To: John Duffield, Director of Assessment and Review, Office of Institutional Effectiveness
Date: November 30, 2017
From: Susan J. Kelley, Associate Dean for Nursing and Chief Academic Officer
Re: School of Nursing Academic Program Review (APR) Self-Study

This letter contains an overview of the APR self-study by the School of Nursing (SON). I am grateful to Lisa Cranwell-Bruce who chaired the self-study committee, as well as to committee members Susan Breslin, Joan Cranford, Paula Gordon, Kimberly Hires, Eva Horn, Martha Polovich, and Regena Spratling. The self-study report was approved by the SON faculty on October 30, 2017.

The SON has five degree programs. At the bachelor’s level, the SON offers a Bachelor of Science (BS), as well as a registered nurse (RN) to BS completion program. The latter is designed for students who have already obtained their RN nurse licensure, most often through an associate degree program, and are seeking the BS degree. The SON offers a Master of Science degree with multiple specialty concentrations, as well as two doctoral programs—the Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) and Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) degrees. Our total enrollment is approximately 600 students, excluding pre-nursing undergraduate students who are not yet admitted to the major. Approximately half of all SON students are enrolled in graduate programs.

This self-study report demonstrates that the SON rates highly in productivity, quality, and viability; it is also central to the university’s strategic mission and plan. With regard to productivity, tenured and tenure-track faculty maintain active programs of research that result in a steady record of publications in highly-ranked journals. The current level of external funding is reasonable considering the relatively small complement of tenure-track faculty; however, this needs to grow. It is noteworthy that two faculty members are currently funded by the National Institutes of Health.

Important indicators of quality include the fact that the undergraduate nursing program is one of the most competitive undergraduate degree programs at the university, allowing the unit to be very selective in the admissions process. The high quality of our BS and MS programs is substantiated by very successful pass rates on national licensure and certification exams. The extensive diversity of students and faculty is another noteworthy strength. Faculty make steady progress moving through the ranks, whether in tenure or non-tenure track positions. The unit’s viability is underscored by large enrollments at the undergraduate and graduate levels.
Furthermore, graduates of our programs are in high demand—especially given the national shortage of registered nurses, as well as nurses with PhDs.

The unit has been innovative in seeking new opportunities for generating credit hours through the extensive offering of online courses. The master's degree program utilizes a hybrid format with approximately 75% of course content delivered online. Recently, the PhD and DNP programs transitioned to distant-accessible programs, with all course content delivered online. Learning is augmented by on-campus intensive sessions designed to enhance student socialization into the role of scholar. This form of program delivery will facilitate increased enrollment beyond Georgia. It is important to note that during this three-year review period, SON credit hour productivity increased by six percent.

Despite these accomplishments, the unit faces several challenges as described in the report. The national shortage of PhD prepared faculty hinders our ability to hire tenure track faculty. As a result, we have a relatively small number of tenure-track faculty in relation to non-tenure track (NTT) faculty. While NTT faculty contribute greatly to the teaching and service mission of the unit, we need additional tenure track faculty to support our PhD program, as well as to increase scholarly productivity. Currently, we have three open tenure tract positions which we are aggressively attempting to fill. Other limitations of the unit include length of time taken to complete the PhD program and the relatively small number of undergraduate students who participate in the Honor's College, as well as study abroad programs. In accordance with national trends and market demands, we recognize the need to transition the current master’s level preparation of advanced practice nurses to the DNP level.

The SON's goals are closely aligned with our strengths and challenges, as well as with the university's strategic plan. The self-study report includes the following goals: 1) Enhance scholarly productivity by increasing the complement of tenure-track faculty and expanding external funding; 2) Expand and further strengthen our doctoral programs—especially the PhD; 3) Enhance the undergraduate learning experience; and 4) Expand research and interdisciplinary collaborations related to urban health disparities.

To achieve these goals, we plan to fill existing tenure-track faculty vacancies, as well as seek additional tenure-track faculty positions. We will improve our research infrastructure in order to facilitate increased external funding. To meet the national demand for nurses with doctorates, especially those with PhDs, we will expand enrollment of our two doctoral programs. We will shorten the length of time-to-graduation for PhD students, while maintaining quality. Undergraduate learning will be enhanced by facilitating student success, developing research-related signature experiences, and expanding global learning opportunities. Lastly, we will increase research productivity related to urban health disparities through targeted faculty hiring and enhanced collaborations with other academic units.

We believe this self-study has given us the opportunity to thoroughly assess the unit’s strengths and limitations, as well as devise goals for moving the unit forward while contributing to the university’s strategic plan. We look forward to the next phases of the APR process.