Right pick for provost, his fans say

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Only time will tell how well Jere Morehead will do when he becomes the University of Georgia's next provost and senior vice president for academic affairs on New Year's Day.

But if Morehead's legions of fans among former students and co-workers are right - and they are legion - UGA President Michael Adams made the right choice when he picked Morehead to follow Arnett Mace as UGA's top academic officer.

"In tough times like these, I want a leader like Jere Morehead," said Pam Kleiber, associate director of the UGA Honors Program, which Morehead headed for years. "I know he'll have to make some tough decisions, but there's no one I'd trust more to make those decisions."

Morehead, the first in his family to graduate from college, comes to the job after a wide variety of faculty and administrative posts at the university.

A professor in UGA's business school, he also taught in the law school and has held a variety of administrative posts since 1986, when he came to UGA after six years as an assistant U.S. attorney prosecuting white-collar criminals.

Morehead served as vice president for instruction since 2007, and also has been vice president for academic affairs, director of the Honors Program, the university's top lawyer as head of the UGA Office of Legal Affairs, the faculty representative on the board of the UGA Athletic Association - and even a coach himself.

Fayetteville lawyer Michael Hofrichter and UGA law school professor Kellie Casey Monk recall Morehead from that last role - when Morehead was their coach on the UGA law school's moot court teams, which argue hypothetical cases in a mock court setting. They say the same qualities that made him a top coach make him a good choice for the UGA provost job.

"He's a good leader," Hofrichter said. "It's great for the University of Georgia."

Morehead's teams did a lot better than the football team, winning national and even world championships competing against the nation's and world's top law schools.
Morehead knew how to pair students so that together, they made a team - and to do that, he had to know the students well, observed Monk.

"He had a really good knack of picking people who might complement each other," Monk said.

But more than that, Morehead taught them that the best strategy was to out-work the other team, said Hofrichter, a trial lawyer who has been law partners for 17 years with the student Morehead paired him up with on the moot court team.

"We were prepared; we knew the stuff inside and out, absolutely," Hofrichter said. "We felt like when we walked in there, it was over."

Friends and students talk about Morehead in terms of dedication and the pursuit of excellence, and Morehead himself admits that "married to the job" is a fair description of him.

"He is so focused on students," said former Miss Georgia Amy Mulkey McGowan, a 2001 UGA graduate who got to know Morehead when he headed the Honors Program and Mulkey was a Foundation Fellow in UGA's most prestigious scholarship program.

"He takes the time to get to know his students, so he knows your strengths and can really provide good guidance," said McGowan, who went on to get an MBA from Harvard Business School and now works for an Atlanta consulting firm.

Professional colleagues name several characteristics over and over when describing Morehead - honest, dedicated to students, hard-working, intelligent and a sometimes uncannily good listener.

"He's a fair-minded person and is very goal-oriented, and knows how to achieve positive results," said Del Dunn, a retired professor. "He's an extremely hard worker, highly dedicated to his work."

Besides his administrative jobs, Morehead also has won the Meigs award, given to UGA's best teachers, and was editor of the top journal in his academic field, said Rob Hoyt, a colleague on the business school faculty.

"I can't imagine anyone having more breadth or depth of connection to the university," Hoyt said. "He really lives and breathes every aspect of the University of Georgia."

"He's very smart, very hard-working, straightforward and honest," said Robert Sumichrast, dean of UGA's Terry College of Business.

"He's also a very thoughtful and analytical individual. He cares deeply about this university," said Rebecca White, dean of the UGA School of Law.

"He's a man of his word," Kleiber said.

The Rev. Bill Britt, senior pastor of Peachtree Road United Methodist Church - Atlanta's largest Methodist congregation - recalled Morehead in another role. The new UGA provost helped ease Britt's transition into the pastorship of Athens First United Methodist Church in 1997.
Some in the Athens congregation thought Britt was too young, but Morehead helped sway them.

"People looked to him. They wanted to know, 'How does Jere Morehead feel about this?'" Britt said.

"He's got good political instincts," said Britt, a close observer of Morehead's career at UGA. "Mike Adams just kept loading responsibility on him, and obviously he handled it very, very well. I never heard any criticisms. I never heard anyone say, 'He's in over his head.'"

As provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, Morehead, 53, will be both the chief academic officer for the university as well as its chief operating officer, responsible for managing the day-to-day activities of the university.

Four vice presidents will report to Morehead, as well as the deans of all 16 colleges and schools and the heads of numerous other UGA entities such as the University of Georgia Press and the Georgia Museum of Art.

Morehead declined to talk about any specific changes or initiatives he has planned for when he steps into the job, but one goal will be to streamline the chain of reporting to his office, he said.

Morehead also will be working on building UGA's engineering programs and the university's medical partnership with the Medical College of Georgia, although for now Mace will continue to be the point man with the medical partnership.

But the biggest challenge UGA faces right now is simply "the stress the budget has placed on our research enterprise and our research capabilities," Morehead said.

Some universities will emerge from the budget crisis stronger, and some weakened, he said.

"Every university is facing similar challenges. It's not a problem unique to the University of Georgia. The key will be which universities make the strategic decisions necessary to keep their institutions advancing, and which ones lose ground as a result of these budgetary challenges."