

# **The Future We Make of It: Presidential Address**

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University**

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Legend has it that upon leaving the meeting in Philadelphia that created the new republic, Benjamin Franklin was asked: Sir, do we have a monarchy or a republic? His reply: "A republic if you can keep it!"

Dr. Payton, members of the Albany State University community, friends and supporters, I am honored and privileged to deliver brief remarks before our keynote speaker. The future of ASU, as is true for the larger republic, is in our hands. It will be what we make it.

The Chinese proverb says "may you live in interesting times". These truly are interesting times because they present both challenges and opportunities to ASU. This is a time where we finish our current strategic plan and begin a new one.

Where has ASU come in the past five years? Where is it going? How will it get there? And once there, what kind of future will we make for ourselves? These are the questions I wish to reflect upon in the brief time I have.

In 2006, ASU launched a strategic planning that has at its core four distinct yet interrelated goals:

1. Strengthening the historic mission and role of the University while proactively serving the diverse needs of the region and the state;
2. Using the University's intellectual resources to advance the educational, economic, social, and cultural opportunities of the citizens of Southwest Georgia;
3. Building a stronger University community by increasing customer satisfaction, improving human resource development and enhancing organizational capacity;
4. Providing and maintaining state of the art technology infrastructure that supports the University's mission and goals.

### *What occurred?*

ASU developed a new undergraduate degree in logistics and supply chain management that prepares students to enter the logistics field as fully prepared practitioners. We are designing an undergraduate degree in renewable and sustainable energy management that positions our graduates to enter the burgeoning “green economy”. On the graduate school level, ASU offers a new Masters degree in Social Work and continues to work with the Georgia Department of Children and Family Services to address the pressing problems facing the less fortunate among us.

When I arrived, ASU provided no pathways from two year colleges to here. Today, we have in place more transfer and college completion programs with colleges and universities in southwest Georgia than any other entity within the University System of Georgia. Our nursing articulation and education articulation agreements with Albany Technical College and Darton College serve as a model for recently penned copycat agreements between Bainbridge and Georgia Southwestern, and Darton College and Georgia Southwestern.

In the domain of building a stronger University community, over the past 5 years alumni giving has dramatically increased and the same is true for faculty and staff giving. Young alumni have been especially open to giving back to their alma mater. Since 2007 each graduating class has given at a 100% rate to ASU at graduation. That’s right. Every single alumni of the University who has graduated since 2007, nearly 4,000 young alumni in all, have given modestly to be sure, but nonetheless, given to their alma mater. That giving pattern will continue over time as these graduates establish themselves financially.

Recently, I made the decision to re-energize our efforts to offer Presidential Scholarships to Georgia’s best and brightest students who wish to attend ASU. When Dr. Billy Black created the Presidential Scholars program and when Dr. Portia Shields expanded it, both understood clearly that presidential scholarships are investments that reap dividends not only in years to come but during the years those young scholars are on campus because bright students attract other bright students.

ASU also has improved our University’s commitment to customer satisfaction by focusing with laser-like intensity on process improvement. Since January 2010, mission-focused teams of faculty, staff and student representatives have worked with two remarkably talented external consultants to modernize and streamline how we conduct business in recruitment, admissions, financial aid, transfer articulation, and registration.

ASU’s fourth goal called upon us to vastly improve our technology support to faculty, staff and students and to catapult the University into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as an instructional and information technology leader. Today, ASU is cited as one of the most creative HBCUs in the country with respect to instructional and information technology. Over the past three years, we spent over \$2 million in network equipment, fiber infrastructure, file servers and storage for emails and documents, and quicker internet access. More improvements are on the way.

This coming August we will complete two major construction projects on our campus; namely, expansion of our student center and dining facility as well as opening two new residence halls to accommodate 600 more students who wish to live on campus. Both construction projects, injected roughly \$38 million into the state and local economy reeling from the economic downturn. ASU students, emboldened by their own strong vision about ASU’s future, took it upon themselves to vote with their wallets and purses for a new student center that they and we believe will be a magnet for attracting new students to the ASU of the future.

### *So what shall the future of ASU be?*

Between now and December 2011, ASU will implement the final elements of our 2006-2011 strategic plans. We plan on launching a new strategic plan for 2012 thru 2017 by January 14, 2012. In September 2011, we will launch a new series of focus group discussions with community stakeholders and students toward that goal. As was true when we developed our current strategic plan, we will need the collective input from all of you to make our plan truly a University plan – not a Freeman plan – but a strategic plan for the future that reflects the hopes, dreams and aspirations of us all. We also will need to remember the sacrifices of those who have gone before as we plan ahead. To this end, we have dedicated 2011 as the year we celebrate the courage and vision of the 1961 Albany Movement participants. Fifty years ago a brave few students risked their lives and future to participate in the unfolding civil rights struggle in this country on the streets of downtown Albany. We shall not forget them.

Perhaps there could not have been a better way to launch the yearly celebration of the 1961 Albany Movement than the one initiated by our very own Miss Albany State University, Ali'Yah Arnold. Miss Arnold decided to share her October 3, 2010 coronation with Miss ASC of 1961. During her coronation, Miss Arnold restored Mrs. Annette Jones White's crown as Miss ASC for 1961. Ms. Jones lost her crown and college scholarship for her civil rights activism in 1961. Miss ASC bravely lost her crown. Miss ASU restored her crown! Please join me in saluting Miss ASU, senior scholar Ali'Yah Arnold.

Soon we will have an ASU strategic plan for 2012-2017. By 2017, China will have surpassed the United States to become the most powerful economy in the world. By 2017, the world of higher education will be considerably different than it is today. The likely persistence of high levels of unemployment in the United States and most of the western free market economies will have reshaped our view of the expected returns on a college education for not only traditional age students, but not traditional students, parents, faculty, staff and students. While my hope is that students entering ASU's Fall 2017 class will be motivated by the age-old desire to pursue higher education for the joy of learning and discovery, I fully realize that those incoming students will be far more focused on the economic as well as intellectual benefits of their time here. By 2017, students will gravitate toward those colleges and universities that can show clearly that they provide academic rigor and employment-related value. Both will be required in greater measure. HBCUs will not be exempt. ASU will not be exempt.

Each month, the Student Government Association leaders invite my Cabinet members and me to dinner. When we met at the beginning of this month, we had a blockbuster conversation about our beloved ASU. By far it was the most exciting dialogue I have ever had at ASU or at any other university in my 37 years in higher education. The student leaders told my vice presidents and me that they wanted "more". They wanted more substance, more rigor in their classrooms, more challenging expectations, more interaction with faculty and staff beyond the scheduled instructional times, more ways to connect their theoretical learning to what will await them beyond ASU, and more intellectual passion from us all. These student leaders were not criticizing our incredibly committed faculty or staff or administrators for what we now do so well. They were simply saying fill their intellectual cups to the brim. Indeed, fill them to overflowing.

The SGA leaders told me that they and their like-minded classmates - growing in numbers by the day - were perfectly willing to stand resolute behind faculty members who demand that students come to class on time, prepared, and are willing to do their best. These leaders were clear that grades should be earned and not given. They were equally firm in stating that ASU cannot be and will not be a place where student imposters come merely for the refund check or an inviting place to live during troubling economic times.

In the Winter 2011 issue of *The American Scholar*, William M. Chace suggests affirmative action's last chance in higher education may be with the wealthiest private colleges and universities because of the shrinking numbers of minority students at America's public universities. Chace suggests that these wealthy colleges and universities essential buy up the best and brightest students of color whom public colleges and universities are struggling to recruit because of budget tightening.

I don't buy it. You may be able to buy entering students through a bidding war but you cannot keep them if they know you do not care. What ASU is able to offer students is priceless; namely, a better value proposition. What is that better value proposition? An environment of cultural and intellectual freedom to learn in communities of fellow knowledge-seekers who believe education is for eventual service to others and not simply a consumer good like a coat or an Ipad. The academe is not and cannot become an educational haven for the wealthy or an escape from the challenges the future will present.

As Dr. Payton will show so masterfully in his keynote address this evening, HBCUs never have allow the lack of wallet to get in the way of will and determination. Since 1903, ASU has set its sight on preparing the sons and daughters of those born beneath the veil of racism and all others who wish seek an education to find within our halls an intellectual docking station as well as future launching pad. A place where it is all right to ask the important questions of what it means to be a human being as well as what it means to be professionally successful. ASU will long remain a place where a student may discover her voice as she write across the curriculum and across the stars...A place where the echoes of the past whisper still.

Our Future is bright and squarely within our hands. We will seize it!..... Facing the rising sun of a new day begun, let us march on 'til victory is won!

The symposium's theme is ***“The Past, Present and Future: The Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Higher Education.”***

Our keynote speaker is the former leader of one of the nation's most storied institutions of higher education: Tuskegee University.

Dr. Benjamin F. Payton served as the fifth President of Tuskegee University. He led Tuskegee for 28 years from its centennial year, 1981, through 2009. Dr. Payton – known for inspiring audiences world-wide with lectures on the power of courage, industry and personal accountability to transform – led an amazing transformation at Tuskegee. Under his leadership, Tuskegee Institute became Tuskegee University in 1985 and established or enhanced many programs as part of its mission to provide teaching, research, and service to the community and to the world.

Dr. Payton guided the university as it added two doctoral programs – Materials Science, and Engineering and Integrative Biosciences. During his tenure, more than \$300 million was invested in student scholarships and campus infrastructure. The University's endowment grew from \$15 million to more than \$102 million. In addition, the General Daniel "Crappie" James Center for Aerospace Engineering and Health Education, the National Center for Bioethics in Research and Health Care, and the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center were constructed. Also under Dr. Payton's leadership the Tuskegee University School of Veterinary Sciences became the nation's number-two producer of African-American veterinarians and still maintains that ranking today.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Benjamin Franklin Payton....