

JSU Faculty and Staff Convocation
State of the University Address
President John M. Beehler
August 22, 2016

Good Morning Gamecock Family! It is a great day to be a Gamecock at the "Friendliest Campus in the South." I am proud to report that the State of the University is strong and getting stronger every day.

Mr. Jim Bennett, JSU alumnus and Chairman of the Board of Trustees, passed away last week and was buried this past weekend. Jim was a diehard Gamecock fan and a member of our Board of Trustees for 31 years (14 of which he was Chairman). At this time, I would like you to join me in a moment of silence for Chairman Jim Bennett.

Thank you!

A year ago, I addressed all of you about my plans to learn as much as possible about JSU and its history, culture, and traditions. I have spent most of my first year at JSU getting to know JSU mainly through my interactions with our people: faculty, staff, students, administrators, alumni and community supporters. I have learned so much through my "immersion" year and I am still learning. The First Lady and I have had the pleasure visiting with many of you and watching you in action. We have met so many friendly, talented, and dedicated people. Clearly, a university is only as good as its people. We appreciate all of you and what you do for JSU every day. There was no one happier than me when I was able to grant the 2% raise to all faculty and staff in April once we got a handle on the true fiscal situation of the university. We hope to be able to do this more frequently as we improve our financial position.

The past year has been a remarkable year for the university across all dimensions. Thank you for all you have done to help our university be successful. Over the next year, we will plot our course to success by engaging all our constituents in our strategic planning process. At this time, I would like to share with you our Strategic Planning video highlighting our key accomplishments over the past year and how we will develop our strategy for the future.

Indeed 2015-2016 was a very special year. I believe that the upcoming academic year and future years will be every bit as special as together we chart our course for the future with our new strategic plan. I look forward to working with all of you in this great endeavor.

As you may recall, during my investiture speech, I revealed JSU's inaugural theme: *"Transformative, Innovative and Engaged for Success: JSU 'TIES' that bind us together."* As we move forward to our future toward what I am calling *JSU's Renaissance*, this theme will serve as a guidepost. Transformative, Innovative and Engaged are the three key descriptors leading to our future Success. *We must be Transformative. We must be Innovative. We must be Engaged.* I would like to review each of these in turn.

For future success, JSU must be *"transformative"* in at least three ways. First, we must transform our *students*. Second, we must transform our *region*. Third, we must transform our *university*. As for our *students*, we must transform them into educated, ethical professionals and responsible global citizens. We must take them from where they are and provide them with every opportunity to become who they can be. We must help them to find their passion in life which will lead them to identify their major and their future profession and whom they are destined to serve. We must give them the opportunity to develop holistically in mind, body, and spirit through a wide array of classes, activities and interactions. We are all here at JSU to facilitate this transformation and help each student reach his/her potential.

As for the transformation of our *region*, we must be committed to regional stewardship; that is, regional state universities like JSU exist to serve their region. As such, JSU must work to transform Northeast Alabama intellectually, culturally, socially and economically. We should all be thinking about how we individually and collectively can contribute to improve our region of Northeast Alabama. Every employee in the university can play a role in improving our region.

The third transformation is of the *university* itself. We can only transform our students and our region if we transform ourselves to focus on our key mission. As we begin the development of our new Strategic Plan, we will determine our future direction and then work to accomplish our long range vision, our mission, and our key strategic initiatives. All of us must be committed to continuous improvement and this must start at the individual employee level. Each of us needs to set annual goals that are congruent with the goals of the university and be evaluated on the accomplishment of goals. We will continue to be “The Friendliest Campus in the South” providing world class customer service. We will continue to be a learning-centered university focusing on academic excellence and student success. We will be entrepreneurial, innovative, and responsive to the needs of learners in the 21st Century. We will develop new programs that better prepare students for future workforce needs. Focusing on all these worthy goals will lead to the transformation of the university.

That leads us to “*innovative*.” The world of higher education is changing rapidly and we face challenges never before faced in terms of funding, competition, accountability, and preparation of students for an ever changing world. We can no longer maintain the status quo. For future success, JSU must be an “innovative university.” We must embrace change and be receptive to change. At JSU, we are a learning organization committed to continuous improvement. As such, we must regularly identify areas where improvement is needed and make changes. This requires critical evaluation, perspective, creativity and innovation. While change is not easy for many people, we need to realize that change is normal in high performing organizations. We must embrace change rather than to choose “insanity” which is defined as doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results. If we embrace change, JSU will indeed reach even higher levels of excellence. On the other hand, it is important that we do not merely change for change sake. We need strong rationale for changes made with a reasonable probability that changes will indeed improve the university. We have made various key changes over the past year that should pay great dividends in the future. One key example is the academic reorganization resulting in six schools rather than four colleges. This change is designed to co-locate related disciplines in reasonably-sized schools to provide greater synergy and collaboration among disciplines and enhanced marketability for each school. The Founding Deans for the two totally new schools will be announced within the next week.

With our focus on student success, we must find new ways to reach the current generation of students using technology to the fullest, developing new pedagogical and remediation approaches, constructing new flexible learning spaces, and linking coursework to real practical workplace experiences. We must strive for higher levels of placement of students in jobs and graduate school and make sure that students possess the leadership and global skills necessary for long-term career success. From a fiscal perspective, we must also become more efficient in our operations and find new revenue sources. All these things will take innovation and the ingenuity of us all. Together, we will test our own new ideas and benchmark the best practices of other universities to determine what will work for us. We cannot be afraid to think outside of the box and try new things. We must be entrepreneurial and learn to think of change as an opportunity for progress and a brighter future. I look forward to working with you all in identifying and implementing many future innovations at JSU.

And finally, we must all be “*engaged*.” All of us – faculty, staff, administration, students, alumni and external constituents must be strongly engaged at JSU and committed to our mission for future success. We must become a Carnegie Classification “engaged campus.” Research shows that a strong level of engagement is the key to success of any organization, especially universities. From the student’s perspective, strong student engagement with faculty, staff, alumni and other students leads to “Great Lives and Great Jobs” per the Gallup Purdue Survey. That is, there is a strong correlation between student engagement at college and future job satisfaction and happy lives. With student success at the forefront of our mission, it is extremely important that we all continue to be engaged strongly with our students and provide them with an “up-close-and-personal” experience at the

“Friendliest Campus in the South.” As such, all employees need to be engaged in world class customer service and committed to continuous improvement in all we do. This high level of engagement will lead to our future success as a university including increased enrollment, greater fiscal stability, a strong brand, and a meritocracy where rewards are distributed to employees for enhanced performance.

At this time, I would like to outline various areas on which we should focus over the next year.

- **Enrollment Management** – we need to continue to build and grow enrollment to facilitate our future funding. Since 65% of our funding comes from tuition and fees, it is critical that we focus on improved ways to recruit, retain, graduate and place our students. First of all, we need to reallocate resources to assure that we can be successful in this area. Second, we must mobilize our alumni base as “boots on the ground” to help us recruit and sponsor students. Third, all of us must realize that we are all recruiters, customer service personnel, advisers, mentors and student success facilitators. As I indicated last year, if each one of us brings in an additional student to the university each year and helps retain our current students, we will never have an enrollment problem. In the upcoming year, we will develop a comprehensive enrollment management plan that covers recruitment and student success strategies for the future.
- **Deferred Maintenance and New Construction** – JSU has postponed maintaining and upgrading our facilities for many years and it is time to do something about it. We need those types of facilities that will meet the needs of our students, faculty and staff in the future. Our facilities must be competitive with those of other universities. We currently have about \$40M of deferred maintenance (with at least \$17.5M of which must be done over the next few years). We need to develop a funding strategy to make this happen. We are looking at P3s (public private partnerships) as well as traditional lines of credit and bond financing to make this happen. Private donations will also play a major part of new construction moving forward. Among the projects on the horizon are a new Student Recreation Center (for faculty and staff too), new student housing, academic space renovations, new baseball stadium, and a performing arts center.
- **Friend and Fund Raising** - with many financial needs looming, it is imperative that we establish a culture of philanthropy at JSU. This goes back to the idea that we need to behave more like a private school and build the expectation that our constituents will help us financially as we strive for higher levels of excellence across all dimensions. Major construction projects need to be funded by at least 40% from private funds moving forward. To get this done, we also need make reallocations to make sure we have adequate advancement personnel for the task.
- **Academic Excellence** – our core business at JSU is our academic programs leading to student success and preparation for careers and life. As such, we need to assure that we have high quality accredited programs and the “right” programs moving forward. We must also determine how to adequately fund academics to make this happen. Do we have adequate levels of terminally qualified faculty for all the programs we offer? Do we provide adequate operational funding for our departments and schools? Do we compensate our adjunct faculty enough to assure attraction of quality instructors? I think that we all know the answers to these questions. Over time, we need to find a way to change the answers. We must think about the needs of our region and our state and what niche programs make sense for JSU. What programs should we develop and what programs are obsolete and need to be re-configured. We also need to look at the efficiency with which are current programs are offered. Do we have too many choices for upper level courses for students in our current programs? Should perhaps we have five-year combo bachelors/masters programs to facilitate our students progression to graduate work? How can we internationalize our curriculum and our campus? How can we better prepare our students for careers earlier in their academic careers? Should we enhance our advisory boards across campus for all disciplines/programs and more heavily involve professionals with our students? I am raising many

questions and challenging all of academic affairs from faculty to department chairs to deans to the Provost's Office to work with me to address these issues.

- **Regional Stewardship** – It is time to focus on regional strategic planning for the ten counties of northeast Alabama. We are currently working on setting up the initial meetings. We also need to focus on engagement and how to improve our engagement with the goal of achieving the Carnegie Community Engaged Campus designation. If all of us focus on increased engagement with our community and our region, we will be successful in our regional stewardship efforts.
- **Marketing/Branding** – JSU needs to develop a comprehensive Marketing/Branding plan and develop a new tagline. We must now market our six new schools and their programs. JSU must become a well-known gem rather than a hidden gem. Letting people know how special we are is not bragging, it is simply good strategy.
- **Finance and Administration** – JSU must be strong financially to be successful. We have made great strides over the past year in efficiency, transparency, budgeting, and tuition/fee setting with widespread participation. Over the next year, we must continue to build on our progress and make sure that there is a direct tie in between our allocation of resources and our strategic plan as well as the development of a complimentary Campus Master Plan.
- **Technology** – JSU needs to fully utilize the technology we have and make sure that personnel across campus are fully suited and equipped to this task. This will take much evaluation and training. We also need to continue to make progress in instructional technology and in providing strong access across campus to the internet.
- **Human Resources** - JSU needs to continue to develop job descriptions campus wide and improve policies. We must also evaluate staffing across campus with an eye toward reallocating personnel to key strategic understaffed areas. A new strategy encompassing goal setting by all employees and a merit pay system needs to be developed. Continued progress in diversity across campus will enhance our university. Enhanced staff training and mentoring will improve performance while use of flexible scheduling in offices to meet customer needs will be beneficial.
- **Student Affairs** – JSU needs to expand Student Life options so that students want to be at JSU on the weekends and even in the summer. A new Student Recreation Center will greatly aid in this effort. Enhancements in the student discipline process, Greek Life options, and student engagement are worthy goals.
- **Athletics** – JSU needs to build on its success in athletic competition and the strong academic performance of our student-athletes while focusing on their health and well-being. A smooth transition to our new athletic medical providers will assure success in this area. Athletics needs to focus on enhanced revenue generation to fund their operations and to be more fiscally-responsible and stay within budget constraints.

As you can see from my comments, academic year 2016-2017 is a very important year with many things to accomplish. Many of the initiatives I have outlined will take multiple years; however, it is important to get started and mobilize to assure our future success. I would like to thank you all in advance for your efforts as together we work to make JSU the best university it can be. I cannot do it alone.

Each of you was given a special business-like card to remind you how important customer service will be to the future success of our university. The card reads:

Your SMILE is your LOGO,
Your PERSONALITY is your BUSINESS CARD,
How you leave others feeling after having an experience with you becomes your TRADEMARK.

-Jay Danzie

Please take this to heart as we continue to be the "Friendliest Campus in the South."

Have a great academic year.

Thank you and Go Gamecocks!

John M. Beehler
President