

From Higher Perspectives From a



Hank Huckaby is a freshman Republican member of Georgia's House of Representatives, but he's no stranger to state government. In 1973, he served as a senior policy planner for higher education for Gov. Jimmy Carter. He's also served as executive director of the Georgia Housing and Finance Authority, the first director of the Georgia State Senate Research Office, and the first commissioner of the state Department of Community Affairs.

In the early 1990s under Gov. Zell Miller, he oversaw the state Office of Planning and Budget, the highest financial planning position in the state government. He's also worked in higher education for a number of years, having served in the late 1960s and early 1970s as an administrator at Georgia State University and Gordon College.

In 1997, Huckaby joined the University of Georgia as the head of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, which helps train legislators and other elected officials. In 2000, he became the university's senior vice president for finance and administration, a position he held until his retirement in 2006.

Hank Huckaby has years of experience in finance and administration in both higher education and state government, which is serving him well as he's finding his voice and making his mark as a newly elected official in the Georgia State House of Representatives. As someone who well knows the inner workings of both academia and government, Huckaby is a wellspring of knowledge.

In a recent interview with CUPA-HR President and CEO Andy Brantley (who served as associate vice president and chief HR officer under Huckaby at the University of Georgia), he shared his thoughts on a number of hot-button issues, including the cost of higher education, the teaching-centric institution model, the economy and what's needed from today's institutional leadership.

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Looking back at your time at the University of Georgia, how will your experiences "inside" higher education drive your work as an elected leader?

A My experience in higher education has a tremendous impact and influence on the work I'm doing in the House. I'm currently serving on the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee and on the Higher Education Committee. The fact that I have worked in both higher ed and state government certainly helps me to see both sides of the coin when it comes to certain issues, particularly budget and funding woes, scholarship legislation and continuing education initiatives.

I see and hear every day the growing frustration constituents and lawmakers alike have with the cost of higher education and the rate at which those costs are escalating. This is causing a lot of consternation

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and uncertainty in the state of Georgia (and I know, too, around the country). The question is, how do we get a handle on these costs, particularly at public schools, and to what degree and at what level should state support continue? I think there are going to be some challenging discussions about this over the next few years. But I'm thankful that I do have experience on both sides of the fence, and I look forward to bringing that experience to the table.

Q **What do you consider to be the most pressing workforce issues in higher education today?**

A I think one of the most challenging issues, and one that's been simmering for a long time, is the increasingly cynical view of faculty teaching loads and the whole concept of teaching vs. research. And this is mostly an issue in public institutions. I serve on the board of trustees at a small private institution, and the teaching load there is four to five courses a semester, and that's just assumed because quality teaching is the school's mission. At large universities, a teaching load like this for tenured faculty members is unheard of.

At the new Georgia Gwinnett College [see sidebar], faculty are required to teach four courses a semester, and there is no tenure. In speaking with the college's president, I asked him, "How is that affecting your ability to recruit?" And he said, "We're inundated." So that tells me that there are a large number of individuals who want to teach, who see that as their life's work and aren't particularly interested in the research side of academia.

Georgia Gwinnett College's approach to teaching is certainly catching the attention of state legislators and the board of regents. It'll be interesting to see to what degree this model acquires greater support. I for one hope it's a precursor for what's to come on a broader basis.

Georgia Gwinnett College: A New Model

Location: Lawrenceville, Georgia (a suburb of Atlanta)

Established: 2006 (GGC is the first public, four-year liberal arts college to be founded in the United States in the 21st century and the first four-year public institution created in Georgia in more than 100 years)

President: Daniel J. Kaufman

Enrollment: 5,700 (and growing – the college saw a nearly 70% increase in enrollment from the spring 2010 semester to the spring 2011 semester)

Mission: Georgia Gwinnett College provides access to targeted baccalaureate-level degrees that meet the economic development needs of the growing and diverse population of the northeast Atlanta metropolitan region.

GGC is founded on two guiding principles: the innovative use of educational technology to enhance student learning and the commitment to an integrated experience that develops the whole person. Teaching and student engagement are the school's foremost commitments.

What's Different: Georgia Gwinnett College is different from most other public four-year institutions in many ways. Most notably, there is no tenure for faculty members at GGC. Quality teaching and learning is the college's focus. Every member of the GGC faculty and staff is devoted to student intellectual and personal development. Faculty members serve as teachers, advisors and mentors on academic, career and even personal matters.

This approach seems to be working — in the fall of 2010, the college's retention rate for returning sophomores was 75 percent (double the average rate for noncompetitive-admissions colleges in Georgia and on par with many competitive-admissions public institutions across the country).

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Let's talk about the economy. In the private sector, it looks like things may be starting to turn around. Are state revenues beginning to rebound at all?

A They are slowly starting to rebound, at least here in Georgia. As is the case for most states trying to recover from the recession, we've got some things going our way and some things not going our way. The budget that we recently passed didn't include any cuts that weren't expected. If this recovery trend continues for the rest of the fiscal year, we'll be in a position for the first time in a few years to be able to make a meaningful contribution to the revenue shortfall reserve (the rainy day fund).

The downside is that the housing market in Georgia is still not rebounding. And we're still one of the top states in the country for bank closures. We are a long way from being in the clear, but we're cautiously optimistic.

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As someone whose life's work has revolved around governing and budgeting, do you have any words of wisdom for higher education leaders on how to push through state budget reductions and keep moving their institutions forward?

A Communication is key. I know that may sound trite, but it is so important. Higher ed leaders need to be able to tell their stories to lawmakers, constituents and the campus community in a way that intuitively makes sense and opens up genuine dialogue about what it's truly going to take to do the job that needs to be done in higher ed. They need to be able to give strong evidence of the value of their institution as it relates to the overall economic wellbeing of their community, region or state.

So many times those of us in higher education remain aloof to the political process and to the political environment (although since the recession hit, it seems more and more higher ed leaders are deliberately tuning in to those discussions). The bottom line is, the traditional academic mindset is going to have to change. Too often, higher ed leaders are just trying to preserve the status quo. But we need leaders who really understand the broader public policy agenda, who are willing to engage in genuine discussions of the needs of their institutions, and are willing to be open to new ideas and new models.

Again, Georgia Gwinnett College comes to mind. I really think this institutional model will open some eyes and gain strong support among policymakers.

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What advice do you have for those of us working in human resources? How can we help our institutions and our employees get over the bump in the road?

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Just continue to provide good service and information. And be forthcoming about what may be around the bend. Due to many factors, it's likely that in most institutions the richness of benefits like healthcare and retirement are going to be tougher and tougher to maintain. I think we will increasingly begin to see the public sector adopting some of the policies and practices of the private sector, and that's just born out of fiscal necessity. And that's okay ... just make sure your institution's employees and leaders are in the know, all the time. 



In this interview, Huckaby also spoke at length about the issues surrounding defined benefits plans to which most public institutions are bound and contends that we must do a better job of educating employees on how to effectively manage their retirement funds. To read the full interview, visit www.cupahr.org/knowledgecenter/heworkplace.aspx.