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# THE PRESIDENT'S INAUGURATION ADDRESS

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Rodney D. Smith, Ed.D.  
President  
University of The Bahamas



## President's Inauguration Address Rodney D. Smith, Ed.D. November 10th, 2016

Following established protocol, allow me to greet you with a sunny, sandy, warm, and tropical, University of The Bahamas "Good morning."

My dear fellow Bahamians from all walks of life, all University family members and colleagues, all friends of The Bahamas and the University, my friend and mentor for the past 23 years, Dr. William R. Harvey and his dear wife Norma Harvey, my dear wife of 30 years, Christina, and our children, we have indeed, come a long way.

I pause, here, recognizing my brother Jerry and sisters, Winifred and Linda, in remembrance of our departed parents, Wilfred Smith and Floretta Malone-Smith, both from Burnt Ground, Long Island. It was my mother who constantly reminded me that getting an education is the absolute best investment. She would say that "people can take anything away from you; but, they can never take away your education." She would say that "your education and faith in God will always cause you to get back up; no matter how many times you fall." Thank you, mom. You were right.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to say a special thank you to the former Council of the College of The Bahamas and all past Chairs, especially, Alfred Sears, who began this process as Minister of Education and ended as Chairman of the Council. To Sir Franklyn Wilson, who played a key role in reintroducing me to my home land many years ago. To Chairman Dr. Earl Cash who has been at the forefront since day one, some 14 years ago; and, someone I have come to appreciate and admire, as we sat across the table on a weekly basis for over a year, while working on the draft UB Bill along with colleagues. To all Members of the Government Cabinet, to all Members of the House of Assembly, to the President of the Senate and all Members of the Senate, we say "Thank you." To the Hon. Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Jerome Fitzgerald, sir, your passion and commitment has helped to make

this day happen. We could not have had a better partner. Thank you.

Finally, I must express the gratitude of the entire University community and every Bahamian, domestically and abroad, in thanking the Right Hon. Perry Gladstone Christie. Sir, in your capacity as Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, you have consistently demonstrated unending support, unquestionable commitment, and undeniable determination as you steered our country toward the manifestation of what is now the University of The Bahamas. On behalf of the entire University community, please know that we look forward to the continued journey along the road to even greater successes, yet to come. Thank you, sir.

Prime Minister, Paul J. Meyer wrote that "whatever you vividly imagine, ardently desire, sincerely believe, and enthusiastically act upon, ... must inevitably come to pass." The challenges of leading the University of The Bahamas, fills my heart with humility while inspiring my soul beyond words; challenges that weigh heavily, yet give me strength at the same time.

Today, I am privileged and humbled, to take on a challenge that will surely test the inner depths of strength, creativity, skill and patience. This challenge will bring to bear sensitivities that are key to realizing the birth and full maturation of the University of The Bahamas.

One month ago today, the college community, like the rest of The Bahamas, was still feeling deeply overwhelmed by the horrific blows struck by Hurricane Matthew. One month ago today, many were still without electricity or water in their homes. Some lost everything they owned. Others have suffered damages so severe that it looked as if starting over would be almost impossible. Many are still reeling from Matthew.

But, through it all, one thing remained strong throughout the storm, and during its aftermath. The one thing I detected in the sentiments of everyone with whom I spoke, was the unshakeable faith that despite everything, God is still in charge.



We raised our spirits in thanks, and today we come together to celebrate what will be referred to as a Red-letter day in the history of The Bahamas. In academia, such a time as this is referred to as a Scarlet Day; signifying a day which marks the beginning of a new era, a time of special significance.

As we embrace this new period, we must reflect on our history and recognize those defining milestones. From the time when learning how to read was denied us, to when most Bahamians were only required to attend school up to the age of fourteen; and when students, barely teenagers themselves, served as the teachers, or monitors, as they were called; to the level of universal education we have today. We must reflect on the true magnitude and meaning of this day. It is important that we take time to remember all who went before us: the monitors, the teachers, the first lecturers of the College, the principals, the presidents, the staff, and yes – the students.

Many of you here in this stadium are the very same builders of whom I speak. In our new University, when we build new classrooms, laboratories, athletics facilities, residential halls, campuses throughout the country, degree programmes and centres of excellence, let us remember the struggle endured by those who got us to where we are today; and, yes, this includes the “political will” of Sir Lynden and Dame Marguerite Pindling and all the disciples who followed. To you we say, thank you. Thank you for never giving up on the dream. Thank you for your years of service, of sacrifice, dedication and selfless commitment. Borrowing from an old African proverb, “We are because you are and were, committed to the cause of excellence in education.”

We must though, mark this day by reaching even higher. We must be visionary in our thinking. We must find new and more innovative ways to nurture and inspire critical thinking in what has become an increasingly technological age. We must develop the places and spaces that stimulate creativity in our young and more matured, alike. We must challenge the status quo; inspire invention and pave solutions for tomorrow’s challenges.

In this era of higher education, we must find new ways of engaging students, and be willing to acknowledge that learning is a life journey. We must respect the fact that our rapidly expanding technological age has produced generations of young people who are unable to imagine not having a computer in their pocket, a cell phone, immediate access to information on any topic, along with the means to communicate instantaneously with millions of people around the world.

For the past two years you have heard me say that we were “racing toward the starting line”, as we moved toward making this day a reality. Today, we are standing at that starting line; the beginning of the next phase of our evolution.

The mission of the University of The Bahamas has been in gestation for some 42 years. The Mission demands that the University seek to provide access to higher education for all Bahamians across the length and breadth of the archipelago.

The mission demands that the University protect academic freedom while welcoming different points of view and encouraging open dialogue. Academic researchers will be committed to driving national development in the interest of all Bahamians and for the enhanced knowledge of all who come to our shores to study and learn. Our national development focus will be at all levels, in every field, from sustainability and climate change to helping create improved governance and health care systems.

The mission of the University demands that in everything we do; whether through teaching; to conducting research in the laboratory or in the field; or through service within our communities, and serving as positive role models, the building of character must be and always remain on par with academic excellence.

The University’s academic programme will be re-envisioned by our faculty, leveraging local, regional and global partnerships. Innovative curricula will be based on the goals and needs as enunciated in the country’s National Development Plan. In preparation, we have begun the process of creating centres of excellence

dedicated to the advancement of research and study in several areas. Campuses throughout the country will become not only centres of excellence but also, and equally important, economic drivers for the overall development of respective communities. For instance,

- *Anthropology, Oceanography and Geology in San Salvador at the University owned residential campus known as the Gerace Research Institute;*
- *Sustainable Development in Exuma and Eleuthera in conjunction with our Small Island Sustainability Research Complex here in Nassau;*
- *Agriculture and Marine Sciences in Andros;*
- *Manufacturing, Engineering and Entrepreneurial Studies in Grand Bahama which will also have the country’s largest Business Incubator;*
- *Culinary and Hospitality Management at the Nassau Campus along with Legal Studies, Nursing, Pharmacology, Finance and Economics and, for the first time, a Government and Public Policy Institute.*

It is our hope to establish a medical campus, in the near future, that will house our schools of Nursing, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy and Applied Health Professions. It will have a medical clinic as well as a fully functioning pharmacy. This facility will serve as the foundation for the University’s School of Medicine.





Further, the University’s development of programmes and courses in the area of Food Sciences and Technology will provide students with the most current knowledge and skills in the areas of food analysis, processing, packaging and storage – while leveraging state-of-the-art food science laboratories that are currently being constructed at the GTR Campbell Small Island Sustainability Research Complex.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are billions of dollars in the agricultural and marine sectors in association with food production, distribution and consumption. 3.5 billion people, today, rely on the ocean as their primary source of food. By 2040, the demand for food from the ocean will increase beyond 7 billion people. Approximately, 95% of The Bahamas is water. With good stewardship and care of our land and sea, the agricultural and oceanic food resources of The Bahamas can be unlimited.

Under the University of The Bahamas, our rich ecosystems on land and beneath the sea will drive robust programmatic and research studies. The University of The Bahamas - UB - will seek to be the lead institution in not only exploring the natural gifts of The Bahamas, but also expanding opportunities for Bahamians to become agricultural, fisheries and oceanic entrepreneurs. The University will find new ways to maximize ecologically sustainable oceanic energy resources for the full benefit of The Bahamas, while adding to scientific research for the benefit of peoples around the world.

The University’s Government and Public Policy Institute, a new Centre of Excellence, will meet institutional and national objectives. Through this institute, we will encourage and support research on national and regional matters relevant to public policy creation and practice. We will provide consultancy and research services to agencies and ministries of the Government of The Bahamas and private entities based on national development goals and national research priorities. We will assist in monitoring the implementation of the National Development Plan for The Bahamas and informing revisions and refinements for the same on an ongoing basis. We will develop and disseminate National Key Performance Indicators (NKPis) and Economic

Forecasts; while assisting in the provision of strategic support to government agencies and ministries with respect to the training of public personnel. We will provide ongoing research and academic analyses in the areas of governance, decentralization and democratization.

Let us pause for a moment. We must also accept the fact that our country sits within the hurricane belt. It is prone to flooding and is particularly susceptible to rising tides. With some 1,368 square miles of coastline and a virtually flat land mass, it is imperative that the University of The Bahamas, develop a centre of excellence in the study of coastal erosion, as well as emergency management and preparedness. We must prepare ourselves.

Yes, we know that there is a Disaster Risk Research Centre at the University of the West Indies; however, as one of our researchers indicated in a recent exchange, there is limited or no research pertaining to The Bahamas, Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands and Bermuda. Clearly, one of the most important of all national needs in The Bahamas is disaster preparedness. At the University of The Bahamas, partnering in ways to address this gap, we will provide free online certification courses in emergency management preparedness. It is our obligation.

We are also currently exploring the development of degree programmes in Disaster Mitigation. It is a must that every major business or corporation, every school, every government agency, and every extended community, throughout the archipelago, have trained emergency management and disaster preparedness personnel.

The time is now for us to harness the financial and human capital resources of our multi-cultural society to build a vibrant, productive, and effective national institution of higher education. It is time for our “collective responsibility” to have a “collaborative impact” on social, environmental and technological change.

Holistically, we are developing plans to build an Arts Museum Complex. Here we will showcase the rich talents of our arts and music majors. We will strengthen our ties



with arts alumni, so that we can deepen the country’s appreciation for arts education while highlighting the global successes of artists and musicians.

The University will place emphasis on Bahamian cultural studies. As our culture changes and develops, matures and morphs, we will document these changes and encourage our students to engage in the life of its people. Academics will be integral in the explosion of appreciation for Bahamian culture.

In the quest for overall academic excellence in all areas, a systematic process and plan of quality assurance must be established, executed and continuously refined. One component of this plan will set in motion steps to ensure that the University acquires globally recognized accreditations. We have already begun the process of being fully accredited through the National Accreditation and Equivalency Council of The Bahamas as well as America’s Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges. In years to come, the University of The Bahamas will secure further accreditations through the European Union, the United Kingdom and Canada’s higher education systems. This will help to bring the world to The Bahamas through education. Simultaneously, programmatic accreditations will be sought through relevant professional bodies as efforts are made to ensure currency and innovative thinking and practices in and across disciplines pursued at the University of The Bahamas.

To succeed in fulfilling the mission of the University of The Bahamas, the University’s campus must be expansive, while remaining virtually connected, particularly given the archipelagic nature of our country. It must have the capability of reaching across 5,382 square miles of land mass and 100,000 square miles of the Atlantic Ocean. Every single person who dreams of and desires to access a University of The Bahamas education, must be given the opportunity to do so whether they reside in Matthew Town, Inagua; Salina Point Acklins; or Bullocks Harbour, the Berry Islands.

As we prepare our graduates for competition on the world stage, it is imperative that we internationalize the University’s curriculum. Along these lines, in just a few short years, all enrolled undergraduate students of the University will be required to complete a study abroad experience prior to the end of the junior year. Students will then complete their senior year at the University prior to graduating.

We are living in a time when the percentage of degree completions defines national success. At the University of The Bahamas every building, every new initiative, every programme, must be designed to reach every citizen, no matter where they reside. We must harness and capitalize on the unlimited academic, athletic, creative and artistic talents lying dormant in the hearts of so many hundreds and thousands of our people.

In order to accomplish what we have laid out thus far, we must develop the necessary facilities and spaces, while









harnessing national and international resources. We must expand our partnerships, create more public-private investments, expand global and mutually beneficial agreements, and vigorously recruit academics, both Bahamian and non-Bahamian, to become members of the faculty, both in teaching and in research capacities. We

Port Authority, initiated by former Council Chairman Alfred Sears, in which we are now nearing completion of this campus' first residential hall. It will have a cafeteria, health clinic, expanded study areas, and a technology lab. We will begin housing students on the Northern Bahamas



must maximize efforts in securing research funding from the billions of dollars sitting within global foundations. We must maximize partnerships with local and multi-national corporations, as we build out our University campuses throughout the country.

One example is the partnership with the Grand Bahama

Campus in 2017. At our Oakes Field Campus, here in Nassau, we have just signed contracts for the building of a 1,000-bed living and learning residential facility that will also house a cafeteria, fitness facilities, swimming pool, study rooms, additional classrooms, retail spaces, a ball room, and a parking deck. This roughly \$100M public-private partnership project, is being led by a



graduate of The Bahamas, Mr. Ken Kerr. Mr. Kerr is a graduate of the College's School of Business. Of course, this is just the first of other public-private partnerships.

Already, we have received expressed interests in efforts that will bring about the creation of a 10,000-seat multi-purpose University Convocation Center; as well as a state-of-the-art Visual and Performing Arts Centre.

In yet another public-private partnership, we have partnered with the Bahamas Telecommunications Company (BTC) for the creation of a unique Technology Innovation laboratory. This lab, designed by our architecture students, will be housed within the Harry C. Moore Library, and will have the most up-to-date technology in existence. Students will create new apps, design and implement new and improved social media, and create new global companies. In addition, BTC has committed to establishing a \$300,000 endowed scholarship fund. The total of these donations, combined, from BTC is estimated to be up to one million dollars.

In preparation for our transition to University, this year alone, we have already upgraded all of our hardware technologies throughout all campuses and begun the process of implementing an advanced data management and administrative system throughout the country. This will allow for a 21st century financial administration system, academic data-base management, and online student registration, among many other things, at all locations, whether students are registering within The Bahamas or online



internationally. The University will maximize the use of shared resources for all of its campuses. The National University System, ladies and gentlemen, has become a reality.

The University's Oakes Field Campus will include a 140 acres Ecosystem Preservation and Education Site to be managed by the GTR Campbell Small Island Sustainability Research Complex.

Our young campus is in the process of evolving into a fully-functional University Campus system. One additional pillar to this evolution will be a much needed 21st century student centre. Currently, our student union building only accommodates about 200 students on a revolving basis. The campus has grown over the years and we have a student population in excess of 5,000. We are in desperate need of a more functional University student centre, where both residential and full-time working students can gather, meet to socialize, innovate, inspire, and yes, even study. Over the past few years, our students have had no choice but to use the library, a place designed for



study and research, as a place for socializing while being told constantly to be quiet. Our next major project must be a University Student Centre. It is estimated that such a centre will cost in the vicinity of \$20M.

Ladies and gentlemen... today, I am filled with emotion and great pride. I am blessed to announce that one of our very own Bahamian families has come forward to help make yet another dream come true. I am honoured and filled with gratitude, to announce that the family of former Council Chairman, Sir Franklyn and Bahamas Senate President, Lady Sharon Wilson, at my request, have graciously decided to lead the fundraising efforts with an initial generous donation to build a 21st century state-of-the-art University Student Centre. This centre will be the very key to a successful academic life for current and future generations of University of The Bahamas students. To the Wilson Family, we say humbly, thank you. With your permission, and since we already have a building named after Sir Franklyn, we would seek approval from the University Board of Trustees, and in accordance with the naming policy, to name this building after Lady Sharon Wilson.

Ladies and gentlemen, we believe there are others here today who will join the Wilson Family and the University, as we strive to make this addition to the lives of our students, a reality, at the earliest possible date.

This new student centre will be designed in consultation with our students and it will house the student government, society and club offices, student newspaper, TV and radio production studios, student lounges and other meeting areas, a cinema, food courts, and many other amenities specifically crafted for and by students.

In further expansions, as of today, the University's facilities also include collaborative programming between our academic programming and the National Sports Authority. We are effectively expanding the campus to include this very stadium. Technically, you are now on the campus of the University of The Bahamas. This expansion allows us to jointly create and build the Bahamas National Sports Academy. The University will be the

epicenter for student-athletes from throughout the country; and, during the summer months we will host visiting athletes for international competitions. In order to grow our University Athletics programme, we are now in the process of securing membership in the National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). In the near future, the University will host championship tournaments across several sports, while providing unlimited opportunities for our student-athletes, educationally, athletically and professionally.

I have shared much with you today and I believe I have much more to share. I have presented, specifically, on the four pillars presented in the State of the Nation Report as presented by The Right Honourable Prime Minister, Perry Gladstone Christie. They are in the areas of Governance, Human Capital, the Environment and the Economy.

Whether you are a student, faculty, staff or graduate of this great institution, what happens at the University of The Bahamas impacts you. This is our University. Every Bahamian and friend to the Bahamas must feel a sense of pride that fills our hearts. This University belongs to each and every one of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and family, we have vividly imagined our national University, and possibilities therein. We have ardently desired to have our national University. We sincerely believed that we would have our national University. And now, today, we have our National University. I now invite every Bahamian and everyone who loves The Bahamas, by God's grace, to join us as we stand on the shoulders of our forefathers and mothers, and enthusiastically build this great University. This is our University of The Bahamas.

Congratulations and may God continue to bless us all.





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OF THE BAHAMAS