

University of the Virgin Islands
Fall 2006 University Convocation
August 16, 2006

President's Message
LaVerne E. Ragster, Ph.D.
President

May we have a moment of silence to acknowledge your faith, celebrate being alive and to remember those we have lost and persons in pain or ill. Celebrate this day and life and this space.

Good morning. It is a pleasure to welcome you all to the beginning of the 2006-07 academic year at the University of the Virgin Islands. A warm and special Virgin Islands welcome is extended to all new faculty and staff. It is with appreciation for their service, leadership and support that I introduce and greet, Provost, Dr. Al Hassan Musah, Vice President for Administration and Finance, Vincent Samuel, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Joseph Boschulte, Vice President for Information and Technology Services, Tina Koopmans, Campus Executive Administrator for St. Croix, Dr. Monique Guillory and CEA for the St. Thomas Campus, John D'Orazio. Greetings to members of the Board of Trustees. Provost Musah please introduce the chairs of the academic divisions. Mr. Samuel I ask you to present the new members of the HR department.

We are all here in a very beautiful part of the world populated by communities of people who depend on the University of the Virgin Islands to fulfill its mission to be a learner-centered institution dedicated to the success of its students and committed to enhancing the lives of the people of the US Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean through excellent teaching, innovative research, and responsive community service. I believe it is appropriate to begin this Convocation and this academic year remembering that despite many challenges, and the sometimes difficult demands of change and institutional growth, UVI, through *your* individual and collective efforts, has many accomplishments and achievements to feel good about.

I am particularly pleased to remind you that:

- ◆ Standard and Poor's reaffirmed the 'Triple B' investment rating of the institution.
- ◆ 19 million dollars of approved capital projects, including renovation of administration and conference center, the marine science building and dormitories on St. Thomas Campus and extension of the Northwest wing

and repair of the Evans Center on the St. Croix Campus were ongoing, and the facilities on our campuses continue to improve.

- ◆ UVI conferred 353 degrees this May, our largest number to date, and inclusive of the first Educational Specialist degrees in School Psychology (15) and the first BS degree jointly sponsored between Columbia University and UVI.
- ◆ The University provided non-traditional education in the form of certificates, workshops and seminars to more than 18,000 Virgin Islanders through CELL, SBDC, VIUCEDD, CES, AES, CMES and ECC.
- ◆ The St. Thomas Student Government Association had a very positive and proactive year, including the launch of a program called SOS, Shadow our Students, to help recruit and encourage high school students to come to UVI.
- ◆ St. Croix Chapter of Golden Key International Society organized a Youth Leadership Forum and hosted the Prime Minister of Dominica, the Honorable Roosevelt Skerit as the keynote speaker.
- ◆ The 4th Annual Spring Research Symposium was held on the St. Croix Campus for students from both campuses, funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the VI Experimental Program for the Stimulation of Competitive Research (VI-EPSCoR).
- ◆ Annual giving funds have exceeded the target of \$1.0 million for the third year and included a one-time gift of Senepol cattle from the Gasperi family of Castle Nugent Farms on St. Croix.
- ◆ The University Compensation Committee's recommendation for a salary adjustment plan was approved by the Board and Phase I was implemented in April. Please acknowledge the hard work of F. Mills, E. Esdaille, F. Depusoir, C Ferris, I. Bartlette, M. Fleming, Marthious Clavier, M. Sekou, D. Gould, A Musah, J Boschulte, and V. Samuel.
- ◆ The University received for the first time in many years an appropriation for the operations budget at the level it requested. (\$30M)
- ◆ There have been many compliments and positive comments from members of the community, the Legislature and the Board on the appearance of both campuses. A special thank you and commendations are extended to the men and women of physical plant on both campuses. Please stand and be acknowledged.

- ◆ UVI was accepted into the athletic league, Liga Atletica Interuniversitaria (LAI) de Puerto Rico to play men's and women's basketball, volleyball, beach volleyball, tennis, cross-country and track and field sports beginning with the 2006-07 academic year. The league, which includes the University of Puerto Rico campuses and the Ana G. Mendez University System (20 schools) has NCAA Division III members and will allow UVI to finally have varsity basketball and volleyball teams play home games for fans to enjoy. Thank you to our Athletic Director, Peter Sauer, for great leadership and persistence on this special initiative.
- ◆ After a year of development and input from all groups of stakeholders, the University's third strategic plan was approved by the Board of Trustees. Vision 2012 is the framework or roadmap for the University's efforts to achieve goals in educational excellence, institutional improvement, financial sustainability and community engagement between 2006 and 2012, our 50th anniversary.
- ◆ And there is so much more!!!

A very sincere thank you to every member of the UVI Community. The improvement in our image in the community, wonderful outcomes and accomplishments, and increased support from the community are due to your dedication and commitment to our mission and goals.

I know that you are all very aware that even as we were able to achieve many of our goals and continue the transformation of the University there have been great **challenges**.

- ◆ ***Compliance requirements from federal agencies and donors continue to be very high and are increasingly associated with stiff penalties for failure to meet standards.*** Special concerns are in the areas of financial aid and hazardous waste management. Accountability remains one of the major areas of focus for me and for the Institution. We are continuing the search for an internal auditor, even as we note with pleasure that our financial statements and audits for the last fiscal year were completed on time and we have published a President's Report for 2004-05, presenting our major accomplishments, annual giving outcomes and the financial statements of the Institution. Thank you Mr. Samuel and Mr. Boschulte and Patrice Johnson for your leadership and hard work.
- ◆ ***Addressing competitive compensation for staff and faculty within resources and in a fair manner.*** Persistence and dedication to shared process have been required. I must thank the members of the University Compensation Committee for the level of professionalism and commitment they have shown throughout the year and this summer. I

believe special commendations are in order for VP Samuel who is a great example of a very competent CFO with a heart.

- ◆ ***Reversing the decline in enrollment and addressing retention concerns.*** Although we have seen an increase in our enrollment during the spring semester, it has been the challenge of the enrollment management area and the faculty under Dr. Musah's leadership to develop strategies to ensure that we reach our targets with respect to new and continuing students. There is still much to do.

Thanks to your dedication, cooperation and hard work we are improving in all of these areas.

Moving Ahead

During the coming year I expect that my time and focus will be to ensure that we continue to improve our image, cultivate and encourage stronger partnerships with major donors (including addressing the wind turbine project) and meet expected levels of accountability in all areas. I anticipate there will be some very special activities and efforts that will capture the institution's attention:

Budget & compensation –

- Requested \$32.7M for FY07, including a 3% increase for salaries, \$1M for plant equipment and renewals.
- University Compensation Committee will finish its current assignment and I expect to take a recommendation from the Committee to the Finance Committee of the Board very shortly. The expectation is that the Board will make a decision by the 3rd week in September, allowing the University to address the compensation adjustment plan in this fiscal year.

Accreditation –

Reaffirmation of our accreditation with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is one of the most important objectives we must achieve. You are all aware of how critical it is to assure the public and the federal government that we meet the standards set for a viable higher education institution. We are scheduled for a site visit by the Team headed by Dr. Helen Giles –Gee during the week of April 22, 2007. Our self –study report is due to the Commission by January 2007, and Dr. Giles –Gee will be here on a preliminary visit the week of October 27, 2006. The Self-Study Committee has been co-chaired by Drs. F. Mills and Patricia Rhymer Todman. Jennifer Jackson is serving as the editor. Thank you to all those who have contributed to the document to date.

There will be opportunities to review the document and participate in discussions about the areas of emphasis we have chosen to highlight - planning, shared governance and student outcomes assessment.

Charter Day –

In March 2007 we will celebrate the 45th anniversary of the founding of the University. The intent is to make the Charter Day activities and experiences especially notable. I am asking for your ideas and participation.

Public Education Project for 2008 Constitution –

The 26th Legislature appropriated 500K towards a public education project that would support the adoption of a VI Constitution in 2008. This honor and assignment is an appropriate way to fulfill the part of our vision that commits the Institution to the facilitation of the social and economic transformation of the VI. Attorney Tregenza Roach is the coordinator for the project, which was launched July 21. This is a tremendous learning/teaching opportunity for the students, faculty and staff of the University and can be found at www.itsourfuture.vi.

Implementing Vision 2012 – Leap Frog

Vision 2012 is an ambitious plan to transform the University into the exceptional, responsive higher education institution needed by the Territory and the region in this century. We dedicate ourselves to student success, commit to always seeking excellence and pledge to enhance the social and economic transformation of the USVI. In order to accomplish our goals we must develop an extensive training program to address professional development and cross-functional team development as well as invest in the required technical infrastructure to utilize systems that will optimize operations at every level of the University. Basically, we have to value and invest in our human potential and invest in our technical potential. The Foundation of the University agreed with this approach and supported a proposal for a 2.5 year project (\$1.5M) that would provide the opportunity for the University to leap (leap frog) from where it is now to a much different level. The leadership for this effort, which I anticipate will touch us all will be invested in a team that includes Tina Koopmans and a special assistant to the President about to be hired. I believe this is a historical and critical activity for the UVI, and I invite you all to take a close look at where you can gain from this effort. It is going to be critical to our successful implementation of Vision 2012.

In closing I believe it is important for every member of the UVI community to take note of the core values we have agreed on in our strategic plan as being the center from which we will work as an institution of professionals in higher education. One core value in particular seems to be on a number of people's mind. – Collegiality. Collegiality is a complex issue in any workplace, but especially in higher education. I agree with the position, and ask you to consider, that central to collegiality and shared decision-making is respect for differing opinions and points of view and an acceptance of the responsibility to participate constructively. Collegiality is a critical part of the workplace for us as a small institution where our resources are limited and the negative effects of

inappropriate behavior become amplified. I hope the faculty and others will find the time to discuss and come to consensus about what collegiality means at UVI.

We have an exciting but challenging year ahead of us. I wish you all good health and success in all that you do. Thank you for being a part of the UVI Community. Remember that we specialize in futures and we change and touch lives in this community and beyond.

Thank you.