

Remarks to the Faculty, Fall 2011

Expanded from remarks made at the Fall Semester General Faculty Meeting
On Wednesday, August 17, 2011

By Provost and VPAA Michael Horvath

Thank you again for making me feel so welcome at the University of West Georgia.

As I survey the landscape, I see seven areas in which I can help this institution.

One: Helping to Advocate for the Academic Side of the House

Students, faculty, and staff are the institution. In a public, regional, comprehensive university such as ours, we (faculty and staff members) exist to help students meet their personal and professional goals. This goal is much easier to achieve, however, if faculty and staff members are also engaged in growing professionally. My expectation is that this growth would be encouraged by the institution.

For tenured/tenure-track faculty, growth in the areas of teaching, scholarly activity (including performance where applicable), and service is expected. At UWG, all tenured/tenure-track faculty members must prove that they are good teachers. Probably the most efficacious way to do this is to demonstrate that learning has taken place. That alone, however, is not enough. It takes good teaching plus contributions in the areas of scholarship and service to ensure success. Faculty members may feel burdened by the contemporary expectations, so it is wise to reflect on how one might fulfill his or her duties. When I was a faculty member at a medium-sized comprehensive institution, the provost, for whom I had great respect, once told me that my research can and should be used to support my teaching. I believe that that statement is especially relevant today. In addition, I believe that each faculty member makes contributions in unique ways, that we should value the various types of scholarship, and that our scholarly efforts should be useful beyond the walls of our own institutions. We can feel good about the fact that Ernest Boyer's seminal work on the classification of scholarship is especially appropriate at institutions such as ours. To summarize, Boyer has posited four types of scholarship. The first is discovery of knowledge, the basic research that adds to the store of human knowledge. The second is integration of knowledge or making connections and interpretations across disciplines. This may be thought of as the search for meaning in the results of basic research or the integration of one's own research into the larger body of knowledge. The third is application of knowledge, which may be thought of as practical exercises in problem solving. This also may be thought of as the scholarship of service. The fourth is teaching and learning. The formal study of teaching and learning is little more than 130 years old, so there are many discoveries yet to be made in this area. Any of these four kinds of scholarship may be used to support one's teaching. Finally, we need to talk about service, which may be broadly thought of as good citizenship. With the expectation that institutions

such as ours have an obligation to make contributions in their service areas, the opportunities for both internal and external service usually exist in abundance.

For those faculty members not tenured or in a tenure-track position, expectations are negotiated. It goes without saying, however, that good teaching, including supervision of clinical and laboratory experiences where appropriate, is paramount to the success of the lecturer, instructor, and part-time faculty member. Additional talents that these faculty members bring to the institution, such as the ability to supervise students in their clinical experiences, are valued and may form the basis for employment.

For administrators and staff members, it must be remembered that their expectations are tied to the success and well being of the students and those who deal directly with them. At the University of West Georgia, of prime concern is the retention, progression, and graduation of students (RPG). All of us must work together to meet our RPG goals, but administration and staff members have a special responsibility to help the institution move forward in this area. In addition, those in my office will be working hard to increase the ability of the various offices to function smoothly, to guarantee more transparency in the governance process, and to maintain the morale of the university community. One of the responsibilities of the provost is to keep the institution moving forward despite the internal and external challenges. At UWG, we have the talent to pursue our vision. I encourage discussion of innovative approaches to help us meet our goals.

Two: Helping to Build on the Strong Foundation that Currently Exists

The University of West Georgia is a good place that provides undergraduate students with a strong liberal arts foundation, professional competencies, and experiential learning. Lifelong learning, faculty-directed research, learning communities, holistic experiences that include aesthetic appreciation, and access to modern technology complement the undergraduate experience. At the graduate level, UWG offers a wide range of programs designed to enhance the professional competence of the learner and continue the lifelong commitment to learning. It is especially encouraging to note that the values of high quality education, cultivation of a personal environment, affirmation of the equal dignity of each person, and practices that embody the ideals of an open democratic society and cultivate an environment of collegiality have resulted in an academic environment that fosters the development of thoughtful and productive leaders and citizens who make a positive impact throughout an increasingly global society. I believe that the next step is to re-examine the attributes of an educated person in a rapidly changing global environment in which knowledge will increasingly be managed to solve problems rather than memorized as an end in itself, that the ability to work collaboratively will be increasingly valued, that understanding of procedures is necessary but not sufficient to function effectively as a citizen, that one's responsibility to others and the environment is valued, and that civil discourse is seen as the preferred way to reconcile competing interests in a diverse society. Themes that may be addressed in this climate include, but are not limited to, poverty, war, the environment, and the economy. I believe that engaging students in case studies or problem-based learning where appropriate will increasingly be incorporated into the curriculum. In the case of problem-based learning, students

will be asked to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to know as they address the problems with which they are presented. No matter how teaching and learning develop, however, it is safe to say that coverage without understanding will become increasingly passé. Analysis and evaluation of information will continue to take on a more important role in learning. The educated person will increasingly be seen as one who is capable of deep critical thinking.

Three: Helping to Initiate New Programs

Fewer topics covered in greater depth will be the watchword of the future. Learning will increasingly replace teaching as one of the pillars of faculty responsibilities. Programs of study will become increasingly meaningful and relevant in a world in which rapid technological advances, population increases, desertification, competition for resources, and other factors threaten to overwhelm our sense of complacency. These phenomena can, while threatening, also provide opportunities for interdisciplinary studies. How we teach people to cope with life's challenges will increasingly be the metric by how we will be judged. So, we will need programs that address deep understanding of relevant issues, teach students how to work collaboratively, and foster social responsibility. A good example of this is the UTeach program, designed to change the way we prepare secondary education teachers in science and mathematics.

Four: Helping to Grow the Campus

The deans, with the assistance of my office, will be especially focusing on Retention/Progression/ Graduation (RPG), growing graduate programs, and partnering more closely with other institutions. Our optimum size is 15,000 or so students. To get there, we will need approximately 3,500 more students. Retaining a significant fraction of those who leave would be significant. We must fervently avow, however, that we will not compromise rigor in our efforts to reach our optimum size. We also will operate on the premise that we have a moral obligation to provide an atmosphere in which those we accept can succeed. Higher standards will lead to higher levels of discourse and performance in our classes and make us a more desirable institution. For those who have not met our standards, we must encourage them to prove themselves at institutions whose mission is student development before coming to us as students. It would behoove us to work with our high school and community college counterparts as partners to help students matriculate from high school to a successful postsecondary experience.

Five: Helping to Integrate Planning, Budgeting, and Assessment

We need to think strategically, make data-based decisions, embrace our shared vision and mission as engines to drive our thinking, and articulate policy and procedures so that the system is as fair and predictable as we can make it. In this spirit, budget increases and cuts can no longer be made across the board. Questions we will ask include: (1) Does this decision fit our vision? (2) Does it advance our mission? (3) Does it serve our region? (4) Is it the right thing to do?

Six: Helping to Make the System More Transparent

I believe that it is more important for people to focus on their purpose, rather than struggle with the system. If you are a student, your purpose is to study and develop your capacity. One of the ways we can help is to revise the catalog so that the average student can easily gain needed information from it. Documents often grow by accretion. Periodically, it is necessary to re-examine the language to achieve clarity. Reasonably intelligent people should be able to read and understand manuals. The goal for all of us is to be able to find answers to our policies and procedures questions with little or no need for interpretation. Those in my office will work with our colleagues throughout the university to make sure that there is as little ambiguity as possible in the parts of the system that we control and to advocate for transparency in the parts that we don't.

Seven: Helping the Institution to Find its Niche as a Destination University

We have made great strides in this area, but still need to establish our identity by building on our strengths of solid teaching, undergraduate research, the only Georgia Board of Regents (BOR) certified honors college, on-line offerings, and the strong relationship between liberal arts and professional programs. Possibilities for us to explore include: (1) cross-disciplinary studies such as (a) wellness (integrated health) and/or (b) sustainability; (2) leadership in promulgating teaching and learning in science/technology/math to break the cycle of math and science illiteracy in this country; and (3) other as yet undefined opportunities.

I want to again thank you for bringing me here to help us shape our university of the future. There is always much work to be done in higher education, but I am eager to engage you in the continuing dialogue that will form the basis of our planning. Of course, related activities will follow. Together, we will make UWG the destination university we all envision.