

Installation Address
Charlie Nelms
February 22, 2008
In Pursuit of Excellence: A Return to Basics

To President Bowles and members of the UNC Board of Governors; members of the North Carolina Central University Board of Trustees; my colleagues and fellow chancellors in the UNC System; my local colleagues, President Brodhead of Duke University and President Ingram of Durham Technical Community College; elected officials; members of the University community; friends and family members from across the county: I am grateful for your presence today, humbled by your salutations and encouraged by your expressions of support.

As I reflect on this occasion from a personal perspective, I realize that my being in this place at this point in time would not be possible without the power of a Source and Force greater than myself. Likewise, it would not be possible without the love, encouragement and support of my late parents, Eddie and Carrie Nelms, who instilled in their children the belief that education is the engine of opportunity. Today is possible because of the investment of teachers, counselors and mentors throughout my life. Much of the credit for my being here also belongs to Jeanetta Sherrod Nelms, my spouse and confidant and to Rashad, our son. Jeanetta, thank you for your lifetime of support. I feel fortunate that these two wonderful people share my deep commitment to leave the world better than we found it. Please allow me to recognize my entire family. Will all members of the Nelms support team please stand?

I would also like to take a moment to thank the Installation Planning Committee for their hard work and dedication over the last several months, not only in planning this ceremony today but also for planning each detail of all the wonderful activities and programs we have experienced this week. Thank you Committee Members for your outstanding service to the University.

We are here at this hour because of the vision, passion, persistence and dedication of Dr. James E. Shepard, the founder of what is now North Carolina Central University. I ask you to join me in welcoming members of Dr. Shepard's family; his granddaughter, Mrs. Carolyn Green, and all other descendants of the Shepard family who are with us today.

Also present today are visionary servant leaders who preceded me as president or chancellor. Please join me in welcoming former Chancellors Leroy T. Walker, Donna Benson, and Julius Chambers and thanking them for their leadership, service, and contributions to this outstanding University.

Although I have just been installed as the 10th chief administrator of North Carolina Central University, this event is not really about me; it's about the future of the University. In two short years, North Carolina Central University will celebrate its centennial: 100 years of successfully educating men and women who became entrepreneurs, teachers, pastors, government workers, physicians, elected officials, musicians, and the like, indeed, leaders in their respective fields of endeavor.

By any objective assessment, this institution has had an immeasurable and indelible impact on the lives of the citizens of this city, this state, and this nation. While we can and should be proud of its past, we must remember that the social landscape that gave birth to the establishment of North Carolina Religious Training Institute – subsequently North Carolina College – has shifted in major ways. Those institutions that once fought to bar the enrollment of Blacks are now in constant pursuit of students from diverse backgrounds as they seek to provide opportunities for a wider array of North Carolinians and prepare their students to lead successful lives in an increasingly global world. Students whose enrollment was once limited only to North Carolina College and other historically black colleges now populate the athletic teams and, to a lesser extent, the classrooms of business and engineering schools, computer science and pre-med

programs at majority institutions as well. While North Carolina Central University will continue its historic mission to be responsive to the needs of African American students, we will also expand our commitment to meet the educational needs of a student body that is diverse in race and other socioeconomic characteristics. The competitive landscape of higher education in America and in North Carolina has changed and will continue to evolve in the decades ahead. And our University must continue to change and evolve with it!

While the need, importance, and relevance of NCCU and other historically black colleges was and continues to be linked in significant ways to the needs of less affluent and under-privileged populations, we recognize also that today's students of all races and all economic classes have options far greater than persons from earlier generations could ever had imagined. Yet, statistics substantiate that HBCU's play a critical role in today's higher education enterprise. Here are a few facts:

- ◆ While HBCUs account for only three percent of all college and universities, they enroll sixteen percent of all African Americans in four-year degree granting institutions.
- ◆ HBCUs graduate thirty percent of African Americans receiving four-year degrees overall and forty percent of African Americans receiving four-year degrees in Science, Technology, and Mathematics disciplines.
- ◆ HBCUs represent four of the top ten producers of African American medical school applicants and represent eight of the top ten producers of African American engineers.

There is little doubt that our institutions are still relevant. Yet, the education budget that President Bush proposed this week will seek to cut \$85 million that is currently designated for historically black colleges -- \$27 million of which would go to the ten HBCUs in North Carolina. With this proposed reduction in funding, we must renew our collective commitment to support and sustain our historically black colleagues and universities.

As we gather today at the dawn of the University's centennial celebration and the installation of its 10th chief administrator, it seems appropriate to consider the future of North

Carolina Central University in the context of the needs of the citizens of North Carolina on the one hand, and the University's mission and vision on the other.

From the earliest days of my candidacy for Chancellorship at NCCU, I have read virtually everything I could find about the University, including historic documents, speeches, and vision statements articulated by my predecessors, including our founder, Dr. James E. Shepard. I have talked with countless NCCU students, alumni, faculty, elected officials, and friends of the University. They all seem to want the same thing: a more excellent and responsive institution.

As I accept the mantle of leadership of one of this state's and nation's most strategic assets, I do so willingly and enthusiastically. In mapping my vision for NCCU in the context of the needs of the state, as articulated by those with whom I have conferred and the feedback gathered by President Bowles through the recently concluded *UNC Tomorrow* assessment, I have titled my remarks, "In Pursuit of Excellence: A Return to Basics."

My vision for North Carolina Central University is deeply rooted in the belief that the true measure of an excellent university is defined by the success of its students and alumni, not in the recitation of its rhetoric or in the repletion of its rituals. NCCU has a rich, vibrant, and deeply rooted history for which we should all be very proud. But the operative focus now, in 2008, is not where we have been, but rather, where we are headed. We must demonstrate through the quality of our programs and services that we are competitive, relevant, and responsive.

We live in a knowledge-based economy in a world without boundaries. In 2005, *New York Times* foreign affairs columnist, Thomas Friedman, opined in his book, *The World is Flat*, that globalization in the twenty-first century is occurring at a speed and pace unlike any we have ever seen before; that the convergence of technology, political systems, and economic models is

changing so rapidly that countries, companies, communities, individuals and government must either learn to adapt to that pace ... or risk forever being left behind.

I contend that the same is true for universities. Those institutions that continue to succeed will be the ones which can adjust to the demands of change and focus on growing in ways that allow them to remain relevant and embrace the ever-evolving global landscape.

My vision for North Carolina Central University is that we will accept the challenge to keep up with the pace and, in so doing, we will be among the best comprehensive, public, liberal arts universities in the Southeast, graduating students who are prepared to live and lead successfully in the global world.

We must educate and graduate character-centered students who can think critically and analytically, communicate exceptionally well orally, in writing, and interpersonally ... students who have an appreciation for other cultures and a passion for creating a more equitable world for all of its inhabitants. This is my vision. But I have also been in higher education long enough to realize that a vision without focus is merely an illusion! So to achieve this vision of which I speak, I propose that we at North Carolina Central University focus on five fundamental imperatives.

First and foremost, we must raise the expectations we have for ourselves. We must set excellence as the standard for everything and for everyone, not just for the special few. The research is clear: high expectations lead to higher performance. People can and will meet the standard! We have to raise the bar. We must expect our faculty to perform their teaching, research, and creative activities at highest levels of excellence. We must expect every student to master course content at higher levels of excellence, rather than settling for a "C" in a collection of courses that lead to the receipt of a degree but not the possession of a set of skills that will allow them to compete successfully in the world of work. And we university leaders and administrators must be expected to support them in concrete ways.

Currently, too many of our students are entering one door and exiting another with a great deal of debt but with no degree and lacking viable skills that will make them competitive in the global marketplace. This must change. Students, I would suggest to you that if you do not have graduation as your destination, you may want to consider transferring to some place with lower expectations. Failure is not an option at NCCU. No matter how well our faculty teach and mentor students, and no matter how well the others of us serve your needs, you must assume greater responsibility for your own education. This is essential. Expect to excel and then proceed to do what it takes to achieve.

Secondly, we must embrace collaboration, internally and externally. Let it be known from this day forward that the silos that permeate the culture and the landscape of NCCU must be dismantled and the component parts shipped to wherever antiquated practices and ideas are buried. Silo attitudes and tendencies must be replaced by transparency, cooperation, and collaboration. We must each see ourselves first and foremost as members of the North Carolina Central University community, not as mere inhabitants of departments, divisions, schools, a university group, or a community group. We must replace the silo paradigm if we are to achieve new levels of excellence and responsiveness.

Third, we must become more strategic in the investments we make in academic programs and services. Our focus will be on initiatives which enable the University to improve quality and achieve new levels of distinction and distinctiveness. We will focus also on investments which will allow us to respond more effectively to the needs of current and future students in the context of our mission and in the context of the recently launched *UNC Tomorrow* planning effort.

Fourth, we must make more effective use of current fiscal and human resources, while at the same time procuring more resources for the kinds of investments required to achieve the vision of being among the best comprehensive, four-year institutions in the Southeast. I would be

the first to acknowledge that we do not have all the resources we need, but I would also be the first to acknowledge that we must become more effective stewards of the resources we do have.

Fifth, we must create and nurture a stronger sense of community within NCCU. Respect and civility must be the hallmarks of this heightened sense of community. Disrespect must be replaced with self-respect. Cynicism must be replaced by caring and optimism. Profane language must be replaced by language that recognizes the dignity and humanity of each person. The attitude of “each person for himself or herself” must be replaced by attitudes of mutual well-being for all members of the NCCU community.

These five key goals represent what I would characterize as the anchors of the North Carolina Central University vision. There are a host of strategic initiatives that we have implemented or will commence implementing immediately in an effort to achieve this vision.

As we look to raise the expectations of our students, we must first look at the area of Student Academic Success. Enhancing student academic success entails more than raising expectations and making structural changes. We must improve the quality of student life. NCCU students deserve a more comprehensive array of cultural, intellectual, social, and leadership development opportunities. They deserve high quality living environments and a modern student union building with the necessary amenities that will permit NCCU to attract and retain students. Funds for supporting a more viable student life program must come from a combination of state appropriations, University allocations and student fees. Opportunities for international travel and intercollegiate athletics are part and parcel of a complete collegiate experience and neither one should be viewed as frills. Our students need and deserve a high quality education that is also an affordable education. Our students deserve both access and opportunities for success.

To this end, we will also focus greater attention on the University College. It will be completely restructured based on successful models used by other universities that have achieved excellent results in retaining and graduating students. Headed by an experienced and passionate dean, Dr. Bernice Johnson, the programs in the University College portfolio will include an increased emphasis on the assessment of student learning and the effectiveness of various intervention strategies. We must and will place greater emphasis on achieving higher levels of synergy between various campus initiatives rather than treating them as discrete activities housed in the same administrative unit. The ultimate measure of the effectiveness of University College will be the increase in persistence at the freshman and sophomore levels, and ultimately graduation.

Our community service requirement is also a key to student academic success. Currently, NCCU is one of only a handful of colleges nationally with a community service requirement for graduation. However, the quality of many of the student experiences is lacking and currently community service is not well integrated into the academic curriculum. To address this, I have asked Provost Jones to consult and confer with members of the University community and to develop, by June 30, 2008, a plan for overhauling the community service program, concentrating efforts in assisting the six public schools that are located within a two mile radius of our University. If our efforts are planned and executed effectively, the research points to a strong, positive correlation between community service and student academic success. We know that Service Learning strengthens academic learning, personal growth, and civil responsibility.

Next, as we seek to embrace collaboration and become more strategic, we must place a greater focus on Graduate Education and Research. North Carolina Central University's research and graduate programs provide unparalleled opportunities for collaboration with external entities that could expand the effectiveness of our programs. Currently, NCCU's annual research budget

is approximately \$40 million. I propose that increased cross-disciplinary collaboration and strategic investments should result in doubling the amount of extramural funding in five to six years. Effective immediately, a search for the position of Vice Chancellor for Graduate Education and Research will commence. The newly created office will seek to consolidate university-wide efforts to achieve high levels of synergy among our graduate education and research areas. With strong and effective leadership, we can improve our research funding and the quality and quantity of our graduate programs. The 2008-2009 fiscal year budget will reflect the re-allocation of resources which will support graduate student financial aid in the form of graduate fellowships. We will also designate funds each year, over the next five years, for the purpose of expanding graduate offerings in selected areas. We will seek to match this investment from a combination of new state appropriations under the *UNC Tomorrow* initiative and from private gifts.

The time has come for NCCU to implement Ph.D. programs that build on the strengths of existing programs, and meet state and national needs while enabling the University to achieve higher levels of distinction and responsiveness. I propose implementation of three such programs over the next six years, beginning with a multidisciplinary Ph.D. program in Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Science. This program will build on the strengths of the Julius Chambers Biomedical Biotechnology Research Institute (BBRI) and the Biomanufacturing Research Institute and Technology Enterprise (BRITE) initiatives. I propose also the development of a Ph.D. program in Library and Information Sciences and a Ph.D. program in Communication Disorders. Each of these programs will be delivered at the highest levels of quality and will compete nationally for faculty, students, and research support. To the extent possible, we will collaborate with area universities and with HBCUs around the country.

In our quest to create and nurture a stronger sense of community at North Carolina Central University, we have launched the North Carolina Central University Quality Service Initiative. A

great deal has been said and written about the unacceptable quality of service in many quarters of the University. In December 2007, we launched the Quality Service Initiative (QSI). Under QSI, all University employees, including members of the Chancellor's Cabinet, will participate in a mandatory continuous customer service training and professional development program. All participants are expected to perform their duties in a manner consistent with the training. Failure to do so will result in a re-negotiated relationship between the employee and the University.

As we look at ways to achieve continuous improvement, I am pleased also to announce the establishment of the Office of University Ombudsperson. Reporting directly to the Chancellor, the University Ombudsperson is empowered to work across academic and administrative boundaries, as well as across student and staff boundaries to ensure that problems are resolved in a timely manner. In addition to establishing the QSI and the Office of the Ombudsperson, we are in the process of re-engineering a number of key administrative processes which have impeded the delivery of quality service.

These are just some of the many ways we are proposing to achieve the vision. And yet we know that without resources, a vision, no matter how compelling, quickly becomes an illusion. While we are grateful for the support provided by the State of North Carolina which has assisted in a number of accomplishments and growth opportunities in recent years, the fact remains that the cumulative effects of historic underfunding means that NCCU is undercapitalized and that the basic infrastructure is inadequate. As we seek to make more effective use of current fiscal and human resources, we must continue addressing the day-to-day quality of student life issues: housing, recreation, wellness, and athletic needs. NCCU has unmet instructional, research equipment, and academic space needs. We must focus on the whole student. We simply cannot advocate for a more supportive environment for our students without making strategic investments which improve the University's overall physical and aesthetic environment.

While we have the vision, we must recognize that vision alone is simply not enough. We need individuals, corporations, foundations, and governmental entities to invest in the University and to assist us with providing access to high quality, affordable education, not access to a revolving door. Notice that I am not inviting you just to donate to the University, but rather to invest in the vision we have for North Carolina Central University. In so doing, we each become vested in the success of the institution, and we all benefit from a robust return on that investment.

The return on investment, or ROI, is guaranteed by higher student retention and graduation rates and a better educated citizenry. It is reflected in more and better prepared public school teachers and nurses, social workers and lawyers, researchers and biotechnologists, and criminal justice professionals. The ROI is reflected in increased state revenues because of wages earned and taxes paid by higher earning workers. The ROI is reflected in conscientious citizens who vote and volunteer in their communities and in more citizens who earn graduate degrees in high demand areas.

Today, I invite all of you to invest in this vision.

All our students . . . I invite you to invest in the vision by doubling your determination, self-discipline, and resolve to succeed by graduating. Raise your expectations for yourself by making graduation your destination. If you are not prepared to do so, I strongly encourage you to find another university where you can coast. North Carolina Central University is not that place.

My faculty colleagues . . . I challenge you to invest in the vision by deepening your commitment to teaching the students we have rather than wishing they were more like the students you were. Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute, once said: “Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him.” At North Carolina Central University, we must begin to give our students both the responsibility and the support to

be successful. Historically, our mission has been to take students where they are and help move them to where they need to be in order to excel in life. This mission has not changed.

My administrative and staff colleagues ... I challenge you to invest in the vision by serving the needs of students as though you were responding to the needs of your neighbors, your own children, grandchildren, and other family members. The services we provide must be based on the principles of respect, civility, and community with our fellow beings. They must reflect the University's motto of Truth and Service.

Our illustrious alumni ... as a reflection of your commitment and confidence in the institution, we invite you to invest in the vision. You are living proof that the vision is worth the investment. Effective, July 1, 2008, additional staff will be added in the institutional advancement division to help us work with alumni and other prospective investors to achieve the vision. We are grateful for the support of all alumni who have already invested in the vision, including Bishop Eddie Long and George Hamilton, both members of the class of 1977, who have each generously pledged \$1 million to the University. We are likewise grateful to the North Carolina Central University Alumni Association for its commitment to provide matching funds for a distinguished professorship. While it would be great to receive a million dollar gift from every NCCU alumnus, just imagine the cumulative effect if each of our 30,000 alumni gave the University \$100 a month for just one year! That alone would generate 36 million dollars! What a tremendous difference that would make for the University. Although everyone cannot give at the same level, each of us can be a philanthropist on some level. My staff and I will make every effort to share the investment opportunities with you that are thoughtful, beneficial to this fine institution, and accommodating with respect to your personal situation. The best time to demonstrate your commitment to your *alma mater* is now!

Our elected officials ... I invite you to invest in the vision by appropriating funds consistent with the mission of the University and its aspirations for achieving new levels of excellence and responsiveness. Access to high quality educational experiences should not be determined by where one chooses to enroll. Our historic mission has been, and continues to be, one of providing access and opportunity, but we cannot do that without the requisite human, fiscal, and physical resources. Excellence has a price!

Our friends and neighbors in the community ... I invite you to invest in the vision by partnering with us on initiatives that are mutually beneficial to the University and the greater community and to continue to support our students as they seek to be productive citizens. By the same token, we pledge to work with you to strengthen the community through the greater engagement of our students and by sharing the expertise of our faculty and staff. We are grateful for the ongoing support of friends in the community, such as Dr. Michel Bourgeois-Gavardin, a long time supporter of North Carolina Central University, who believes enough in our vision to have made a \$3 million commitment to the University this week. Dr. Bourgeois-Gavardin is designating \$1.5 million of his gift for student scholarships and the remaining half of the gift will be unrestricted. We are deeply grateful for his generosity and friendship to our University.

If North Carolina Central University is to remain relevant, competitive, and responsive in the twenty-first century, we all must invest in the vision. The question is not whether we can achieve the vision, but whether or not we have the will to do so. On this 22nd day of February 2008, I invite you to join forces with us, as we endeavor, with even greater zeal, to live out the ideals of Truth and Service set forth by our founder, Dr. James E. Shepard, nearly 100 years ago. Let us begin!

THANK YOU!