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Presentation to Students

George C. Wright

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Presentation to Students

September 3, 2008

Welcome to the new school year. I am always excited when school starts; this is a new beginning, and I have many things that I want to accomplish.

I have two purposes in speaking to you this morning: (1) I want to say something that will help all of you have a better understanding of the life-long value of your education. (2) I want my remarks, my speech to “inspire you.” I love the song, “I Believe I Can Fly,” because of its words. Let me share another song title that I love, and this one is truly “Old School.” **It comes from the great Quincy Jones’ 1976 album, “I Heard That!! It is entitled, “What Good Is A Song.”** Some of the lyrics are “What good is a song if it can’t soothe you; What good is a song if it can’t move you; What good is a song if can’t inspire you, if it has no message to bring; if it cannot send you higher, higher, higher, then it’s not good enough to sing.” That is how I feel about my message to you!

Key Point: I believe that far too many students—one student would be one too many--are not aware of the possible outcomes from attending this University; they don't understand just how much their investment in an education will pay off.

You must be fully aware of the “end” results. Not knowing this is probably the reason some students willingly short-circuit their careers. By contrast, take the situation of 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 to reach this goal she needs to do a number of things; she and her family would do these 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?**

1. **Key: Students must “Keep Their Eyes On The Prize.”** Think of the things that MLK endured because he was clear of the goals and even of the final outcome. How do you respond when you encounter a problem with your roommate, with Financial Aid, with your Professor? What do you do when you have a crisis in your personal or family life?

- 2. As a young person, who is seeking an education and attempting to find your way in this world, you must believe in yourself. That is why I love the song, “I Believe I Can Fly.”**

Let me tell you about myself: I have always been goal oriented and I have always been willing to work hard. **I am not smart.**

Indeed, I am always struck when I encounter people who are gifted, smart, and don't have to work hard to reach their goals.

All of you can emulate me.

- 3. Students, before doing things that can be harmful, destructive, or criminal, you need to ask the question “Is it ‘worth’ it”?**

Think about one of our students being dismissed, never to return, because he/she got into a fight. Then, fast-forward 20 years

when their child wants something and the parent cannot afford it,

all because he/she decided to get into a fight or whatever.

Let me state this another way: when you fail to do your best and to act appropriately, it is akin to your gambling with a million dollars that you have with someone else who has only one dollar. You have everything in the world to lose and nothing to gain when failing to get everything that PVAMU has to offer.

4. **Very important: as you pursue your education, and even after obtaining it, you must be clear on your “moral compass.”** How do you respond when peers try to pressure you to lie, cheat, steal, use drugs, or have sex?

5. **An important aspect of maturing is when you respect other people and yourself. At an HBCU, all of us need to take the “N” word out of our vocabulary. We most surely need to take the “B” word out of our vocabulary as well. We need to take all of the derogatory terms about whites, Hispanics, Jews, and Muslims out as well. And we need to quit referring to gays and lesbians in a disrespectful manner.**

All of the above are things that I am challenging you to do to be successful. **At the same time, I have also “challenged” every PVAMU employee—staff, faculty, Administrator, and even our Alumni—to make a difference this school year in the life of at least one student. This can be done through mentoring. Student leaders, you must be involved in mentoring as well.** I mentor administrators, faculty, staff, and students, sharing with them how I have reached my goals, and how I respond in various situations. While I am positive in my interactions with them, I do give some “constructive criticisms.” **But above all I feel the need to “inspire” every one I come into close contact with.**

I always conclude this program by asking God to bless each and every one of you.

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In preparing to speak to you, in trying to come up with something that you can take away from this General Assembly, I have decided that far too many students—one student would be one too many--are not aware of the possible outcomes from attending this University; they don't understand just how much their investment in an education will pay off. Therefore, I want to share the following with you:

1. **You must be fully aware of the “end” results. Not knowing this is probably the reason some students willingly short-circuit their careers.** By contrast, take the situation of 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 to reach this goal she needs to do a number of things; she and her family would do these 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 because he was clear of the goals and even of the final outcome. How do you respond when you encounter a problem with your roommate, with Financial Aid, with your Professor? What do you do when you have a crisis in your personal or family life?

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As mentioned, I love the song, “I Believe I Can Fly,” because of its words. Let me share another song title that I love, and this one is truly “Old School.” **It comes from the great Quincy Jones’ 1976 album, “I Heard That!! It is entitled, “What Good Is A Song.”** Some of the lyrics of the song are “What good is a song if it can’t soothe you; What good is a song if it can’t move you; What good is a song if can’t inspire you, if it has no message to bring; if it cannot send you higher, higher, higher, then it’s not good enough to sing.” That is how I feel about my message to you!

Let me give you a final point to ponder: when you fail to do your best and to act appropriately, it is akin to your gambling with a million dollars that you have with someone else who has only one dollar. You have everything in the world to lose and nothing to gain when failing to get everything that PVAMU has to offer.

I always conclude this program by asking God to bless each and every one of you.



PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

PRESIDENT GEORGE C. WRIGHT
Encourages All Students, Faculty & Staff To Attend
FALL 2008 GENERAL STUDENT ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2008

WILLIAM J. "BILLY" NICKS FIELD HOUSE

10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

(STUDENTS ARE ASKED TO BE IN THE FIELD HOUSE BY 9:45 a.m.)

SPECIAL INCENTIVES WILL BE GIVEN TO STUDENTS WHO ATTEND
AND REMAIN FOR THE ENTIRE ASSEMBLY

**5 LUCKY STUDENTS WILL RECEIVE A \$100 BOOK VOUCHER
TO THE UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE**

STUDENTS MUST BE REGISTERED BY 10:00A.M. AND BE
PRESENT TO WIN.

CLASSES RELEASED: 9:30 a.m.
(Faculty who are in class "should" accompany their students to the assembly!)

CLASSES RESUME: NOON

All Services (i.e. bookstore, financial aid, food services, etc.) will be
closed during the Assembly.

Please contact the Office for Academic Affairs (x 2175) for additional information.

For assistance with disabilities please call ext. 3583.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

A Member of the Texas A&M University System

August 27, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Academic Deans, Directors, Department Heads, Faculty and Staff

FROM: E. Joahanne Thomas-Smith, Ed. D. 
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs

RE: Fall 2008 General Student Assembly

President George C. Wright will meet the PVAMU Students in a General Student Assembly on September 3, 2008 in the William "Billy" Nicks Field House. The Assembly will begin promptly at **10:00 a.m.**

All students who are campus residents or commuters are expected to attend the assembly. Classes are to be released at 9:20 a.m. so that students can arrive at the Field House on time. Faculty members are expected to accompany their students to the assembly and, where appropriate, give students an opportunity to discuss or write their reflections on President Wright's message as well as other aspects of this annual gathering of the University Community. Our President's message will echo this year's theme, "***Quality without Compromise.***"

Students are asked to remain for the entire assembly. All auxiliary services (i.e. bookstore, financial aid, food service, etc.) will not open until the assembly ends.

To speak of increased engagement is one thing; to become a more engaged faculty, staff and student surely is another. The full participation of faculty, staff and students is a tradition in Pantherland. Let's preserve this hallmark of institutional quality and success.

xc: Dr. George C. Wright
Dr. Willie F. Trotty
Dr. Laurreta Byars
Mrs. Mary Lee Hodge
Mr. Fred Washington
Mr. Johnie Jones
Ms. Sheleah Hughes

Office for Academic Affairs
P.O. Box 519 ~ M.S. 1023 Prairie View, Texas 77446
Phone (936) 857-2314 Fax (936) 857-4956

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MES:

You prob already
have a copy.

Key Point: I believe that far too many students—one student would be one too many--are not aware of the possible outcomes from attending this University; they don't understand just how much their investment in an education will pay off.

You must be fully aware of the “end” results. Not knowing this is probably the reason some students willingly short-circuit their careers. By contrast, take the situation of 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 to reach this goal she needs to do a number of things; she and her family would do these 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?**

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I always conclude this program by asking God to bless each and every one of you.

This summer, more than previous ones, I have spent time evaluating you, the Administrators. Are you “good” at your jobs? What should you be doing?

Specifically for the Vice Presidents and Deans, I have asked about your accomplishments over the last five years (or for however long you have been in the job) and your goals for the coming year and beyond. **I asked a very pointed question: “How long do you want to remain in your current position? What is the next job you want to have in your career?”**

Key Point: I not only evaluated you, but I have done the same regarding my entire tenure as President.

My Accomplishments Over the Last Five Years

1. Increased Governance at all levels.
2. Improved relationship with PVAMU alums; there are a list of alums I can call, at a moment’s notice, and they will give me the support that I am seeking from them.

3. Increased the prestige of the University in the eyes of lawmakers; at the A&M System. An important reason for success is that people are impressed with my “sense of urgency,” my telling them that we will get it done now, on my watch.
4. Proud of my Reading List. Key Point about it: it is an “ice breaker” in meetings with people.

Importance of Reading

What can I say that you don't already know about the importance of reading? It broadens your world, helps you have different perspectives on any issue. For me, a scholar of race relations, reading helps me to see how complicated race truly is.

After becoming President of Prairie View A&M University, I was struck by the number of people who seemed not to have read some of the basic books. I decided that I needed to make promoting books something I did at almost every forum that I attended.

There are 63 titles on the Reading List.

By categories:

1. **Help**—How to read; write; be successful; **The Prince** by Niccolo Machiavelli

2. **Fiction**
3. **Biographies**
4. **Autobiographies**—Anne Frank; Nelson Mandela
5. **Exploration**—The White Nile; Mt. Everest; South Pole
6. **War**

Twenty-two of the books are on Black Americans.

A number—somewhere between 5-10—touch on race relations outside of the United States, racial, ethnic, and religious strife/oppression.

For what it is worth to you, there are two books that assisted me in my education: **The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin** and Richard Wright's **Black Boy**.

Comments from the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin:

These names of virtues, with their precepts, were:

1. **Temperance**

Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

2. **Silence**

Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.

3. **Order**

Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.

4. **Resolution**

Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.

5. **Frugality**

Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.

6. **Industry**

Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.

7. **Sincerity**

Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

8. **Justice**

Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

9. **Moderation**

Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

10. **Cleanliness**

Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation.

11. Tranquility

Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

12. Chastity

Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dulness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

13. Humility

Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

Comments from Richard Wright's Black Boy**1. Comments on Black Behavior Patterns and White Expectations of Blacks**

No Negroes in my environment had ever thought of organizing, no matter in how orderly a fashion, and petitioning their white employers for higher wages. The very thought would have been terrifying to them, and they knew that the whites would have retaliated with swift brutality. So pretending to conform to the laws of the whites, grinning, bowing, they let their fingers stick to what they could touch. And the whites seemed to like it.

But I, who stole nothing, who wanted to look them straight in the face, who wanted to talk and act like a man, inspired fear in them. The southern whites would rather have had Negroes who stole, work for them than Negroes who knew, however dimly the worth of their own humanity. Hence, whites placed a premium upon black deceit; they encouraged irresponsibility; and their rewards were bestowed upon us blacks in the degree that we could make them feel safe and superior.

The most colorful of the Negro boys on the job was Shorty, the round, yellow, fat elevator operator. He had tiny, beady eyes that looked out between rolls of flesh with a hard but humorous stare. He had the complexion of a Chinese, a short forehead, and three chins. Psychologically he was the most amazing specimen of the southern Negro I had ever met. Hard-headed, sensible, a reader of magazines and books, he was proud of his race and indignant about its wrongs. But in the presence of whites he would play the role of a clown of the most debased and degraded type.

Shorty allowed whites to kick him in the behind for 25 cents.

2. Key point in the book that has shaped me.

The white South said that it knew “niggers,” and I was what the white South called a “nigger.” Well, the white South had never known me—never known what I thought, what I felt. The white South said that I had a “place” in life. Well, I had never felt my “place”; or, rather, my deepest instincts had always made me reject the “place” to which the white South had assigned me. It had never occurred to me that I was in any way an inferior being. And no word that I had ever heard fall from the lips of southern white men had ever made me really doubt the worth of my own humanity. True, I had lied. I had stolen. I had struggled to contain my seething anger. I had fought. And it was perhaps a mere accident that I had never killed... But in what other ways had the South allowed me to be natural, to be real, to be myself, except in rejection, rebellion, and aggression?

I wrote in the margin of the book “Judge Yourself.” This was a very important breakthrough in my life.

Conclusion on Reading

Because of reading (1) I love to “argue” to debate; (2) I am a dreamer—I believe that my life is special and that I can, will, do special, unique things; (3) I am a black person, but much more, a humanist, and (4) above all I have always been a Radical.

Colleagues—fellow Administrators--we are in an academic environment, and an emphasis on “Reading” serves us well. I urge you to take the time and to “educate” the people who you interact with; it will pay off. What books did you read this summer and can recommend for us to read? Indeed, have you developed a Reading List for students, faculty, and alums in your discipline? Why not???

2008-09 Goals

Question to all Administrators: What do you plan on devoting your time on in 2008-09?

1. Major improvements in Athletics.
2. Recruiting students in the Cy Fair area and other local school districts.
3. **Very important:** As I mentioned last week at the Faculty/Staff Conference: Every one of us must make a difference for our students in a way that we have not done so previously. A charge to all Administrators: I want you to commit to making a positive difference in the educational experiences of students. My goal: I want to mentor them better than ever. I want to help them become productive in their careers upon leaving PVAMU.

Here is something that I have given a great deal of thought to: that far too many of our students are not aware of what the possible outcomes can be from attending this University; they have no real clue just how much their investment will pay off, of the value added. (1) Student wants to come here in Architecture, but does not want to pay one dime to attend this school; (2) Why do our students work: to get cars and cell phones.

A goal that will address an ongoing problem at PVAMU is the absence of a sufficient number of employees to promote when someone is unable or unwilling to do their assigned jobs. This “thin bench” results in Directors, Deans, and Vice Presidents often assuming a greater range of responsibilities because there is no one to share the load with them.

My primary response to the “thin bench” is to “grow our own,” to identify bright, energetic employees and call on them for special assignments. Over the next year, I would like to make this a formal arrangement by developing an internship program in my office, which, I hope, will also include some release time for the people selected to work with the Vice Presidents and me. I need your help in developing this program.

The position of President affords me the opportunity of mentoring students and a wide range of employees at the University. I have shared openly my own story of how I moved up the academic and administrative ladders, and when doing so I point out that hard work, sacrifice and discernment, were essential. I invite members of all of these groups to my home for receptions, meals, and above all conversations. I invite tenure-track faculty to lunch meetings where they discuss their research projects and I offer observations about how to enhance their scholarship. I have a commitment to prepare future Deans, Vice Presidents, and Presidents. I have challenged the five Vice Presidents to do the same by explaining that I want them to remain in their positions for at least five more years, which should give them comfort in that I am not trying to get rid of them, and in return they must provide associates with opportunities to learn every aspect of their jobs so that they can be promoted at the appropriate time.

Now for the final goal, one that I mentioned at the Faculty/Staff Conference: this school year, we must work “with a sense of urgency” on re-accreditation as 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.**

Comments from the Vice Presidents: starting with Fred Washington, then Mary Lee Hodge, Laretta Byars, Willie Trotty, and Thomas-Smith.

Conclusion

As I close, I hope I have conveyed not only my excitement over still being in the position of President of PVAMU but that I realize how much more difficult this coming year and the next period of my Administration will be. In every one of my Executive Level jobs, it proved to be much harder each successive year than the previous one. In other words, while experience is important, there are new challenges to be met as well as many unresolved issues as well. I hope you understand that as Administrators the same is true for you as well.

Those of you who heard me speak at the start of my second year as President may recall my saying that I would not be seduced by the “low hanging fruit” that I had plucked into believing that I was being successful in my job. As I pointed out, in the classic book, **I, Claudius**, the life of Tiberius Claudius of Ancient Rome, who lived from 10 BC to AD 54, his father the King trusted no one, especially his wife, the wicked Queen. The King always had someone taste his food first; he had guards surrounding him an all times, even in the most private and intimate places and interactions. The Queen was able to kill him anyway by putting the poison directly on the grapes while they were still on the vine. **She poisoned the “Low Hanging Fruit.”**

