

## Opening Faculty Meeting

August 10, 2009

Remarks—Thomas J. Hynes Jr.

Like so many of us, I love the start of school. While subject to the continuous changes that are a part of all of our lives, the start of school always brings for me a sense of renewal, of hope, of promise. Perhaps it is just the smell of number two pencils in the air, or the sight of all these kids who just seem to be getting younger. But perhaps it is the special roles we are asked to play—or as a wise friend told me, business plans look different when you move from making a product to helping to fulfill dreams. And the business of higher education is really nothing less than creating the conditions for learning for faculty, for students, for staff, and for community that gives access to American dreams.

To begin, I want to thank the many colleagues who have extended kind words and warm welcome to me at Clayton State University. I am grateful for the good work of leadership at this institution, especially Dr. Thomas Harden and Dr. Sharon Hoffman, who have helped to position our university to make important contributions to higher education in Metropolitan Atlanta, in Georgia, and in the Southeast. For those with whom I have had chances to interact to date (as well as the many with whom I will be able to interact in coming weeks), I hope you will share my excitement about the promise, the possibilities, and the challenges for Clayton State University.

I have had an opportunity to work closely with an accomplished and thoughtful leadership team, which includes Vice Presidents, Deans, and some program directors. Out of those interactions, we've developed a series of possible themes and directions that we will be sharing in the coming days, weeks and months, and working with you to move our institution forward. And as long as I serve the role of President at the pleasure of the Board of Regents, I will do so with the energy, with the fun, and with the dedication that I bring to virtually everything I do—admittedly, some clearly find those traits occasionally annoying. While I do not take myself especially seriously, I could not be any more serious about our obligations to support an environment of learning for our students, our faculty, our staff, and our community.

In the next few minutes, I'd like to initiate four topics that will be part of campus conversations in the coming months. These are Principles and values that must under girth our actions; the external economic and political contexts, and implications for us; preliminary internal or institutional findings, and some proposed next steps; and finally, some current examples of faculty, student, staff, and institutional successes.

I would number four immediate principles and values: 1) A presumption of openness in the ways in which we conduct ourselves within the University—we must be diligent in the ways in which we give access to information needed to share in informed decisions, and to focus our choices from more to less speculation and suspicion. 2) A culture of evidence--we must create a culture of evidence in the ways in

which we examine our options and our activities—we must be prepared to evaluate our effectiveness based on the evidence we can provide, and use that evidence as a guide to choices among our activities. 3) Essential values of the academy—we are committed to intellectual and academic freedom, and support it for our students, faculty and staff alike. We are committed to reinforcing both ownership of, and responsibility for, faculty ownership of a curriculum that advances the learning we identify for our students. And we are committed to academic and intellectual honesty, in which the knowledge claims we make can be relied upon. 4) A value for collaboration—we are committed to creating and reinforcing a presumption of collaboration—beginning with the belief that we agree on far more than we disagree, and that it is far more important to advance the institution than to assume a single group has ownership for the “correct perspective.”

These values and principles exist with a context, and some elements of that context will constitute the second portion of our discussion. I want to spend a bit of time introducing my take on three elements of our external context and some immediate implications for us. First, we operate during the most significant economic downturn of memory, with the associated significant decline in budget resources available from the state. During the last year, the state portion of our institutional budget was reduced by more than 11%. The strategic and thoughtful approach to budget decisions demonstrated last year (and we believe for this year) has helped to preserve the foundation for Clayton State’s greater advances in more prosperous times, all the while creating some real heart ships with the end of a college, and some real opportunity losses from the projected return of nearly a million dollars that could have been invested in learning for students, faculty, staff, and community. Governor Purdue has ordered three furlough days for state employees outside of education—and I believe we must anticipate the assignment of such a requirement to us by the USG Board of Regents when they meet tomorrow and Wednesday. Assuming that is the case, we will share with you information we have, as well as ask for some help in framing whatever specific actions will be left to individual institutions like ours. Any procedures rightfully will require that we protect our classes. In a few minutes I will share some examples of great things we continue to accomplish here in the face of the current budget environment—but it is also important to note that we have and will experience economic pain even as we work to position the university for future success.

To move to the second contextual element, we operate within an increasingly competitive higher education environment. When one reduces the level of state support, and thus increases the degree to which operations are dependent on tuition and enrollment support. Put quite simply, more places want our better students to learn from them. More institutions (including a number of proprietary institutions) who previously left to Clayton State University operations in this county and elsewhere in the southern crescent such as Fayette and Henry County are finding their way here. The airport located in Clayton (and in some of Fulton County) once was ours to have, and increasingly is seen by others as a focal point to offer their educational wares. We have done much to create academic offerings that will give students and others reason to seek us—but in this current environment, we must be far more intentional and far more thoughtful in which we invest our dollars and our intellectual capital to get a fair share on enrollments, and thus get a better opportunity to attract more resources in the future. This is especially true in the open source environment of curriculum in which we exist. Care must be

taken to carefully identify our connection with our students now and in the future in a world in which institutions such as M.I.T make available most of their content on-line without charge. The balance is of course a delicate one—if we are successful in attracting more students, we may stretch even further existing stretched resources. Nonetheless, we can be quite confident that as economic recovery appears, resources will be provided to those whose enrollments help make the best case for those new resources.

At Clayton State University, we face a third contextual element not faced by many other similar institutions. There have been public questions raised, especially through statewide media outlets, about school and government and public safety leadership in Clayton County. Having spent the last few months getting to know some of the emerging leadership in the County, I have a great deal of confidence that we are on the edge of huge leaps for improvements in civil and economic and educational conditions in the area—and thus for us. New leaders in education, law enforcement, government, chambers of commerce all share the commitment to dramatic changes, and the hope that Clayton State University will be an essential part of those changes. And candidly, this really is one place in which the challenge really is an opportunity—our engagement with our community, and the creation of conditions in which we support the engagement of our students in our community, can have far reaching effects beyond what any other institution may be able to accomplish. When 25 of our students tutor middle school students in Jonesboro, it may be the difference between college and dropping out of school for the middle school students—like all other investments, the payoffs are greatest when the risks are high—and we have the chance to become part of the context and to thus make changes. Our time, our energies, and intellectual capital invested strategically in this context can make differences, and in this context we must take care to match policies with the kinds of activities the circumstances suggest. It is clear that our future will also be affected if we cannot help find ways to build on the present advances.

From the principles and values we hold, to the context within which we find ourselves, I now want to share Internal or Institutional findings and proposed efforts for activities. This institution has spent some considerable time asking important questions, and in many snapshots having elements that may provide some tentative responses to such questions. And out of that material, and in consultation with the leadership team, several items have emerged. We must be about the business of planning and thinking strategically. First, we must, with external assistance, engage the campus and the local community in questions about who we are, what are our institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The campus must start the year long process of engaged strategic planning, needed to be started quite independently of whom ever is asked to guide the leadership of this institution in coming years. You will be hearing for us shortly with a request for volunteers to serve on a campus strategic planning committee. Second, we must review and act strategically about enrollment management. That concept does more than simply recruit and admit students, but includes a series of strategic decisions of how to match investments in recruitment, in orientation, in retention, in student services including housing, in academic success, in academic programs as part of a campus strategy to best match enrollments with institutional missions, visions, and goals. Our valuing of collaboration and academic missions are all part of our likely success in this area. Third, we must improve the ways in

which we communicate to both internal and external audiences. We must find ways to better share among ourselves and others key and consistent messages about who we are, what we can do, and why we should be valued. Fourth, we must reflect on ways to seek and obtain more external support for our efforts. To their credit, the University Foundation has committed itself to rethink its plans for success, as well as to secure outside financial support for university activities. Finally, we must update our physical master plan, so that we might match our plans, goals and programs with long range plans for our physical environment, both here in Morrow and at other sites in Henry and Fayette Counties. All of these taken together are meant to focus and others on saying who we are, where we are going, what do we do very well, what we should be able to do very well in the future, and why we merit support through resources based on that information.

Certainly there are other activities that will occupy importance for us in the coming months—SACS interim report and review and completion of changes in faculty handbook materials come to mind. And I will asking many audiences what will be on their minds, and how we can take those suggestions, and make that part of a cohesive map for Clayton State University's future actions.

I want to conclude with some examples of some current faculty, student and staff successes. These are all the more impressive given the state budget conditions and changes in institutional leadership. These accomplishments—and others that I may have left out, are all indications of the strength and the momentum we have now and those we will increase at Clayton State University. From a physical perspective, we have successfully completed our move to CSU East, the former Atlanta Bible College for use this fall. We are well on the way to a smooth transition to new financial and HR systems. First the first time, we are now able to have a payment plan for our housing students instead of the long time requirement of complete payment at one time. It appears as though our enrollments will grow this Fall from last, and we know for certain that our programs in Fayette County will experience a 50% growth from last year to this. In the development of contingencies for budget reductions, at all but the most extreme levels we have been able to protect travel budgets, and have been able to add 123 new faculty laptops to our institutional inventory. Our international activities have expanded significantly—ranging from the visit of six presidents from Turkish speaking institutions to come to our campus, to have nursing faculty to bring 14 nursing students to the jungles of Guatemala to MBA students spending time learning in India to social science students learning in South Africa. This internationalization may be one important strategic activity for an institution sharing location with the World's busiest airport. Our Center for Academic Success has been nominated for a state wide customer service award. The Board of Regents approved new academic programs in Business, in Justice Administration, in Archival Studies, in undergraduate sciences and in off campus programs. Our Business School was cited as one of the top 10 programs in the region, and our nursing students demonstrated a near perfect success rate in licensing exams. Nearly 16,000 adults received training and job assistance through the Career Resource Center. From a personal perspective, I have signed up to teach this fall CSU 1022, and have completed reading colleague Phillip Depoy's recent novel. ☺

I take this brief time to welcome Dr. Micheal Crafton to the leadership team here. The press releases do not do justice to the exceptional abilities he will bring to Clayton State as we move the institution forward—to think and act strategically, to presume to move forward collaboratively, to celebrate and to act consistently with our sense of place and our history of civic engagement, and to reinforce a culture of evidence in evaluating our current and future actions and directions.

The library current reading shelves include a book whose title is the punch line to a joke that reflects a part of my general philosophy of life. Kara Swisher's book is called "There must be a pony in there somewhere." The joke itself will not be repeated in the written text, in the hope that telling it once in public will be sufficient.

And so like me, I hope you will avoid the temptation of concentrating on the manure, and working together to help us find the pony that's here somewhere. Thank you for all you do for Clayton State University.