

ASU FACULTY & STAFF CONFERENCE

August 8, 2013

Theme: Access • Success • Progress
It's Everybody's Business

Dr. Beverly Edmond, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Opening Remarks

Thank you, Dr. Freeman for such a warm and gracious introduction. To President Freeman, members of the Executive Cabinet, fellow administrators, our illustrious faculty, staff, and students, I am honored to bring remarks to you this morning as we begin what unquestionable will be an exciting, demanding and productive academic year. Who could have imagined some 46 years ago that the journey begun at a small institution in South Georgia named Albany State College, would lead me back in humble servant leadership to that same institution which played such a vital and foundational role in my personal and professional life? I certainly, could not have imagined this, but then again there is but one “who knows the plans predetermined for any of us”. I eagerly return to the origins of my educational foundation with a deep love and appreciation for the experiences, the challenges and the positive influences that more than prepared me for my life journey. I bring to this great institution a passion for education, a commitment to the vitality of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, an understanding of the attributes of successful high performing organization and the motivation to be a contributing influence to President Freeman and all of ASU’s stakeholders in navigating our continued strive toward excellence.

My remarks this morning will center around four (4) topics which I believe will provide both the necessary context and the fundamental framework for what lies ahead for Albany State University and other institutions of higher education and, most importantly, the way we must position and drive ASU through the 21st Century and beyond. First, I want to give you a brief overview of the critical issues facing higher education institutions in general and ASU in particular. Second, I will spend some time laying out for you,

the various initiatives and efforts both underway and needed at ASU as we chart a path towards the future. This discussion will illuminate the importance of the theme chosen for our Faculty Staff Conference; *Access, Progress, Success: It's Everybody's Business*. It will also serve as the opening dialogue on some of the issues with which we must immediately grapple. Third, I will share with you the beginning rudiments for the operational framework and vision I believe will be necessary to propel us forward and help sustain our future. Fourth, and finally, because there is indeed no such thing as a “free lunch”, I will make a special appeal to you on what I believe is needed from each of us to ensure the viability and future for ASU.

Let me begin by presenting a generalized depiction of the world in which higher education exist today and some of the major trends and challenges significant to those of us in the academy. For many of you this will be nothing more than restating what is obvious or telling you that which you already know. Others, however, may not have had the opportunity to take what I describe as a panoramic sweep of the higher education landscape and for them this may become somewhat of a wakeup call or hopefully a “call to arms”. In any event, the importance of laying this out at the outset of my remarks is to make clear the answer to the question of WHY we must take the actions that we propose in support of our goals *Access, Progress and Success* *and* the CONSEQUENCES likely to accrue from a failure to take appropriate action.

To do what I have just proposed is, to say the least, a massively daunting undertaking. The volume and complexity of research, reports, press releases, editorials, conference proceedings and the like on the subject of higher education trends and challenges, is extensive. To adequately cover these materials would require time well beyond what I have available this morning. So, at the risk of over simplification, I have culled from these materials what I contend are some of the major issues higher education institutions face. These include issues surrounding accessibility, affordability, accountability, the role of technology, the quest for innovation, and the emphasis on performance and results. They exist not as a “zero sum game” or a question of our need to focus on one issue at the expense of the other, but as a set of intertwined, interdependent circumstances which one expert has described as higher education’s “perfect storm”.

A useful backdrop for understanding both the interconnectedness and the divergence of these multiple issues can be found first in the national policy agenda for postsecondary education most recently articulated by the Obama administration and, concurrently, the position of American higher education in a competitive global economic and social environment. In 2009 President Obama is quoted as saying “America cannot lead in the 21st Century unless we have the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world”. In a Whitehouse publication issued around that same time, it was further noted that “In higher education the U.S. has been outpaced internationally...ranking 16th in the world in the awarding of certificates and degrees to adults ages 25-34”. In response to this President Obama identified some of the key factors undergirding this lost in rank which he encouraged had to be addressed in our postsecondary initiatives. He went on to set an ambitious goal for the nation of regaining our standing in the production of college graduates by the year 2020. So this then establishes an operational framework for us. We, and all institutions of higher education, must produce more graduates. But that is not all that is needed.

Let us look for a moment at the particulars associated with the major issues identified as facing higher education institutions, especially as they impact our ability to meet the objectives of our national agenda.

First, is the issue of accessibility. There is little argument that a strong educational foundation within this country has allowed for significant upward mobility witnessed here over the last several decades and across socioeconomic levels. Despite this, the goal of full accessibility remains unattained. In commenting on the access to higher education, The American Council on Education offered that “despite progress over the past decades in making higher education more accessible, challenges still remain”. They go on to say that “disparities in college access limit job opportunities and in general hinder success in life especially among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Removing barriers to college education requires elevating student preparation, continued investment in financial aid, and greater flexibility in course delivery”. Now most of this is not new to those of us who have worked in the higher education trenches for some time. We see it manifested every day in the interaction with our students and have molded our institutional mission to overcome these barriers. ACE and a host of other organizations representing higher education, make clear what I earlier referred to as the intertwining and

interdependent nature of accessibility by offering in addition to preparedness a focus on affordability and the use of technology. Again the solution cannot be viewed as a “zero sum game”.

This leads to the second category of challenge which is affordability. In a 2012 article in the Washington Post, it was reported that “Americans owe more on their student loans than on their credit cards or car loans”. The article goes on to point out that “student loan debt stands at \$870 billion nationally surpassing the nation’s outstanding balance on auto loans (\$730 billion) and credit cards (\$693 billion). Higher education institutions have been challenged to “keep cost down” at a time when the availability of state and federal funding which could help to achieve this goal is declining rapidly. While where you sit depends on how you see this issue, the realities of an already discounted educational system and the escalating cost of fixed expenditures like utilities, health costs, etc. balanced by shrinking revenues significantly ripples the waters of higher education’s perfect storm. Unfortunately, too many of us inside the academy, much less those externally, have limited understanding or appreciation of the true fundamentals of higher education finance and budgeting. This is an issue I have discussed with the deans and one for which I have advised them will be a focus of accountability. Also, greatly impacting this is fact that the percentage of our students who rely on financial aid remains among the highest levels ever. And, I would be remiss if I did not remind us of the devastating impact the Parent PLUS Loan debacle last fall which reports indicated impacted the ability of some 14,000 students attending HBCUs to continue to pursue their education.

This notwithstanding, issues of affordability have and will continue to be front in center in the challenges higher education institutions face. Indeed, the issue of affordability is not simply viewed in the context of cost containment, but in the call for institutions to demonstrate that there is a “tangible value” in the educational “product” “sold” to the public. Both U.S. Secretaries of Education Margaret Spellings and her successor Arne Duncan have made clear the need for our institutions to present clear ROI (return on investments) evidence in promoting the value proposition of postsecondary education. As such the affordability issues both stands alone and overlaps into issues of accountability, performance and results.

Issues of accountability, performance and results play out in the higher education arena in several ways and from several sources. In a world of

shrinking resources and concurrent increasing demands for government services, elected and appointed officials are pressed to make hard decisions about the expenditure of limited resources. As such the question of where they can achieve the “best bang for the public’s buck” is central to their decision making process. If then one accepts the proposition that the common denominator across the missions of all higher education institutions is to educate students, then the natural follow up questions by those from whom we seek resources is- 1) how can we account for the low retention and graduation rates exhibited by our institutions and 2) what can we offer to show that those who graduate have indeed walked away with a set of valuable knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies that they did not have before entering our institutional portals and what proof do we have that but for the learning which occurred in our institutions these students would not have the level of proficiency needed for their success. While the debate on just how we do this remains open, one must acknowledge that the questions themselves are fair game. In January 2013 Dr. Todd Bloom reporting in an educational blog noted that one of several clear national trends is the adoption by states of a performance based funding strategy for higher education. He notes that “an increasing number of states are transforming their higher education funding models from one based on student enrollment to a combination of enrollment and student performance”. He goes on to assert that “With these changes policymakers are adjusting priorities for institutions. Student success (through better instruction and student supports) is the goal”. In the state of Georgia we know that the University System of Georgia has already adopted or announced plans to adopt such an approach. My esteemed colleagues while we can certainly debate the fairness, the utility or even the historical implications that such an approach has on us, to do so will be nothing more than an academic exercise in futility. The fact of the matter is that that train has left the station and we can either get on board and help steer it in a manner best suited to fit our needs or we will be run over by it and suffer the consequences accordingly.

Further driving the focus on accountability, performance and results is the push from accrediting bodies and employers to show proof that there is a real identifiable value accrued for students at the end of their educational programs. What is it they know, or can do, understand at the end of their educational experiences with us? Secondly, what are we prepared to do to make their journeys fruitful, to remove any unnecessary impediments

along the journey and to provide support in the areas of void and under preparedness?

The final set of issues facing higher education institutions are the quest for more innovation and the use of technology. Again, the interconnectedness between and among these two issues and those already mentioned (accessibility, affordability, accountability, performance and results) is complex and has elicited vigorous debate about how best to proceed in integrating these approaches in the higher education arena. My position is simply this. No matter what your individual view is about the effectiveness of strategies supporting innovative learning delivery models and the use of technology in higher education, the fact remains that these are a central driving force in the academy. It seems to me that the debate should be framed not around whether or not we align our institutions with these trends, but how best to do this so that they support what we feel best fits our respective institutional missions and the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. This diversity, I must hasten to say includes not only issues of race, ethnicity and gender, but a wide range of different demographics (i.e., adult learners, individuals with disability, veterans, international students, etc.).

A recent report from the Whitehouse on the future of higher education reforms notes the “need for more innovation, the need to strengthen the teaching profession and the need to promote partnerships with business and industry”. Among the 15 innovations to watch for identified by Steven Mintz in a July 2013 article in the Chronicle of Higher Education are such things as e-advising, evidence based pedagogy, web enhanced and blended classes, increased student engagement in online learning, to name just a few. The accelerated availability of MOOCs, interest from non-U.S. residents to access to our educational programs, to the plethora of for profit institutions, all reflect the “here to stay” use of technology in the delivery of higher education programs. This does not lessen the debate on the best use of these technological platforms, it is simply a caution that we either get in front of the technology move and steer it to best fit our needs and that of our students or we will likely find ourselves outpaced by those who do.

So, what has/is Albany State University doing to address the issues peppering the higher education landscape? By adopting the theme “Access, Progress and Success: It’s Everybody’s Business” we have created a platform for several initiatives that link and directly support attention to this theme by ASU.

First, we have done this through our Strategic Plan and the value proposition upon which it was established and from which the plans four major goals emanate. As you know, our Vision Statement is that “By 2017 Albany State University will be known for its: Diverse, academically focused campus; Discovery, learning, and teaching; Community and global prominence; Operational Effectiveness and agility and Centers of Excellence”. In furtherance of achieving this vision the plan identifies four (4) goals which will frame our operational plan and commensurate activities.

Goal 1 is creating an environment that nurtures academically focused learners from diverse backgrounds.

The strategies used to support this goal focus on improving accessibility and performance outcomes for both onsite and online learning as well as creating a platform for global learning.

Goal 2 is excellence in discovery, learning, teaching and the use of technology.

Strategies supporting this goal include creating a culture of discovery and opportunities for all stake holders and transforming the learning culture to align with student success.

Goal 3 is leadership in community and global partnerships and service.

Here, the requisite strategies identified include preparing our students to succeed in a global world by involvement in structured experiences such as study abroad and exposure to world language and cultures.

Goal 4 is to create a workforce that collaboratively achieves operational efficiency, effectiveness and agility.

This fourth goal includes strategies designed to more efficiently use technology in our daily operations and to adopt environmentally friendly policies and practices. It will require a major paradigm shift in how we view ourselves and our units interacting with each other and our students. Abandonment of strict allegiance to hierarchical relations will need to be embraced in favor of teams of cross unit participants and in which leadership is project performance based rather than driven by role or title. This is an important point and I will return to it shortly.

Facilitating the achievement of these goals is the development of four Centers of Excellence; one of which is aligned with each goal. These centers are the Center for Social Justice, the Center for Innovation, the Center for Community Engagement and the Center for Process Improvement. As you juxtapose the elements of ASU's strategic plan with the aforementioned issues facing higher education a clear nexus emerges.

The second initiative undertaken by ASU to address the issues impacting higher education institutions, as well as to move us forward in implementing the four (4) goals of our strategic plan occurred at a recent retreat where the executive team and key unit heads spent several days looking at how to begin implementation of critical activities needed in this regard. The resulting deliberations created what are called SMART Action Plans; that is plans which are Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound. These SMART Action Plans were developed to address both the goals of the strategic plan and goals inherent in the theme for this conference Access (recruitment), Progress (retention/persistence) and Success (graduation). The goal of Service was added to the framework of the SMART Action Plans to further strengthen outcomes of the plans and their alignment with the four (4) Centers of Excellence.

Unit heads were charged with incorporating these SMART Action Plans into their annual operational plans and of ensuring that individuals in their respective units understand what must be accomplished in the short and long term. The expectation is that your unit head will first share the plan with you, identify what your role will be in its implementation and regularly include a discussion of the progress being made in implementation of the SMART action plans.

A third important initiative which ASU is moving forward on is the finalization of our 2013 Status Report to the Board of Regents on actions planned in support of the Complete College Georgia (CCG) Program. I suspect that most of you are far more familiar with this initiative than I am as it has been underway since 2012. The CCG plan adopted for ASU identifies three (3) specific academic goals under the broad categories of retention and graduation, along with a set of five (5) implementation strategies.

The goals for ASU's Complete College Georgia Plan are:

1. Reduce midterm and final grade academic deficiencies by 2% per year over the next 5 years;
2. Increase ASU's retention rate to 70% by 2017; and
3. Increase ASU's graduation rate to 45% by 2017

Dr. Girmsley's session will provide more detail on the CCG plan.

The five implementation strategies identified in the ASU plan include: developing partnerships , improving college access and retention through specific recruitment and retention efforts, shortening the time it takes for students to complete degree requirements by adjusting/ expanding instructional delivery modes to meet the needs of specific targeted student populations, restructuring the availability and quality of instructional delivery through enhanced online course offerings, and finally transforming our approach to remediation by shifting the focus of how we view Learning Support away from a model based on remediation to one focused on providing supplemental instruction for all students. Much of this will require action at the level where students interact with faculty and our academic support units. The overarching goal will be to change patterns, policies and approaches that do not support the goals of CCGP and replace them with those which do.

In addition to providing regular status updates on our progress in attaining these goals, we will be creating a Dashboard which will be posted on our website reflecting comparative data in the areas of retention (progress) and graduation (success) rates. Such transparency aligns nicely with the need to address higher education issues of accountability, performance and results. Such a Dashboard also aligns with President Obama's directive

that institutions consider the use of College Scorecards which provide a source of comparative performance data for those parents and students considering enrollment in a particular institution. I had the pleasure in 2007-08 of serving on a task force with the Association of Public Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the Association of State Colleges and Universities (ASCU) charged with developing just such a system. We developed what started out as the Voluntary System of Accountability and ultimately was changed to College Portrait. The member institutions of both organizations adopted use of this in an effort to show more accountability and to provide readily identifiable clarity in performance measures.

The third and final initiative underway at ASU in response to the current demands and expectations facing higher education institutions is perhaps the most daunting. As many of you know, we are expected to submit an updated 5th Year Compliance Report and Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) Impact Report to the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 2014. This will require that we prepare what amounts to an abbreviated compliance report with accompanying evidence in support of and to document what we argue shows that we are indeed in compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*. To do so with the full integrity expected by SACS, we will need to revitalize the Institutional Effectiveness System in place when we were last reaffirmed in 2008. Of most importance, is that we will also need to collect and systematically organize and document assessment data for both program outcomes and student learning outcomes. Not only must we collect organize and document that assessment has been ongoing, we must show that the data is used to make changes to our academic programs and degree curricula.

To this end, we will be taking several actions. We will ask the Colleges and academic programs to use the Academic Program Reviews conducted last year to develop annual action plans designed to address the findings of these reports. Second, we will be asking some of you to serve on teams alongside of members from the Accreditation Leadership Team and to serve as writers and/or reviews of our compliance responses. Third, we will be inviting your service on one of the several committees under our “revitalized” Institutional Effectiveness (IE) System. These initiatives present a clear indication of how and why ASU must position itself going forward.

As I have begun to wrap my arms around the enormous tasks ahead of us, two thoughts come to mind. First, is the answer to a somewhat dated metaphor, How do you eat an elephant? With the answer being “one bite at a time.” The other is the need to use the well-worn cliché; All hands on Deck. These thoughts lead me to my last two points: the initial elements of the operational vision I will use as I humbly serve as your Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and finally what I will need and expect from you.

When I interviewed for this position I indicated that one of the guiding ideas by which I framed my administrative and leadership philosophy was the notion of high performing organizations. I have been quite interested in the characteristics of such organizations, especially as they relate to those in the public and nonprofit sectors. Much of what is written about HPOs focuses on those in the private sector. My contention is that effective organizational operations ought not to be limited to the business sector and if one understands the tremendous impact that public and nonprofit organizations have on society and the quality of life therein, the case for adopting such characteristics is logical. So for me, some of characteristics of public HPOs are: proactivity in addressing the resolution of internal and external threats; accountability; transparency; effective two-way communication; a culture which respects and values differences; collaboration as a key value; commitment to continuous quality improvement; customer/client focused; use of data and metrics; innovation and risk taking; appreciation for policy, procedures and protocol balanced by a willingness to be flexible and adaptable; focus on results/outcomes; use of best practices, demonstrable commitment to the importance of human capital and efforts to manage and influence relationships with outside organizations (partnerships). These are just a few of the characteristics I see as important to creating and sustaining a HPO. I have structured my leadership and administrative style to promote movement towards an institution which operationally is a High Performing Organization. What then can you expect from me and my vision for ASU as we move to implement the initiatives previously noted? I will strive to break down silos within the institution which inhibit collaboration. I will exhibit and expect a culture where we value differences and respect for others. In approaching problems, I will steer the conversation away from what we can't do to what we can do. I will champion innovation and “out of the box” thinking. I will respond to conversations reflecting “that's the way

we have always done” it to well what if we did it differently. I will use data, logic and rationality in making decisions and expect the same of others. I will discourage the use of randomness and happenstance and encourage that it be replaced with structure and procedure. I will promote and encourage professional development as a reflection of the value of human capital. I will promote the use of cost effectiveness and efficiency through encouraging economies of scale. It is my contention that by approaching my role here in this context we will be able to successfully “eat the elephant one bite at a time” and in addition to using best practices in higher education, it is my vision that ASU will become known as a model (a best practice institution, if you will) used by others in higher education to address issues of accessibility, affordability, accountability, student retention, persistence and graduation, in the effective use of technology and as a bastion of innovativeness and a results centered institution.

Let me now move into the last topic of my remarks which will focus on what is needed to achieve the specific things I have outlined and the broader goal of establishing Albany State University as A High Performing Organization (HPO). I am certain that as I talked about the characteristics of HPOs and the leadership culture and climate I will pursue in that regard, there were some of you who probably were thinking “apparently she does not know ASU” or others of you might have thought “noble ideas, Edmond-good luck with that”. Let me assure you that I know what I’ve outlined for us will not be an easy or overnight accomplishment. I also, know that there are some of you who by your very nature such a discussion has you thinking about how to stymie achievement of the characteristics pursued for an HPO or the activities necessary in pursuit of the our SACS 5TH Year Compliance Report, our strategic plan or our Complete College Georgia Plan. As I’ve reminded some of you in our individual discussions I have been in administration for the best part of 30 years and in a wide range of organizational settings. To put it bluntly, this is not my first rodeo. I know how organizations operate and how areas of dysfunction can destroy and impede progress. But I also, know that the vast majority of people in organizations want to see them succeed and prosper. ASU is no different than any other in that regard. So I enter this process with my eyes wide open. Understanding that resistance will occur and not everyone will be on board at the outset. The challenge for me is to create an organizational climate where you want to be on board. But it is really much, much bigger than that. It is truly not about me, or the members of the Executive Cabinet, the Deans or the chairs, or the faculty or staff. It’s about two

things, the students and the future of Albany State University. When we say that access, progress and success is everybody's business that is not just a jazzy cliché; it is a statement of purpose and direction. At a recent SACS Conference I attended a few weeks ago, one of the speakers made one of the most profound statements I have heard in a long time. She said, and I paraphrase, "if we in higher education contend that we have legitimate authority to determine how students are educated and to determine the educational environment in which they will pursue their educational dreams, then we have a requisite obligation, indeed a duty, to ensure that learning occurs and that they have a conducive environment in which learning can occur". Education is not a privilege, it is a fundamental right and those of us who are the "gatekeepers" to the access of learning (note the shift from teaching to learning), are obligated to facilitate that end. The threat to ASU is not imagined it is real and we must individually and collectively be a contributor and not a detractor. If you sense a level of passion in me this morning you are on point. What I challenge each of us to do is to make a commitment this year to personally help ASU navigate the challenges we face. I have a very, very personal agenda that wakes me in the morning and sometimes keeps me up at night. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to ASU and the foundation it provided for me some 40 plus years ago. I was nurtured, I was challenged, I was encouraged and I was prepared for a future for which at the time I had no real sense would emerge. So, to be able to serve ASU and to contribute to its sustainability and viability is why I am here today and why I will work as hard as I can for as long as you will allow me to move ASU forward. I need your help in ensuring that we are assessing student learning outcomes and using them to improve the curriculum and our degree programs. I need your help in getting on the front lines of helping to retain our students, and removing barriers to their successful completion. I need your help in improving customer service both for our students and with each other. I need your help in pushing the ASU brand into the global market through the use of technology and other innovative methods that promote access, progress and success. I need your help in embracing quality improvement, accountability and results. So, as I take my seat, I leave you with this observation. Access, Success and Progress is Everybody's Business, so your charge is very simply: TO BE ABOUT THE BUSINESS, TO BE ABOUT THE BUSINESS, TO BE ABOUT THE BUSINESS.