

**INTRODUCTORY MESSAGE OF
PRESIDENT DAVID HALL
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
AUGUST 10, 2009**

It is a very special honor to be appointed as the fifth President of the University of the Virgin Islands. I want to thank the Board of Trustees for selecting me, and for the enormous faith they have placed in me. Their thoughtfulness and enthusiasm for this university were very instrumental in my decision to embrace this opportunity. I appreciate the presence of various members of the Board of Trustees today, and members of the Reichhold and UVI Foundation Boards. I also want to thank the various faculty members, staff and students for their support and insights as I went through the appointment and transition process. The greatest asset of an institution is its people, and I have been extremely impressed by the quality and authenticity of the people I have met at UVI.

I know that I would not be able to inherit the leadership of such a special university if it were not for the previous Presidents who guided this university to its present level of achievement. My sincere gratitude and respect go out to my four predecessors. I am especially appreciative to Dr. LaVerne Ragster for her recent leadership of this university, and for the genuine cooperation and thoughtfulness she has shown to me during my transition.

I accepted this position because I deeply believe that UVI has a special and worthy mission in the world of higher education. The tag line that UVI is “Specializing in Futures” is not an abstract ideal for me. My success in life has been greatly propelled by the winds of educational institutions that transformed my life. I grew up during the period of segregation in the deep south, raised by two loving parents who did not have the privilege of receiving much

formal education. My mother never went to school and my father only completed the 3rd grade. Yet they and the teachers in those segregated institutions instilled within me an understanding of the value of learning and nurtured a deep sense of collective pride that empowered me to graduate from and work at some of the leading institutions in this country. Without the dedication and love of my parents, teachers and professors I would not be standing here today as your fifth president.

I believe that many of the students who have come, and will come through the doors of this university, have and will face circumstances that could limit their futures. Yet UVI has the potential to help them transform their lives, build their futures, and become excellent leaders of this territory, nation and world. It is a privilege for me to be President of an institution with such a special mission, and such unlimited potential to do good in the world. UVI plays such an essential role in the future of the US Virgin Islands, and the Caribbean. Many of our future leaders, teachers, entrepreneurs, and health care professionals will come through the doors of UVI. We must ensure that we not only equip them with the skills they desire, but with the values they need to succeed and serve this Territory and the world.

When the sole responsibility for higher education within the Territory is placed in the hands of one university, then it is critical that we serve the educational needs of our students in an excellent manner. Excellence cannot be a luxury for us; it must be our unyielding mandate. I pledge to do whatever is within my power and capacity to keep us focused on this goal, and to lead us down the paths that will ensure our success. Yet I believe that we not only have within our grasp the potential to become an excellent university, but we also have within our reach the possibility of becoming a great university. Excellence means that we consistently achieve and maintain the highest standards of our profession. But greatness suggests that we have become

the envy of other institutions throughout the world because of our “distinctive impact.” This may seem like a farfetched idea for some, but it will be the burning desire for me each day that I am President of UVI. For, to paraphrase Jim Collins the author of From Good to Greatness, “Greatness is not a matter of circumstances or resources, but a matter of choice, faith and discipline.”

There were a few of my friends who upon hearing of my appointment responded by saying, “This is a nice stepping stone for your career as a university president.” My response is that UVI is not a stepping stone, it is the stone; it is the rock upon which we collectively can build a great university and the forces of doubt, cynicism and negativity shall not prevail against us, if we work respectfully and creatively to shape the destiny of this university.

In the days and months ahead I will share my goals and areas of focus for the university. But I want to share with you today three major themes that I hope will define the initial stage of my presidency.

First, we cannot be excellent or great unless we nurture the spirit of this university. The people who make up the UVI family must be respected, included and challenged to grow. Our faculty, students, administrators and staff are our greatest assets, and I will do my best to ensure that we create a spirit of oneness among groups and across our two campuses. Even when we disagree there must be an unshakeable commitment to the values of respect, transparency and integrity. The health of the soul of this university will be as important to me as its financial health. For what will it profit us if we grow our resources but neglect or abuse our people?

Second, if we are to be an excellent university then we must ensure that every student we admit is given every opportunity to graduate. The retention and graduation rates of this

institution will be a primary focus of my presidency. To achieve a higher graduation rate does not mean that we will lower standards; it means that we must do all we can to ensure that our students can meet our standards and exceed them. We must also ensure that we are not creating unnecessary barriers to their success. Yet our faculty and administrators cannot carry this burden alone. All of our students must embrace the challenge of excellence in a serious and compassionate manner. When we collectively invest in the success of our students, then we gain the dividends of their success by becoming a more transformative university.

Third, I also look forward to working in partnership with the Commissioner of Education, the Superintendents, the Chair of the Board of Education and educators throughout the Territory to ensure that all students in the U.S. Virgin Islands receive the best education that our hands, hearts and minds can deliver. From preschool to graduate school we must have a seamless commitment to excellence and innovation. The future of this land does not rest solely on the majestic beauty that lies around us. The future of this land will be shaped by the quality of the people that our educational system cultivates and produces. UVI must be an essential partner and player in this quest.

New presidents are cautioned not to promise too much at the start of their presidency, because people have a tendency to remember what was promised. Despite that warning, I promise this day to serve this institution with the utmost passion that I can muster. I promise to pour out of my soul the commitment and love which this university deserves. I promise to leave this place better than I found it; to treat each of you with respect, even when we disagree. I promise to work collaboratively as we search for answers to our most vexing problems. I promise to make decisions not out of fear, but out of hope and thoughtful deliberation. And I promise to ask for your forgiveness when I fail at any of these promises.

I make these promises because today I enter into a covenant with this university. Though I signed the contract months ago, today I urge us to embrace a new covenant between President and University. The success of a presidency does not depend solely on the person who occupies the office. I will not achieve my dreams unless you achieve yours. You will not paint your masterpiece unless I can create a canvass large enough so that you can perfect and display your creativity. Our destinies are inextricably linked, and it is with that spirit that I embrace tomorrow. I ask that you will join me in this mutual covenant in pursuit of greatness.

I would like to conclude by introducing three of the most important people in my life, and ask that they say a few words to you once I have introduced all three of them. I was blessed over 20 years ago to meet a beautiful, kind and intelligent woman that God fashioned specifically for me. I have enjoyed our journey through life together, and she has made me a much better person through her love, unequivocal support and encouragement. It was not difficult for me to agree to move from Boston to the Caribbean, because this woman from Jamaica, who captured my heart over twenty-one years ago, has already taught me what it means to live in paradise. We spent our honeymoon in St. Thomas, and we are thrilled to return. I introduce to the university my dear wife, Mrs. Marilyn Braithwaite-Hall.

Also with me today is my oldest daughter. Her name is Sakile Ashia Nadira, which means “peace and beauty are rare in life.” She is 16 and through her love and smile she has demonstrated to me that peace and beauty can be common place in life.

My youngest daughter is also with us today. She is 12 and her name is Kiamsha Imani Thandekile, which means “the one who awakens faith and love.” Though Kiamsha is known for

awakening other forces in me at times, she is a tremendous source of wisdom, joy and love in our home.

I also have an adult son, Rahsaan Hall, who lives in Massachusetts and was not able to join us today. But I look forward to introducing him, his wife and my two granddaughters to you in the future.

Before Marilyn and the girls come forward, I want to again thank you for embracing my family with such kindness and respect. I realize that the names Marilyn and David may remind you of winds of destruction and danger. (And I'm really glad we don't have a child named Hugo). Please be assured that we come on winds of healing, peace and inspiration. We are committed to serving and representing this university with sincerity and dedication.

I look forward to this journey and I wish many blessings of success upon this special university.