

The College of The Bahamas



Building a National University to Serve National Development

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The College of The Bahamas**

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

I was delighted to receive the invitation to speak to you today. I get to speak about one of this country's most important and most exciting developments, the building of a university, and I get to remember that our work is important to a professional group like this one.

When we tell our story and engage others in the many things that we are doing, we want them to become tellers of our story and believers in the importance of our work for this country. It adds great value to our case and our cause when, for instance, Ray Winder, Managing Partner at Deloitte and Touche, talks about the importance of ensuring that The College of The Bahamas possess the capacity to educate the majority of students seeking a tertiary education. What a great tribute it is to our institution when he asserts that *"60 per cent of the staff at Deloitte and Touche went through the College of the Bahamas, including the firms two youngest partners"*, and adds further that having attended The College is something on a job applicant's resume that gets attention at his firm. It is equally gratifying when Larry Gibson, Vice President-Pensions, Colonial Pensions Services (Bahamas), and former College of The Bahamas student, writes that *"the institutional strengthening and expansion of COB should be a national priority"*.

So we are elated with every opportunity we get to tell our story, a story of university building since the day The College first opened its doors in 1974.

As I highlight some recent milestones in our development, I invite you to think of us as an infrastructure development. While we typically think of infrastructure development as capital projects such road building, bridge construction, the creation of super information highways, telecom and utilities networks - all without question critical to our advancement as a country- we also need to think of infrastructure development as building human capital. We build human capital by ensuring that we have a broad pool of skilled and educated men and women who can face the challenges of today and also meet the challenges we have not yet even considered. Capital projects of a physical nature are seen as long term projects which increase national competitiveness; so it is with human capital development.

We now face the challenges of shaping a society equipped to compete in a global and integrated economy. One of the things that caught my attention when reviewing today's conference schedule, was the question that will drive one of this afternoon's panel: "What does The Bahamas need to do to get better and smarter?"

Reading the question, I was struck with the thought that this is what we do – help people do better and be smarter.

The challenges facing both the financial and tourism services sectors, the realities imposed by new economic partnerships (EPAs) and new agreements on the exchange of tax information (TIEAs), the challenge of global warming and the risks sea level rise pose to the Bahamian environment, the challenge of poverty alleviation and crime reduction – none of these will be successfully addressed without well educated people making smart and thoughtful choices. The sustainable development of The Bahamas depends on the availability of highly skilled human capital.

The argument that university education is a remote and “academic” good accessible only to an élite is an outdated argument. It presumes that we have a large pool of jobs which can be filled by people with few skills but high salary expectations. This is not the world in which we live; nor is it the one our children will find.

According to UNESCO, “the number of students pursuing tertiary education has skyrocketed over the past 37 years, growing five-fold from 28.6 million in 1970 to 152.5 million in 2007. This translates into an average annual increase of 4.6%, with the average number of tertiary students doubling every fifteen years.”¹

How are we performing against this global trend? Again, according to UNESCO statistics, the tertiary gross enrolment ratio in Europe and North America – a measure of participation for the population of students for the five years after high school – has grown from 30% in 1970 to 71% in 2007. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this ratio has grown from 6% to 34%, in East Asia and the Pacific, from 7% to 26% and on and on.

While the study does not report directly on The Bahamas, we understand that the participation rate for the 18-24 year-old population in The Bahamas hovers around 14%, putting us, a relatively wealthy nation, only above some of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa (5.6%) and in South and West Asia (11%).

Building a population capable not only of adapting to constantly changing global experiences, but also able to share in the leadership in driving some of that change means appreciating that education today is about learning how to learn. An important part of our job at The College of The Bahamas is to prepare graduates to

¹ UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), **GLOBAL EDUCATION DIGEST 2009: COMPARING STATISTICS ACROSS THE WORLD**, Montreal, Canada, 2009. Letter to the Editor of The Tribune 7/12/2009 Page 3

communicate effectively, to reflect on their lives, to think critically, to be creative, to solve problems and to be engaged and active citizens.

I am often asked when we will become a university and there are two answers to this question. The first is that this is a matter of legislation and thus, a matter for government decision-making. The second is that what we are today operating as a university.

- The majority of The College's students are graduating with bachelor degrees, shifting from earlier trends when we were mainly a two-year degree granting institution. Today, we are predominantly a four-year degree granting institution.
- Since 2007, we have been sending students (and faculty) on exchanges and study abroad experiences with other universities, in Canada, the United States, Costa Rica, England, Mexico and Spain. They are performing exceptionally alongside their international peers, returning with GPAs in the 3.5 – 4.0 range.
- This year we added a "Study at Sea" component to our study abroad programme, a floating university campus experience, where over the course of a 108 day voyage, including 10 ports of call [Hilo/Honolulu, Hawaii USA; Yokohama/Kobe, Japan; Shanghai/Hong Kong, China; Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam; Chennai/Cochin, India; Port Louis, Mauritius; Cape Town, South Africa; Accra, Ghana; Salvador, Brazil and Fort Lauderdale, FL USA], students will complete traditional university courses in the campus environment of the not-so-traditional MV Explorer, a global experience administered by the Institute for Shipboard Education.
- We are members of the International Association of Universities (IAU). As College of The Bahamas President I serve on the Board of the IAU, an important presence for an institution of our small size and in an association with a membership that spans more than 150 countries.
- We are in the process of completing our application to the Association of Commonwealth Universities.
- We are planning the delivery of an MBA degree, beginning in the Fall 2010 Semester, an exciting academic achievement for us. We have already secured private funding of \$2 Million, half the investment needed for the construction of our new Graduate School of Business.
- The MBA will be The College's very first graduate degree, although in recent years we have facilitated as many as 7 graduate degree programmes of international university and college partners, including Kent State University and Wheelock College.
- Last fall, we introduced a Small Island Sustainability baccalaureate programme. Students from throughout The Bahamas, around the Caribbean and any small island nation, can now come to The Bahamas to earn Bachelor of Science degrees in Small Island Sustainability with concentrations in Environmental & Ecosystems management and Integrated Development & Planning and Bachelor of

Arts degrees in Small Island Sustainability with concentrations in Ecotourism & Development and Policy Studies. These programmes were made possible by the outstanding private philanthropy of \$10 million from The Freedom Foundation.

- In the fall of 2008, we introduced a Bachelor in Pharmacy degree, in response to industry needs for more qualified pharmacists. The four-year degree programme is delivered in conjunction with Jamaica's University of Technology.
- These degree concentrations are an excellent example of how universities can be responsive to national needs and build programmes that support and drive development in areas of national need.
- We have also been building a sound research base (students and faculty). Universities are creators of knowledge, while colleges transmit knowledge, and it is through research and innovation that we will become such creators. Last year The College allocated \$30,000 to faculty research which we have since doubled to \$60,000, and have also added a \$10,000 allocation for student research. We see our contribution in research and innovation as supporting not only sciences, business or professional programmes but also the humanities, arts and culture. This year, for example, we have welcomed two Scholars-In-Residence, President Emerita Keva Bethel who is writing a book on the history of higher education in The Bahamas and Dr. Gail Saunders who is writing a book on the history of race relations in The Bahamas from the later 19th Century to the late 1950's. Both of these scholarly projects serve to enhance national identity, another goal of university work.

Given our efforts to demonstrate the quality of our university work, we are hopeful that the final stage of our transition, the adoption of new legislation and of a national quality assurance framework will not be far away.

This Fall, there are some 5,000 students enrolled at The College, including nearly 600 in Grand Bahama, and a combined first-year class of around 1,300 students, from an application pool of more than 2,000. More than 30% of our faculty are holders of terminal degrees, compared to 16% in 1990 and 23% in 2007.

In addition to New Providence and Grand Bahama, we operate centres in Abaco, Andros and Exuma.

We have completed capital developments in recent years valued at almost \$24 million, including administrative buildings at \$9.5 Million [PESmith, \$4.3M and MHE Complex, \$5.2M]; Pharmacy Labs [\$1.6M]; a Wellness Centre [\$925K]; student residences renovations [\$677K] and our Performing Arts Centre [\$3.3M] which was officially opened this past May.

By the end of this month, we will have added to that investment total with the completion of a \$1.5M fibre optic and wireless network upgrade. Already College of The Bahamas students are tapping into the information superhighway, from benches on our campuses under trees, in gazebos, at the dorms and various other student common areas. We are, as well, on target for a February completion of the \$8.4M second phase of our new Northern Bahamas Campus (Phase 1 – \$1.7M Site Preparation) and we have been in discussions for the start of the next Phase, estimated to cost approximately \$8M. Finally, we anticipate a fall 2010 completion of the Harry C. Moore Library & Information Centre, an investment of \$28M.

This remarkable facility will be one of our greatest avenues of outreach to the wider Bahamian community, acting as the de facto national library of the Bahamas, with special collections and exhibitions that will speak to this country's heritage and history.

These are unprecedented times in the life of The College in terms of the unprecedented generosity of private giving. Last year, The College received close to \$5 Million in private donations, from some 373 donors. 300 of those donors, including The College's own faculty and staff (93) and alumni (207) represented annual fund giving in excess of \$57,000, exceeding the previous year's total of \$32,000 by approximately \$25,000.

We are very appreciative of the support of all of our donors. They have permitted us to do so much in terms of academic programming, capital development and research, and have allowed us to enhance the College experience of our students. Our donors become members of our community, people who can rightfully share every success story that our students, graduates and faculty enjoy. Our donors are changing the landscape of private giving in The Bahamas. Given that this is an audience of bankers, I am happy to share the story of a recent call from a private banker. He called to tell us of a client wanted to make a donation of over \$157,000 to The College. His only condition was that his gift should remain anonymous. What an extraordinary act of giving! And if you have any other such clients, please do call us!

Giving to The College is one of the most effective ways to ensure that there will always be well-educated Bahamians giving back to their country and driving its development.

Through the provision of a high quality accessible university education, the nation creates opportunities for individuals to improve their personal standard of living and their capacity to support national development.

When nations choose to invest in higher education, they increase the pool of highly qualified human resources that can fill existing labour market needs. Having a pool of highly skilled human resources also creates new

job opportunities and new avenues for economic development. Economic development occurs also when talented and educated people develop new businesses and create jobs, expanding the labour market and not simply filling the existing one.

Public investment in higher education also creates a private good since university graduates are more likely to enjoy a higher standard of living. In the United States, a report of the US Census Bureau² reveals that over an adult's working life, high school graduates can expect, on average, to earn \$1.2 million; those with a bachelor's degree, \$2.1 million; and people with a master's degree, \$2.5 million. The report further reveals that those without a high school diploma are likely to earn \$23,400 a year while those with an associate degree earn on average \$38,200 and those with a bachelor degree, \$52,000. While we do not have comparative figures for The Bahamas, it is expected that the variances would be similar.

But helping individuals to enjoy a higher standard of living is not the only benefit of higher education. University education also aims to create engaged citizens; people who are happier, healthier and capable of contributing in myriad ways to national development, in the arts and culture, in the sciences, in the social sciences, in the development of their profession and in the humanities. This creates the conditions for these individuals to give back to their country; one of the best examples of how a university education creates a virtuous cycle.

There is simply no other investment that can do more for the future of The Bahamas than an investment in its people. For years, The Bahamas has “outsourced” higher education, accepting that many of its most talented citizens will leave the country to complete university studies, creating the very real risk that too many will not return. By providing high quality academic degrees here at home, degrees that are closely tied to the needs of this country, we can help ensure that The Bahamas enjoys the gifts of its most talented young – and not so young - people. We also keep Bahamian dollars at home and The College itself becomes an important source of economic activity.

There are those who claim that we have too small a population pool to build a quality university; yet, there are examples the world over of small jurisdictions that have created universities that have served local, regional and national development. These universities do not claim to be all things to all people; rather, they focus their mission on quality degrees which have resonance and relevance to their environment. For example, we do not offer medicine nor will we. This need is amply filled by The University of The West Indies. But we are

² <http://usgovinfo.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-210.pdf>

offering pharmacy and we are looking at other allied health fields. The issue is always: what is needed that we can do well? What is our niche?

There is also the question of what can be done to increase the pool of well-prepared applicants who can then benefit from higher education. This fall, we began a pilot project offering College Prep English and Mathematics online, a project we will launch in earnest in January. Because of this initiative we will be able to serve the thousands of Bahamians who may not have succeeded in meeting the 5 BGCSE's requirement when they were in high school but who are now ready to prepare themselves for College studies. And we can do this whether they live in New Providence, Grand Bahama or Exuma and Mayaguana.

We see The College as a place where big dreams come true, and we will continue to work to be that place. Our dream is our mission, building one step at a time a university that will support and drive national development.

I thank you for this opportunity to address you today, I congratulate you on your fifth year hosting this event and I extend an invitation to each one of you to come and visit us. If you haven't been to our campus before or haven't been back in a very long time, it would be our pleasure to set up a special tour for you, so that you might see our facilities and meet some of our students, faculty and staff, all of whom we are exceedingly proud.

Thank you once again, I do hope to see each and every one of you very soon on our College campuses here in New Providence and in Grand Bahama and our centres in other islands.