



# **2019 TIAA Institute Theodore M. Hesburgh Award for Leadership Excellence in Higher Education**

**Honoring Mark P. Becker  
President, Georgia State University**



**BUILT TO PERFORM.**

**CREATED TO SERVE.**

**“Kudos to Mark Becker for all he has done to help level the playing field for disadvantaged students. Under his leadership, Georgia State’s pioneering programs and initiatives have made a huge difference in the lives of countless individuals. President Becker’s innovations demonstrate that even the largest public universities can offer students personalized attention—and achieve incredible results.”**

**Stephanie Bell-Rose**

**Senior Managing Director, Corporate Strategy and Development,  
TIAA and Head of the TIAA Institute**





# **Honoring Mark P. Becker, President, Georgia State University**

**2019 Recipient of the TIAA Institute Theodore M. Hesburgh  
Award for Leadership Excellence in Higher Education**

## **A model for promoting student success**

Since being named Georgia State University's seventh president in 2009, Mark Becker has led the university through a dynamic period of growth and advancement, earning national recognition for promoting student success. Implementing a 10-year strategic plan introduced in 2011, Georgia State has set records for both its graduation rates and the number of students it graduates, and has gone on in recent years to lead the country in eliminating achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity and income.

Under President Becker's leadership, Georgia State also has built a burgeoning research enterprise—growing sponsored research at more than twice the national average—and has made major enhancements to its downtown campus. These accomplishments, in turn, have served as a catalyst for downtown Atlanta's revitalization, strengthening the economic vitality of the area.

## **Eliminating achievement gaps**

Georgia State's student success initiatives, combined with President Becker's leadership, prompted the University System of Georgia in 2016 to consolidate Georgia State with Georgia Perimeter College, a two-year institution with five campuses in suburban Atlanta.

While Georgia State today is lauded for its achievements and innovations, 15 years ago the situation was different. The institutional graduation rate was 32%, and underserved populations were foundering. Graduation rates were 22% for Latinos, 29% for African-Americans and 18% for African-American males. Pell students were graduating at rates 10 percentage points lower than those of non-Pell students.

Today, 80% of Georgia State's students are low income, minority, first generation, or a combination of the three, and the achievement gaps have disappeared. Graduation rates are up 35 points for Latinos, 29 points for African-Americans and 39 points for African-American males. Pell-eligible students now graduate at slightly better rates than their middle- and upper-income counterparts.

In recognition of these results, former President Barack Obama, businessman and philanthropist Bill Gates, and U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos have praised and credited the university's leadership. As Bill Gates concluded, "No other institution has accomplished what Georgia State has over the last decade."

**“Father Hesburgh was a transformational leader and icon of American higher education. To be associated with him through this award is humbling and a tremendous honor. There is no higher ideal than to embody Father Hesburgh’s commitment to higher education and society at large.”**

**Mark P. Becker**  
**President, Georgia State University**

## Expanding Georgia State's reach and impact

During his tenure, President Becker has introduced a host of programs and initiatives to expand Georgia State's reach and impact, including:

- **Panther Retention Grants**, through which the university makes small sources of funding accessible to students who are close to graduation but at risk of dropping out because of unpaid balances.
- **Next Generation Initiative and Second Century Initiative**, both of which bring distinguished scholars to the university's Atlanta campus, which in turn has helped increase research funding by 152% over the last six years.
- **FinTech hub**, a public-private partnership with businesses designed to help all 26 institutions in the University System of Georgia train students for careers in the financial technology industry.
- **Creative Media Industries Institute**, which prepares students for careers in Georgia's growing media industry, fosters research and incubates companies in the state's growing entertainment sector.

President Becker also has fostered the development of NCAA Division 1 athletics. The university's intercollegiate teams have won nine conference championships since rejoining the Sun Belt Conference in 2013, and Georgia State's football team made its first bowl appearance in 2015.



## **Redefining what's possible**

Georgia State University has shared its best practices and student success initiatives with institutions around the world. More than 200 groups from U.S. colleges and universities have visited the Atlanta campus to examine Georgia State's highly regarded programs, and the university has shared its learnings with more than a dozen public universities in South Africa, as well as institutions in Australia, Brazil, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

By embracing inclusion and spreading word of its accomplishments, Georgia State—under the leadership of President Becker—has changed the nation's expectations of student outcomes. The university's success in meeting the needs of disadvantaged populations shows that demographics are not destiny, and achievement gaps are not inevitable. Low-income and underrepresented students—given the right tools, programs and support—can succeed—and excel—at the same levels as anyone else.



## About the award



**The Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh**  
**President Emeritus, University of Notre Dame**

The Hesburgh Award is named in honor of the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., (1917-2015) past president of the University of Notre Dame and longtime member of the TIAA and CREF Boards of Overseers. A world-renowned educator and humanitarian, Father Hesburgh was a lifelong champion of human rights, the cause of peace, and the care of the poor. He received both the Congressional Gold Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

As a tribute to Father Hesburgh's lasting legacy, the TIAA Institute grants the Hesburgh Award to a current college or university president or chancellor who embodies Father Hesburgh's commitment to higher education and national and global communities. The award is presented each year at the annual meeting of the American Council on Education (ACE). Recipients are chosen by an independent panel of judges, and ACE administers the award on the Institute's behalf.

## About the TIAA Institute

For more than 20 years, the TIAA Institute has helped advance the ways individuals and institutions plan for financial security and organizational effectiveness. The Institute conducts in-depth research, provides access to a network of thought leaders, and enables those it serves to anticipate trends, plan future strategies and maximize opportunities for success. To learn more, visit [www.tiaainstitute.org](http://www.tiaainstitute.org) and follow us on Twitter @TIAAInstitute.

## About TIAA

Founded more than 100 years ago, TIAA today is a Fortune 100 financial services organization grounded in our core values, committed to responsible investing, and dedicated to being a force for good, building on our legacy of serving the broad financial needs of those who make a difference in the world.

## About Georgia State University

Georgia State is widely recognized as a national leader in fostering student success through innovative initiatives that have markedly increased graduation rates for students of all races, ethnicities and economic backgrounds. With more than 53,000 students, it is the largest university in Georgia, and one of the largest in the nation. *The Washington Post* called Georgia State “a perpetual laboratory of new ideas,” while *The New York Times* cited it as an “engine of social mobility.” For more information, go to [www.gsu.edu](http://www.gsu.edu).



TIAA Institute is a division of Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America (TIAA), New York, NY.

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