

Convocation Address
LeRoy T. Walker, Chancellor
October 4, 1984
N.C.C.U.: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Three hundred and sixty-three days ago, it was indeed a unique pleasure for me to deliver the Chancellor's Convocation Address on the historical anniversary date of the death the founder, Dr. James E. Shepard. It is now my privilege to participate on this Convocation Program which marks the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the University's founding.

These sloping hills and verdant greens have been the place where a rich history has developed. As we open a year of celebration of the University's 75 years of service to the Durham community, the State of North Carolina, and the nation, it is indeed a time for rejoicing and singing as we reflect on NCCU yesterday, today, and contemplate the NCCU of tomorrow.

During the celebration of the 75th Anniversary, we will let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies. As we initiate the celebration with this convocation, faculty, staff, and students, alumni and friends of the University should sing a song full of the faith that the past has taught us – a past that symbolized the commitment to teaching and scholarship of the founder – an NCCU of yesterday which has been described as having a mission of teaching, of diffusing knowledge along the broadest possible lines, of pursuing excellence in every endeavor, an NCCU that has been an educational bastion and has impacted many lives as from the darkness the light revives.

Although stony the road we trod and bitter the chastening rod, NCCU of yesterday has produced more than its share of citizens who have made this a better nation. Among the illustrious alumni are mayors, judges, presidents of universities, government officials, lawyers, doctors, outstanding teachers, and productive citizens.

The 18,000 alumni have come from a university community that was enlightened far beyond the level of most of its sister institutions. For upon coming to this campus in 1945, I

found an interracial, international faculty. It was an institution built upon the experience of broader human interaction.

NCCU of yesterday was a beginning demonstrative of a humility which was basic to the learning process. For once we are sure we know it all – most often expressed as disregard or disdain for the thinking and skills of others – our minds are closed. NCCU of yesterday reflects a glorious history and a noble heritage of which we so proudly hail.

As we build on the NCCU of yesterday, we acknowledge that our rich history only proves that our present is secure and that we deserve a future. We have arrived at this status with a steady beat knowing well that our weary feet have brought us to the place for which our founding father sighed.

NCCU of yesterday has made rich the sloping hills and verdant greens from which our heritage has emerged, but we now sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us. Out of the rich past 'til now we stand at last where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

The NCCU of today has been built upon a strategic course of action which ensures that less well prepared students now enrolled will, upon graduation, compete free of the disadvantages which will loom large in their future, and [prepared] to meet the rigorous standards imposed by a society which offers no special dispensations nor entitlements, a society which has little compassion for mediocrity. The NCCU of today has adapted an approach to develop an enriched program to excite students to higher levels of motivation, inspiring students to become more innovative, creative, productive students and eventually successful citizens in today's complex, demanding society.

I sing the praises of predecessors whom I admire for their efforts in bringing NCCU of today to a high quantitative level. Our facilities, when the present construction is completed and those recently requested, will be adequate.

The present student body, approximately 5,000, and faculty and staff must dedicate themselves to the qualitative dimension of the university. The theme of the past year – Excellence Without Excuse: A Shared Responsibility – was selected to give proper focus to the qualitative dimension of NCCU today.

The decision to select twenty-five percent of the recently enrolled freshman class from the upper ten percent of their [high school] graduating classes was designed to raise the academic standards of the university. I am happy to report that as a result of the dynamic initiative of Mrs. Nancy Rowland and the recruitment staff, we came within a few percentage points of reaching our goal.

I hasten to add that our procedure did not prevent access of disadvantaged applicants, for there is a distinct difference between under prepared and disadvantaged.

The students enrolled in NCCU today must review the record of the outstanding alumni who have been, and those who continue to be, community, state, and national leaders.

With higher levels of motivation from the students of today, I can envision other [future] presidents of universities, like the late Marion Thorpe, the late Vivian Henderson, and Dallas Simmons, leading universities of tomorrow. From this body will come more judges like Bob Glass, Sammie Chess, Bill Pearson, Clifton Johnson; within the sound of my voice will eventually develop those who will become mayors like Clarence Lightner and Maynard Jackson; – I have seen those who, if they wish to pay the price, can become fine nationally known artists, as are Hilda Harris, Ernie Barnes, and Ivan Dixon; public servants in the mold of Mickey Michaux and Ben Ruffin; effective lawyers, like Julius Chambers and a host of others; outstanding educators who inspire our youth in the likeness of a host of teachers on this faculty; physicians who heal the sick; scientists who bring us closer to solving the riddle of cancer, there are among the students enrolled here the leaders of tomorrow, I do believe.

To assume your rightful place, it is imperative that students of NCCU today, building on NCCU of yesterday, must believe that the future is now. Yes, we must build on NCCU of yesterday and build on past experiences at the University, but not dwell on them. A trip to nostalgia now and then is good for the spirit, as long as you do not set up housekeeping.

There is a time to let things happen and a time to make things happen. As students of NCCU today, I urge you to plan your future. Carefully write your plans, set your target, decide your plan of attack, state what you are willing to give up to achieve your goal, visualize your action, see it happening and make it happen. Whenever you cannot solve a problem, learn to manage it as you make things happen. NCCU students of today must fit their personal aspirations and desires for recognition with consensus of what their academic goals must be in search of tomorrow. For next to excellence is the appreciation of it.

The 75th Anniversary of this young educational institution is significant for the review of NCCU yesterday and today should lead us to contemplate the future – NCCU of tomorrow. It is a time for reflecting, rejoicing, and singing:

God of our weary years
 God of our silent tears
 Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
 Thou who has by thy might
 Led us into the light
 Keep us forever in the path we pray.

NCCU of tomorrow will retain its heritage as an historically Black institution and be true to the mission of truth and service originally set forth by its founder to the extent that it retains its excellence. NCCU must cope with the changes in society which impact the mission and give new direction to the University.

Since NCCU, like the other constituent members of the University System, receives less than fifty percent of its financial needs from the State of North Carolina, the University's

accountability must be to the alumni, the federal government with its numerous grants, public and private agencies, and friends of the university. NCCU of tomorrow must through its daily operations reflect this multiple accountability.

The University-of-Tomorrow's accountability must also respond to the mandate of the Consent Decree. The Decree guidelines suggest that NCCU's future is tied to its ability to accommodate all citizens of the state with its offerings and resources. The University's quest for excellence must be a hallmark which attracts all qualified students. Faculty personnel must raise its level of teaching excellence and, at the same time, be more demanding of a higher qualified student population, as we attempt to make the NCCU of tomorrow a part of the educational mainstream.

John Hope Franklin, noted historian, former faculty colleague at NCCU, now of Duke University, advised the Deans and Chairpersons in a recent retreat that "the pursuit of excellence must remain the consuming passion and objective of everyone related in any way to this magnificent enterprise. ... There is no reason," said Dr. Franklin, "why in the near future North Carolina Central University should not shelter a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. After all, Morehouse College got a chapter before Georgia Tech and Howard University got a chapter before North Carolina State University which is still without one. In order to do so, NCCU of tomorrow must not only pursue the path of excellence with due diligence, it must also fight to secure the best students, to recruit and retain the best faculty possible, and develop the best educational programs possible."

As we sing and rejoice, it is essential to consider the factors which will impact our future directions. NCCU of tomorrow must be prepared to cope with the persistent move in the direction of outcome assessment, the measuring of educational outcomes rather than processes. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in the months ahead will focus more attention

on the outcomes of education as a means of further improving the quality of education programs and service.

In a recent retreat, Dr. Frank Brown, Dean of the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, stated that the future of NCCU is in the hands of the faculty. The student produced at NCCU is inextricably tied to the quality of instruction received from a creative, innovative, demanding, hard-working faculty. In this scenario, the outcome will be positive.

NCCU of tomorrow will be affected by two other significant factors. The birth rate has been cut almost in half since 1960, resulting in a decrease in the pool of traditional students. At the same time, it is estimated that by 1995, there will be nearly a million new jobs in the service area and more than twenty percent of college and university graduates will not find jobs requiring degrees or which are related to their earned degrees. Business and industry will be demanding the liberally educated specialist that can be trained to fit the needs of the industry. The University must be responsive to these factors.

The NCCU of tomorrow through its dedicated, concerned faculty must implement programs which will prepare students to compete with graduates from all other universities. Several points should be noted for our NCCU of tomorrow.

Faculty must:

- ◆ update teaching material to be consistent with the demands of today's society; and
- ◆ give more assignments which require greater use of libraries, laboratories, and other resources of the University.

Students must:

- ◆ make greater use of standard written and verbal skills;

- ◆ develop a greater appreciation of excellence and the ability to do creative thinking; and
- ◆ support student programs at the University. Work to eliminate the need for [such editorials as the one] I have read recently in the Campus Echo lamenting the lack of involvement of the majority of students and begging for “support not lip service.”

A warning! The NCCU of tomorrow must, in its attempt to be contemporary avoid the pitfalls of technostress [sic]. In the computer oriented society, students, our leaders of tomorrow, must not fall victim to the machine which is affecting our personalities, behavior and relationships to our families, faculties, and jobs in discernible and alarming ways.

As valuable as the computer is in the educational pursuits of tomorrow, it can cause a loss of capacity to feel and relate to others. Computer technostress [sic] can cause anti-social behavior and the inability to think intuitively and creatively. The NCCU of tomorrow must be determined that the General Studies Program will be the foundation for developing liberally educated specialists fully capable of effective service in a demanding society while at the same time demonstrating the capability of coping with and positively exploiting the advantages of the computer.

One of the most significant impacts of tomorrow will come from the State of North Carolina coming to grips with its ability to provide support for the sixteen units of the University System and, at the same time, respond to the persistent demands of the 38 independent colleges and universities for a larger piece of the pie to educate North Carolina citizens enrolled in those institutions.

The Association of Independent College and Universities has already leveled the claim that the State spends more money on out-of-state students enrolled in the University System than it does on North Carolina students enrolled in the private colleges.

The future directions of NCCU will depend upon the extent to which this University is a bastion of excellence to which it can claim programs that are unique, different, innovative, creative, marketable programs which are “just as good as.” This can come about only through the efforts of a dedicated, hardworking, creative faculty.

It is equally as clear that NCCU cannot, with its limited resources, develop all departments to the same level of excellence. Harvard does not. Yale does not. Duke does not. UNC does not, and neither can we. But NCCU can become so outstanding in some areas that the rest of the departments move with the tide to provide the bases for a comprehensive education.

NCCU of yesterday and today have provided the building blocks of tomorrow. We recognize that we are a \$38 million enterprise which is in the business of education.

The University’s annual payroll of nearly \$20 million, plus the million dollars supplemented from students and university-sponsored programs contribute immensely to the Durham economy.

We know that we are a viable part of the Durham, Durham County, and State of North Carolina economies*

The nation is indeed at risk in terms of the quality of education in our secondary schools. If there is not a dramatic increase in the percentage of students in higher education who wish to enter the profession of education, the resolution to the problems remains uncertain. That percentage has dropped from above twenty percent a decade ago to four percent in 1984.

I trust that the students of today who will be the leaders of tomorrow will take heart that the Governor’s Task Force on Education has recommended that teachers’ salaries be structured

*Two sentences in the typescript here are apparently garbled.

from an entry level salary of \$15,680 to \$27,108 per year. The twelve-months salary could go as high as \$39,612. While money may not be the total cure, it sure would help the patient on the road to recovery.

It is our goal to deliver to the professional ranks outstanding graduates who can take their places along side the graduates of any university in the country.

In this celebration of our 75th Anniversary, we clearly recognize that NCCU has had a rich history which gives the University a bright future. As we pursue excellence, we shall not forget the teachings of our founder, Dr. James E. Shepard.

We will take our place among the great institutions of this area because we have the faculty and administrations to lead us there and a student body which will respond to that leadership. Because tomorrow is ours.

We are tired of sailing our educational boat close to the harbor shore. We want to go out where the big boats are, out in the deep where the great ones oar. If our craft proves too slight for the waves which sweep the deep sea over, we would rather go down in a stirring fight than to drowse to death by the slumbering shore.