

Auburn University President Jay Gogue “believes in Auburn and loves it”

In an age of texting words without meaning and throwing around phrases with selfish intentions, a word like love often loses its weight. Its duty. Its power. What society often neglects to consider is that the word ‘love’ encompasses much more than a feeling. As Elizabeth Elliot quotes, “It’s impossible to love deeply without sacrifice.”

Jay Gogue, the current, and past, president of Auburn University, did just that.

After serving a legendary term as president of Auburn from 2007-2017, Gogue retired and focused his time and energy on resting and spending time with his family. But, when Gogue received an unexpected request to serve as president of the university once more, he was quick to say yes.

“He could have continued to enjoy his retirement, but he made the decision to assist Auburn in its time of need because he loves it.” Ada Ruth Huntley, president of the Student Government Association at Auburn said.

Jay Gogue was brought up with the gentle, southern tongue of the Peach State people. His deep Georgian roots left him with no desire to uproot and move elsewhere; that is, until he first fell in love with the Loveliest Village on the Plains.

Gogue's first term as president of Auburn University in 2007-2017 couldn't have prepared him for the challenges that he would face in his second term. When Gogue left retirement in 2019 to heed the call that his university needed his leadership once more, he was ready to lead as he had before.

The unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial turmoil in the nation left Gogue to lead the university that he loves through the stormy waters of 2020. As the United States began to see its COVID-19 numbers increase exponentially in March of 2020, Gogue found himself steering Auburn University through the fog of uncertainty and decisions that no prior president had faced. Through hundreds of meetings with professionals and doctors, Gogue and his team sent the students of the university home for the remainder of the semester.

A student at Auburn during the Vietnam War, Gogue received word to return to his humble hometown of Waycross, Georgia, to complete a physical examination. The realization of the dangers of war sparked an urgency to return to his studies with hard work and discipline to avoid being drafted to the jungles of Vietnam in the year of 1965.

"The faculty that you have freshman year is what you always remember," Gogue said as he recalled his first months at Auburn. He stayed in touch with his former professors and friends that he met during his first year.

Gogue began to understand the uniqueness of the relationship-minded town of Auburn, but it wasn't until he found himself at other universities he realized how different Auburn truly is. After serving on staff at universities like Clemson and Texas A&M, Gogue made his way back to his Alma Mater to serve two separate terms as president of Auburn University.

“The community of Auburn is kind to students, and that's not always the case,” said Gogue. Other universities' ‘town and gown relationship’, as Gogue described, are not as intermingled as Auburn University's.

Seeing the distinct differences between Auburn University and other higher education institutions led him to love Auburn in a way that drew him to serve the town of Toomer's Lemonade to the best of his ability- through a year that proved to be crucial in the history of America.

Gogue has fought for keeping the oak-stained doors of Auburn University open wide, whether that looks like limited-capacity face-to-face meetings or Zoom classes. Other universities were locking their doors, and some were euthanizing their animals in their veterinary schools.

Bob Dumas, Vice President Pro Tempore of the Board of Trustees at Auburn University, shared that Gogue's passion for Auburn University stems from an understanding of what Auburn brings to students, faculty, and alumni and supporters around the globe.

“It’s a great educational opportunity, and he understands that,” Dumas said. “He committed his adult life to promoting and trying to make us better so that these experiences can continue; he wants to bring value and pride to every association.”

Dumas said that Gogue is always up to any challenge that is thrown his way, even the challenge of Gogue’s first year out of retirement flooded with strife from a pandemic and social justice change.

“He is committed; he loves Auburn and loves what is best for Auburn, faculty, students, and alumni alike,” Dumas said.

Both Dumas and Gogue himself believe that ‘modest’ is the best suited word to describe the current leader of Auburn University.

After deciding that a state-of-the-art performing arts center is what Auburn needed, Gogue pushed the building of the \$27 million Gogue Performing Arts Center. Gogue said that he feels ‘embarrassed’ that this building is named after him, as he would rather give the namesake to the donors of the funds.

Ada Ruth Huntley, president of the Student Government Association at Auburn for the 2020 school year, watched as Gogue led Auburn through this challenging year.

“He is one of the best leaders that I know in the sense of making sure that everyone feels seen and heard as he is navigating decisions for our university,” Huntley said.

Huntley believes Gogue’s love for Auburn is proven in the way he responded to the challenges of 2020. The biggest testament to love is that he is supposed to be retired and free from this leadership responsibility.

But, he isn’t. His love for Auburn is bigger than the perks of retirement.

“The best leaders are the best listeners, and Dr. Gogue has proved to be just that as he has navigated scenarios like the pandemic and social justice issues,” Huntley said.