Thank you for that kind introduction. I am pleased to be the speaker for this occasion for at least two reasons. First, it is an honor to be a part of this important milestone for the University of Georgia. Those present tonight believe that living the life of the mind, AND sharing its ideals with others, is the premier profession in life. This occasion provides an opportunity to reflect on the past, celebrate the present, and perhaps contemplate the future a bit.

The second reason I am so pleased to be at this podium is self-serving. One of the things a teacher of 40 years misses during retirement is an audience. It’s for sure your family is not going to listen. So, thank you for the pleasure of being here this evening, and for providing me an “audience fix.”

Renowned psychologist Alfred Adler observed many years ago that a relatively small number of critical events in a person’s life usually defines how we see ourselves and make choices. I would like for us to think for a few minutes about the concept of “defining moments” and how these have influenced not only our careers in academe, but have served as a catalyst for changing the culture of teaching at the University of Georgia over the past 25 years.

Listen to this account by Professor Peter Giordano, a clinical psychologist educated at the University of North Carolina:

“While an undergraduate student at Chapel Hill I had a political science professor who encouraged me to consider a graduate program at Yale University. Whether I could have actually gained admission to this program is certifiably debatable, however, the point is that a professor I held in high esteem THOUGHT I should consider it. My parents were not college graduates and one of my brothers had flunked out by the time I got there. When I arrived on campus I was intimidated by the academic game. But, this somewhat
off-handed comment by a teacher, stuck with me and altered how I saw myself as a student from that day on.”

Peter Giordano went on to earn a master’s and PhD in clinical psychology on the Chapel Hill campus. I’m sure most of you can recall something similar that you have experienced, either as a student or teacher.

There has been research on what we might call “teachable moments,” “critical events,” or what I am calling this evening: “defining moments.” What we know (based on research) about these potentially life-altering events is this:

- They are specific and precise moments remembered clearly by the learner;
- They are rare (in the sense that people report few of them);
- They are personal in nature;
- They almost always possess a strong emotional dimension (in other words a change in self-perception occurs rather than a shift in cognitive learning);
- It usually takes time for the learner to realize the significance of such an event;
- They are serendipitous (that is, difficult to predict),
- They are transformative, and
- Teachers seldom remember their role in these events.

What is amazing about this phenomenon is that a 5-second remark, one not even remembered by a teacher, can change a life. Fortunately, from the research reported, most of these events are positive—but not all. A careless negative remark from a professor can reverberate in a person’s memory for many years. Sometimes a negative comment can motivate an individual to overcome the alleged weakness, while on other occasions the outcome remains negative.

So, do we always know when we are teaching? Do we fully realize how much our students’ beliefs about themselves and their academic disciplines impact their learning? Do we realize how many seemingly “innocuous” remarks we make in a day that might become “defining moments” in the lives of our students—or even in the lives of our colleagues?

Joe Crim recalls with clarity during his first year here what a kind, wise senior professor told him: “Think first of who the students are and then consider how to reach them in your teaching.” Joe says most of his students were non-majors and this advice saved him from many impending disconnects. Equally significant in this report is the way Joe recalls the caring manner of Professor Hope Ritter during those first few months and how he has tried hard to follow Ritter’s advice ever since.
Of course, this line of thinking should not suggest that cognition is unimportant. Neither does it suggest that teachers should become indulgent with praise. There is already too much of that in our society. What it does say is that providing honest feedback and authentic support is a big part of teaching and is something that takes place outside, as well as inside, the classroom.

What does this have to do with our anniversary celebration and induction ceremony tonight? Well, this phenomenon of “critical events” or “defining moments” has a parallel at the institutional level. For example:

- Twenty five years ago three separate faculty committees reported to then Vice President Virginia Trotter that the rapid progress of the University’s research and public service missions was, by comparison, outstripping current efforts to promote excellent instruction. To be blunt: at that time in history, many large state universities like ours harbored (appropriately so) an ambition to become first-class (or even “world class”) research universities. These aspirations led to such a rapid shift in institutional goals and rewards that many faculty members thought undergraduate education was not only being neglected, but disrespected.

- While those faculty reports were well-conceived, and communicated clearly, it was Virginia Trotter’s personal commitment—[a belief that things needed to change]-- that prompted her decision in 1979 to establish a central unit to provide increased leadership for instruction across this campus. While serving as Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Nebraska during the late 60s and early 70s, she oversaw the successful establishment of a similar unit there. During her years of service as Commissioner of Education in the Ford Administration, she became even more convinced that excellence in teaching should be the foundation of all educational enterprises. This became her highest priority. The beliefs and values she acquired at Nebraska and in Washington gave her emotional strength needed to overcome resistance by some on this campus when it came to allocating more resources for instruction and faculty support. At her funeral one of the speakers, a colleague who knew her well, made it clear that this was her proudest accomplishment as an administrator at the University of Georgia.

- Bill Jackson enjoys telling a story that fits the category of a “defining moment” at the University of Georgia. At the time Charles Knapp was appointed president of the University of Georgia he had never been on our campus. Unknown to us, his first visit came during what was-- in those days-- an annual seminar sponsored by the Alumni Society. The seminars were well attended and attracted key citizens and supporters from across the state. Louise McBee, a tireless promoter of undergraduate education, was then our Vice President for Academic Affairs and suggested that the theme of that conference be “undergraduate teaching,” (the first time the topic of teaching had been the focal point within this series). The essence of this fateful morning was that a panel of Lilly Teaching Fellows spoke on how important teaching was to them as young faculty members—AND-- how valuable this faculty program was in providing the solid emotional and practical support needed at this critical juncture in their professional
development. As Bill often says, “no amount of good planning can replace dumb luck.” It turned out, Charles Knapp was in the audience, and when those Lilly Fellows finished speaking-- and the last speaker mentioned that funding from the Lilly Endowment was ending-- soon-to-be President Knapp leaned over to Vice President McBee and said: “I want that program continued.” Louise said that was, no doubt, his first “financial decision” at the University of Georgia.

Soon after, UGA received a three-year federal grant from the U.S. Office of Education (through the FIPSE program) to establish a Senior Teaching Fellows program—patterned after the Lilly program and, as before, its success led to sustained funding from the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

As the decade of the 80s proceeded, a rising number from our faculty came to believe that even more emphasis on instruction was needed. This played a major role in the selection of William Prokasy as Vice President for Academic Affairs in 1988. The Search Committee was comprised of several individuals who believed that for us to be a strong and balanced university, a concept of scholarship that included student learning needed to be accommodated—genuinely and seriously. It was clear from Dr. Prokasy’s resume and from his interviews on campus that he had a strong record of supporting instruction.

During each of the 10 years Dr. Prokasy was vice president, he met faithfully with both the Lilly Fellows and Senior Fellows. Those informal “off the record” discussions often served as forum for some of his creations. New programs such as the Academic Affairs Symposia, the unprecedented expansion of the Josiah Meigs Awards for Excellence in Teaching, Study in a Second Discipline, Instructional Technology Grants, sizeable financial support for the National Peer Review of Teaching Project, along with a plethora of other faculty support programs were established by Vice President Prokasy.

Bill told me only recently that he had always noticed (at other institutions and here) the difference between the size of the prizes and awards for research and public service compared to the small plaques and faint pats on the back for good teaching. He certainly leveled the playing field with his enhancement of the Meigs Awards. Furthermore, his concept of how to conduct an absolutely first-class faculty recognition banquet was instituted here, based on experiences he had at the University of Illinois. Bill’s commitment to quality instruction and to helping faculty obtain the institutional support they needed can best be demonstrated by this interchange: When asked by someone during one of our budget crunches (in the early 90s) if less money would be available for faculty development he replied- “Hell no; now is the time faculty need the most support!” His bold initiatives continued to fuel an unmistakable shift in the culture of teaching on this campus.

Many of these important changes in instruction during the last quarter century were influenced AS MUCH by how Virginia Trotter, Louise McBee, Bill Prokasy, Karen Holbrook, Tom Dyer and others BELIEVED and FELT, as they were based on COGNITIVE UNDERSTANDING. Certainly in academia we like to think that we do everything based on REASON and LOGIC. What I am suggesting this evening is that, while we as academicians value-- in supreme fashion-
- rational thinking, the choice of a particular fork in the road is often influenced by the moral convictions and internal value systems of significant people, or by unforeseen events that are impossible to plan for or even anticipate.

This reminds me of a situation that happened about 15 years ago. UGA was sponsoring a national conference in Atlanta on professional and personal renewal for faculty. We wanted the giant in the field of self-renewal, Stanford psychologist and former HEW Secretary John Gardner, for our keynote speaker; but were told by a host of our national colleagues that he was impossible to get. I knew he had delivered the dedicatory address for the Visual Arts Building back in 1961, so I went to see Lamar Dodd. I asked Professor Dodd what we could do to increase our chances of securing Dr. Gardner as our speaker. Lamar said: “Tell him I said it is time for him to come back to Georgia. And, call him Mr. Gardner, not Dr. Gardner.” I did exactly what I was told and he accepted our invitation on the spot. We were the envy of several presidents of national organizations who had been turned down by John Gardner. This great opportunity came our way strictly because of the personal and professional admiration Gardner and Dodd had for each other.

Such was the case with the initial meeting Sylvia Hutchinson, Tricia Kalivoda and Bill Jackson had with Vice President Karen Holbrook to explore the possibility of establishing a Teaching Academy at the University of Georgia. What propelled the idea at that time was the trust and mutual respect these campus leaders had for each other.

“When we drink the water we should not forget to thank those who dug the well.” Tonight we salute the Charter Members of the Teaching Academy-- for these colleagues dug the well. As Peter Shedd prefers to explain it—after more than a year of deep discussion and soul searching, the Academy was formed because of the WILL of these founding members.

So-- based on what we know about the nature of critical events and what we have experienced over the past 25 years on this campus, we can say these things about a few of our “defining moments.”

- There have been times when individual faculty members, our institutional leaders, and even certain national leaders (like Bill McKeachie and Lee Shulman coming to our campus to honor and support us) have made decisions—guided by their personal values and feelings—that benefitted us and are remembered by us, but probably not by them.

- Comparatively speaking, these events did not occur frequently.

- They are remembered because they influenced us in very personal ways.

- These events possessed a strong emotional component which connected with the self-concept and self-worth of those faculty members and teaching assistants who continued to believe that teaching is an important function of a great university.

- These events were typically random and unpredictable.
Often, considerable time passed before their significance was recognized. (In fact, some may not be recognized until years from now).

Finally, as mentioned earlier, these defining moments were TRANSFORMATIVE. To illustrate this I recall that in 1983, just before the Christmas holidays, Roland Christensen came to our campus for a two-day workshop on “teaching by the case method.” Professor Christensen is considered the originator of this teaching method—a unique instructional approach he pioneered in the Harvard MBA program and, by now, is used in many other curricula. This teaching approach is starkly different from traditional lecture and discussion. It requires maximum preparation on the part of students prior to class and the role of the professor is then to generate penetrating questions and skillfully guide class discussions that fosters critical thinking and higher order conceptual development. A major part of the course grade is based on the daily performances of students and this requires on-the-spot recorded, daily assessments by the instructor. Roland Christensen’s attention to detail and his humane approach was a sight to behold. For example, we spent nearly two hours the night before just constructing a seating chart for the 60 participants. Having specific personalities seated in strategic locations is important when using this teaching method. And I’ll never forget how he began his initial remarks the first morning by acknowledging that during the holiday season there are many heavy hearts and shadows in our midst.

By the end of those two days I heard—and still hear to this day—faculty members on our campus say: “After that workshop I totally changed the way I view the act of teaching and learning.” This is what we mean when we say a “defining moment” can be transformative.

And so tonight I stand before a group of scholars who, perhaps unknown to many in our community, have been party to many defining moments—those unnoticed turns along the way that slowly, and incrementally, helped to transform this institution.

- The Teaching Academy has not been about administrative influence, but about scholars working together to create a sense of community—as portrayed by the diligence of our founding members.

- The Teaching Academy has not been about authority or power, but about servant leadership—portrayed no better than by the unselfish yet painstaking actions of Joe Broder.

- The Teaching Academy has not been about money and budgets, but about the precious and intangible nature of the human beings who comprise this academic community.

- The Teaching Academy has not been about benchmarking and strategic planning, but about doing what is right for our students and their instructors.

- The Teaching Academy is not a physical place abundantly equipped with computers and
peripherals, but a sanctuary where ideas are shared and differing viewpoints are respected.

- And, as seen here tonight, you in this room are not here as data sets that can be added to annual reports or enhance national ranking; rather, you comprise a collection of individuals with stories about moments in your lives that have made a difference.

These final reflections come to mind: I began my association with the University of Georgia in 1966, first as a graduate student, coming back later as an assistant professor, and then returning for a third time as a more senior member of the faculty and administration. I can tell you with unqualified confidence that the attitudes and values held by our faculty and administration toward the importance of teaching are vastly different—VASTLY DIFFERENT—today than they were just two decades ago. And if one asks “why?”—here is the answer. In addition to the noticeable increase in the quality of our student body, changes have resulted from two primary forces: (1) the lasting courage of many faculty members who never stopped believing that learning and teaching should be the fulcrum around which the activities of a great university revolve, and (2) the bold actions taken by those academic leaders who reformed policy and continuously have appropriated fiscal resources, even during tough times.

After looking for one tangible OUTCOME that best represents the aftermath (or residue) of change in teaching culture at the University of Georgia, one has to say it is the Teaching Academy.

Let me assert here this evening that the University of Georgia Teaching Academy is the depository (the Fort Knox of this institution) that holds “en trust” the core values associated with the scholarship of teaching on this campus. Furthermore, you as a community of scholars, serve as the foundation upon which the professoriate and students can—with dignity and respect—engage in the most exciting of all human endeavors—meaningful and lasting learning.

It’s because of you, that when the question is asked—“Is the University of Georgia a publish or perish institution?”—the answer today is “NO.” (pause) It’s worse than that—you also have to teach well.”