Dear Friends -

As we embark upon 2010, I am optimistic that it is going to be a good year. In the extraordinary history of the University of Georgia Foundation, there are many instances where the organization has navigated turbulent economic waters. I believe we’ll look back at the current recession and find that the foundation again persevered.

Although the foundation faced unprecedented challenges as 2009 drew to a close, there was significant improvement in global markets and the unwavering commitment of our donors. Who wouldn’t be optimistic?

I also believe we are blessed with a board of trustees that is second to none. Like those who preceded them and guided this foundation in fulfilling its mission for more than 70 years, our current board includes some of the brightest minds and most dedicated leaders.

I am optimistic because regardless of what events have transpired on our campus, in our state or around the world, this foundation has never wavered in ensuring that the funds entrusted to our care provide the maximum benefit to the academic mission of the University of Georgia.

It remains abundantly clear to me that the strengths of this foundation – our donors, our trustees and our proud history – will once again lead us to greater heights. I wish you all a happy and healthy 2010!

Sam Holmes, Chairman

UGA recognized as a national leader in study abroad programs

Foundation support of UGA’s study abroad programs has not only succeeded in making these programs some of the university’s most sought-after learning opportunities, but has enriched the educational experience of thousands of students.

UGA is ranked second in the nation in the number of students who participate in summer and other short-term programs, and tenth among research institutions in overall study abroad participants. More than 2,000 students are enrolled in UGA’s 170 study abroad and exchange programs, in dozens of countries and on every continent, including UGA’s three year-round residential centers in Oxford (UK), Cortona, and Costa Rica.

“Studying, interning, and researching abroad continue to be high priorities of UGA students,” said Kasee Laster, the university’s study abroad program director.

Atlanta gallery hosts Cortona program faculty art exhibition

The University of Georgia study abroad program in Cortona, Italy will culminate the festivities celebrating its 40th anniversary with a show of works by Lamar Dodd School of Art faculty who have taught in the program since its inception in 1970. The Gallery at the Chastain Arts Center, 135 W. Wieuca Road NW in Atlanta, will host the exhibition “Professori di Cortona” through February 27.

One of the oldest study abroad programs at UGA, the Cortona program has educated more than 8,000 students within the Old World confines of Tuscany. The comprehensive curriculum blends studio art or art history with firsthand introductions to Italian language and culture. UGA’s 4.5-acre campus offers instruction to UGA students as well as those from many institutions across the U.S.

“We love over half of our art school faculty has taught in Cortona, many of whom return time and again and have made Cortona their second home,” said Rick Johnson, director of the program. “I feel truly blessed to live, work on my art, and teach in this magnificent environment.”
Foundation funding supports vital faculty research and scholarship

As you know, the University of Georgia not only seeks to attract the best and brightest students, but also the best and brightest faculty. In this Chairman's Letter, it is my privilege to highlight a few of the exceptional faculty whose positions are funded through gifts to the foundation, as well as the cutting-edge and critical research these scientists are performing.

As the state’s leading research institution, UGA faculty scholarship extends into all areas of science and the social sciences. The foundation is proud to fund more than 140 chairs and professorships across the university according to donor wishes. The foundation is proud to extend into all areas of science and the institution, UGA faculty scholarship as well as the cutting-edge and critical research these scientists are performing.

Maier named AAAS Fellow for research in microbiology

Robert J. Maier, Georgia Research Alliance Ramsey Eminent Scholar of Microbial Physiology, was recently named a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Maier was honored for his distinguished contributions in the field of microbiology, especially the processes that bacteria use to convert nitrogen into ammonia, metabolize hydrogen and sequester and store nickel.

"Selection as a Fellow of the AAAS represents a major milestone in the careers of our most talented scientists and is an important recognition of their enduring contributions," said David Lee, UGA vice president for research.

Founded in 1848, AAAS is the world’s largest general scientific society, and being named a Fellow is one of its most prestigious honors.

McKissick part of UGA faculty research initiative on poverty

John C. McKissick, Distinguished McKissick in Agricultural Marketing in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, is researching economic development as part of UGA’s Poverty and the Economy Faculty Research Grant program.

The multi-disciplinary research program is part of a campus-wide effort to address poverty in Georgia and explore ways that university teaching, research and service can help all Georgians become full participants in the economy.

McKissick’s study, “Using the Economic Vitality Index as a Tool for Identifying Successful Economic Development Strategies in Georgia Counties,” is one of five faculty projects funded for the 2009-2010 program.

Dalton receives federal grant for stem cell research

Stephen Dalton, Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar of Molecular Biology, has received a $600,000 federal grant to accelerate research into a type of stem cell that can turn into virtually any cell type.

Scientists recently discovered that induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS cells) – which appear to be similar to stem cells derived from embryos – can be reprogrammed from skin or other easily obtained adult cells. The cells potentially could be used in the development of cell therapies to treat disorders ranging from spinal cord injury, heart disease and diabetes, and may also allow patients’ cells to be used in their own medical treatment.

Dalton’s research group previously had received a five-year, $9.2 million award from the National Institute of Health’s National Institute of General Medical Sciences as part of an initiative to uncover the basic biology of human embryonic stem cells.

Tsai studies gene duplication and splicing in plants

Chung-Jui Tsai, GRA Hank Hayne Eminent Scholar in Forest Biotechnology, has conducted compelling research into the genetic mechanisms of plant growth and defenses that may also have implications for humans and other animals. Her research was published online in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in December.

In research funded by the National Science Foundation, Tsai’s team set out to investigate the role of a gene that encodes for the enzyme isochorismate synthase (ICS) in plants and found an inverse relationship between gene duplication and alternative splicing. Alternative splicing is the molecular process that allows a single gene to produce many gene products or proteins with potentially different functions.

It is thought to be an efficient mechanism for the cell to rapidly create greater structural and functional diversity without evolving new genes.

Ruter part of national study on water-saving technology

John Ruter, D.W. Brooks Distinguished Professor in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, is part of a national multi-institution team of scholars that received a five-year, $5 million grant from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

The researchers are working to develop the next generation of tools to precisely monitor plant water use, allow for better control of irrigation water applications, and increase the efficiency of water and nutrient use by ornamental growers.

UGA faculty involved in the research will study affordable soil moisture sensors and the water needs of different types of plants. They also will work with researchers at the other institutions to develop software that will predict how much water plants will use.

The University of Georgia Foundation accepts and manages gifts to the university according to donor wishes.

For more information, please call (706) 542-6677 or visit the foundation’s Web site at www.ugafoundation.org.