

Congratulations to all of today's award recipients. We are pleased to recognize your work and celebrate your contributions to the UNG community.

It is great to see everyone and to kick-off the new academic year. Before we proceed, I especially want to welcome the new faculty and staff who are with us today. If you have

- Student Health Services stepped up to provide almost 2,000 COVID-19 tests to symptomatic students, faculty and staff last year, and they administered—with critical support from our Nursing department—almost 1600 vaccines in the spring.
- Public Safety, Student Affairs and Health Services staffed asymptomatic testing and vaccine clinics to serve the UNG community, and we partnered with the Department of Public Health to provide a public mass vaccination site at the Gainesville Campus.
- Our IT teams equipped all classrooms with technology for multimodal instruction, supported more than 71,000 Zoom meetings and webinars, managed 31,000 support calls, and developed hundreds of automated workflows to support our work.

I am deeply grateful to each of you for your resilience and creativity in the face of adversity. You have demonstrated repeatedly that, together, we can manage complex problems.

I have heard from students, families and many of you that you welcome the opportunity to return to traditional in-person classes and on-campus experiences. We know the pandemic is not in the rear-view mirror yet, and we should expect there to be continued challenges. However, as I shared with you last year, the way we face our challenges will define who we are.

The recent Olympic Games in Tokyo served as a good reminder of this. One Associated Press article referred to the games as the “Perseverance games,” where the event was “imperfect, but not impossible.”

We saw inspiring examples of tenacity and sportsmanship as athletes like U.S. Olympian and Army Specialist Benard Keter, who helped his competitors off the ground after completing a grueling 3,000-meter steeplechase race in Tokyo’s extreme heat, citing the importance of “taking care of others.”

In another example, American runner Isaiah Jewett fell during a semi-final event when a fellow hurdler accidentally tripped him. The devastating incident dashed his dreams of earning a medal, but he helped his rival get up and they completed the event together.

I know there are so many of you who are supporting and taking care of each other to get

Seven students won Fulbright Awards and 11 others were semi-finalists. UNG was named a national Top Producer of Fulbrights for the fourth consecutive year.

In addition, we had our fourth National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship – a very impressive opportunity that carries a monetary value of up to \$138,000.

Overall, last year, UNG students earned more than \$535,000 in awards for nationally competitive scholarships and paid summer research internships. Congratulations to Dr. Anastasia Lin and Dr. Victoria Hightower and all of our other faculty and staff mentors who helped guide these students to success.

Our Corps of Cadets and their advisors also deserve kudos for strong performances last year. UNG commissioned more than 100 officers for the 6th year in a row. Of those commissioning, 24 cadets earned recognition as Distinguished Military Students, 9 earned the honor of Distinguished Military Graduates, and two of them were in the top 10% of all Army cadets in the United States.

In addition, the corps' Ranger Challenge Team won best ROTC unit for the third time in four years, and they won the third-straight ROTC title in the international Sandhurst Military Skills Competition at West Point, defeating the other five senior military colleges in the U.S. and all other Army ROTC programs.

Congratulations to the Military Science Department, Col. Joe Matthews and the Commandant's Office and for their outstanding work to develop our future military leaders!

Likewise, Athletics had a banner year with softball going to the NCAA DII championships in Denver, a national pole-vaulting championship, and a record 155 athletes on the Peach Belt Conference Presidential Honor Roll. Congratulations to Mary Rob Plunkett and our coaches and athletes!

Never underestimate the importance of faculty and staff mentoring to our students' success!

While the pandemic caused significant disruptions to research and other grant-funded activities, UNG maintained its momentum in both proposal activity and the number of active awards. The number of active awards at UNG has increased by more than 20 percent in the past four years, and the annual grant award amounts have increased about 74 percent in the same time.

The Presidential Incentive Awards program remains a strong priority to seed faculty and staff research. Since 2013, we have awarded nearly \$2.3 million through this program. Despite the pandemic, faculty and staff were able to meet most of the goals set forth within their original proposals this past year, and we were able to carry forward funding to enable those who were not able to complete the 2020 awards.

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The total assets of the UNG Foundation are now just over \$100 million—a 17 percent increase over last year. The majority of these funds are endowed for scholarships, and the UNG Foundation has 233 endowed scholarship funds created by donors—an increase of 19 percent in the past 5 years.

Endowed scholarships are critical for students and UNG, as they are a predictable revenue source to support student and institutional needs. Jeff, we are very grateful to you and your team for your efforts to support our students and the university!

Modern technology infrastructure and academic facilities are additional elements that are critical to the learning environments that support our students' success and the work of our faculty and staff.

Our IT teams implemented new technology in many computer labs at the Gainesville and Dahlonega campuses and a “managed-print service” for students at all campuses to improve efficiency and reduce waste.

On the facility side, we were very fortunate a few years ago to inherit the facilities formerly occupied by Lanier Technical College. We have completed significant renovations, and those facilities are opening this fall to support and expand educational opportunities for students at our Gainesville Campus.

Each building is just beautiful! The expansion has resulted in state-of-the-art, centralized spaces for nursing, IT, IESA, visual arts, film and digital media, and professional and continuing education.

Bill Moody and his facilities team and the IT team that installed all of the new technology poured blood, sweat and tears into that project, and their commitment shows in every detail. Thank you, all!

We are very pleased that an addition to the academic building in Cumming was finally approved in the state budget this year and, pending continued funding approval, construction should begin next year. I know that is welcome news to Jason Pruitt and the team in Cumming! I am very grateful to our legislative delegation in getting that project approved.

In Dahlonega, the new Cottrell Center for Business, Technology & Innovation is taking shape quickly and will open next fall. As the new home for the Mike Cottrell College of Business, it is poised to provide world-class learning and collaboration spaces for our students, faculty and staff.

One of the fast-growing opportunities for students through the M58 0()-2 ()]TJ[rdfffd beOneheBusinesion is

In the past year, we have seen rapid and widespread adoption of technology, reductions in state financial support, greater expectations for workforce development, increased compliance requirements.

Last year, we paused our strategic planning process to enable us time to catch our breath from the pandemic and assess how it might affect the university. We are resuming the planning process this fall, under the leadership of Dr. Sue Doyle-Portillo, Department Head for Psychological Science, and Dr. Kate Maine, vice president for university relations and chief of staff. We plan to complete the effort in the spring and begin implementation next year.

We have several complementary planning processes that are wrapping up or are underway.

In 2019, Dr. Sheila Schulte, of UNG's Center for Global Engagement, and Dr. Steven Lloyd, of Academic Affairs, led a 40-member UNG team in the American Council on Education's Internationalization Laboratory to consider strategies to give students a broader view of the world, including the incorporation of more global learning opportunities for students on UNG's campuses.

As a result, we will launch the Global Learning Community this fall in one of the residence halls in Dahlonega. It will pair incoming international students with new U.S.

