

The College of The Bahamas

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Notes for remarks at the Opening Reception of The 2007 West Indian Literature conference at Government House

Your Excellencies Governor General and Mrs. Hanna, colleagues and guests,

It is my great pleasure to add my words of welcome to those of my colleagues. The College of the Bahamas is deeply honoured to be your host at the 2007 West Indian Literature conference.

As some of you will know, this conference comes at a very special time for us.

In 1974, one year after Independence, The College of The Bahamas Act was passed and in 1975, it opened its doors. For over thirty years, The College was intended to be the primary vehicle through which the higher education, research and public service needs of the country would be met.

For the first twenty years, The College offered two year Associate degrees in addition to a number of undergraduate diplomas and certificates. In the 90's, it began to offer a number of baccalaureate programmes and now in 2006, the College offers six Bachelor's degrees in more than fifty-nine majors as well as a number of associate degrees and other certificates and diplomas.

We also have agreements with other universities that allow us to offer some graduate degrees and we have been establishing a number of new student and faculty exchange programmes.

We have more than 11,000 alumni – in every walk of life. Indeed, we have a number who have made literature and cultural studies their career – this is the case of Dr. Ian Strachan, Prof. Krista Walkes here at The College, and I understand also Professor Ian Bethel-Bennet at The University of Puerto Rico.

Annual enrolment at The College is close to 5000 students, about 40% of whom attended on a part-time basis. We have been at the heart of a nation-building effort for over thirty years. And we have passed on knowledge and offered education, and skills and opportunities to many who not otherwise have been able to learn the freedom that education brings.

Today, we are about to take a very important next step. We are building on our past to create The University of the Bahamas. Among the many different meanings this step has for many different audiences, one of these stands out.

The transformation from college to university must mean a shift from being sharers of knowledge created elsewhere to being creators of new knowledge. For me, this is the deepest and most significant part of our journey today. And perhaps also our greatest challenge.

How do we nurture - with confidence – but not hubris, with pride – but not sentimentality - the context and the culture that will foster a community of scholars who teach and learn and create and for whom each of these activities feeds the other.

This conference is an opportunity for each of you to do this – to move through the cycle of teaching research, creation, dissemination that is the bread and butter of a professor's life. We are honoured you have chosen to be with us to do this. We hope this is also a moment to renew old friendships and discover new ones. I hope you enjoy every moment.

For having you here gives us time to pause for a moment and celebrate our faculty who are the leaders on this journey from College to University. I want to thank them.

I would like to thank to The School of English Studies for having taken on the challenge of organizing this conference. I understand that this has been a model of departmental collaboration and thank you to all you. I want to thank in particular the co-convenors, Present Chair Dr. Ian Strachan and Chair elect Dr. Marjorie Brooks-Jones.

Dr. Brooks-Jones has been a friend for over thirty years now and I like others know well how determined she can be when focused on a goal. Marjorie, I hope all the books came in.

I want to thank also my colleagues in the administration and on staff who are working to assist our guests in every way. I thank you for responding to our invitation, and I offer my best wishes for a great conference time. I also thank Your Excellency for opening the doors of Government House to us. It is always a joy to be here. Thank you to The Ministry of Tourism for hosting us and for providing refreshments and entertainment.

And on that note, I will reveal that I have found out that tonight – dough became duff! Enjoy it.

Thank you.

Janyne M. Hodder
President, The College of the Bahamas
March 8th 2007