

The National Association of HBCU Title III Administrators, Inc.
2012 Technical Assistance Workshop
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New Orleans, Louisiana

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And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I marked the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost

Thank goodness, I took the road that led me to Arkansas AM&N College, a place where people nurtured me into becoming the person, the professional that I am today.

Thank you for those kind introductory remarks, Dr. Strickland.

Let me thank Title III directors for all that you do to support students and to make sure that Title III expenditures comply with the programmatic and legal requirements of the U.S. Department of Education.

Dr. Brenda Shaw is the best Title III director in the country.

She's involved in every aspect of NCCU's operation.

There isn't anything that we sought to do and couldn't do under Title III, because Brenda and I worked together.

She knew that I wouldn't ask her to do anything illegal or not in keeping with grant guidelines.

Good afternoon!

I bring you greetings from the students, faculty and staff of America's oldest public liberal arts college founded for the education of African-Americans.

Our highest priority is to create a culture of student success — a culture characterized by high levels of learning, retention and graduation.

It has been an honor to serve as Chancellor of the type of institution that helped me become the person, the professional and the servant-leader that I am today.

While it is an honor, in all candor, it is one of the most challenging assignments of my 44-year career in higher education.

I've had the opportunity to serve at some of America's better-resourced institutions.

Many of the daily issues I face at North Carolina Central University weren't even on the radar screen at Earlham College, the University of Michigan or Indiana University.

I say that not as a backdoor way of complaining, but simply to acknowledge the differences in the context in which leadership takes place at many HBCUs as compared with many predominantly white institutions.

I am truly in awe of the men and women who have served our HBCUs for decades.

Although I may have served at better-resourced institutions, I have never been affiliated with a place that provided higher levels of personal and professional satisfaction.

There is nothing — absolutely, unequivocally nothing — more rewarding than to see so many people who look like me, and who come from backgrounds similar to mine, at NCCU's graduation ceremony.

My heart is simply flooded with joy when I present young people from some of North Carolina's poorest counties with a degree, in the presence of their families.

Regrettably, as we gather here today, the promise of graduation has been burdened with student loan debt that has surpassed the \$1 trillion mark.

One of our candidates for president told students they should (quote) “borrow money, if you have to, from your parents,” (end-quote) which seems to me to completely miss the point.

If their parents had the money, they wouldn’t have to borrow at all!

An even greater tragedy is the story of those who have incurred the debt but have failed to earn their degree.

Either way, paying back those loans has become particularly challenging in this job market.

So it shouldn’t be any surprise that although students still believe a college education is worth the investment, we are losing the support of the broader public like never before.

According to a Pew Research survey conducted last year, 57 percent of Americans didn’t think that students received good value for the money, and 75 percent said it was too expensive.

Of course, the increases in tuition have come as a result of cuts to public higher education by state governments all across the country.

But that cause and effect link has not been made clear.

I don’t have to tell you that the political landscape, in which HBCUs go about the business of educating and graduating students, has changed dramatically.

While America has been busy making cuts to public education, other nations around the world have been investing in their future prosperity.

As we gather here today, the United States has fallen to 16th place in the 2011 OECD survey of 36 modern nations.

This is the ranking of the percentage of college graduates between the ages of 25 and 34.

In 2010, we were in 12th place.

Now, we’re 16th.

President Barack Obama called for an increase of 20 percentage points in our graduation rate in order to retake the lead — the American Graduation Initiative.

Now 20 points won’t be good enough to overtake first-place South Korea.

Sixty-five percent of South Korean young adults have earned a degree.

And a much higher proportion of them entered careers in the sciences.

As we gather here today, 40 states have cut back on their support for higher education within the past year, and my state of North Carolina was one of them.

With the 2010 election, North Carolina witnessed the establishment of Republican majorities in the House and Senate for the first time in more than 100 years.

Since that election, the new General Assembly allowed a surtax to expire on corporate and individual income.

Then they made significant cuts to public sector employment, benefits and, especially, to education.

With the 2011 budget, \$414 million was cut from the University of North Carolina system's budget.

From my institution alone, nearly \$14 million was cut and another \$2.6 million allocated for goods received and services rendered, was clawed back.

Since I arrived in 2007, NCCU has lost a total of \$50 million in budget cuts and permanent reversions.

This year, we've streamlined course offerings and reviewed operating expenses to identify \$2 million in savings over a four-year period.

But even with these efficiencies and an increase in tuition beginning this fall, we're trying to manage with \$13 million less than we had in 2010.

At NCCU, 65 percent of our budget revenue comes from the state.

So the 14 percent cut had a significantly greater impact on us than on those campuses with larger endowments and a smaller portion of their funding dependent upon taxpayer support and tuition receipts.

This is the sobering environment in which we must now consider our funding requests of the federal government.

"Strengthening Developing Institutions" was the name given to Title III part B of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

To my knowledge, there has never been another national program to strengthen historically black colleges.

It raises the question, and those on the right will begin to ask: When is an institution “developed”?

NCCU is 102 years old!

Language is important because language signals intent.

We need to change the language from “developing institutions” to “transforming institutions.”

And then we have to demonstrate that Title III can do just that.

Title III is one of the most vulnerable programs offered by the federal government today!

Let me repeat that.

Title III is one of the most vulnerable programs offered by the federal government today!

I can point to three reasons why I believe this to be true.

No. 1: there have been repeated attempts to eliminate or severely cut it already.

The conservative movement has left us with far fewer allies in power than before.

No matter who is elected President, this program is in for some tough days ahead.

Two: this program is perceived as bestowing favor on a select group of institutions.

How do we justify special consideration for us when there are hundreds of other institutions across the country, with comparable, student-body profiles — the MSIs — who receive considerably less funding.

And three: Title III consumes a healthy portion of the discretionary dollars available to the Department of Education.

For however much longer Title III is available to us; we must manage our operations in a far more strategic manner.

If there is one thing that I have learned in my four decades in higher education, it is this: While everything is important, everything is not of equal importance.

I believe now is the time to strategically leverage our Title III investments.

I know the needs are great, but I suggest to you that student retention and graduation must be our highest priority.

States are shifting, en masse, to the use of performance-based outcomes to drive the process of allocating dollars.

We have no choice but to invest in programs that impact degree efficiency, because student success is the bottom line.

And if your institution's Title III proposal does not address retention and graduation, it should never leave the campus.

It will only serve as a red flag to those who would argue that Title III is just a president or chancellor's discretionary fund.

We have to move from 25 activities that touch upon anything and everything, to a dozen that are centered on student academic performance.

We need to use this grant money to reposition our institutions as the centers of excellence for the education and graduation of outstanding, marketable professionals.

We must be in a position to demonstrate, with quantitative and qualitative evidence, that we are positively impacting students' lives today.

Our historical significance is irrelevant to most of our critics!

Think about some of the activities funded through your Title III grant.

If you were called to testify at a Congressional hearing about the results of Title III funding on your campus, what would you say?

What could you say?

Where's your evidence that these activities impact student success?

Let me tell you about some activities from our Title III program that I believe warrant federal funding.

At NCCU, we've re-allocated \$1.3 million in HBCU Title III funds to transform our University College into a hub of academic support services for freshman through to senior year.

This investment is in keeping with our highest priority and that is the retention and graduation of our students.

So we feel justified in making the case for initial support.

University College offers mandatory, intrusive, weekly advising and mentoring sessions that entail:

- Tutorials
- Weekly writing assignments
- Progress reviews, and
- Goal setting and academic planning.

Now, we're in the process of program assessment that must be qualitatively and quantitatively robust.

Believe me when I tell you I am pressing my dean, Dr. Ontario Wooden, with the constant question: "Where's the evidence to prove that this works?"

I'm pleased to say that in the case of another initiative, our Centennial Scholars program, there is a direct and measurable correlation with retention and graduation.

Funded through SAFRA, the program serves 385 African-American males who participate in intrusive advising, mentoring, service learning and learning communities.

We engage these students in multiple supportive relationships and experiences.

So far, overall retention is greater than 80 percent, when it is typically less than 65 percent for black males at NCCU.

Of our three cohorts, the lowest average GPA is 2.45, when the mean GPA is typically 2.2 for this population.

These are not anecdotal results based on someone's hunch that it ought to work.

We are closely tracking each and every one of these students to produce measurable, statistically significant results that we can defend.

The last initiative that I will mention was a professional development program in which star faculty were requested to lead seminars and workshops to motivate and train their peers.

In the summer of 2010, we instituted a Faculty Learning Community as a pilot program in which high performing faculty and consultants from our School of Education counseled faculty with high student failure rates.

The group leaders helped the low-performing faculty establish clear, student-centered course syllabi, interactive learning environments and other strategies to better engage students in the classroom.

In the semester that followed, faculty participants decreased the number of students who earned DFW grades in their classes by about 10 percent.

These were results I could take to the bank!

And in a manner of speaking, I did.

Given the strong statistical evidence that it worked, we sought and received a \$200,000 award from UNC General Administration to support this faculty development program on a larger scale.

We supplemented the UNC grant with \$135,000 from Title III.

One other point that I will make about this program: It required the collaboration of the School of Education and the College of Science and Technology.

These funded activities are so much less impactful if they are conducted in isolation, in silos across the campus.

I have directed Student Affairs staff to share what they have learned through the Centennial Scholars program with the mentors in Academic Affairs.

High-profile support opportunities that have marketing and public relations value, can and should serve as vehicles for private philanthropy.

The provision of musical instruments, underwriting public competitions or performances that might draw media attention, and new construction that could bear the name of a foundation or corporation — these sorts of opportunities are the bread and butter of the development office.

By contrast, it is almost impossible for my fundraising team to get someone excited about paying for the installation of software that would make our purchasing office more timely and efficient.

Title III funded that for us.

If HBCUs **cannot** demonstrate with empirical evidence that we deserve to be considered as a special class of institutions, that we reliably do a better job of educating and graduating our students, we will lose this support.

I encourage you to read my *Call to Action* to strengthen the HBCU sector.

Just go to our website **www.nccu.edu** and type in the search field “A Call to Action” to access the pdf.

It is the most tangible product of NCCU’s Centennial Symposium, held two years ago this month.

I was grateful for the attendance of 500 colleagues, from around the country, who helped us begin the discussion about the future of HBCUs.

I won’t reiterate to you the recommendations in that report.

But I will say that it lays out a rationale for a national dialogue and commitment from state and federal governments, major foundations and corporations to once and for all, bring our institutions from “developing” to “transforming”; from historically and continually underfunded, to fully capitalized.

Your job as Title III directors is not to tell your president or chancellor what to do, but to advise him or her about the potential to focus Title III allocations in an effort to transform your institutions.

If he or she signs on to the goal of retaining and graduating many more students with a credential that holds value in the marketplace, then you have the authority to prioritize accordingly.

In my view, there are four key areas for Title III investment that are readily defensible and unlikely to attract private investment.

No. 1 is **curricular transformation** to ensure currency in the marketplace.

In my policy paper, I challenge HBCUs to become more competitive and responsive in their curricular offerings.

HBCUs must plunge into the world of online education and offer more Ph.D. programs in the STEM disciplines, for example.

We **must** review, streamline and update existing programs to enhance their relevance to employers and fully embrace the global information age.

Last year, I directed my provost, Dr. Debbie Thomas, to conduct a review of all academic programs, with particular attention to low-productivity programs.

This review was intended to guide decisions about which programs to eliminate, consolidate or expand.

We gained Title III support for this activity.

Last week, the UNC Board of Governors approved the results of the most thorough review on our campus in 30 years.

We merged or eliminated 14 programs.

We merged the Colleges of Science and Technology and Liberal Arts to become one, more efficient College of Arts and Sciences.

But this restructuring was not just about cutting programs.

It was also about deciding what NCCU does well and what it needs to do better.

So in addition to the elimination of low productivity, low priority programs, we moved to establish a Department of Mass Communication.

We also determined that we would develop a new, innovative, undergraduate program that will be a hybrid of computer science and computer information systems and be housed in the School of Business.

The No. 2 funding priority is obviously **student academic support**.

These are the advising, tutoring and mentoring programs I described earlier.

But I can't stress enough that we cannot fund and operate these programs based on anecdotal evidence or emotional arguments that often reference culture or tradition.

We must conduct statistically robust evaluations.

We need to derive the evidence that either corroborates the effectiveness of your program or tells you where there are resources that could be better spent somewhere else.

Empirical data is **the** most important currency in 2012.

If we can't prove it, we're going to lose it.

Technology support is critical at No. 3.

For example, Title III assisted us in achieving wireless connectivity across campus.

Now students can be productive anywhere, without having to be tied to a cable.

It also means that every classroom faculty member can access the web, even if they are not teaching in a so-called smart classroom.

Finally, the fourth priority for Title III funding should be for **administrative infrastructure** projects like the software upgrades we made in our Purchasing Department.

Whereas once it could take as long as a week to establish a purchase order, now, with new software in place, purchase orders can be turned around the same day the requisition is made.

Ask yourselves, what concrete evidence could you provide to make a compelling argument for continued financial support?

Is there anyone here whose institution can afford to continue to operate in an ineffective or inefficient manner just because it happens to serve the needs of a dozen employees?

It is only a matter of time until there is a congressional bill to abolish Title III.

Our only effective defense is through the promulgation of an ironclad value proposition to the public — one that is based on solid, empirical evidence.

In closing, I would like to say this: I am convinced that the future of HBCUs will be determined by their **competitiveness, relevance** and **responsiveness**.

To thrive, we must make hard choices and lead with passion, energy and commitment, or else we will fade away into the annals of history.

And that would be a tragic loss to this country and to a community still struggling to escape poverty.

Our HBCUs have so much to offer.

I believe we can lead the way in increasing the educational attainment of African-Americans and others in the changing society of the 21st century.

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I challenge each of you to assist students in taking the path to academic and career success!