

16th Annual Bahamas Business Outlook

“From College to University: The Role of Higher Education in
Developing Bahamian Society”

Radisson Cable Beach Resort

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Notes for a presentation by Janyne M Hodder

The College of The Bahamas

Good afternoon.

I congratulate The Counsellors on the organization of this event and thank them for inviting me to join this most distinguished roster of speakers. The theme of this year's event "*Economic Year 2007: Opportunities, Plans and Outcomes*" is particularly appropriate for us at The College of the Bahamas as we are deeply engaged in analyzing the opportunities we face, in making the plans we need to make to lead to the outcomes we seek – not for ourselves, but for the country at large.

Before looking to the future, I wish to pay tribute to those who laid the foundation from which we are now building The University of The Bahamas. The University of The Bahamas was foreshadowed by the government administration that led this country to independence over thirty years ago. Its foundations were built by the principals, presidents, faculty, staff and students who, in the performance of their roles for three decades, created at The College a passion for excellence and who built programmes of high quality. Many of our graduates went on to universities overseas, many others are

employed here – and in all cases, their performance has contributed to our reputation for excellence.

We can count numbers of College alumni in every sector of our economy. Indeed, the roster of speakers today includes two College alumni, Vernice Walkine and Peter Blair.

The contribution of these men and women is also enriched by that of those who are at the College today. I have a formidable team—men and women who have a passion for education; men and women who helped build the College and have fostered its growth.

Today, The College serves 4,615 registered students as of January 6th 2007. We employ 202 regular teaching faculty and 200 more on a part-time basis, 100 of whom are working this semester. Close to one quarter of our faculty, including counsellors and librarians have terminal degrees, most usually a doctorate. We also employ 396 full and part time staff. We have a budget of \$37 M for operations and anticipate spending

nearly \$11M on capital projects this year. We offer 6 baccalaureate degrees in 59 majors and 3 associate degrees. We offer, as well, 4 graduate degrees in collaboration with other universities.

This then is the foundation from which we are building The University of the Bahamas.

Often when I speak about the transformation from College to University, I am asked two very important questions.

The first is: “ Do we need a university “

Those who ask that question often follow it with the statement that there are good universities elsewhere that Bahamians can attend. They imply that we cannot achieve excellence here in the Bahamas – in part because of our size.

My answer that question is that no country should “outsource” the higher education of its citizens. The presence of a national

university is crucial to ensuring long-term, sustainable prosperity and a high quality of life.

A national university has a triple mandate; to educate citizens, to carry out research that creates and disseminates new knowledge, and to serve the community in ways it is most capable of doing by virtue of its teaching and research excellence. The universities of other countries, though a valuable resource to students and researchers everywhere, have no mandate to meet our national needs.

We do.

We must invest in the talent of this nation, – as much the talent of the students we educate as that of the Bahamian professors we support and bring home. A country that exports the most talented citizens is not building a prosperous, peaceful and sustainable future. The extent to which The College of the Bahamas has had outstanding success in educating more and more Bahamians, so that now, for example, most accountants

are no longer expatriates, should serve as a clear reminder that educating at home is the best investment a country can make.

And though it is true that much of our economy is based on the beauty of our natural resources, it is also true that the sustainable future of these very resources and the extent to which Bahamians benefit from their development will be a direct consequence of our national investment in highly-qualified and talented human resources.

The second answer to this question concerns confidence. It is the idea that because we are a small country, we cannot have an excellent university. The evidence does not support this view.

There are a number of relatively small universities that have established high quality reputations. It is mostly a question of focus. A relatively small university must be committed to seeking excellence where it can achieve it.

For us at The University of the Bahamas, this will of necessity mean offering a broad range of undergraduate programmes, a reasonable range of professional graduate programmes, and a very select number of research graduate programmes where we can be truly excellent – one thinks spontaneously of the marine sciences, of tourism, of the financial sector, of public policy research and others

The second question is: “Does the move to University entail any real change?”

The answer to that question is yes. But though the differences are profound, they are not always easy to see from the outside. An analogy might be helpful. There is a huge difference between a medical clinic and a university hospital – yet, if you are at a clinic to be treated for a routine flu, you will not really notice much difference. If you are there to have heart surgery, however, you will.

A university – particularly a comprehensive one such as The University of the Bahamas will continue to do many of the things you see us doing today. We will be offering undergraduate degree programmes to full and part-time students and this will continue to be where the bulk of our activity is.

But we will also be building a stronger outreach programme to be able to respond to human resources training needs of the Bahamian economy. We will offer better quality teaching and learning resources – a stronger library, improved access to on-line knowledge and learning.

We will be supporting faculty who want to develop research programmes, and our priority focus will be supporting multi-disciplinary teams working on broad thematic areas of importance to the nation. We will be more present on the international scene, joining international associations of Universities as a full member, representing the Bahamas and

learning and sharing with these universities from across the world.

We will be seeking to offer our own graduate programmes in those areas where we know we can build excellence nationally.

The key difference between now and then will be in the depth and in breadth of our scholarly work and reach.

2007 is a pivotal year for us. Our internal plans are well underway. These plans include generating broad and deep public support, of the kind which crosses all differences in our society – political differences, religious differences, class differences. All these must pale in the face of the awesome opportunity of building the University of the Bahamas - the university to shape our future.

We are confident of this support but we never take it for granted. We require major investment and we know that investors need to be confident before they invest.

Why then should you invest in us and what is our role in developing Bahamian Society?

We have three distinct roles to play in the development of Bahamian society.

- 1. Contribution through education: Access of Bahamians to high quality university programmes.*

The first role is the one we have already been playing as The College of The Bahamas. We provide high quality and accessible undergraduate education to Bahamians, many of whom would not have such access without us. It is important to remember, for example, that over half of our students study on a part-time basis. Many of these combine work and study and we serve in helping them improve their skills and thereby increase their capacity to aspire to more demanding work.

The University of the Bahamas will build on this foundation to increase access by developing new delivery models across the archipelago. We will also be increasing accessibility to graduate programmes. This again is of great benefit to the nation and to the pool of talented human resources.

In addition, as we build the University of the Bahamas, we will also be building international links which will allow Bahamians students to study abroad with partner universities. This is again of great benefit to our students and to the nation. This will allow Bahamian students to have the benefit of international exposure which so many want (and so many parents want for their children) while not having to spend 4 years abroad. Already, two students from The College will be on an exchange at The University of Rhode Island this semester, and in December, we signed an agreement with The University of Johannesburg which will allow for such exchanges. In identifying international partners, we are always looking for those who offer programmes which can enrich those we offer ourselves - The University of Johannesburg is well-known, for

example, for its tourism programme and we believe both our faculty and our students would have an enriched experience through an exchange.

This first contribution we make then is in the education and development of Bahamian citizens directly through the education we offer.

As we build our programmes, review them for quality, monitor their evolution and ensure that they meet international standards of excellence, we also have a need to stay close to all sectors of the Bahamian economy which will employ our graduates. I am pleased to report that we are doing so more and more.

For example, we are currently working very closely with the Bahamas Hotel Association to make sure our tourism, hospitality and culinary programmes respond to industry needs. We are grateful for the collaboration of industry – both as financial supporters and advisors. We are also pleased to

welcome Dr Lincoln Marshall as our new Executive Director. Dr. Marshall has extensive experience and brings back to the Bahamas his great talent.

Academic activity will also occur in the context of lifelong learning programmes, which offer to adults not only the chance to complete an interrupted education but also opportunities to explore areas that can represent an interest quite outside their professional life. I have asked my colleagues to seek out ways of increasing the general level of public offerings and I draw your attention to the wonderful Anatol Rodgers Lecture series first held in 2006 when a talented Caribbean-born writer and academic – Fred D’Aguiar - came to deliver a lecture and stayed to offer writing workshops to the public at large. This too demonstrates the kind of contribution The University of the Bahamas can make to the quality of life in our country.

2. Contribution through Research

For thirty years now, The College of the Bahamas has educated students, passing on the combined skills, knowledge and attitudes which form the current best in each discipline or professional programme. The exciting time ahead for us is that we are now going to be expected to create new knowledge – which is in fact what good research does.

The University of the Bahamas will take its place in the world as a place where new knowledge is created, discovered and shared. This is a major step for us. And it represents a significant challenge. For example, there is the tension between research driven entirely by the personal interest of an individual researcher and research driven by national interests of one kind or another. We see The University of The Bahamas as a place where this tension is resolved creatively with a focus on excellence.

We see research as having practical applications for the course of our national future. And we see the possibility of research carried out here which has an impact internationally. And in

the international sphere, we see our research as built on productive partnerships –with the universities of other small island developing states in some cases, with countries that have strong marine research programmes in others, and indeed with any who seek to answer questions similar to those that occupy us – in education, in the marine and environmental sciences, in cultural areas, in economics, in business, in tourism, in development studies or any other field of interest.

We do not see research as esoteric, disconnected from our daily lives. In fact over the past twenty to thirty years, research in universities has been at the source of an extraordinary number of innovations. We see research at The University of The Bahamas as linked in a fundamental way to our identity and to our future.

For example, we know of the major anchor investment projects that are planned across the archipelago. It is obvious to me that The University of the Bahamas can be a research partner as well as a human resources development partner. The kinds of

research needed include not only impact assessment on the physical environment. We should also be studying how to plan and manage social, cultural and other impacts. This is the kind of multi-disciplinary integrated work a modern university can do that is very difficult to do when you do not have a university framework.

The University of the Bahamas can also play a key role in making sure that research carried out by others in this country also serves the needs of this country and is respectful of national concerns. This is particularly important as we learn of discoveries of previously unknown fossils in Abaco, or of rare life forms off the coast of Andros. The University of the Bahamas can make sure there is a national research framework designed in service to the nation.

3. Contribution through Service.

The idea that a university contributes through direct service is not new and the College and its members have been prominent

in all kinds of community endeavours in every sector of activity. My colleagues are all leaders in community service and you will know them as such.

But as the University of the Bahamas, we will be seeking to formalize this service component somewhat and this will be through various forms of Outreach, through Institutes, through partnerships.

Walking out by Clifton over the Christmas break and seeing once again the beautiful the carvings of Antonius Roberts, I wondered how the University of the Bahamas might increase its partnership with heritage and cultural groups to involve students in understanding and protecting the public spaces we wish to honour.

Service must also mean direct engagement with community issues and concerns. For example, the University of the Bahamas will see as part of its mission:

- To facilitate social justice through enhanced access to higher education to disadvantaged and excluded constituencies. We must do more to rescue our young men and provide greater access to the disabled.
- To make it possible to pursue knowledge in ways that could extend the horizon of human understanding without always being constrained by considerations of immediate relevance or returns on investment.
- To ensure that the function of higher education as the 'critic and conscience of society' is upheld as fundamental to the role of a critical citizenry in keeping democracy vibrant and substantive.

Service can also be found in the myriad activities which do not fit neatly within the academic programmes or research areas but which are the life and breath of university life.

For example, our plans include making the University of The Bahamas a significant centre for cultural development. The College has long been an incubator for many of the gifted students of art and music, who have not only benefited from our academic programmes but also had the wonderful opportunity to gain public exposure for their talents through our well-patronised Colour of Harmony event. A listing of the prominent talents in Bahamian art today reads like a who's who of our alumni.

Last year we held a major jazz concert and our first Band Festival. The latter gave community musicians an opportunity to hone their skills under the guidance of master musicians.

The College has invested heavily in creating a state-of-the-art performing arts centre from the bones of the old auditorium which, in the days of The Government High School, functioned as an axis for exciting cultural productions. We have targeted the month of April for a grand opening.

All of this speaks to the breadth of activity a University expects to be engaged in.

In conclusion

The University of The Bahamas is very much part of this year's Outlook. Our plans are underway and we will shortly be sharing with the public at large a calendar and timeline for the transformation.

We have the talent and drive to contribute significantly to our country's prosperity, to the sustainability of our resources, and to the overall quality of life of Bahamians. We have the expertise to do what we are mandated to do. We need however to have champions and supporters like you across the country.

I invite you then to:

- Stay tuned for further announcements about our calendar of transformation, and give us feedback on areas where you or your business interacts with us.

- Join our Advisory Boards, which are designed to bring together university officials and major employers for two main purposes: 1) to discuss the needs of local business and industry, including research, product innovation, and workforce training and 2) to contribute expertise to the development of new programmes and curriculum where a need is demonstrated.
- Respond when we seek your financial support. We will be launching a major funding campaign and hope to have partners to build The University of the Bahamas with us. Contribute directly and promote the University's case to potential donors.
- Sponsor scholarships, faculty and student internships and research, as well as incubator programmes.
- Sponsor and participate in our networking events and college fairs.
- Recruit our alumni and let us know how well prepared you believe they are.

- Provide university artists and musicians opportunities and places in which to showcase their talents.
- Promote university events through your website, your newsletters and notice boards, so that our alumni in your organization, other members of your staff and your clients can learn of them.
- Communicate available job opportunities to us so that our Offices of Communication and Student Affairs can promote them to our students and alumni.
- Patronise our sporting events, concerts, and other university events.

We are in the nation-building business and we need a nation of nation-builders to help us do what we are poised to do.

Thank you.