral part of the plan. (Yet, it is important to point out that state appropriations and Educational and General funds did not go into the construction of these facilities, and funds from these projects are not “fungible” with money for salary increases or faculty positions.)

3. Facilities:

Appropriate facilities play a supporting role for all the best aspects of the previous analysis.

At ~645 acres, UWG's main campus is one of the largest in the University System of Georgia. While that has its share of challenges, it provides exceptional opportunities for growth.

UWG's campus is 105 years old. Several buildings are 30, 40, and 50+ years old. This poses a serious maintenance challenge. Yet, with sound budget and facilities management, the campus has thrived.

The Board of Regents has defined a Major Capital Project as costing five million dollars or more. We moved into our first Major Capital Project facility in 2000. At that time, the University was 94 years old.

On the positive side, in the past 17 years, including those projects already approved, the institution has added **about \$300 Million** in terms of new construction and major renovations.

This represents exceptional progress, using a variety of funding sources such as state appropriations, money allocated by the state to a specific building, available funds at the end of the year, gifts from private donors, student fees, and student rents funding Private-Public Partnerships. This has generated very good publicity on and off campus, but we can do much, much more.

4. Sharing the UWG Story:

As UWG has continued to grow, it has become more important than ever to spread the message about the institution to help maintain its momentum. Among those who know the university, it is valued for its engaging professors, mentoring, solid programs, respect for independent thinking, and diversity.

The University of West Georgia's leadership convened in the summer of 2009 to shape the strategic direction for our university, and developing and promoting a brand identity became a top priority. Research was commissioned to gauge the university's image with key findings revealing that UWG has a somewhat low awareness factor relative to its overall stature.

This becomes a challenge that manifests itself in many ways. It becomes more difficult to attract top-notch students and faculty, hinders the ability to maintain a high level of support and pride among alumni, and creates a barrier for the public and potential funding partners to see what an incredible resource UWG is. To address this challenge, we must recognize the importance of promoting UWG's strengths and act appropriately to achieve this.

We've taken some key steps.

In the fall of 2010, UWG revealed a bold new branding and recruitment campaign – *Go West!* – that was designed to raise our regional profile, attract “right-fit” students to grow enrollment, communicate clearly who we are and what we represent, and forge a feeling of unity and school pride.

Go West refers not only to our geographic standing in the state, but symbolically refers to students exploring, discovering, and learning about themselves and the world around them.

It suggests an alternate direction for their future – one that offers greater possibilities, opportunities, and freedom to make their own mark.

It's non-traditional and captures the imagination – as the prospect of “going west” always has. Therefore, it is provocative, not predictable.

“West” is synonymous with *possibility* and *unfettered opportunity* – *a university that is more progressive, enlightened, advanced and pioneering.*

“When everyone else is going east, we go west to a world of unfettered opportunity. We are blazing trails to new possibilities for scholarly achievement, creative expression and service to humanity.”

We have stepped up existing efforts to promote our faculty experts and showcase our students' and faculty's accomplishments. We are reaching out to media outlets regionally and nationally to display the wealth of knowledge on a variety of subjects that exists here.

Additionally, we have enthusiastically embraced social media, allowing us to interact with our variety of audiences in ways not previously possible. By engaging in social media platforms, we can not only share our message, but just as importantly we can receive messages from our constituencies so that we can know what's on their minds and what's important to them. This has benefited our ability to build relationships, especially with students and alumni.

Let me circle back with an Academic update: One year ago at the Fall Meeting of the General Faculty, I spoke of our vision to build a Carnegie Doctoral Research University. There are two major criteria: 20 doctoral graduates a year, and an appropriate level of external research funding. I hypothesized that we would get to the first target within three years. In the 12 months that have elapsed since the last Fall meeting, we have graduated 22 doctoral graduates, admittedly not in the definition of an academic year that IPEDS and Carnegie use, but in a 12-month period nonetheless. We still have a hill to climb on the second criterion, that of external research funding, but we have put considerable resources into building support systems which enhance external research funding, and we will get there.

In closing, let me re-emphasize the main point: We can reach our destination as a Destination University within a 3-5 year period, using a four-point plan of Academics, Vibrancy of Campus Life, Facilities, and Sharing our Story.

It will happen only if all of us pull together.

Thank you for all you do, and all you will do to help us arrive at our destination as a Destination University!