I want to join my colleague Loch Johnson in welcoming you to this conference. I appreciate all of you taking time from your busy schedules to discuss how teaching can be improved on this campus. We are all proud of the many indicators that suggest our university is making progress on a number of fronts. We are proud that *U.S. News and World Report* believes we are one of the 18 best public universities in the country. But ultimately we stand or fall by what we do for our students and how we can help them achieve their best by participating in an effective and high quality learning experience while they are attending the University of Georgia. This doesn’t mean that we forget our research mission as a leading research university. But it does mean that we must give teaching the proper emphasis.

As we consider what to do, let us also consider what we are already doing. I believe that the Meigs Teaching Award is one of the finest in the country. It also demonstrates this institution’s commitment to effective teaching. Each recipient receives a permanent salary increase of $6000. Over 60 have now been awarded and about 40 faculty members are currently teaching who have this award. This means that resources of nearly a quarter of a million dollars are devoted to faculty teaching awards at the University level, not counting those given at the college, school, and department level. In addition, the institution has a world class faculty development unit that assists faculty to be more effective teachers. I also think that the Office of Instructional Support and Development has done much to foster the culture for teaching on our campus, a culture that is more widespread now that it was ten or fifteen years ago.

As we think of improvements, let me tell you of two ongoing efforts designed to improve the experience of our students. I hope that you will take these into account as you explore the important questions you have identified for this conference. One of these is greater emphasis on service learning. An earlier symposium dealt with this subject, and I hope that we can start implementing a stronger emphasis in this area during the next academic year.

We already have a number of faculty members who are incorporating service learning options into their courses, and a number of others who use service learning as the center of their courses. Dr. Art Dunning, Vice President for Public Service and Outreach, and I appointed a committee to look at the general concept of civic engagement, but with special emphasis on how the campus could encourage more classes with a service learning theme or component. This
committee will report its recommendations later in the year. Although we expect funds to be tight for funding this project, we hope to phase-in a support mechanism to assist faculty with these kinds of courses, to develop other programs that will not incur great costs, and to get a bridge grant to help get a jump-start for increasing these kinds of programs.

A second effort is one that would foster the creation of learning communities on campus. These might take a variety of forms. We already have some that exist on campus – some of our study abroad programs in effect become learning communities even though unplanned. A learning community generally establishes a group of students, which, as a cohort, takes a number of classes together. This version is sometimes called a Freshman Interest Group, or FIG. Some programs incorporate a cross cutting theme for the three or four courses, often with the instructors meeting together to coordinate among the courses. For students, it offers the opportunity to get to know other students better than in the usual environment of taking most courses with entirely different students. Study groups can be formed and some sense of community established among the students.

Finally, we have coming on-line in the fall the new student learning center. This center, with 26 classrooms, 96 group study rooms, and an electronic based library will foster an academic climate that we hope will improve students’ learning environments on campus. There will be easy migration from class space to the library. The library is designed to be utilized like students use libraries today, including a coffee house in the midst of library space. The excellent research library will not be far away when the services of this kind of library are needed.

The proximity of the Student Learning Center to the Tate Center will make the area a very active areas on campus, and it will be likely ecome the gathering place for students on campus. The possibility of greater integration of learning with extracurricular and co-curricular activities will also be present. We must take a more integrated stance toward learning. We must recognize more than we have before that what takes place outside the class room is important for what takes place inside the class room. And, we must recognize that university faculty and other university personnel must collaborate to make the learning experience for students on our campus what it ought to be.

Again, let me welcome you. Thank you for your interest and for the ideas that will come from this conference.