

Prairie View A&M University

Digital Commons @PVAMU

President Emeritus George C. Wright Speeches

Office of the President

8-18-2004

Performing Our Roles of Teaching and Serving in an Era of Accountability: An Imperative for Each of Us

George C. Wright

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pvamu.edu/president-emeritus-george-c-wright>

Theme

Performing Our Roles of Teaching and Serving in an Era of Accountability: An Imperative for Each of Us

Good Morning. I want to welcome all of you to this program. I hope you are excited about the start of a new school year.

Special words of welcome to a person who is a friend of mine, Dr. Jeanne Gerlach, Dean of the School of Education, and Vice Provost for K-16 Programs at the University of Texas at Arlington.

The Theme of this Year's Program is very important:

On Monday of this week, I met with the Administrators of this University. My topic, was “Accountability,” that as Administrators, we have great jobs, great opportunities to make a difference, but there are some things that we simply must do, that we have no choice in the matter. **We must be held accountable.** I made the statement: “At PVAMU, more than any University I have been affiliated with, there are far too many Administrators, Professional Staff, Classified Staff, and Faculty who do not understand that they being held “accountable” on their jobs.”

I asked them a rather direct and simple question: do they appreciate the job that they have at PVAMU? What are they doing to keep their jobs, to enhance their job, and then put themselves in a position to “move to an even better job” whether here at PVAMU or at another institution? I am now raising the same question with all of you. To be completely candid with you, I have my doubts about some of you who are in staff positions and some of you who are faculty.

During my presentation, I also touched on the following:

1. That all of us should be optimistic and excited, not just because it is the start of a new school year, but because of the numerous “successes” we have to build on. There are so many great things occurring here at PVAMU and we need to sustain them. And, very importantly, we need to tell our story. (Mention the Texas Monthly piece and my conversation yesterday with the Editor; hope I did not cost my wife her job).
2. More importantly, I shared with the Administrators my Philosophical Views of Leadership; my goals as President, such things as (1) increasing the overall number, quality, and diversity of our students.
3. Then I discussed student behavior and our expectations. We are going to make sure that our students handle their monies appropriately by not spending huge amounts on programs and above all “bad speakers” and entertainers.
4. But the majority of my presentation centered around challenging everyone in an Administrative position at PVAMU to do a better job than they did last year. We must set good examples, we must mentor the people who report to us; by our actions, we must demonstrate that we support the goals and values of the institution, and that we care about many things that impact the overall well-being of our students, staff, and faculty. I mentioned the “principle” of good customer service. I must admit that I even became “negative” or at least very candid with them when I said that you, the people who report to them, can get them fired by coming to work late or by performing poorly in the classroom.

5. I mentioned at length that inappropriate behavior will end at PVAMU. **Ending sexual harassment and other inappropriate behavior is one of the cornerstones of my academic values.** Our students, staff, and faculty must have the proper environment in which to study and work. While you might not associate sexual harassment with “race,” the way I respond to it is a by-product of my having seen people being forced to endure racial prejudice in the work place to keep their jobs. Personally, I have never been sexually harassed but I can imagine what it feels like because I know what racial harassment feels like. **Let’s be clear: anyone on this campus who engages or condones sexual harassment, racial harassment, or anything touching on these matters, not only is in violation of the law but has forfeited the right to their position.”**

6. I challenge all of you in this auditorium to come forward with instances of where you or others have been harassed on the job. In doing so, I want you to be clear about what you allege, because if you say something that is not true, that will not be tolerated. But, understand me, just because it is “your word versus his word” or something to that effect does not mean that a person will get off. I am deadly serious. I realize that people do not always get along; I realize that problems occur on the job or in the classroom, **but I am convinced that we can end all vestiges of inappropriate behavior on this campus, by students and by all employees.** Let me conclude on sexual harassment by stating clearly that in this area, I, as your President, am not on a “witch hunt,” I am not out to “get” anybody. But, I know how sexual harassment or inappropriate behavior even if it seems “consensual” can erode everything that an institution like this stands for. So often, it is difficult to prove because of the cunning behavior of the predator involved in this behavior. Often, when charges are made, dozens of people will come to that person’s defense, swearing that he is a person who would never act in that manner. Significantly, they are telling the truth. Why? Because this cunning individual knows who to “target,” just like lions and hyenas know which animals to target.

I have some additional challenges for you. First to the Staff. Even though you will hear me say that the “faculty are the heart of the University,” we could not exist, nor function smoothly, if you failed to do your jobs. You are often the first contact that potential students, alums, donors, and political leaders have with the University.

Faculty, what will you be doing differently this year to improve your performance in the classroom? Do you hand out a course outline on the first day of class? How many of you have your course outlines on the Web? Then, what about Student Evaluations? Do you take them seriously?

The Evaluation of Teaching

1. Did the instructor provide a syllabus? y/n
2. Was the instructor available to answer questions at the times that were designated, either in person or via email, phone, etc.? y/n
3. Where applicable, was the instructor in attendance and on time? y/n
4. Did the instructor make students aware of grading procedures? y/n
5. Was the course content as described in the syllabus and/or in the University catalogue? y/n
6. Were papers, projects, and/or exams graded and returned in a timely fashion? y/n
7. Were you able to hear and understand the instructor? y/n
8. Please review your responses to the seven (7) questions above. Overall, how would you rate the way that this instructor fulfills his/her professional responsibilities to this course?

Excellent/Very good/Good/Poor/Unacceptable

Best Teaching Practices

It has been 10 full years since I last taught a History Class at the College Level. Yet, I want to pass along some general advice to you. Nothing can substitute for being prepared, for spending time reading over the materials that you assign students and above all going over and revising your lecture notes. Need to raise new questions etc.

I will use an American History course as an example. Need a theme of the course or at the very least a title for each separate lecture. “History From the Bottom Up.” This is a “hook.” Need to arrive in class early, not late, and stay a few minutes late. Must show excitement. A key point and this applies to all courses, not just in my discipline: from the first day on, explain the significance of the course. Why should a student spend their time and money taking this class?

Conclusion

The more I think about it, I am extremely confident that at PVAMU we are going to be successful in the area of Accountability because it is a minimal goal. Instead of using the word, “Accountability,” insert something that means the same thing: **“the things that we are required to do.”** We are “required” to come to work on time; we are “required” to treat others respectfully on the job; teachers are ‘required” to teach, inspire, and challenge their students. This time next year, I want to move beyond the issue of “Accountability” and be talking about the things we need to do to become an “Institution of Excellence;” then, I want to move to the level of discussing the things we need to do to sustain “Excellence.” That is what we must aspire to here at PVAMU.