

STATE OF THE COLLEGE 2007

I would like to wish you all a happy new year-2007!

I trust that you all had a much deserved and restful respite—catching up on sleep playing with your kids, reconnecting with family and friends, traveling...some to Tennessee, to New Mexico, to Canada, to Beijing, and even to my hometown of New York City.

As for myself, I morph from being a college president to daddy, friend, brother and son...My daddy role consisted of being a personal assistant to my two daughters.

First, my nine year-old Mia just completed her second year in the cast of Velveteen Rabbit.

My older daughter, Sophia, played a soldier in the San Francisco Ballet Nutcracker who murders the mouse king with what else, a giant mousetrap.

For the parents of the performers, our brief moment of immense pride is quickly replaced with countless hours of dancer sitting in the green rooms, preparing meals, chauffeuring our daughters.

I returned last night from visiting my family and friends in New York City...Though a bit jet lagged, I still am in wonderment of what a magnificent metropolis it is...I must admit I was not ready for 70-degree weather in NYC. My childhood memories recalled snow-covered cars and slushy sidewalks... Global warming hasn't escaped the Big Apple...its more like the baked apple!

As there are many annual addresses at the federal, state and local level, I have made it a point to begin every New Year with a State-of-the-College Address.

Let me begin by saying that my first semester at Laney College has been marked by a welcoming, encouraging and supportive faculty, staff, administrators, and students.

Not surprisingly, I find that the college is almost singularly in agreement with the State of the College. When I broadly sent out a letter to college leaders upon my arrival about the strengths, challenges and opportunities, the college leadership responded with amazingly honest and strikingly similar responses:

First, the three strengths of the College are:

1. Diversity
2. Location
3. Commitment of the College to serve students

Secondly, the three challenges are:

1. Fair share of resources
2. Woefully inadequate facilities
3. Lack of support from the District

As your incoming president, I embraced those three challenges as your priorities and my priorities. Moreover, when asked about what are the three things that I should focus on as your president, you responded in kind that I should focus on the three major challenges.

I would like to offer you a progress report.

To date, I have embarked upon an ambitious yet doable goal to:

1. Insure that Laney College has adequate and a fair share of resources.

Using the shared governance process, we compiled a list of much needed equipment, supplies, technology and furniture that totals about \$1.7 million.

We have begun the process of ordering and procuring these items that will directly benefit students, faculty and staff.

Specifically, before we left for Winter Break, I signed off on an order of computers that will provide:

- An Upgrade of computers for the Computer Lab
- An upgrade of computers for the Library
- An Upgrade of computers for the Business Lab
- An upgrade of computers for Faculty and Staff

In all, Laney College received 41% of the Prop A funds for upgrading our equipment, supplies, furniture and computer needs. I would particularly like to express my appreciation to Dr. Webb, all of the instructional deans and department chairs for their hard work and cooperation.

2. Lack of Support from the district

I have seen first hand some of the challenges of working with the District Office. What I found was a group of District administrators such as Dr. Haig

in Educational Services, Dr. Ikharo in General Services/Facilities, Tom Smith in Finance, Howard Perdue in Admissions and Records, Gary Perkins in IT, Jeff Heyman in Marketing, Joanne Baldinelli in Risk Management, and yes, even Wyman Fong in HR, all committed to helping Laney College and more importantly—working to improve some poorly laid out processes. Essentially, good people, bad systems.

My approach has been to invite those folks to Laney College and develop a partnership, a dialogue and a dual accountability. Poor past practices and institutional culture are difficult to change and alter.

But I can say with some assurance that none of the people that I mentioned by name want anything more than myself to see Laney College succeed. I am confident that things are getting better and please work with the district staff as I am to get things done.

Finally, number 3 has been my greatest challenge and quite honestly, the one that I have the greatest sense of urgency.

After over 40 years of deferred maintenance, I honestly underestimated how bad things had gotten. Fortunately, I turned to James Kendrix, our steady business manager who helped me develop a strategy and system for attacking the deferred maintenance challenge.

We have worked with Dr. Ikharo, Bob Beckwith and the College and District Facilities Committee to draft an Action Plan that I presented to the Chancellor in November.

Chancellor Harris immediately understood the enormity of the challenge and made a commitment to provide Laney College with the necessary resources to get the job done.

During the holiday break, I met with Mark Lindquist and his able staffer, Lindsay McNally, along with James Kendrix and Joanne Baldinelli, and we were all over the campus to see first hand the unacceptable conditions that many of you have had to work under.

Mark and Lindsay have hit the ground running, lining up contractors, roofers, blind vendors, painters, carpeting folks, etc. We are embarking on Laney College's own version of "Extreme Makeover". After all, who is more deserving!

Please join me in welcoming Mark and Lindsay. I want to introduce them to you because they will invariably be meeting with faculty, staff and students.

I would also like to share with you that Laney College's Financial Aid Office has undergone a Best Practices Review by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators in November.

I have received the preliminary recommendations and I am confident that we will begin to implement their recommendations and become a model operation.

I want to particularly thank Judith Cohen and the Financial Aid staff for their openness, honesty and commitment to better serving our students! I continue believe that Financial Aid remains the most important access and retention tool! That is why we focused on this office first!

Another initiative that I am supporting is the creation of a Tutorial Center focused on supporting our students with basic skills needs. Through the faculty leadership of Meryl Siegal and Catherine Crystal and the unwavering support of Dr. Webb and our instructional deans, we are earmarking some significant resources from basic skills dollars to develop a model tutorial lab that I have coined BSI (Basic Skills Institute).

With Extreme Makeover and now BSI, I think I am watching too much television...nah!

The Math, English and ESL Departments are stepping up to partner with our Counseling Department to develop a web of support for our many students who are at the pre-collegiate level.

I also plan to meet with the respective task forces on African American, Latino, and Asian American faculty, staff and students to discuss plans to implement ethnic specific interventions that will be culturally and linguistically appropriate to improve retention.

I have been so impressed with the Carnegie Foundation faculty and administration participation and leadership. I have high hopes for a Tutorial Center that everyone agrees is needed to improve retention.

Before we put 2006 to rest, I want to reflect on all of the great teaching and learning that took place at Laney College...such as

- Carole Ward-Allen's moving Kwanza celebration;
- Or Michael Torres's multicultural version of Beauty and the Beast;

- Or Coach Jay Uchiumi's bowl winning football team that is sending over a dozen of our student athletes to enroll in four-year colleges across the country;
 - The wonderful exhibits that Leslie Stradford puts on in the gallery;
 - Or the well-attended Transfer Day that Manuel Alcala put on this semester;
 - Or the Asian American Community Day that Janine Fujioka organized that steadily grows every year;
 - Or the wonderful Career fair that our deans and department chairs organized for our students;
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- Or the hundreds of young musicians who come to Laney College on Saturdays to make beautiful music whether it is Coltrane, Ravel or classical Chinese music that predates western civilization ...Thank you Jay Lehman and Sherlyn Chew;
 - And to our student leaders who have brought us lively debates, provocative films, a renewed school spirit and a rekindled alumni network...All of you do the work of the people and make my coming to Laney every day a joy and a privilege!

Laney Leads

In my Fall Address, I challenged the college to step up and make Laney College a true flagship of the district.

Under the theme of Laney Leads, I have been so impressed with the Laney College leadership...TEAM.

Shirley Coaston has been an effective and unrelenting advocate for Laney College as your Academic Senate President

Judith Cohen is reviving the Classified Senate and raising the standing and morale of the Classified staff at Laney.

Ron Jones and Matt Goldstein have reached out to me and we are forging a partnership with PFT that is collegial, professional and mutually supportive.

Reginald James and Marlene Hurd are genuine student leaders who have developed programs that empower and benefit students.

Let's work together to continue to:

- Improve our services to students
- Improve our facilities
- Improve tutorial lab

I am beaming with hope and confidence that the State of Laney College is a healthy one! Laney College has been and will continue to be a beacon of hope in the City of Oakland and in the East Bay.

As incoming Mayor Dellums brings forth his agenda to eliminating violence in Oakland, Laney College will stand ready to be the first responder and often the last chance for many of our residents to realize their dreams.

Let's pull together along with the Mayor to show, in his words, "the Audacity to eliminate violence." Let's feel this sense of urgency to make Laney College and the City of Oakland a model of urban awakening!

Let me close by sharing a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King as we celebrate his birthday: "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically...Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."

Thank you for taking the time to listen and have a great semester.