

*Remarks for the
9th Annual Institute on Teaching and Mentoring
October 25, 2002*

Thank you, Dr. Tankson, for that kind introduction. Let me take a moment to congratulate you on the great work you are doing in higher education, and the focus you have kept in reaching your goals. You are an inspiration.

This Annual Institute on Teaching and Mentoring is sponsored by The Compact for Faculty Diversity, which is comprised of the New England Board of Higher Education, the Southern Regional Education Board, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

I want to thank The Compact, as well as the representatives here today from colleges, universities and state agencies, for their support of this event.

This institute is conducted in cooperation with the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, the National Science Foundation / Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate, the Ronald McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Minority Ph.D. Program.

Special thanks also go to the organizations hosting tables here today by donating the time and expertise of an executive to visit with the doctoral students seated with them. (*refer to list of separate list of tables and names*)

Thank you to these great organizations for their work here today. And, let me also thank the Coca-Cola Foundation for their special financial support of the Institute.

The focus of this meeting on the issue of minority students earning doctoral degrees and entering the academic world at lower rates than non-minority students illustrates a challenge faced at so many levels.

The process begins at the earliest age, and the first day our children walk through the schoolhouse door isn't necessarily the beginning of the process. So much is tied into those early formative years – health issues, home issues, family issues.

But when a child walks into a school for the first time, that's where our work begins in earnest.

That's where we start the process of investing in their promise and potential – in the hope they represent for a time yet to come.

I am committed to that investment and that hope, in Mississippi and beyond. In January of this year, we were the first state selected by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and College's Center for Public Higher Education Trusteeship and Governance to host a summit on higher education.

We brought together leaders from government, business and education to provide a cooperative framework for education, economic and social progress.

The report we issued at that summit introduced a shared vision for our future, outlining six major priorities to help advance our ability to compete in the 21st century economy.

Those priorities included initiatives that each of you can take on in partnership with the public and private sectors.

The six priorities included raising the educational aspirations of all Mississippians; preparing our children to learn by the time they begin school; boosting the quality of teaching and learning in elementary and secondary schools; increasing college and university graduation rates; expanding lifelong learning; and increasing the level of activity in university research and development.

The hallmark of our vision at that summit was to give each and every one of our young people an opportunity – an opportunity to live up to their potential and promise.

To meet that hallmark will demand our very best. It will require us to examine our priorities and focus in on the steps we must take in the months and years to come.

The hallmark we have set is a complementary fit with the issues of this Institute. The common goal is found in helping students attain their educational goals and providing a system by which they can shape their own career path in education.

The opportunities found in this Institute through shared insights, networking and mentoring are a key component in the growth in numbers of minority doctoral students and academics.

The Southern Regional Education Board is proud to support these opportunities through their Doctoral Scholars Program, with help from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Ford Foundation.

Working together, SREB members states share resources and focus on supporting students in graduate study and searches for employment in academia.

More than 200 scholars are currently participating in this program, and I'm especially proud of the ten scholars from Mississippi – including Dr. Tankson, who was also one of the first 100 scholars to complete this program.

And, while I'm boasting about Mississippi, I also want to mention that we had the honor of actually having the 100th scholar – Jennifer Riley – to go through the program complete her work at Mississippi State University.

The work of building opportunity is well underway. From the rural school districts to the halls of graduate schools, we must work together to improve the alignment of policies and practices across educational sectors, and strengthen accountability in meeting this aggressive agenda.

Yet, while the work is underway, there's so much more to do – and that work must begin with the financial support we are willing to put behind its efforts.

It's no secret that every state in the nation is facing tight budgetary times. The condition of the national economy is presenting challenges to us in so many areas, forcing us to re-focus on issues such as tuition and scholarships.

These tight times, however, demand that we set priorities and stand by them.

In Mississippi, I will continue to call for the adequate resources necessary to achieve success in education – at all levels.

To accomplish this demands tough decisions.

We cannot afford to base our budget on the simple hope that our economy will turn around.

We have to use realistic numbers, not the numbers we would all prefer.

If the creation of a budget that supports all levels of education depended solely on what we wished would happen with the economy, we would have no problem.

But that's not the case. When we craft our budgets, budgets that must – first and foremost – provide for the education of all our people, we must make tough decisions about where the funds for those budgets will come from.

Simply, we are building our foundation as strong and secure as we can. We are all aware of the biblical proverb about building a house on sand. We are building ours on the most stable rock we can, and that rock is education.

It's exciting to think about what we can do with education as a priority. There is no limit to what can happen. Horizons are broadened, the sky is the limit.

(tell your own story here; upbringing, first in family to attend college)

I understand the hard work it takes to go where others haven't, and I appreciate the challenges faced by students today.

We've chosen a path covered with challenges and surrounded by opportunity. How we walk that path and use our resources will determine our success for generations to come.

Creating jobs for the people of Mississippi has become a trademark of my administration, but building a future for the young people of our state through quality education is my personal passion.

Our commitment is focused, but our aim is broad. Education is where we build our success, and we're going to do it.

We have the tools to get this work done. We have the people and the talent and the resources to get this work done.

There's an old saying that the challenges of hard work affect people in different ways – some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don't turn up at all.

Thank you for turning up your sleeves.