

Inaugural Address
James H. Ammons, Chancellor
April 6, 2002
Soaring to New Education Heights:
Accepting the Perpetual Challenge of North Carolina Central University

To Chairman Ben Ruffin and the members of the Board of Governors, President Molly Corbett Broad, Chairman William Smith and our distinguished Board of Trustees; our honored federal and state officials, Mayor of Durham Bill Bell, and other public officials, other civil and social organizations, Attorney Julius Chambers, Dr. Donna Benson and Dr. LeRoy Walker, my distinguished predecessors, and other former NCCU administrators, and retirees, the reverend clergy, representatives and delegates from other universities, colleges and educational agencies; our supporters from corporate America; faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you so much for your presence here today and for sharing with the University family in this installation ceremony. Judy, James, and I have been warmly welcomed into the NCCU family and the Durham community. Let me assure you that we are honored and humbled by your presence, but also, we are encouraged by the outpouring of moral and spiritual support that you bring to this occasion. Today represents a high watermark in my educational and professional life. But as I stand here in awe of the moment, it becomes extremely clear to me that I am indebted to so many people for their sacrifices and guidance they have afforded me.

I would like to publicly thank my beloved wife, Judy, and my son, James III, for being with me every step of the way.

My dear mother, Mrs. Agnes Ammons, who is here with us today, made tremendous sacrifices to provide for my sister, Mrs. Patricia Ammons Salary, and me. Please stand. Mom, you provided us with the best education possible in the segregated schools of Winter Haven; but more importantly, you provided us with a firm Christian foundation and other humanizing values

which have under girded my educational, social, and professional life. I am proud to acknowledge your presence, and I am blessed by your endless love, prayers, and support.

Her brothers are also present and I would like for them to stand; James Ruffin and his wife Shirlene; John Ruffin and his wife Bonita. Will all of our family please stand.

As I look out over the audience, I am keenly aware of the fact that Winter Haven sent a bus and many supporters to share this occasion with us. Judy and I were in the same high school class and that class is present among the Winter Haven group. Please stand. Also, I want to acknowledge the many friends from Tallahassee who made the trip north. Their presence demonstrates that in Florida we believe the old African proverb: It takes a village to raise a child. And today, I salute you and I am indebted to so many of you who helped me on my way. In order for my Durham village to meet the Winter Haven and Tallahassee villages, I ask all of those from Florida to please stand. I hope that the members of my Florida and North Carolina villages will greet each other during the reception.

To the members of the Installation Planning Committee, your hard work, planning and attention to every detail have culminated in a very special week in my life; please accept my genuine and sincere appreciation for your efforts.

To the Members of the Shepard and Green families, descendents of our founder, you honor me with your presence and continued support of North Carolina Central University. I promise our work at this institution will always reflect Dr. Shepard's devotion to "Truth and Service."

I feel impelled to publicly mention five others. Although Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) and Florida State University (FSU) are less than two miles apart, yet in some ways, they are like different worlds. But I was fortunate enough to have a distinguished professor who guided me through the graduate experience and directed my

dissertation. Today, I am privileged by the presence of the world-renowned political scientist, Dr. Thomas R. Dye. Dr. Aubrey Perry, former Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences who invited me back to join the Political Science faculty at FAMU. Dr. Leedell W. Neyland, former Vice President for Academic Affairs at FAMU, you gave me my initial administrative position as Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs. Your support and guidance grounded me in the academic operations of campus life. Please accept my deepest gratitude for your tutelage. Dr. Richard Hogg, former Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, who allowed me to continue to build the skills that prepared me to eventually become Provost. Finally, to the former President of Florida A & M University and the current President and CEO of the National Association for Equal Opportunity (NAFEO) in Higher Education, Dr. Frederick S. Humphries, you gave me invaluable years of experience when you appointed me as your Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Please know that your exemplary leadership and your personal mentoring inspired me to assume this position and this ceremony confirms that your confidence in my abilities was not misplaced. You know, imitation is the highest form of flattery.

So standing on the shoulders of giants, I am ready for the challenges and opportunities ahead that will transform this university into a center of academic excellence and a model of administrative efficiency. I ask the Board of Trustees, the faculty, administration, staff, students and alumni to join me. But no university and its internal constituency can undertake this mission alone. I also ask the President, Board of Governors, the General Assembly and our corporate partners to be with me every step of the way.

As the current chancellor of NCCU, I fully realize that our illustrious founder, Dr. James E. Shepard, laid the foundation for our history and heritage. A registered pharmacist, educator, politician, ordained minister and businessman, Dr. Shepard envisioned a place where intellectual pursuits would converge with more fortitude and formulate cures for the social, cultural, and

political ills of society. Despite the conventional wisdom of the day, in 1910, he founded and designated this university as a forum to develop leaders among the talented tenth, as well as the industrious workers and former field hands. These young scholars would take relevant courses grounded in morality and ethics, enabling them to become leaders who truly served their respective communities. Scholarship, moral fortitude, and “Truth and Service” are the stones Dr. Shepard set in NCCU’s foundation to serve as a *perpetual challenge* for the chief executives who were to follow. When you invoke the names of Elder, Massie, Whiting, Walker, Richmond, Benson, and Chambers, images of distinctive leadership come into view and we know Dr. Shepard’s challenge has survived over 92 years and now awaits my response.

I ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE!

Today, I feel indeed that I am one of the most fortunate men in the world. I proudly stand before you as the chancellor of the most *promising* university in the State of North Carolina. To those who entrusted me with this position, I pledge my all to serve this extraordinary university as Dr. Shepard envisioned. Symbolic of our mascot, the eagle, NCCU will soar majestically to exceptional heights, exploring new academic vistas and moving at an incredible rate of speed as we approach the centennial celebration of this great university in 2010.

The mantra of this administration shall be a “Legacy of Leadership.” Building upon the foundational stones, NCCU will revive its designation as a forum for national and international intelligentsia conversing with our students to formulate resolutions for today’s problems. We will temper our actions with the sobering dictates of moral and ethical resolutions rather than those answers that are economically or politically expedient. We will not become tingling cymbals expounding from an ivy-covered tower, but rather, NCCU’s legacy for actual and effective service will refrain across this administration. Everyday new opportunities and challenges greet us. In order to accept this challenge, eight components are critical action steps that must occur.

To realize our vision of soaring to new education heights, we must, as our Board of Governors mandated, develop a Strategic Plan, a plan that emphasizes academic excellence and is supported by sound financial investments. To enhance the intellectual climate, major investments will be targeted in the following areas: the faculty and staff, academic programs, student life, facilities, and infrastructure. The success of this plan requires academic programs with relevant curricula taught in state-of-the-art facilities built with the 2000 bond initiative funds. The plan will be judged by the extent to which our graduates compete and win in the global market place and how this faculty is viewed in their respective disciplines.

Therefore, our goal is to make North Carolina Central University one of the leading institutions in the country.

We must expand access. In order for North Carolina and, indeed America, to remain competitive in the global economy, the educational attainment of all our citizens must be among our highest priorities. The enhancement of homeland security and a successful war against bioterrorism cannot be achieved with major segments of American society being regulated to the outskirts of our higher education system, undereducated and unutilized.

At no point in American history has a college been more important, yet rising tuition and other costs associated with education threaten to put college beyond the reach of many deserving students, especially African Americans and other low and moderate income students. We must ensure that financial barriers do not impede success.

Also, NCCU will be regarded as an oasis of educational opportunity, a change agent and a place where dreams are transformed into reality. As stewards of this University, we will not drift out on the sea of elitism and forget from whence we have come. We welcome all students to matriculate without regard to race, color, creed, gender, or national origin. For at NCCU, we realize that this is a pluralistic, multiethnic and multicultural America, and we truly believe that there is strength in our diversity. My goal is to keep NCCU as that beacon of hope for the educationally

disadvantaged, for first generation college students, and for those sometimes referred to as late bloomers.

We will improve our record in attracting the state and nation's top scholars. In each academic program, our faculty will continue to add rigor and raise the bar. Our goal is to transform each program into a center of excellence. We will enhance the experiences that are provided through our honors program. National Achievement, National Merit and National Hispanic Scholars will be offered one of the nation's most innovative scholarship packages, including internships. We will encourage our students to pursue advanced degrees by developing a network of research universities that will provide opportunities for our graduate students. My goal is to have twenty-five percent of NCCU graduate earning terminal degrees.

Our legacy would not exist without the presence of an outstanding faculty. The faculty possesses the institutional memory that preserves our traditions and permits the continuity of standards of excellence for the students, despite the changes among the leadership ranks. As we soar to new educational heights, we must continue to recruit enough talented scholars who will "cut their academic teeth" on innovative research and publications here in this forum. I will be your advocate to move faculty salaries to top quintiles and to enhance professional development opportunities for the faculty. Our faculty sets the standards by which we are assessed and measured as a high powered enterprise steeped in intellectual pursuits. We value our teaching faculty; but we must encourage all faculty to engage in greater research efforts that will aid our ability to remain viable partners in this knowledge-based economy of today. It is our faculty who provide our students with the best practices in public service, locally and nationally. To the faculty and staff, I appreciate the support you have provided me since my arrival. One of the most notable gestures by many faculty and staff was the return of their recent salary increase to augment the operating budget of this university. I pledge to solicit continuously your input on all academic matters and to provide an atmosphere for productive scholarship to abound. This is why one of my goals is to generate \$25 million in sponsored research.

The mark of greatness of any university can be measured by the quality of its alumni. I am happy to say that I have inherited a notable cadre of alumni of which any chancellor would be extremely proud. Our illustrious alumni include the recently appointed ambassador to Central African Republic; the current Governor of North Carolina; the former Speaker of the House of Representatives; the chairman of the UNC Board of Governors; sixty-six member of the North Carolina Judiciary; one thousand seven hundred and fifty teachers; a former chancellor to name only a few among an array of professionals in all walks of life who have made significant contributions in their respective fields of study. Most importantly, our alumni serve as living exemplars for the leaders that NCCU is known for producing. Our Legacy of Leadership is clear. My goal is to have one-third of NCCU's 26,000 graduates become *active* members of the Alumni Association.

The presence of NCCU faculty, students, and alumni in the classrooms and board rooms across the country is a testament to our enduring work that occurs at this university. We want to fortify our institutional vitality by strengthening our connections with our new partners in the Research Triangle Park and by honoring the long-standing institutions that are the backbone of this community. To our new partners, we will work to clarify our vitality and centrality in the Durham, Chapel Hill, and Raleigh area. When you draw the lines to connect these geographical points, it is well known that a triangle is formed. Lesser known is the fact that NCCU sits at the *heart* of the Triangle. Even though the heart is unseen, everyone knows that this vital organ keeps every visible manifestation of an organism alive and functioning. Such is the role of NCCU as the heart of the Research Triangle, home to more than one hundred forty corporations and the largest Research Park in the nation.

Our corporate partners within and without the Research Triangle Park understand that NCCU is a major artery for advanced research, socially responsible collaborations, and a contributor to their diversified work force. At our first Fall Summit of the NCCU Industrial Cluster in October, sixty-eight corporations participated, and we received a commitment of over three million dollars to support the goals of this administration. This outpouring of support shows the mutual respect and vitality that exist among our partners of business and industry.

Our new partnerships are built upon the examples of partnering with the long-standing institutions that have sustained us from 1910 to the present. The existence of these stalwart institutions made Durham the epitome of successful business ventures in Black America. North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, Mechanic & Farmers Bank, and Mutual Community Savings Bank – these institutions are the foundational base for all of Durham. We salute the steadfast support each has rendered to NCCU and we look forward to continuing our partnership and creating new endeavors for the future. Our goal is to strengthen our business alliances and confirmed partnerships with over one hundred corporations in the Research Triangle Park and across the nation and to build our endowments from \$18 million to \$50 million dollars.

We must revive our commitments to core values. The leaders of our long standing institutions displayed acute business acumen; but more importantly, their decisions were guided by a courageous value system. As we soar to new educational heights, our major mission is to help prepare the next generation of leaders. Throughout the university, there must be a firm commitment to such values as courage, equality, equity, excellence and understanding of the value systems of others. So as we prepare students to meet the ever changing demands of the twenty-first century, my goal is to emphasize and incorporate basic human values – such as honesty, integrity, and ethics – into the learning process.

While we are committed to maintaining and enhancing the liberal arts tradition that has shaped the mission of NCCU, our ability to respond to the human resource needs of the information age would be enhanced by expanding the mission. Therefore, we propose to add under-graduate degrees in mass communications and journalism, software engineering, information sciences, actuarial science and bio-informatics and genomics. A new institutional structure for the Division of Academic Affairs will be established to fulfill the mission.

Capitalizing on the momentum from the Julius L. Chambers Biomedical/Biotechnology Research Institute, a Ph.D. program in biomedical sciences will be developed. Further, we need a Ph.D. in information sciences to meet the needs of a knowledge-

based economy. Building upon a remarkable record of preparing teachers and administrators for the public schools of North Carolina and the nation, our much heralded School of Education will develop a plan to bring back a Ph.D. program in education. NCCU is a leader in the state's effort to close the achievement gap. I believe by creating more well-trained educators, we will be able to enhance our efforts to close the gap. Therefore, I ask North Carolina to empower this institution to provide Ph.D.s in three areas – biomedical sciences, information sciences, and education – to meet critical needs for this state and the nation.

My goals for North Carolina Central University may seem Herculean and even unattainable to a less optimistic or less determined chancellor. But I sincerely believe that with the help of our dedicated faculty and staff and engaging students; with the visionary leadership of the Board of Trustees; with the supportive efforts of the Board of Governors and the President of the University System; and with my personal and deep-seated spiritual belief that we are destined to grow and render greater service, ***we will realize our goals!***

In closing, I believe Dr. Shepard would admonish me with the following quote from Edward Robinson's "The Story of the Eagle" in *Talk that Talk*.

I, the old eagle, say to you young Turk, learn the truths of our glorious age of Songhai West Africa, then you will be shielded from the darts and arrows of the falsehood portrayed on television and the motion pictures about Africa and Africans. You will find that there is no profession that you cannot claim, that there is no height to which you cannot [soar] because you have the strength of kings [and queens] in your wings. Fly on!

Thank you, and may God's richest blessings fall upon this University and each of you.