Director’s Message

Changing circumstances demand a renewed focus and innovative approaches. At the Vinson Institute, promoting excellence in government in a time of transition like 2011 means helping state and local governments navigate through the change with a vision for the future.

2011 was the year when stabilizing budgets and emerging signs of economic recovery let many in government begin to breathe a little easier. Vinson Institute outreach was more relevant than ever as our faculty and staff helped develop current and upcoming leaders, find objective answers to daunting questions, and reevaluate organizational structures in light of new realities.

Vinson Institute faculty collaborated with officials and staff on the ground throughout the state and internationally to help them hone their visions for what their governments will look like going forward and how they will best be able to respond to their constituents’ needs. We engaged with leaders and personnel of all levels in the classroom to build the knowledge and skills that are essential in today’s workforce. We were there behind the scenes to help governments find operational efficiencies, look for ways to ensure the economic vitality of their communities, deploy advanced technology to more effectively serve residents, and more.

Having first taken the reigns of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government as interim director in 2011, it has been my pleasure to have the opportunity to work more closely with so many individuals in governments statewide who are devoted to public service. I look forward to another year of listening and learning about the opportunities as well as the challenges that each of you face as government leaders and employees and finding ways that the Vinson Institute can help you prepare for the future and accomplish your goals.

Laura Meadows
Director
on the GROUND

By carrying the University of Georgia’s impressive resources and expertise to governments in all corners of the state, the Vinson Institute plays an integral part in UGA’s public service and outreach mission. Institute faculty pride themselves on their ability to respond quickly when state and local governments express a need for assistance or objective information. They work closely with governments on the ground in their communities to provide careful analyses that help inform policies, advance best practices in such areas as human resources and financial management, locate opportunities for improving operational efficiency, and more.

The Institute's local government experts find themselves in all parts of Georgia providing customized assistance to governments both large and small. This year, they shared their widely acknowledged expertise in the area of city-county consolidation in a number of communities. When leaders from the City of Dalton and Whitfield County began exploring the possibility of consolidation, they asked Institute faculty to conduct a feasibility study and to address issues related to service delivery, personnel, and finances during a two-day retreat. To the City of Macon and Bibb County, the Institute presented a report of case studies detailing the experiences of Georgia's three largest consolidated governments before, during, and after the consolidation process.

No project embodied the Institute’s “on the ground” mission more literally than assistance provided to the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to help them comply with Federal Highway Administration reporting requirements. Beginning in August, GIS, or geographic information systems, specialists from the Institute’s Office of Information Technology Outreach Services (ITOS) hit the road to help the state gather important highway data for the federal Highway Performance Monitoring System. Using video and GPS-capturing technology, the Institute specialists traveled by van over 346 road segments around the state to record data on road characteristics including highway width, pavement condition, number of lanes, signage, and more.

Institute demographer Matt Hauer has a unique perspective of the situation on the ground in Georgia. Hauer has been sharing his expertise about Georgia’s diverse and rapidly changing demographics as he travels the state speaking with government and community leaders at such events as the Association County Commissioners of Georgia or Georgia Municipal Association conferences and the Georgia Forward Forum in Callaway Gardens. Hauer surprises many audiences with his message that Georgia, with its growing Hispanic, Asian, and aging populations, is the new California. Leaders, armed with a broader perspective on the state’s population characteristics and trends, can approach policy formulation and decision making with more information and a better sense of what the future has in store.
Thousands of officials and staff from all levels of government learn new skills and discover new ways of approaching their responsibilities in Vinson Institute classrooms every year. As the government landscape evolves, so too does the Vinson Institute’s comprehensive offering of training and development opportunities. Enrollments in Institute training courses grew to over 18,000 in 2011. The Institute also extended its training outreach to new countries through its International Center.

Indeed, even the Institute’s concept of “classroom” evolves along with technology and a changing world. In 2011, the Vinson Institute continued to innovate in information delivery by expanding online course offerings and by providing information on practical topics for free through a variety of multimedia formats such as videos and tutorials.

November’s fall color at Amicalola Falls State Park provided a scenic classroom setting for the inaugural Legislative Environmental Policy Academy, which was coordinated by the Institute’s Environmental Policy Program. Trading the politics of the capitol for the calm of one of the state’s beautiful parks, representatives serving on the House Natural Resources and Environment Committee attended the three-day event. They prepared for the upcoming 2012 legislative session and received objective information from experts and state agency leaders about the complex environmental concerns coming before the committee.

The Vinson Institute’s legislative training activities also included the fourth Georgia Legislative Leadership Institute (GLLI). Twenty-one freshman state representatives and senators participated in the program, which helps newer members of the General Assembly hone their leadership, problem-solving, and decision-making skills while learning about how things work under the Gold Dome.

The Institute broadened the reach of its training programs by signing memoranda of understanding with two South Korea organizations—the Governors Association of Korea and the Seoul Municipal Government—in October. Through these new partnerships, high-ranking Korean public officials have the opportunity to come to Georgia for short- and long-term leadership development programs coordinated by the Institute’s International Center. These partnerships open the doors for networking between government and business leaders from Georgia and South Korea and increased economic cooperation.

Chatham County employees applied what they learned about leadership and project management in the second level of the Institute’s Management Development Program (MDP) to inspire positive change in their community. After taking part in the classroom lessons about team building, group dynamics, motivation, and communication, the group tackled the planning for their community service project, which is part of the MDP program. They decided to erect a bench memorializing the victims of violence near the Chatham County Citizens Center. Engraved with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the bench serves as encouragement to individuals and their families who have encountered violence.
behind the SCENES

The Vinson Institute’s commitment is clear—to help governments and the individuals who serve in them build the skills, talents, and organizational capacity they need to better serve their constituents. Much of the Institute’s assistance—in the form of objective studies, meeting facilitation, program evaluation, information technology solutions, and more—takes place behind the scenes so that government officials and staff can have the tools to accomplish their most important initiatives.

In 2011, the Vinson Institute provided critical support for a number of statewide projects addressing the top priorities of Governor Nathan Deal and the General Assembly. The Institute worked with the Department of Economic Development and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce in the governor’s major economic development initiative, the Georgia Competitiveness Initiative. Institute faculty conducted surveys and led meetings in each of 12 regions throughout the state. Information collected from business owners and leaders, state and local government officials, development authorities, local chambers of commerce, and the public from around the state about how Georgia can strengthen its ability to improve economic growth and attract investment and jobs. This information contributed significantly to the governor’s long-term strategy for economic development.

State officials also tapped the Vinson Institute to help lead efforts to strengthen Georgia’s rural communities through the OneGeorgia Rural Policy Center. Working alongside the Department of Community Affairs, Institute faculty are active in developing policies that create new opportunities for success in Georgia’s rural areas. Additionally, the Institute will help deploy the resources of the University System of Georgia (USG) throughout the state by identifying and subcontracting with USG entities that can conduct research addressing rural development issues.

Governments often turn to the Vinson Institute to help them assess current programs and verify that they are accomplishing their stated goals. The Institute compiled a data-driven report for administrators of the Hall County DUI Court that analyzed the program’s success in preventing recidivism among repeat DUI offenders and provided insights to help them continue to improve the court’s interventions. Vinson Institute faculty reviewed records to determine reoffending rates among DUI Court graduates and surveyed participants to learn what they found beneficial about it. Overall, the Hall County court will be able to use the information to hone its program to target individuals most likely to complete it.

Vinson Institute human resource experts worked with the Department of Public Safety to renew promotional testing for troopers and compliance officers after a three-year hiatus brought about by budget cuts. With the growing need for new leaders at Georgia State Patrol and the Motor Carrier Compliance Division posts throughout the state, the Institute helped these agencies devise and implement a testing strategy that provided fair access to promotional opportunities for the employees and can be legally defensible for the employers. More than 500 troopers and officers had the opportunity to vie for positions with the ranks of corporal, sergeant, sergeant first class, and lieutenant.