OPENING REMARKS
NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY INTERIM PRESIDENT & CEO
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The Sound of Progress

Thank you, Rector Cherry for that generous introduction and for your steadfast leadership of the Board of Visitors. It seems like only yesterday that I was serving alongside you as Vice Rector of the Board.

Madam Provost, Vice Presidents, Deans, Faculty and Staff – I say to each of you good morning and welcome back to a new year, a new semester, and a renewed commitment to excellence in everything that we do here at Norfolk State University.

Let me begin my remarks by recognizing a highly accomplished NSU alum who also happens to be one of my most trusted advisors and strongest sources of support. Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to introduce my wife, Dr. Patricia Stith. Patricia - would you please stand and be recognized. Thank you for joining me on this journey and for your many years of unwavering support. I could not do this work without you.

I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the many contributions of NSU’s Sixth President Eddie N. Moore Jr. Under President Moore’s leadership, NSU successfully overcame some very significant challenges. Eddie often remarked that God put him on this earth to be a university President. Looking back at his more than twenty years of service as a higher education leader, I think it is appropriate to say: well done, good and faithful servant – well done. Would the members of President Moore’s cabinet please stand and be recognized. [Pause] Thank you for your commitment to public service and for the work you have done to help move NSU forward.

As I look out over this assembly, I am reminded of my days as a student here at NSU, some forty-nine years ago. I can vividly remember gathering in the gymnasium with my fellow classmates for Monday morning assembly. One Monday morning in particular stands out in my mind from all the rest. On this Monday morning then President Lyman Beecher Brooks called the assembly to order and ask that we all observe a moment of silence. During that moment of silence, you could hear a heavy pounding in the distance as construction workers drove piles into the ground to support the foundation of one of the three buildings that were constructed during my time as a student. President Brooks went on to explain to us that the noise that we heard was more than just the sound of construction- it was the sound of progress - the sound of a university moving forward toward the future.
Today let us reflect upon what kind of university we want and what kind of university we need to ensure that our students are fully prepared to compete in the 21st century global economy. Let us collectively ask the question what will be NSU’s sound of progress on the road ahead?

With more than thirty-six years of experience as a Professor and Dean, I am no stranger to the academy. While I did not seek this appointment as interim President and CEO, the Board of Visitors has now vested me with the authority to exercise all the powers of this office, which I have every intention of doing during my tenure.

The great scientist Albert Einstein once said that nothing happens until something moves. In the coming weeks we will begin in earnest the work of moving NSU into the future. This process will begin with a listening tour with stakeholders and constituencies throughout the NSU community, which will be followed by a top to bottom review of how we operate as a University to include an assessment of leadership at all levels, academic programs, and support units. There will also be changes made. Some of these changes will start today with the reorganization of the President’s Office. These changes include:

- The appointment of NSU alumnus and longtime faculty member Dr. Carl W. Haywood as Chief of Staff to the President [Dr. Haywood, please stand and be recognized.]
  AND
- The re-appointment of Ericke S. Cage to the expanded role of Executive Advisor to the President and Board of Visitors for Policy, Compliance, and University Ombudsman [Ericke, please stand and be recognized.]

The work and mission critical decisions that we must confront on the road ahead will not be easy, but it is fundamentally essential to ensuring the continued vitality and relevance of the institution. Continuous change and improvement are the hallmarks of the SACSCOC accreditation process and it must also be a key feature of NSU’s operating posture. As each of you are well aware, the university is in the midst of preparing for reaffirmation of accreditation by SACSCOC. This is a mission critical test that NSU cannot fail. To that end, every division, department, and unit throughout the university must be fully committed and involved in this very important work, which I will address further in the weeks ahead.

Under my leadership this administration will focus on the advancement of four key priority areas, which include:

- The adoption of a student’s first approach to organizational decision making;
- The cultivation of an organizational environment of mutual respect that fully engages faculty in the shared governance of the university;
- The elevation of NSU as a viable player in the economic development of the Hampton Roads Region, the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Nation, and global community; and
- A renewed focus on philanthropy to jump start the process of better securing NSU’s financial future.
Students First

Simply stated, our greatest asset and responsibility is our students. And under my leadership students will always be first. Our more than 5,300 students come to us from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, ages, and geographic locations.

Students like Emmanuel Adesioye who at the age of sixteen holds the distinction of being the youngest student to enroll at NSU in the institution’s 82-year history. Upon graduating high school in Maryland, he made the decision to attend NSU and become a member of the Spartan family because the NSU community reminded him of the fond memories he had during boarding school in Nigeria and because he believes that a college education signified a first step toward independence and a better way of life. The now 17-year old sociology major, is a member of the NSU Army ROTC program, works as a manager for the men’s basketball team, and has even tried out for the football team as a kicker. Upon graduation Emmanuel plans to serve in the U.S. Army and eventually work for a government organization such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the Central Intelligence Agency. He strongly believes that he has made a sound decision in choosing Norfolk State University for his education.

Also consider, NSU freshman Tytianna Smith who graduated from Lafayette High School in Alabama with a 4.6 GPA and successfully applied to over 50 colleges and received over $1.7 million in scholarships. When asked why she chose NSU over the many other options she had available to her, Tytianna said that she selected NSU because after walking on campus she “felt at home.”

This strong sense of community is what sets NSU apart from other institutions and it is what will help drive our future success.

Each and every year our students and accrediting bodies are challenging us to deliver higher quality educational programs and more meaningful mentorship opportunities. As an institution this is a challenge that we will accept and fully embrace. Starting today, every decision that we make and every dollar that we spend will be directed toward ensuring that our students are fully prepared to compete in the 21st Century global economy. Our students deserve no less.

A Fully Engaged Faculty

Having spent a lifetime in higher education, I know firsthand the rewards, challenges, and sacrifices each of you face as members of the academy. As a former NSU student, I also know that the strength of this institution lies within its deeply committed and diverse faculty, which brings a high level of expertise to the academic enterprise. I want to take a moment to highlight a number of faculty members that stand out in my mind for their contributions to the profession and NSU community:

Interim Dean of the College of Science, Engineering, and Technology, Dr. Joseph C. Hall has been at NSU for more than 20 years. Dean Hall has held a number of positions at NSU including serving as the vice president for research and economic development and as secretary and president of the Faculty Senate. Hall’s achievements include: publishing over 75 peer-
reviewed papers, conference presentations, and books and helping the University receive a $3.6 million grant to establish the first and only NIH-funded Center for Biotechnology and Biomedical Sciences. Hall is currently a member of the Board of Directors of Synergy- a nonprofit Biotechnology Incubator Start-up Company located in Boston, Massachusetts.

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Dr. Leroy Hamilton Jr., is an NSU alum who has been a member of the faculty for more than 26 years. His former appointments include tenured professor, academic dean, executive director of an academic advising unit for the freshman-year experience initiative, and director of a student-services unit. Hamilton is also a published author and researcher and has presented internationally on topics regarding education reform, curriculum mapping, academic program review and much more. As an avid grant writer, Hamilton has received $3.1 million to develop academic support systems that promote student retention and success.

Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander has been a member of the faculty for more than 25 years and has a host of accomplishments that include past service as President of the Faculty Senate and appointment to numerous boards and commissions throughout Virginia. She has received nearly $600,000 in grants from a host of agencies including the National Endowment for the Humanities and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. Dr. Newby-Alexander has co-authored the Book I Too, Am Norfolk, about the history of blacks in Norfolk, which is scheduled to be released soon.

Dean of the School of Business, Glenn Carrington, is a 1977 alum of NSU who returned to campus in 2017 after a highly successful career to lead NSU’s School of Business. A graduate of the University of Virginia Law School, Carrington began his career as an attorney-advisor in the U.S. Department of Treasury’s Honors Program and subsequently went on to hold positions in the Tax Legislative Counsel’s Office, the Office of International Affairs, and the Office of Chief Counsel at the Internal Revenue Service. After leaving government service, Carrington moved into private practice as a Managing Director of Arthur Anderson’s National Tax Office. He also served on the U.S. executive board for Ernst & Young. During his short tenure as Dean, Carrington has already set in motion a strong agenda for growth and excellence. Glenn – we’re glad you’re back home – and as a former B-School dean myself – please know that I am expecting nothing but great things from you and your team.

Assistant Professor of Social Work, Dr. Jason Sawyer, has been at NSU since 2014. He is co-founder of Think.Create.Change an online collective that brings together community workers, non-profit leaders, academics, organizers, citizens, volunteers, artists, and other cultural workers to explore ideas, share innovation, connect, and mobilize for the common good. Dr. Sawyer’s research interests lie in critical pedagogy, community organization practice, positive youth development, difference, and arts based interventions. His research encompasses studies on the use of the creative process in community organizing, youth arts based program evaluation, community practice model development, and transformative arts practice.
Assistant Professor of History, Dr. Stephanie J. Richmond, joined the NSU faculty in 2012 after earning her Ph.D. in history from the Catholic University in Washington, DC. Dr. Richmond’s research interest includes antebellum political and social movements, antislavery, and feminism. She is currently working on her first book manuscript on antislavery women, class and the roots of feminism.

Assistant Professor of Biology, Dr. Aylin Marz has been at NSU since 2016. Dr. Marz’s research interest includes understanding how normal cells respond to DNA repair stress, how these responses change in progression to cancer, and how we can employ this knowledge to find diagnostic markers of cancer progression. Her teaching philosophy involves challenging students to aim high while making sure that they have the support needed to succeed.

It has been said that Presidents are required to trust and follow their leadership instincts and to understand that the presidency is not about the president. Rather, the presidency is about the narrative that has been created by the people who have made the university what it has become. For me, this means that the faculty must have a seat at the decision-making table.

Starting today, we will begin the hard work of putting an end to siloed thinking and decision making by tearing down artificial and arbitrary barriers to information sharing across units, departments, and divisions. Working together we will create an enterprise that fully embraces faculty engagement through the principles and framework of shared governance. Dr. Yousef, as President of the Faculty Senate I look forward to engaging directly with you and the members of the Faculty Senate to chart a new course of cooperation between the administration and faculty. We will not always agree on every issue, but I will work to ensure that every stakeholder has an opportunity to be heard because we are all on the same team - and all working toward the same common mission. My door and the doors of my senior leadership team will always be open to you for critical discussion. No employee whether faculty or staff should every feel threatened or dissuaded from sharing concerns with management.

Today let us also recommit ourselves to the University’s core values of academic excellence, student-centered focus, diversity, integrity and collegiality. Under my leadership we will operate in an open and supportive environment where every member of the NSU community is treated with dignity and respect. Anything less will not be tolerated by any employee at any level of this organization.

Becoming a Relevant Player in Regional Economic Growth and Development

With annual operating revenues above $150 million and more than 1,200 employees, and 5,300 students, NSU plays a vital economic and social role in the Hampton Roads Region. Not only does the University provide skilled workers to the local economy, it is also a major purchaser of goods and services from local businesses. NSU also contributes directly to the growth and economic development of the region through our academic programs, centers, and research which include:

- Ground-breaking Cyber Security Education Programs and Research
- The Creative Gaming and Simulation Lab
• The Micro and Nano Technology Center
• The Center for Biotechnology and Biomedical Sciences
• The Center for Materials Research
• Ernest M. Hodge Institute for Entrepreneurship
• The Virginia Beach Higher Education Center

Under my leadership we will work to fully leverage NSU’s economic impact in the Hampton Roads region to realize a greater return on our investments and to improve the quality of life in our local and surrounding communities. As Interim President and CEO, I will spend significant time in this community - meeting with public officials, corporate leaders, and other community stakeholders to tell the NSU story and to ensure that these critical partners fully embrace and financially support this great institution. To further support this work the University in partnership with the NSU Research and Innovation Foundation and the City of Norfolk has secured office space in downtown Norfolk, which will serve as a hub for the University’s economic development, research commercialization and technology transfer, and other research activities.

A Renewed Focus on Philanthropy

The Virginia General Assembly cannot currently provide enough financial support to secure NSU’s status as a preeminent institution. We must work diligently to augment the limited financial resources we receive with federal research funding and private philanthropy. Starting today, we must begin the hard work of developing a compelling narrative that encourages alumni and friends to invest financially in the institution. In 2017, with the support of more than 3,700 donors the University’s endowment grew by $4 million to just under $29 million. These numbers are highly encouraging, but we still must do much more if we are to maintain our value proposition among our peer institutions.

Having served as a Dean at two major research universities, I am no stranger to fundraising and major capital campaigns. Nor am I a stranger to alumni giving here at NSU – my wife and I have been proud to financially support NSU through a number of gifts, which include: a $50,000 gift to support the Obie and Mildred Lynch Endowed Scholarship, a $100,000 gift to revive the Melvin and Patricia Stith Alumni House and a $400,000 commitment in support of the Dr. Patricia Lynch Stith Student Success Center.

Starting today, we will refocus our efforts to increase financial giving at NSU. This will be a collective effort that will start at the President’s Office and be led by University Advancement and supported by academic deans and other senior administrators throughout the University. We will also expect much more from our alumni, parents, friends, and corporate partners.

As NSU faculty and staff, you also have a very important role to play in the university’s fundraising efforts. Today’s students are tomorrow’s alumni. If they do not have an excellent experience on campus we cannot expect them to be financial supporters when they become alums. Today, I ask every employee at NSU to recommit themselves to the success of our students. I also challenge each of you to show your support for our students by investing financially in NSU.
Closing Thoughts

The agenda I have set forth is ambitious and will not be completed in the first week, first two months, or even during my tenure, but the hard work of moving this agenda forward will begin today, and it will become our sound of progress - our sound of a university moving forward toward the future.

Sitting in that gymnasium 49 years ago as an undergraduate listening to President Brooks speak about the sound of progress I could have never imagined that this farm boy from Sussex County, Virginia would be afforded the high honor of serving as the leader of this great institution.

Whether as an Army captain in Vietnam, university faculty member, or corporate board director, I have never forgotten where my journey began. NSU provided me with an excellent education, solid foundation for career success, and yes – even a wife. Today, let us re-commit ourselves to the task of ensuring that every student has our unequivocal support and our absolute best so that they may leave this University by Virginia’s golden shore, forging onward, bound to lead. Then all of us will be forever bound by that simple, but elegant expression, BEHOLD, THE GREEN AND GOLD!

END REMARKS