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President Emeritus George C. Wright Speeches

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8-2008

### **"Quality Without Compromise."**

George C. Wright

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The theme of this year's conference is very important: **"Quality Without Compromise."** I very much like this theme: quality represents "class" to me, and I want everything that I do and everything that I am part of to have "class."

I have decided to start with the question, "Why Am I Doing This?" Asking this very simple question has been something that I have done periodically throughout my life: why did I decide to go to the University of Kentucky? Why did I decide to get married? Why did I want to be a faculty member? Why did I aspire to be an Administrator? Indeed, as President, I did not sign on to do reports; I did not want to be President so that I could get up at 4:00 in the morning, drive to Austin, wait all day at the State Capitol to give less than 5 minutes of testimony.

I wanted to be in the position to (1) challenge students, faculty, and staff to reach new heights; (2) I wanted to be in this position because I have insights into solving problems; (3) because I know how to bring people who disagree together; (4) because through my example people would know that they can reach their goals; and (5) above all, because I can "inspire" people. It is no coincidence that every year at the Student Assembly I have a student sing, "I Believe I Can Fly."

*I love my job, & I hope you feel that way about your job. It allows me to be the "real me," to not just inspire but to "uplift" through humor. Something humors about the Provost id my talk.*

**While I as President can play an important role in the success of this University, ultimately it is you, the faculty and staff, who are “the key” to the success of this University. Why: because you are where “the rubber meets the road.”** Students interact with you. We have made some progress toward the goal of providing excellent, first class, service to everyone who makes contact with this University.

We are doing a better job than previously in helping our students reach their academic goals; yet much more needs to be done in this area, **and indeed, we have uncovered a major problem: we must help students make progress after their first year here.**

**Key Point: I want to challenge all of you to mentor a student this year, to take someone “under your wing.”** Help retain at least one student; or help at least one student reach new and higher goals. If you do this, can you imagine the impact you will have on that person’s life?

I want to share something about my career as a Professor. It has been 15 years since I last taught a history class at UT, yet, virtually every month I hear from a former student. *Bill & Emily on Sunday mornings.* This week, I had lunch with a student and her husband. Mention the number who work as Legislative aids. Mention David Enloe and the things that he has done for PVAMU. **You can have the same impact by mentoring students.** *Students are married because of me !!!*

Here is something that I have given a great deal of thought to: far too many of our students are not aware of the positives outcomes of attending this University; they have no real clue just how much their investment will pay off. I love playing with numbers and I am in process of calculating the total final investment of my education, of the cost involved in my getting the B.A., and M.A. Degrees from the University of Kentucky, and the Ph.D. from Duke, versus the total amount I have “earned” during my working career; why? to illustrate to our students the “pay off” of their investment. And, as you well know, the real payoff is not in dollars and ~~cents~~ <sup>cents</sup> but that you will be able to make a difference in the lives of your family and society.

Here is what we must do:

1. We need to help them become aware of the “end” results. Not knowing this is probably the reason so many of our students willingly short-circuit their careers. By contrast, take the situation regarding a young female, say ages 12-15, and her parents, who have been told that she could become a tennis star, a gymnast, or an Olympic swimmer, but she needs to do a number of things. If a young male aspires to be a professional athlete, he will make the necessary sacrifices. **Why not make the same type of sacrifices to obtain an education?**

2. **Key: Students must “Keep Their Eyes On The Prize.”** Think of the things that MLK endured but because he was clear of the goals and even of the final outcome he succeeded.
3. **Students, before doing things that can be harmful, destructive, or criminal, need to ask the question “Is it ‘worth’ it”?** Think about one of our students being dismissed, never to return, because he got into a fight. Then, fast-forward 20 years later when his teenage kid wants something and the parent cannot afford it, all because he decided to get into a fight or whatever.
4. **Very important: as our students pursue their education, and even after obtaining it, they must be clear on their “moral compass.”** How do they respond when peers encourage them to lie, cheat, steal, use drugs, or have sex?
5. **An important aspect of our students maturing is that they must respect other people and themselves.** At an HBCU, all of us need to take the “N” word out of our vocabulary. We need to take all of the derogatory terms about whites, Hispanics, Jews, and Muslims out as well. We most surely need to take the “B” word out our vocabulary. And we need to quit referring to gays and lesbians in a disrespectful manner.

Let me give you a final thought to share with our students: tell them that when they fail to do their best and to act appropriately, it is akin to their gambling with a million dollars that they have with someone who has only one dollar. They have everything in the world to lose and nothing to gain when failing to get everything that PVAMU has to offer them.

### Major University Goal for 2008-09

I will be brief here on the "orders" of the Provost. That is akin to a chicken taking advice from Col. Sanders!!!

A very important University goal for 2008-09: we are now gearing up for the massive re-accreditation process required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). In May, the senior administrative team spent a day at a SACS orientation program where we learned a great deal about the expected outcomes and of the requirement to begin implementing a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). We interacted with the person who has been assigned to us. Since returning, we have been informed by SACS that the on-campus visit has been scheduled for March 2010. Under the best of circumstances, even with everyone working in concert, this massive, comprehensive, re-accreditation process is costly, time consuming, and often very frustrating. Yet, at the same time, through developing the QEP that is appropriate for PVAMU, we can chart a course for the future of this University, something I have been committed to doing since assuming the Presidency in August 2003.

**What type of institution should PVAMU “be” in the future to ensure that it is viable and productive?** It is not enough for PVAMU to rest on its history, to say that it is an HBCU and therefore it is unique. We must define and chart its course and make some decisions about priorities.

PVAMU is now at a critical juncture with the introduction of new academic programs. **Should these programs, especially at the M.A. and Ph.D. levels, be expanded or should we devote more resources to programs and course offerings at the undergraduate level?** It is important to keep in mind that PVAMU despite being 132 years old is still an “emerging University.”

The University has more than 8,300 students. What steps need to be enacted to move to the next level, i.e., 12,000 students? What would it mean to be a University of that size?



Currently, PVAMU attracts primarily Afro-Americans. Why not more whites, Hispanics, and international students?

Regardless of race are PVAMU students equipped for the world they will enter beyond this University? How do our graduates compare with those from other HBCUs? With graduates from predominantly white universities?

**Given our legacy, resources, potential, what should be our “signature” programs? Indeed, at present, what is unique (special) about PVAMU?**

**Key Point:** These questions lead to our possible QEP Topic: **“The PVAMU Experience.”** The goal is to enhance the degree and above all the educational experience of PVAMU students and alums.

An aspect of the QEP will be an assessment of our students. Who are they? What is their educational background prior to entering PVAMU? Should PVAMU become more selective?

Flowing from there, the QEP needs to examine student retention and success. What are the three or four programs or steps that will lead to improvements in this area?

The QEP needs to assess both our strong and weak academic programs. What programs need to be enhanced; and just as important, what academic programs need to be eliminated? Indeed, this is the occasion to determine whether or not PVAMU should re-institute an Honor's College, initiate an Afro-American Studies Program, and expand its cultural and intellectual activities. Decisions need to be made whether to expand graduate offerings both on and off campus.

The role of Athletics must be examined. Indeed, given that a likely outcome of the QEP is the recommendation to expand select academic offerings, then what about Athletics when considering that there could be competition for limited resources?

~~Fund raising in both areas will be essential, and an important first step regarding Athletics was taken last week in meeting with you about the PVAMU Foundation.~~

**Key Point:** all of you must be involved in the SACs re-accreditation process.

## Conclusion

### **Presentation by Chancellor Mike McKinney.**

We share a lot in common: married young, value of family; view on mentoring; value of PVAMU to the higher education pipeline. He has a good heart, he deeply cares about people.

Very important, he has created a teaching award program that will start this Fall.

Bio . B.A. Univ of Houston. MD from UT Medical Branch at Galveston

Elected official from 1984 to 1991.

Served as Chief of Staff for Governor Perry.

Various leadership positions in the UT system.

Named Chancellor on Nov 22, 2006.

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