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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

*Jere W. Morehead**

As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the *Georgia Law Review* at the University of Georgia, I pause to consider the impact that my legal scholarship and training have made on my long career in higher education. Following six years as an Assistant United States Attorney and twelve years as a faculty member, I accepted my first position in administration at UGA as Acting Executive Director of Legal Affairs in 1998. This transition from the faculty to administration proved to be a seminal moment in my career. I would go on to serve in a number of other senior administrative roles, with increasing levels of responsibility at UGA, until becoming President of the institution in 2013.

In my early years as an academic administrator, I first came to see the value of legal scholarship and training related to effective leadership in higher education. I vividly recall a meeting involving a number of senior university administrators who were convened to discuss a controversial issue. It was not the resolution but rather the nature of the discussion that made an impression on me that day. I was joined in the meeting by a colleague who also had a background in law. I was struck by the similarity in the rhetorical approaches to our arguments: we both presented our positions on the issues in a detached, logical, and reasoned manner—a sign, indeed, of the legal education we held in common.

I believe some of the biggest mistakes made by higher education administrators can be tied to a failure to address problems through a systematic and thoughtful process of deliberation. Too often, decisions are made at the senior levels of our nation's colleges and universities on the basis of emotion or as a reaction to a current event, without proper grounding in thoughtful, deliberate discourse. Nowadays, we see the unfortunate outcomes of this type of decision-making process routinely broadcast through

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national media, and some of those outcomes have adversely impacted higher education.

Legal scholarship and training have taught me to approach the solution to critical institutional issues by examining them carefully and thoroughly, by assembling all the relevant information, and by analyzing that information without a predetermined outcome in mind. In my experience, the best solutions for the institution are derived through this method. Moreover, in making any decision, having a legal background ensures that the prospect of litigation is taken into account. While some might argue that a sensitivity to litigation creates a decision-making framework overly concerned with legal affairs, I have found the opposite to be true. This sensitivity frees me from the paralysis I often see in others who worry so much about the legal consequences of a decision that they lack the confidence to make a judgment at all. Moreover, if I determine there are significant legal issues involved, I have the foresight to consult immediately with our current Executive Director of Legal Affairs (a former editor in chief of the *Georgia Law Review*) before making a decision. I have a better understanding of the legal advice and the limitations of that advice.

While I am not suggesting that leaders in higher education must have a background in legal scholarship and training to be effective, I am convinced that such a background has contributed to my ability to be successful in the various positions I have held in higher education. I also am certain, beyond any reasonable doubt, such a background contributes to prudent decisions in a university setting. I am grateful for the legal education and training provided to me over the years by many caring and bright mentors. All of them have taught me to think carefully before speaking out, to resist the temptation to make a hasty decision without all the facts before me, and to assess in a logical and thoughtful way the implications any one decision may have on the future of this great University.

I offer my thanks and congratulations to the *Georgia Law Review* on the celebration of 50 years of dedicated service to legal scholarship and training.