

President Ricks:

Below is a letter that Dr. Dunning sent out today someone forwarded to me. You may have already seen it, but just sending along.

Thanks,

March 15, 2016

Dear Albany State University faculty, staff, students and alumni:

Let me begin by thanking all who are committed and passionate about the growth and advancement of Albany State University. We are standing at a pivotal point in this institution's history. In particular, we face an opportunity to reach unprecedented heights of academic excellence.

On November 10, 2015, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia voted to consolidate Albany State University (ASU) and Darton State College (DSC). This marked the seventh consolidation of USG institutions in the past few years. The Board stated the following reasons for their decision: "To increase educational attainment levels, student success and transform how the University System impacts southwest Georgia."

For each consolidation, the System Office has developed a process for each campus to follow. Part of that process includes the appointment of a Consolidation Implementation Committee (CIC) comprising 20 faculty, staff and students from each campus. The CIC is working to meld the institutions and expand the national and international presence of higher education within Southwest Georgia. Functional Area Coordinators (FACs) and 79 Organizational Working Groups (OWGs) support the CIC by handling and addressing issues specific to academic programming and support services. Upon the completion of matters specific to academic and support services, the OWGs will submit recommendations to the CIC. After review, the CIC will forward a full plan to the Georgia Board Regents, the final decision-making authority. In total, more than 200 faculty, staff and students are providing direct input for the new Albany State University. The final approval for the consolidation plan is projected to occur in January 2017.

As the CIC began its work, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia was invited to present relevant statistics about the Southwest Georgia region. While the extensive presentation can be viewed on the consolidation website (<http://www.consolidation.asurams.edu/>), the following statistics were especially poignant:

- The majority of Albany State and Darton State students are from southwest Georgia.
- Both Albany State University and Darton State College are located in the congressional district that ranks No. 1 in Georgia for families living in poverty.
- The 2nd congressional district ranks 419 out of 435 for poverty in the nation.
- The identified population growth in our 26-county service area over the next 15 years is negative 1.6 percent.

The need for higher education in this region is extraordinary. In a January 2014 speech to Georgia legislators, Chancellor Hank Huckaby shared labor surveys which reveal that in the near future, two-thirds of Georgia's working-age population will require some level of post-secondary credentials to

compete for jobs. In spite of this need, enrollment figures at ASU have been declining over the past four years. Enrollment figures determine the amount of funding provided to academic institutions. As a result, ASU continues to address budget shortfalls that impact academic programming and operational services. In FY '16, we endured a \$3.5 million budget cut. Our condition will be further impacted by a \$1.3 million budget cut in FY '17.

Despite current difficulties and challenges that have befallen this region and the academic institutions that exist within, the decision to consolidate not only creates an opportunity for the institution to survive, but also an opportunity to elevate and transform. The new Albany State University is expected to create an institution of nearly 9,000 students, which will make it the largest institution of higher education in Southwest Georgia and one of the largest HBCUs in the country.

Albany State University's HBCU designation is federally mandated. Based on the Higher Education Act of 1965, our HBCU status remains intact and we will continue to move forward, building upon the institution's rich and glorious history.

I, along with Dr. Richard Carvajal, interim president of Darton State College, and the CIC recognize and embrace the challenges and concerns that have been brought forth by supporters and constituents associated with both institutions. We have, and will continue to conduct a transparent process that will include regular updates, town hall meetings, etc.

All of the foundational documents that define the new ASU will be modeled after other leading universities in the country. Those documents will include the history of ASU, the guiding principles, the vision and the mission. Just as we evolved from Albany Bible and Manual Training Institute, we must now evolve into an institution that offers premier academic programs throughout and beyond the region.

To exert a recent Albany Herald editorial, "Rather than focusing on perceived losses, we should strive for great gains that will benefit our children, their children and future generations who call this area home." For all those who believe this region of the state is deserving of better educational and economic opportunities, your support of this consolidation is needed now more than ever.

As reflected earlier, we are living in unprecedented times. The manner in which we approach our individual and collective efforts to solidify our presence as a bastion of academic excellence will not only determine how we are viewed and accepted on the national stage, but also our existence within the not-so-distant future.

Higher education is transforming before our very eyes—and, it must. I simply request that we work cohesively and strategically to ensure that this transformation yields the best the new Albany State University has to offer.

Sincerely,
Art Dunning
President
Albany State University