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1 OF 9

**PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES
WITH 90% OR HIGHER
GRADUATION RATE**

95%

**OF UGA STUDENTS
EMPLOYED OR IN
GRADUATE SCHOOL**

WITHIN SIX MONTHS

TOP 20

**PUBLIC UNIVERSITY
9 YEARS IN A ROW**

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT 2025

PROGRESS & SUCCESS

AT UGA

An interview with President **Jere Morehead**

BY PHIL KENT

Jere W. Morehead, a graduate of the University of Georgia's School of Law, became President in 2013. Prior to that, he served UGA as Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Vice President for Instruction, and Director of the Honors Program.

Morehead is the immediate past chair of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Board of Directors and previously served as president of the Southeastern Conference. He serves as a trustee of the Committee for Economic Development and co-chairs the University Leadership Forum, a national initiative led by the Council on Competitiveness. He also finds time to do some teaching and is the Meigs Professor of Legal Studies at the Terry College of Business.

PK You've often said that "educating Georgians is UGA's first principle" and there has been an expansion of programs and degrees being offered under your leadership. Can you elaborate on that?

JM I think the University of Georgia, as a land-grant and sea-grant institution, has a particularly important mission to

serve the people of Georgia. And we do that in a variety of ways. Eighty-four percent of our student body are in-state students. Eighty percent of our freshman class are in-state students. I think those two statistics say a lot about who the University of Georgia serves.

It's also important to note that the University of Georgia is an institution that can better be described as the "University for Georgia" because we have an obligation to effectively represent the entire state. Therefore, our student body continues to come from virtually every county in this state—either through freshman admissions or transfer admissions. We've tried to make sure that's the case.

PK I think I read where 154 counties out of 159 are represented.

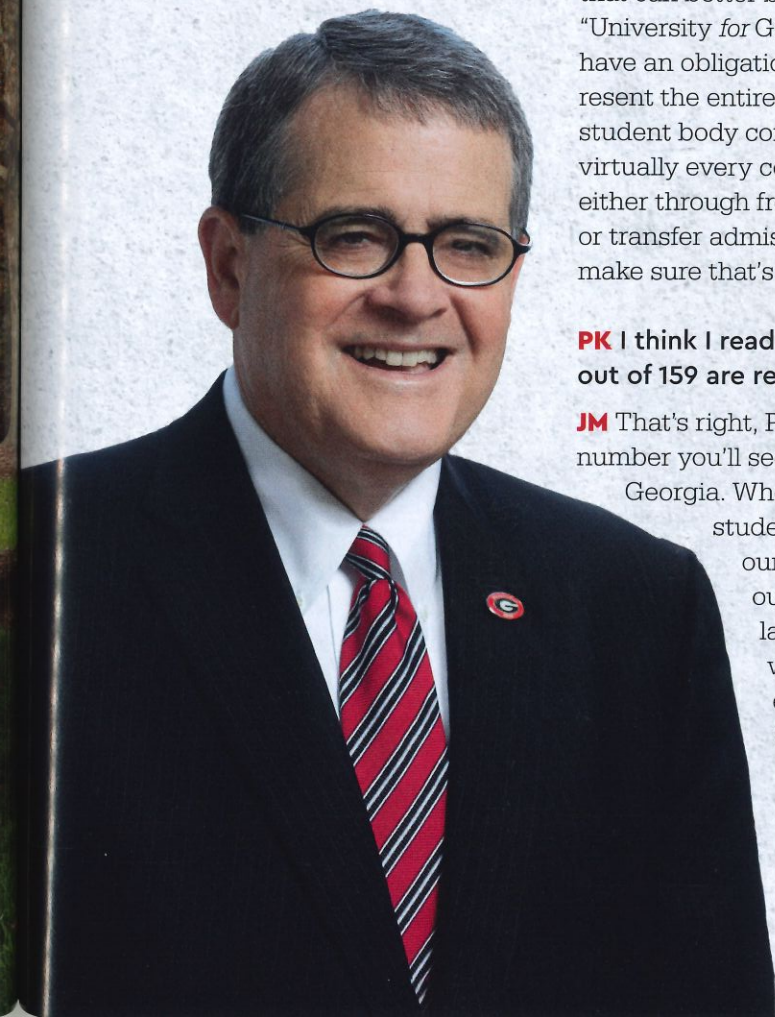
JM That's right, Phil. That's a typical number you'll see at the University of Georgia. When you consider our student body alongside our public service and outreach efforts as a land-grant institution, we have a presence everywhere in the state: whether it's UGA offices, our employees across the state, serving small

businesses, or serving the agricultural industry, we are trying to do our part for economic development and support of Georgia industries.

PK Well, how do you measure the value of an institution like UGA?

JM It goes back to our principles of instruction, research, and public service and outreach. You look at each of those individually and collectively to determine the value of an institution. If you start with instruction, what you'll find over the course of my presidency is that we've made it our motto not to stand still, but to continue the development of new programs and initiatives to set our instructional program apart from other institutions.

For example, since the start of my administration I've taught a freshman seminar program every fall to send a signal that teaching is important. If the president can find time to teach a seminar, it is a statement of the importance of instruction at a large public research university. And one advantage of that engagement is that I get new freshmen every fall who tell me what's good and bad about our instructional programs. I learn so much from getting to know some of my students and understanding how they process information. continued ☺



PK Can you describe for our readers the relationship between UGA and our state's economic well-being?

JM The University of Georgia has over an \$8 billion economic impact on the state of Georgia every year, and it begins with the students that we educate. But it also extends through research and the new products that we put into the marketplace, and then through the various public service and outreach efforts that we engage in to build small businesses across this entire state.

It gets back to where we started: The University of Georgia has the unique responsibility of serving the entire state. Our work with the state Department of Economic Development, the governor's office and other economic development entities has been something that I have personally enjoyed doing, but I think our faculty, students and staff have also enjoyed being a part of those efforts. We have a unique responsibility at this institution to partner with the state on economic development.

PK What is a good example of some of these partnerships?

JM The Small Business Development Center is one example that I would draw to your attention. We have brought many businesses into existence with the work our Small Business Development Center does through service and outreach every year. That office has been particularly beneficial in providing advice, counseling and support to businesses that are getting off the ground. It's something that has been very well received throughout the state.

We also work very closely with Georgia Economic Development Commissioner Pat Wilson and his office when they have new businesses thinking about coming to Georgia, and we are often asked to showcase the University of Georgia's attributes and how they can be helpful to those new businesses.



PK Tell us about UGA's impressive athletic program. There have been some changes and some winning streaks in recent years.

JM Let me start with our head baseball coach, Wes Johnson. We hired him from LSU after they won the national championship, and he has been a tremendous addition. At this time, we're ranked No. 3 in the country, and we've been on quite a winning streak. He had an incredible start as a coach and seems to be sustaining that start with his second season. Another new coach is Drake Bernstein of the women's tennis team, who led the team to the national indoor championship title this year. Our men's basketball coach Mike White broke a 10-year streak by getting to the NCAA men's tournament this year. He has set us on a pathway for future success.

Then, regarding our football program, everything starts and stops with Kirby Smart. He's been having an extraordinary run as our head football coach. I don't have to tell you about our two national championships and now multiple Southeastern Conference championships. He has set a new standard for excellence for our university.

As for our home winning streak at Sanford Stadium, we extended the record to 31 games this fall—that's the longest active home winning streak in college football in the country. But I think we're going to be challenged next year with the difficult schedule that we have been given by the Southeastern

Conference. In any event, there's going to be some unbelievable games at Sanford Stadium this fall.

PK Student tuition and related college costs present a big challenge for all too many parents and students. What are your thoughts on UGA providing an affordable, high-quality education?

JM *The Princeton Review* recently ranked UGA number 13 in the country for best value among public institutions. Being number 13 nationwide for best value says a lot about how our students receive a world-class education without paying premium prices.

Our tuition increases have been rare in recent years and very small in measure. We have kept fees down to make sure a UGA education remains affordable. Probably the thing I'm most proud of is that we have now received support from our alumni and friends to create over 1,000 need-based, endowed scholarships that are going to be a part of UGA forever. And those 1,000 need-based, endowed scholarships are supporting students who would have otherwise never been able to afford to attend UGA. That was something that we were in dire need of having at this university: the ability to support students in need. We are fortunate to have had so many individuals and friends of the institution, led by our loyal alumni base, that have helped us achieve that goal through our Georgia Commitment Scholarship Program.

PK What is UGA's policy on campus free speech and what are the guardrails and guidelines? You especially had to deal with that in the spring of 2024 and there were arrests of demonstrators who violated campus rules.

JM We have a very firm commitment to the First Amendment in terms of guaranteeing free speech and freedom of expression. But at the same time the safety and security of our campus community is also our priority. We have established the time, place and manner on campus where students can express themselves.

These are established guidelines to minimize disruption to the greater campus community. There were a few efforts last spring to challenge those guidelines, but we didn't allow it. The rights of others on campus must be respected. So, I think we've found a good balance on this campus.

I'm also very proud of our student judiciary that is burdened with having to hear and decide disciplinary cases. They've done a very good job of upholding our rules.

PK Any final words, especially regarding your vision for the future?

JM A main focus now is on healthcare and the new UGA School of Medicine. We are very excited about the launch of a \$100 million medical education and research building that will be under construction soon. We appreciate the \$50 million in funding support from the state, combined with \$50 million of private support that will enable us to complete that building by late 2026.

Furthermore, we just received candidate status from the accrediting body for medical schools. That was an important step in this very long and complicated process of accreditation. The accreditors will be visiting our campus in the coming months, and we hope and expect we'll be on a very fast pace to enroll our first class as early as the fall of 2026. That's an ambitious goal, but it's a goal on which we are focused, and we hope everything will fall into place as planned.

The school of medicine is going to have a tremendous, positive impact on the whole state. It's also going to impact the University of Georgia by opening new opportunities for partnership and collaboration that we might not have even anticipated. The provost and I recently formed a task force on health and medicine comprised of representatives from virtually every area of the campus to meet and contemplate how the school of medicine is going to create new opportunities for joint degree programs, for research programs, and for public service and outreach initiatives throughout the state.

I'm excited, and it's something we can all be proud of at this institution. I especially appreciate the strong support we've received from the governor, the General Assembly, the chancellor and the University System of Georgia Board of Regents to make the school of medicine happen.

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