



President Neufville – Coppin State University
Convocation Address
September 11, 2013- James Weldon Johnson Auditorium

Good afternoon and welcome to our 2013 opening Fall Convocation. We extend warm greetings to our class of 2017, to our returning students, faculty, staff, and guests who have joined us for this special event.

I understand that in the past on this occasion the President recognizes our students who are entering for the first time, while highlighting those who will complete their academic requirements during this academic year, and the significant accomplishments of our university and its constituents over the past year.

First, let me express thanks and appreciation for your contributions over these past 8 months of my tenure at Coppin State University. It has been a good 8 months, but a period of challenges and opportunities. The challenges have left me wondering if there is something magical about the number 13, but the opportunities that have emerged have left me with the assurance that we together can build a Coppin that is a place for providing access to the underserved, a place where educational dreams can be attained, a place where future scientists, healthcare professionals, teachers, athletes, information technologists, and geniuses can be discovered.

Future entrepreneurs can begin their ventures, and social scientists can use the community as a laboratory to contemplate an agenda for addressing the social, healthcare, and other disparities of our society.

So, again, greetings to those matriculating at Coppin. Now that you are here there are standards, rules, policies, and procedures. We have expectations of you. Those who provide support for you have expectations of you, and most importantly, you should have expectations for yourself.

Now that you are here, no one is going to tell you what you can do, no one is going to tell you where you can go, no one is going to tell you who you can see. It will be up to you to align your decisions with the goals you have set for yourselves. Remembering that first things first; you are here for a purpose. So be preoccupied with your purpose rather than with your needs. If your needs are at odds with your purpose, then use the resources we have; counseling, advising, and mentoring to get back on track.

When you go to buy a car, a house, or anything else for which you will take out a loan, the shorter the loan period, the lower the interest rate. Your education is no different, the shorter your stay, the lower your cost, but with one caveat, an incomplete grade, an aborted stay can be more costly than a lengthened stay.

Again, let me commend our continuing students and our faculty for their accomplishments this past year. As you will witness over the next few months, we are in the process of change. Reorganizing, right-sizing, and reprioritizing Coppin State University.

This is our first semester under our reorganized academic structure. We are now under four colleges and we have consolidated several departments. This will not affect our students who are currently enrolled under the former structure. We have eliminated some under-performing majors and will continue to build high demand areas to meet the needs of our students. We are in the implementation phase of our enrollment management plan which focuses on activities and areas that will improve our retention and graduation rates. We broke ground and construction is underway for our new Science and Technology Building that will transform the south end of our campus.

To reflect these changes we are rebranding and will introduce new advertising and resource materials under the banner "Coppin Proud."

Our 2013 graduating class had the highest number of class members with a GPA exceeding 3.0 in recent CSU history. Students, I need you to surpass that.

The graduation rate for our student athletes is 75%, the highest on record for Coppin and the 2nd highest graduation rate in the MEAC conference. Numerous CSU honors students were accepted and offered scholarships to several prestigious graduate schools. Dr. Jamaal Uddin for the 2nd year was the recipient of the prestigious Wilson Elkins Professorship Award for his outstanding and innovative work in nanotechnology. Dr. Nicholas Eugene has been appointed CSU STEM Coordinator and working with our facilities management team. We are now embarking on a STEM student recruitment campaign.

Our Division of Student Affairs is making real progress in preparing our students for leadership and life-long success. Our Center for Career Services facilitated a record number of internships to prepare CSU students for today's workforce. Internship opportunities have increased by 20%. Student Leadership on campus is on the rise. This past year, 58 students completed the Charles B. Wright Leadership program and are officially certified student leaders.

Our SGA leaders are working with Facilities Management to renovate the student lounge area in the Tawes Building.

We continue to live up to our reputation for cutting edge IT services, by providing Microsoft Cloud services, and offering our students free access to web apps from anywhere on campus. Just last week our IT Division and the SGA hosted Tech Mania, a first event for Coppin where 400 students and 71 faculty and staff learned about the latest, state-of-the-art IT services we have here at Coppin.

Coppin's Office of Institutional Advancement surpassed the goal set for FY 13 by raising \$2.3 million, the highest amount raised in any single year at Coppin. Alumni giving generated over \$130,000, an increase of 62%.

So what's on the horizon starting this fall?

The most challenging issue for us continues to be increasing our 6-year graduation rate, while at the same time maintaining an optimum student enrollment. We have an infrastructure to accommodate 6,000 students. Our projection for 2020 is 5,000 students.

Our Enrollment Management Plan will target community colleges and recruitment efforts that can yield results, and leadership that will engender success. We must follow through with our --

1. Recruitment contact with prospective students through to the application stage
2. Application process through to admission
3. The point of admission through actual enrollment and attendance
4. Attendance through to attainment and completion

The weakest link in all of this and our greatest challenge appears to be our lack of resources to support the Financial Aid needs of our students and the poor customer service that some of our students encounter. We must—and we will do better.

While it seems like so much of our focus has been on Coppin's challenges, I continue to be inspired by all the positive things that are part of Coppin's past, present and future. So now is the time to embrace a new attitude and a spirit of stewardship. A rise in ATTITUDE raises the ALTITUDE so that we can soar like the Eagles we are. Each of us must become advocates and ambassadors for Coppin!

We were established in 1900 because our fore parents were denied access. Today we are a fully integrated institution with all races and nationalities and cultures. We have had much success locally, across the state, and the nation, yet many still threaten our existence. Relevance is still contemplated in many circles and we are still called upon to legitimize our need for strengthening to achieve some level of parity.

Equity for Coppin, and universities like Coppin, is an elusive barometer, and we are challenged by indicators that determine if we are headed in the right direction. We must be vigilant, and be the best that we can be, so that our strengths will overshadow our weaknesses; our programs compete with the best of the best; our graduates compete anywhere in the world; our research, basic and applied, addresses critical human needs; and we contribute to economic growth and development by engaging with our local, national and international communities. Let us therefore be reminded that we are here for a purpose.

Like many other HBCUs, Coppin State University must continue to address the challenges in higher education and inspire career aspirations for minorities. We must play a role in producing the next generation of Scientists, Technologists, Teachers, and entrepreneurs. With the decline in U.S. scientific productivity and a projected increase in the minority populations you can do the math and see what will happen if we do not provide access and launch a major initiative to attract more students.

To the faculty and staff, we must reach out to recruit more students, keep them, and graduate them.

As faculty, your task is also to provide relevant, outstanding courses and programs for our students so that when their season of preparation is over a season of opportunity awaits them.

When I met with Chancellor Kirwan to discuss my assuming this leadership position, we identified three priorities for the university:

1. Enhancing the learning environment
2. Improving retention and graduation rates
3. Ensuring that our financial house is in order

While these priorities are integral to our mission and inextricably linked, an enhanced learning environment serves as the foundation of our future success.

We are all responsible for the learning environment: the janitor, the gardener, the librarian, the IT technician, the secretary, the faculty, the department chair, the advisor, the registrar, the entire campus. We are all responsible for having a fully integrated teaching, research, and social campus that can facilitate a stimulating, well-structured learning environment.

By enriching the campus experience through effective partnerships with all entities of the campus, and the local community, we can promote a university and community-wide customer service orientation that will demonstrate our commitment to effective, interactive and active learning.

I must recognize a number of faculty members who have adopted the innovative approach to teaching and learning known as “flipping” the classroom. This and other efforts in course redesign must be encouraged and supported.

Our customer service attitude should be such that we treat every moment as an educational moment to demonstrate that knowledge is power. Our attitude should be such that a student will never ask if he or she came to the right university.

The advisor is the key ingredient here. She or he can be the element of success or failure, the stairway to a career or the highway to nowhere. Not all of us can be advisors, because to be an effective advisor one must have patience and skill. Advisors who affect the most change are Real, Ready, Reliable, and Responsive.

Are you Real? Are you truly an advisor or just a camouflaged, invisible person only present at the opening session? Do you have the compassion, spirit, kind heart and demeanor that reflect your readiness to be a mentor, a counselor and a source for information?

Are you **READY** to be an advisor? Can you bring hope to those you encounter? Can you help students overcome their fears and instill peace in place of anxiety? Patience can overcome fears and with patience you can detect the student’s potential for failure so that he/she can prevail when expected to fail.

Are you **RELIABLE**? Will you be there to make a difference to those you encounter? Where do they have to go to get to you when trauma strikes and there is volatility and chaos all around them? Can I count on you not to quit on our students?

Are you RESPONSIVE? Will you promise to monitor their progress and tell them the truth? Is your presence consequential? Will it make a difference having you there because you are quick to respond to their needs?

I am sure most of our students, just as we were in growing up, depend on faith, family and friends for support and sustenance. In our learning community the expectations should be the same. There should be appropriate support groups to meet their educational, social, and faith needs. We have to act as their parents so their family needs can be met, counsel and direct them so that they can establish the right healthy friendships within their cohort groups. You our faculty, staff, students, community leaders have a critical role to play and we should consider this not a burden, but a privilege to serve. Let us serve with love expecting nothing in return.

Let us therefore endeavor to be good advisors. Better than the rest. Being an—

Advocate for their needs.

A Good **D**ecision maker

Volunteering when necessary

Influence in their total well-being, a

Servant leader expecting nothing in return

Organizing their plans and your time so that you are there for them and gain their

Respect so that they will not hesitate to call on you.

Finally, to our students, I encourage you to set priorities. You must keep first things first so that you do not become preoccupied with your needs and forget your purpose for being here. Align your decisions with your priorities. Don't be anxious chasing your needs. With your priorities at the forefront, peace will overtake your anxieties. Study hard and be the best that you can be.

You have heard the statement; look to your left, look to your right and the person you see will not be standing beside you on stage 4 years from now.

I have a different scenario for you. Look to your left, look to your right and it is your responsibility to ensure that the person you see will be on stage with you when your cohort graduates. This is being my sister's keeper/my brother's keeper. Will you accept my challenge?

My final challenge to you students is to ask you to spend 15 minutes each half day while you are awake with no devices turned on. No T.V., no iPad, no cellphones, no microwave, no stove. Relax, meditate and discover you. Just 15 minutes. Try it, and discover the true you.

To our faculty and staff, this is a time for us to act with solidarity as we pursue our vision, goals, and priorities. Working together; let us stand on our values and not on our own devices. I know there will be detractors and there are those who always think of the administration as "them," and, it is them and us. Sometimes there is the natural propensity for us to go left when we ought to go right. Let our standard be to uphold what is best for CSU and our students, remembering that we have to function within a system of institutions.

As for me, I have but one simple goal and that is to leave CSU better than I found it. I deserve no legacy for me, but for a thriving institution for the one who follows me. I am convinced that the things of value that uniquely define Coppin far outweigh the challenges that are holding us back. By working together we will succeed in leading Coppin to new horizons and secure its future as a vibrant university in the state of Maryland.

I am proud of Coppin..... I am proud of our students..... I am proud of our faculty and staff..... I am proud of our legacy..... I am proud of our mission.....I am proud to serve as your President..... I AM COPPIN PROUD!