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## Campus To Council: Blending The Best Of Both Worlds

George C. Wright

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## **Campus To Council:**

### **Blending The Best Of Both Worlds**

Good Afternoon! I want to thank Cynthia Gay and the Committee for inviting me to speak at the “3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Best Practices in Building University/City Relations Conference.” It is my understanding that the purpose of this Conference is to come up with ways for Universities and Communities to work together for the mutual benefit of both, for the betterment of society.

President Murano, it is a pleasure to be here on your campus today.

It is always difficult to give a presentation when your “boss” is present; why, because one can not take credit for certain things that the boss or the people above you have actually done. **Seriously, it is an honor to work with Dr. Mike McKinney; he has a “good heart,” and cares deeply about people.**

I want to acknowledge the presence of my colleagues from PVAMU who are here today. As you will see, they are engaged in projects that line the University and the Community together.

**“Campus to Council,” is a very important endeavor. While it might sound like a cliché, it is nevertheless true: Universities are a part of the Communities where they are located.**

**Without question, the Community is a significant factor in the success of the University, especially in the area of recruiting and retaining faculty and staff.** Many people prefer living in rural or small communities and fortunately for them, many of the best colleges and universities in this country are located in these communities. By contrast, my wife and I prefer a largely urban environment. Since moving here five years ago, we have had something of an on-going debate as to whether or not we live in the city or the country, with Valerie saying that we live in the country. Give the example of the “city cows” running on the access road.

There is perhaps no topic I lecture on more than “diversity,” and yet I must admit that because of my background, there are several things “unique” to the black community that are important for me when it comes to deciding on the area where I choose to live.

The first is the church. On average, it has taken us at least 6 months to find the “right church” when moving into an area. As we look back on the place where we did not like the community, and therefore ended up living there the shortest period of time, it is the Durham-Chapel Hill area of North Carolina and it was because of the churches. The first church we visited had a “song and praise” worship service that lasted for 75 minutes, with everyone being required to stand the entire period of time. My feet hurt so badly that I had to soak them when I got home. I never returned to that church.

The second church’s entire service lasted from 11:00 to 2:30. My kids and I were worn completely out. I told my wife that we could not return there unless I carried lunch and a drink (probably hard liquor or wine) that I could consume mid-way through that church’s service!

**Another important consideration is the quality of the “black talk radio” in the area.** This gives a totally different perspective on all of the local, state, and world events. In this regard, Dallas has a distinct advantage over Houston. Example, in Dallas, there is a talk show that gives excellent advice on

Romance. The show's host explained that a serious problem in our community is that far too many black women cannot find a suitable black man to marry. He then provided some advice for women who were around 40 years old (which meant from 25-60) who wanted to become involved in a serious, meaningful, relationship that would lead to marriage. Two things: (1) ask the man about his job, if his name is printed on his shirt and that the most important question he ask is "whether or not you want your order "super sized." (2) The second question was even more important: ask him to write down his address; and then to write down, on a separate piece of paper, the address of his Mother. If they are the same, then, unfortunately, you had to end that relationship immediately!

Yesterday, on Houston Radio, there was a sports talk show hosted by a black man, and topic of conversation was whether or not "Tiger Woods is the most mentally tough athlete ever." People called in saying that their jobs, as craftsmen, waiters, etc., were tougher than Woods' job. The host almost lost it, saying I am talking about in sports! Then a person called in saying that all Tiger has to do is walk around carrying a stick and on occasion attempt to hit a ball in a hole. Then another said that golf was not really a sport anyway, ranking slightly above badminton but below yard croquet!

But, more important than the church or talk radio is the presence of a black barbershop. Going there you get information on everything, not just world affairs. If you have never been to a black barbershop and would like to have that experience, and you are not black, get one of your black friends to take you there (carry lunch because it will be a long wait) and just listen. In fact, Cynthia Gay, I have a suggestion for you for one of next year's topics: get a black barber from this area to give a presentation. He could talk about "The 'Real' Black Community: My Perspective on Texas A&M and The Black Community from Operating A Business In the Hood for 40 Years!"

### **Formal Relationships**

**Key Point:** There are numerous examples of **Universities and Communities working together** For instance, the primary reason why Land Grant Colleges came into existence in the 1800s was to assist the citizens, the Community, if you will.

**As an Historian, I can tell you that the concept of the University being involved with the Community, helping the local citizens in various ways, is not new.** Primary research in disciplines such as Anthropology and Sociology began during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with researchers going into the community to conduct interviews. Pioneering work of W.E.B. DuBois at Atlanta University. Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy. Very important work conducted by the School of Social Work at the University of Chicago for almost a century.

This has continued down to our day with the University Medical Schools working in the communities to prevent the spread of diseases, and to make the citizens aware of best health practices.

A very interesting project is being conducted by Brown University: “Committee on Slavery and Justice.” Mention some specifics, such as working with the public schools of Providence, Rhode Island, and providing scholarships to African-American students.

**Briefly, I want to mention the activities of PVAMU.** We have a program with the City of PV that is called simply, “College and Community Relations.” The most important feature is the development of the Communi-versity which is a City and University Planning Committee. This committee has worked collaboratively on submitting grants for infrastructure improvements, housing development, service-learning, and plans for a new city park.

Another activity involving the University and the city is “The Community Clean Up,” which has resulted in the improvement of several areas in the city. The “brain child” of Vice President Laretta Byars, the success of this program over the years has led to an increasing number of requests for our students to make a difference in the local community in which we reside.

**Indeed, very important at PVAMU is Service-Learning, where we promote civic engagement by extending academic learning from the classroom into service for the community.**

### **My Activities**



**I want to give “A Challenge” to all of you here today: if you have been assisted in any way by either your Community or University, then you have a responsibility to be involved in making both of them better. One of my favorite Bible talks about “Sowing and Reaping.”**

**Key Point: I have always understood the value of this “blending,” of the Community and the University working together.** Virtually everywhere in the South where Civil Rights Activities occurred, there were community activists and college students joining hands to bring about changes for Afro-Americans. Such was the case in my hometown in the late 1950s and through the decade of the 1960s.

In fact, it was local citizens, both white and black, UK Administrators, and Staff, largely volunteering their time, that opened the University of Kentucky to me. First mention having been “gawked” at in 1962. But the key would be the program in honor of MLK in 1968. At the same time, people in the Lexington community “demanded” that the University provide equal employment opportunities to all citizens.

My sense of “Community” motivated me in part to obtain the Ph.D.: (1) I wanted to enlighten everyone about black contributions; (2) I wanted to be a Lexington black, who obtained an education and who was employed at UK. As late as 1977, there were no more than 3 or 4 on the faculty and none from Lexington. From 1977-80, I gave presentations everywhere, especially in churches and public schools.

I moved to Austin, and continued working in the community. I developed a lecture on “Race Relations in Texas.” My scholarship played a role on black voting rights, housing discrimination and the Criminal Justice System. Served on a hospital board.

I had a dream come true in 1993: an offer to teach at Duke University. Once there, I encountered poor race relations, with blacks calling Duke, “The Plantation.” I served on Committee at my daughter’s high school, and I quickly understood why many blacks were “offended” by my comments.

Even from North Carolina, I was involved in a Texas Project: The Hopwood Case: I wrote a special report on the “Desegregation of Higher Education in Texas” and testified in court.

Over the last 10 years, my focus has been on K-16, lecturing on “The Value of an Education.”

### **Conclusion**

**“Campus to Council” is a “two way street that truly benefits both.** Yes, the University benefits, especially in the area of diversity. The activities of the Community benefits the University: led to many changes and is often the partners in attracting industry, and above all the state funds needed to run the University. Indeed, once the partnership is in place, the citizens will work with elected officials to ensure increased funding and new programs for the University.

**My final example is another illustration of how working together pays off for both the Town and the University. Mention carrying my Reading List to Cy Fair High School.**

**His going to College benefits both.**

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**This is a very important endeavor. While it might sound like a cliché, it is nevertheless true: Universities are a part of the communities where they are located.** As you know from first hand experiences, those of you who are affiliated with a particular University as Administrators, Faculty, or Staff, live in the community located near the University.

The same is often true for students as well since most of them come from distances away, and end up living in the town where their College is located for the greater portion of the year. And, some students stay at home, meaning that they live, work part-time jobs, and go to church in the community, and upon graduating, many of them will settle in the community where they had actually lived already for four or five years.

For all of us, an important consideration when seeking a job is the Community where the University is located, schools for our children, cultural and recreational activities, the church, and for me, the type of barbershop in the Afro-American Community!

### **Formal Relationships**

**Key Point: There are numerous examples of Universities and Communities working together** For instance, the primary reason why Land Grant Colleges came into existence in the 1800s was to assist the citizens, the Community, if you will.

As an Historian, I can tell you that the concept of the University being involved with the Community, helping the local citizens in various ways, is not new. Primary research in disciplines such as Anthropology and Sociology began during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with researchers going into the community to conduct interviews. Pioneering work of W.E.B. DuBois at Atlanta University. Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy. Very important work conducted by the School of Social Work at the University of Chicago for almost a century.

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**Indeed, very important at PVAMU is Service-Learning, where we promote civic engagement by extending academic learning from the classroom into service for the community.**

Some examples of service learning at PVAMU include:

- A faculty member in the School of Architecture assisted his students in developing a feasibility study for the City of PV to consider the type of businesses that would be most successful in the area.
- Various faculty provide tutoring and mentoring services at Jones Elementary School.
- One professor partnered with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Collegiate Marketing and Recruitment Program to give her students the chance to develop and execute their own marketing campaign while addressing the recruitment needs of the FBI. Her students created a student-run marketing agency, called the Panther Innovative Productive Agency, to research, develop, implement, and evaluate a recruitment campaign for the FBI.
- A faculty in the College of Business prepared his students to do marketing research, financial analysis, inventories and preparing business plans for clients of the Small Business Development Center SBDC.



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An article by the President of Virginia Commonwealth University, in the Chronicle of Higher Education, May 16, 2008, is entitled, “Even in Hard Times, Colleges Should Help Their Communities.” He says,

“As the knowledge economy becomes more sophisticated, the country’s towns, cities, and regions need more of everything that universities have to offer, be it students who are well trained for jobs, scientific expertise, medical skills to provide trauma and other health care, vibrant arts events and performances, or the cultural and historical understandings that enable a community to negotiate its differences and potential tensions more productively. Put simply, universities are becoming indispensable partners in almost every major activity in which society is engaged.”

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