

**Message to the Campus  
Bluefield State College**

**November 15, 2019**

We'd like to welcome the faculty and staff of Bluefield State College that are here today and – in particular – our Chair and members of the Board of Governors.

We'd also like to thank those alumni and interested members of the community who are joining us on the college's You Tube channel.

Our purpose here today is plain and straightforward:

- To provide the campus with an open and honest look at our current fiscal situation; and
- To discuss the strategies and actions necessary to assure a bright and prosperous future for Bluefield State College.

For 125 years, Bluefield State College has been more than just a place for young people to go, to learn and to prepare for the future.

It's also been a special place:

- A place of opportunity for generations of students who faced considerable economic and social challenges –
- A special place of opportunity for young men and women to pursue an education that was unavailable to their parents and prior generations – and
- A special place that if it didn't exist - would've resulted in thousands of people being denied the opportunity to pursue their hopes, their dreams and their God-given destinies.

You who are gathered here today – as well as each and every person who has taught, learned, served or supported this institution can truly be proud of Bluefield State's rich heritage of changing the lives of thousands of young men and women.

But along the way, the campus has experienced substantial problems such as:

- Chronic underfunding;
- Social turmoil; and
- A misguided attempt to consolidate Bluefield and Concord

In the past, the college has been able to overcome these challenges through capable leadership, great foresight and prudent management.

In recent years, though, the campus has been faced with a new set of challenges created by:

- Its inability to provide traditional students with on campus housing;
- Reductions in state support;
- A consistent decline in population in our service area;
- The foolish move by the state to strip Bluefield State of many of its more popular two-year programs; and – perhaps even more significantly –
- The incredible advances in technology and the online delivery of post-secondary coursework and programs that has made the higher education marketplace extremely competitive.

At Bluefield State, these and other factors have led to a severe decline in enrollment and a corresponding breakdown in the fiscal health of the institution.

In particular, let's look at the enrollment trend at Bluefield State over the past several years.

But, before we begin, let me note that in terms of enrollment, you've probably seen different numbers that are attributable to the different ways the higher education bureaucracies count enrollment.

For example, you'll hear the term "headcount," which means every student taking even one class – including a high school student paying only \$75 to take an AP class. That counts as one.

Academic leaders like this count because it's usually the highest – but, in effect, it creates a false sense of positioning in that it fails to reflect the true fiscal soundness of the institution.

Full-time enrollment or FTE is another approach in which the total number of hours taught by the college is divided by the number of hours used to determine a full-time student.

Again, this count fails to give an accurate picture of the college's fiscal health - especially in West Virginia – where a student pays one price for tuition for 12 hours, but can take as many hours above 12 as they're permitted.

For example, two students taking 18 hours a piece – would equal 36 hours – and when divided by 12, would be counted as three full-time students – yet, we’re only two students are paying tuition.

As you can see, the amount paid, theoretically, would only cover 2/3 of the costs of providing the classes the student takes.

Both of these approaches ignore reality by inflating the real count that we need to consider if we’re going to get a true fiscal picture of the financial health of the institution.

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A philosopher once said, “We can evade reality, but we can’t evade the consequences of evading reality.”

We’re at a critical place and time at Bluefield State College where we can no longer pretend that we have 1,200 or even 1,000 students because if we do – we’re merely fooling ourselves.

As such, we need to look at “full time headcount” which is the number of full-time students enrolled in, taking and paying for 12 or more hours of classwork.

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If you look at this slide you will see that over the last eight years we’ve lost 40% of our full-time headcount.

True, there’s been a general decline in student population statewide – but none has suffered as much as Bluefield State.

If we dig a little deeper and look at students who have actually paid in full, our number is actually closer to 840 full-time students.

Two other important factors are the drop in our number of students in our freshman class – which has fallen 45% and – perhaps – a most devastating figure is the number of students we lose between a student’s freshman and sophomore years – nearly 46% in the last eight years.

And as a result, the impact on fiscal health of the college has been severe.

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Each year, the Higher Education Policy Commission releases a report that measures the financial health of each public and private college and university in West Virginia by the use of the Composite Financial Index or CFI.

This index is a combination of four different analyses that produces a CFI score on a ten-point scale.

Higher scores above six indicates strong financial health that would position the institution to weather financial difficulties and/or invest in new programs.

A score of three represents minimal financial health.

Scores below three, including negative scores, are an indication of financial stress.

Unfortunately, on the most recent report released by the HEPC — Bluefield State's score was a minus 1.94 (-1.94) - by far, the worst score of any public or private four-year college in West Virginia.

I'll note that based upon some the actions we took last year including a net reduction of \$500,000 in administrative positions, our CFI showed a slight improvement to a minus 1.84.

Nevertheless, it's clear:

**We're currently in a state of severe financial exigency [Ex-i-gen-cy]**

As many of you may know, in the past, we've been actively involved in higher education in West Virginia; served as counsel for the Senate Finance Committee in the Legislature; and served as a primary consultant to the Governor's Blue-Ribbon panel on higher education.

And, there wasn't a time – especially when money was tight - that discussions regarding reforming our higher education system didn't include a comment that “we should just close Bluefield.”

In the past nine months, we've managed to stop such talk.

Yet, we have to face the reality that in today's highly competitive higher education environment, closing colleges and universities has become a regular occurrence.

Since 2016:

- 87 colleges or universities have been acquired, merged or closed.
- 41% of those colleges were closed; and
- 32% were public institutions.

HBCUs have become especially susceptible to closings due to rapidly declining enrollment and deteriorating financial conditions despite increases in Title III funding over the last two years.

All this being said, ladies and gentlemen, we're here today to tell you that we have no intention of closing.

And while we will seek ways to cooperate with other colleges for the benefit of both institutions, we also have no intention of merging with any other institution.

And, finally, let me say, that we have all the intentions in the world of – one day – putting our own football team back on the field and not being bought or becoming a branch of an institution that already has a football team – and plays in the Big 12!

However, to get ourselves back on track; to return this school to a position of prominence; and to honor the magnificent heritage of Bluefield State College as a special place of opportunity for generations to come, it's our duty and our responsibility to act and act boldly - but with great prudence - to make the improvements necessary - to not just succeed, but to excel.

In particular, it's imperative that we:

1. Identify our priorities;
2. Fund our priorities; and
3. Promote our priorities.

In contrast to a course some may wish to follow, we don't believe you can just cut your way to prosperity.

We believe that across-the-board cuts display a lack of courage, an unwillingness to make the tough decisions and a higher interest in placating certain interests.

Instead, we believe in a growth model in which we'll invest in those priorities that will support our three primary objectives:

1. Increasing enrollment;
2. Growing external support; and
3. Maintaining a high quality academic product.

Our enrollment priorities include programs that will meet the ever-evolving economic needs of employers as well as the personal preferences and academic needs of our students – both in terms of content and delivery.

Several projects are already underway, including:

- Establishing new undergraduate and graduate programs;
- Developing on and off campus housing;
- Creating an honors program;
- Growing our online presence; and
- Evaluating the potential presented by a more robust athletic program.

There are also other programs, projects and initiatives that we hope to announce in the next few weeks and months that will align with our objectives including removing unnecessary statutory, regulatory and policy driven bureaucratic roadblocks that inhibit our ability to respond quickly to a competitive and rapidly changing higher education marketplace.

In terms of funding our priorities, we have to look at the current status of our resource allocation.

In particular, please take a look at these two graphs.

As you can see, on the left we've had a 40% drop in enrollment since 2012.

On the right you can see a 33% drop in the number of staff while the number of faculty has held steady with only a 7% drop in the last 8 years.

On its face, this looks disproportionate especially in regard to the dramatically decline in full-time students we've experienced in recent years.

I've asked our Provost, Dr. Ted Lewis, to look at this situation and I trust the leadership and members of the faculty will work with him and his leadership team to make responsible recommendations in that area.

Please believe that my office as well as the members of the Board know and understand that finding and keeping a high-quality faculty is of the utmost importance to this and every other academic institution.

Moreover, let me state again that we're focused on reprioritizing our spending which could include freeing up funds and directing them towards the retention of high-quality faculty in priority areas.

However, our office would be violating its administrative duty to the Board – and the Board would be violating its fiduciary responsibility to the institution, the State, our students and their parents if we chose to ignore such a reality.

### **Telling Our Story**

Let me close by returning to one strategy we cannot emphasize enough – and that is promoting our institution by telling the compelling story of Bluefield State College as far and as wide as possible.

Over the past ten months, I've been privileged to have the opportunity to go to so many places and tell the story of how Bluefield State College has changed the lives of so many people.

Recently, I was meeting with a group of alumni in North Carolina and one young woman told me her story.

She was 18 years old and a single mother with two children. She knew she needed a college education if she was going to make the kind of life she wanted for her two kids.

When she went to enroll, the government counted the support she was receiving - solely for the support of her children – as income and, as such, she didn't qualify for Pell and, consequently, she wouldn't have enough money to go to college.

As she stood alone crying in the hallway, a person from financial aid saw her, took her in his office, gave her a pencil and paper and asked her to write down exactly how much she would need?

Through work study and other support from the college – they made it work.

She got it, she graduated, got a good job, raised her children and the next week her daughter was getting married - and she gives all the credit in the world to Bluefield State College.

For years, this institution - that has impacted so many – has been ignored. Yet, its record is overwhelming.

The \$1,000,000 delivered by Governor Justice for Heritage Village and the refurbishing of our student union shows that our story is getting out – and we're poised to turn the corner.

But, as many of you know and understand, the most difficult time in the history of

any organization are times of transition.

However, we believe that keeping focused on our priorities and our objectives – and by working and communicating with campus leaders and coming to you – the campus community – directly in opportunities such as this – we’re going to be able to navigate this critical time, overcome our challenges and move forward towards providing each of our students with a life-changing opportunity and returning Bluefield State College to a position of prominence that it so richly deserves.

Thank you, and, now, it gives me a great pleasure to introduce the Chairman of the Board of Governors of Bluefield State College, Reverend Garry Moore.