State of the University Address

Chancellor T. J. Bryan
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Good evening, university family. It's my pleasure to welcome you to this "State of the University" address.

I chose Founder's Week for this address very deliberately because I believe wholeheartedly that the health that Fayetteville State University is enjoying today is due to the vision and wisdom of our seven founders 139 years ago.

You know the old saying, "You can't know where you're going if you don't know where you've been." The time is perfect for reminding ourselves of our accomplishments so that we can move forward with confidence and enthusiasm as we plan for the future and strive diligently to fulfill our plans.

I can imagine that, as the founders talked about what the African-American community most needed in the shadow of the Civil War, they must have shaken their heads in disbelief at what they were considering. It must have seemed like an impossible goal. They must have known that establishing a school for African-American children who would themselves become teachers of other African Americans was a high-stakes gamble. The odds were so overwhelmingly against them. Money had to be raised. Parents had to be convinced. A curriculum had to be designed.

I'm sure there were critics who tried to talk them out of their plan. You know how it is when you have a dream: Someone's always around the corner to shoot it down. I'm betting that the founders heard the negative chatter. But they refused to heed it. They forged ahead, believing not in what they saw, but in what they could imagine. Seven men selflessly pooled $136 to purchase the land on which the Howard School, Fayetteville State University's forerunner institution, was constructed. And the first principal of the School, educational pioneer Robert Harris, a man with extraordinary political acumen, transformed an idea into an enduring institution that was so sound that it was selected to become the state's first "colored" normal school. These early leaders persevered because they had "gone up to the mountain." They "had looked over," and they had "seen the Promised Land." We owe them a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. In fact, the only way we can even begin to "make good" on what we owe is to continue what they began.
So by now you're probably asking: What is the state of our university? What have we got to show for these 139 years? In my judgment, the state of Fayetteville State University is excellent. Intellectual and cultural life is vibrant here. The Distinguished Speakers' Series; the Fine Arts Series; our departmental speakers' series; our faculty members' and our students' scholarly presentations and creative performances and exhibitions; and an abundance of other events on campus attest to our vigor.

We are a beautiful campus with what a Fayetteville native recently described as "curb appeal." His statement echoed the observations of Governor Michael Easley, who himself commented to me a few months ago on how well groomed our campus is. In our case, you can judge a book by its cover, for our appearance reflects our pride in who and what we are. In the future, our campus will continue to distinguish itself in appearance, but our grounds will be more expansive. Within the next six months, we will be adding buildable acreage for the first time in more than half a century on which we will locate the Southeastern North Carolina Nursing Education and Research Center. A new science-and-technology complex is, we hope, on the horizon and will require additional land acquisition.

We are financially stable; our current budget from state appropriations and tuition revenue is almost sixty-million dollars, and we expect our budget to increase as the state's economy flourishes and as our enrollment grows.

Our student applications and enrollment are up. We grew by twelve percent this year, and, for fall 2006, acceptances are up by 84%, and our confirmations have grown by a little over one thousand percent. To support current and anticipated enrollment growth, we will add at least thirty new full-time faculty members this fall to our ranks. We will then have at least 268 full-time faculty members. Before I continue with highlights, I need to step back a little and contextualize our present and our future. The World is Flat, a book by New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, argues that the world is being "flattened" by globalization and the convergence of technology, forcing us to adapt quickly to rapid changes. We cannot keep doing what we have been doing, for no longer are our competitors for the good life residing just in Eastover, E-town, Raleigh, and Durham. Our competitors reside in Shanghai, China, and in Bangalore, India. Through the Internet and other technological advances, our competitors, often better educated than are U.S. workers, can now perform the tasks that we have historically completed—usually at lower cost and frequently with a higher level of quality than we can in this country. In candor, as a nation, we must run faster and harder just to stay in place.

Friedman says that ours is a world in which weak and inflexible institutions collapse with frightening speed, while the rugged and adaptable—whether institutions, governments, individuals, or communities—can withstand upheaval and storms. I don't know about you, but I'd rather be rugged and adaptable than weak and inflexible any day! Organizations that will survive are those in which dreams of the "positive, life-affirming variety" predominate and with memories that remain but that do not hinder adaptation. In other words, we must recognize, in Friedman's words, that "that was then and this is now." The world is constantly turning—and today it is changing more than ever before.

In essence, if we focus more on our memories than on our dreams, we won't be as adaptable and flexible as we need to be, because we'll be staring into the rear-view mirror instead of looking at the road in front of us. I believe that, at Fayetteville State, we've found a way to cherish the past while striding boldly forward. In doing so, we embody the notion of "sankofa," a term from Ghana that signifies a reclaiming of the past in order to understand the present and build the future.

Today I want to talk with you briefly about just two aspects of this university's present and future. The two aspects are excellence and access—two qualities that must always be linked to one another.

Our top priority at FSU is academic excellence. For that reason, we have hired the best faculty and have required that our academic programs achieve specialized accreditation status when such a stamp of approval is available. Currently, ninety-three percent of our full-time faculty members hold doctoral or first-professional degrees. Our nursing-completion program and our generic BSN program have earned accreditation for ten years—from 2005 to 2015—from the
Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. Our teacher-
education program has been fully accredited for over fifty
years—since the very beginning, in 1954, of the National Council
for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. I am proud to say
that we are one of only seven institutions in North Carolina
with such a distinction. Our Master of Social Work program
has successfully completed all phases of the accreditation
process, and we expect a favorable outcome when the Council
on Social Work Education completes its deliberations in June
2006. A number of other academic programs—in areas such as
business and economics, computer science, and music—are in
various stages of preparation for the specialized-accreditation
process. For those programs for which specialized accreditation
is unavailable, the university is developing a policy as well
as procedures for evaluating them for currency and other
quality indicators—with a goal of ensuring continuous quality
improvement.

At FSU, we hold this truth to be self-evident—that
21st-century academic programs must, in a flat world, yield
international perspectives. We must ensure that our students
gain mastery of other languages and have experiences in
other lands. How would the founders respond to our forming
partnerships with seven Asian higher-education institutions
thus far and our seeking additional partnerships this summer
when a delegation travels to Hong Kong and China? Would
the founders have smiled at our sending twenty-eight students
abroad to China, India, and Ghana during the last two years?
How would the founders perceive our sending undergraduate
teacher-education students to teach in Okinawa this semester?
What would they think about students pushing beyond borders
to engage in study-abroad experiences in Spain this coming
summer? Would they warmly welcome the three delegations
from Chinese universities and the delegation from France
that visited our campus this year? Would they embrace our
expansion of our world-class foreign-language lab beyond French
and Spanish—to include Chinese, Hindi, and Pashto—three
languages that will be taught at FSU for the first time this fall?
I believe that the founders would give us a standing ovation for
pushing forward!!!

And now on to access. We’re proud of the fact that
Fayetteville State University is a historically black university.
As such, we’ve always been inclusive of all who came to us
seeking education as a portal to better lives. We’re also now a
regional university. And we’re a focused-growth institution—
one of seven universities in the University of North Carolina
System with such a designation and with a funded mandate to
increase student enrollment. To support this growth, each year
we receive additional dollars. This year, the focused-growth
portion of our budget is $396,000.

Currently, our student body is seventy-three percent
African American, eighteen percent white, four percent
Hispanic, two percent other, almost two percent Asian, and one
percent American Indian. As a university that is projected to
grow to 7,629 students by 2015, we must be cognizant of and
act on high-school graduation trend data that reveal that, ten
years from now (in what is just a blink of an eye), when North
Carolina looks in a mirror, the face that will look back will look
dramatically different from the reflection that appears in the
mirror today. By 2015, Hispanics will have soared from their
current representation, five percent, to twenty-five percent
of North Carolina high-school graduates. African Americans
will have declined from twenty-seven percent of high-school
graduates to twenty-two percent. Whites will have declined
from sixty-five percent to forty-eight percent. FSU and the
rest of the institutions in our state will bear evidence of this
demographic shift—as larger and larger numbers of Hispanic
students enter our universities.

Currently, adult learners constitute forty percent of our
student body. Many of these students complete face-to-face
coursework in the evenings and on weekends. Some of these
students travel to our campus; in other instances, our faculty
members travel to them. Many of our adult learners complete
online courses—which have registered a 59-percent enrollment
increase over the past three years. Through the Internet and
through interactive television, we’ve been able to meet the
“anytime, anywhere” needs of adult learners—who are often
working full time; who have families; who are at a distance; and/
or who are nearby but who want to complete courses from the
comfort of their homes. In the future, we will be traveling more
and more to our students—delivering more and more courses
at community colleges and in other settings near our adult
students’ homes. Our online offerings will grow dramatically
to meet the needs of this group, which must engage in lifelong
learning if we are, as a nation, to remain competitive in the flat
world.
Our enrollment of military personnel has grown during the last two years, but it is a mere fraction of what I think it should be. As more and more military officers come to our region as a result of base realignment, FSU must offer master’s programs that align with the preferences of this group, which is made up of individuals already with bachelor’s degrees. And like our other adult learners, they must be able to complete their FSU degrees from Fort Bragg in a face-to-face classroom or online from Iraq. Military personnel’s preferences guided us in the past when we funded the development of online programs in criminal justice, psychology, and sociology—the curricula that they most often pursued. Their preferences will guide us tomorrow.

This university serves students who represent virtually every point on the educational-preparation scale—from underprepared students to highly prepared ones. Through programs such as CHEER—our summer-bridge program—we are meeting the needs of a variety of learners, helping them to acquire tools for success in the university setting. In summer 2004, sixty-three students participated. One hundred and forty-eight high-school students participated in summer 2005, and one hundred percent of them enrolled at FSU and are earning higher grade point averages than are other FSU freshmen, even those who had higher GPAs in high school. We expect to serve up to two-hundred CHEER students this coming summer.

We have established learning communities to meet the needs of our diverse student base. The first two such programs are Bronco Men of Distinction and the Honors Program.

- **Bronco Men has served thirty to fifty male students annually since its inception three years ago.** (We are planning a pre-school through twelfth-grade male initiative that will be connected, we hope, to the Bronco Men. Through this project, FSU hopes to respond regionally to what is an alarming national trend—the shrinking numbers of males of all races and ethnicities in higher education.)

- **One hundred and nine students have been admitted to the Honors Program over the last two years.** Not only do most of these students attend selected classes together, but also many of them reside on campus in living-learning communities (in Hackley Hall and in Hood Hall).

This year, our learning communities grew beyond the Bronco Men and Honors Program. Now we have five communities. Over the coming years, we want these groups to multiply. I think that the founders would have nodded their heads affirmatively in support of what we have done and will do to expand these communities—which contribute positively, studies show to students’ completing their degrees.

To facilitate access to our university, we have reached out assertively to recruit students who have historically sought the high-quality academic programs and the academic and social support that we have always provided. This year, supported by our alumni chapters, student teams and I visited twenty-four high schools and community colleges in North Carolina for the purpose of urging students to pursue higher education—and to encourage them to attend FSU. The university launched publications such as the Bronco Bulletin, a bi-monthly magazine, and FS&U, an alumni quarterly that go to a readership of 30,000 individuals. As most of you know, the 21st-century student shops for universities through the Internet initially; thus, we have increased the user friendliness and currency of our website. We have increased our billboard campaign in Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. We have updated our recruitment and enrollment “print materials” and, in the spirit of continuous quality improvement, will rethink and update them again this summer. We have stationed community-college coordinators at area community colleges. We have signed dual-enrollment agreements in criminal justice, nursing, and teacher education with area community colleges. And the list of our efforts goes on and on.

While these initiatives are essential, the bottom line for an institution such as ours—a focused-growth institution that must prepare increasing numbers of North Carolinians—is the academic-program portfolio. We must offer high-quality academic programs that students demand and that the workplace needs. This year we added bachelor’s-degree programs in biotechnology, communications, forensic science, and management-information systems. We added a master’s program in criminal justice and an experimental track to our master’s program in psychology. We just submitted a plan to
establish a baccalaureate program in fire science—a program that was planned in partnership with the Fayetteville Fire Department, Cumberland County Schools, and Fayetteville Technical Community College. We have other new programs on the horizon, including a master's degree in international studies, for which we received planning money from the UNC General Administration.

In closing, I have just one thing to add. Our theme for this academic year has been “Making a Great University Even Greater.” It implies that Fayetteville State is constantly moving forward and evolving. Returning to the principle of “sankofa” once more, we are reclaiming the past and using it to interpret where we are today and to build a future we can all be proud of.

Honoring the founders' legacy means adapting to a present reality that is different from the world our founders inhabited but one that is just as full of perils and pitfalls. In the deepest core of my being, I know that our founders—great men of vision—would not have feared change, for they were creators of change. Had they been faint hearted and had they been willing to maintain the status quo, there would have been no Fayetteville State University. Instead, they trod bravely—pushing back the nay sayers and moving forward with the help of the maybe sayers and the yea sayers. They were able to imagine a world they could not see and envision a brighter day for their sons and daughters. Without their imagination and courage, we would not be where we are today.

This state of the university address is really a tribute to the founders—to their faith, to their dedication, and to their steadfast belief that, against all odds, they could create a place that would benefit future generations of students. It is our responsibility to continue the work they started by standing for excellence and access today as they did 139 years ago.

Thank you.