



Inaugural Address

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It is my pleasure to greet distinguished members of the platform party. I would also like to thank the friends and colleagues who have come from New York, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Rhode Island, and other areas across the country to be with us today. And I would especially like to thank the delegates representing sister colleges and universities and my new Buffalo State family of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends of the college who have joined us for this very special occasion.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to acknowledge my family members who are here with me today. Would my husband, Dr. Alvin Turner, my mother, Polly Ray, our daughters, Jameela and Shana, and other family members please stand and be recognized? Thank you all for being here to participate in and witness the ceremonies.

I accept the trust and responsibility that the chancellor, the SUNY Board of Trustees, the Buffalo State College Council, and the Buffalo State community have granted to me as the ninth president of Buffalo State. As I stand before you, I would like to convey some of the thoughts that will guide me in my presidency.

First, every story has a beginning, and the story of Buffalo State began 143 years ago, in 1871. The history and legacy of this fine institution have been recounted in several books, have been retold across generations, and continue to inform the present and the future of our college.

One thing has been consistent over time and throughout the strong leadership of previous presidents: Buffalo State has always provided an outstanding preparation for graduates to lead and excel as they complete their degree programs and depart our hallowed halls.

From the beginning, we understood the importance of education and how lives are changed in classrooms across the state and around the world. Each individual in this room has been taught and touched by elementary and secondary schoolteachers. We each cherish the memories of our early years as students.

Buffalo State has graduated generations of teachers who are serving New York and the country in ways that have touched the lives of so many. Sometimes thoughtfully and other times spontaneously, Buffalo State has moved at various paces throughout historical periods. We have expanded our offerings, enhanced our commitment to the community, and instilled a deep pride and commitment to excellence and service.

Buffalo State now stands as the largest comprehensive college in the SUNY system, serving some 11,000 students. Our programs include undergraduate and graduate studies that span the arts, education, humanities, social and natural sciences, technology, and professions.

Our campus includes state-of-the-art buildings and new and newly renovated spaces. It includes the Burchfield Penney Art Center. It includes research and support centers and internationally recognized programs, like the graduate program in art conservation,

and nationally accredited programs in several disciplines. It includes programs with a global reach across several continents.

Our footprint is vast. Our path has not always been simple, but it has always been illuminated by the passion that has produced balanced, knowledgeable, and committed leaders across many fields of study. Today we stand together as a campus that is ready to build on the tremendous foundation of the past while we move toward the future.

I frame my comments to underscore that Buffalo State College is not content with its significant achievements to date but is a college that reaches for the stars.

As Dr. Benjamin Mays, the former president of Morehouse College and mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, stated several decades ago: “It isn’t a calamity to die with dreams unfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream. It is not a disgrace to reach for the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim, is a sin.”

Buffalo State is now poised to reach for the stars and advance our commitment to engagement, excellence, and social responsibility. Each year we graduate future leaders who are infused with the strengths of a liberal arts education, forged with strong interdisciplinary knowledge and the ability to think critically. Now is the time for our reach to touch the stars above and around us. Now is the time for the Buffalo State community to hold steady the ladder and allow our students to meet the challenges they face.

Many years ago, I was a student not unlike our own Buffalo State students. I sat by the railroad tracks, watching the trains go by, and dreamt of seemingly unreachable goals. But many people held the ladder that allowed me to reach for the stars.

From my great-great-grandmother Polly, who loved me unconditionally, to my elementary and high school teachers who saw promise and encouraged me, to my university professors who instilled in me a love of discovery, to my mother, who stood by while I made decisions that she did not always understand, the ladder was securely held while I dared reach for the stars. Like many of our faculty and staff members, I draw upon such memories as we support our students in their endeavors to succeed and excel.

At Buffalo State College, we will reach for the stars and excel in our engagement. Buffalo State has always been known as a campus that engages in healthy and productive discussions. We wrestle to understand the complexity of local, regional, and international issues. We discuss these issues within and outside our classrooms. As we move ahead, we will maximize our ability to engage in civil and productive discussions. We will engage with colleagues in our departments, in our schools, in our college, and in our communities.

We understand that thoughtful engagement requires us to not work or think within silos, or to create silos within our disciplines or departments. It is only when we come together with diverse voices that we can truly understand the complexity of issues. We, as a college, will engage in discussions that allow us to listen, appreciate, and learn from one another. Because we know that from diversity comes strength. The questions of tomorrow will be answered by the push and pull of voices engaged in rigorous debate and discussion today. And creative paths will be uncovered from these dialogues.

Buffalo State has been recognized within SUNY and nationally for our diverse community and our ability to advance diversity on our campus. Just last month, we again received an award from Insight into Diversity, the higher education diversity magazine. This award recognizes the many ways that Buffalo State engages our diverse campus in discussions and activities that enhance and deepen our understanding of complex issues.

Our willingness to engage will push our inquiry and discussion toward innovation. We will continue to advance our engagement with communities and demonstrate that from diversity—of all kinds—emerges true strength. We are engaged in developing leaders with a strong liberal arts base, leaders who are prepared to address the environmental, community, business, nonprofit, and technological needs of our city, region, state, and beyond.

At Buffalo State College, we augment our classroom preparation with a web of partnerships with local and regional companies, businesses, and agencies. I stress that we are partners with these agencies. Dozens of times in just the last two months, I have heard about research and internship opportunities, part-time employment, and future job possibilities for Buffalo State students. I have been told how the expertise of Buffalo State faculty, staff, students, and alumni was used to solve or address community concerns.

The best collaborations are reciprocal. Through these important collaborations, Buffalo State gains insight from our communities in ways that lead to revised curricula, new programs, and new opportunities. A familiar story from area businesses is the strong preparation of Buffalo State students and the strong support provided by the college to address community concerns. We will continue to engage our communities in ways that benefit the growth of our students and cultivate the expertise, knowledge, and strong liberal arts foundation that is needed for long-term individual, organizational, and community success.

Buffalo State embraces the importance of engaging students outside the boundaries of the classroom. We have a strong tradition of community engagement and service within Buffalo, the region, and the world; however, we understand that engagement is a means not only to provide necessary service to our communities but also to enhance the acquisition of knowledge and deepen the understanding of coursework.

Each year at a mounting pace, Buffalo State students are engaged in community service, providing thousands of hours of service to support the city of Buffalo and the region. In many of these programs, students participate in experiential learning, reflection, and documentation of their work. This type of learning will continue to grow as we reach for the stars. We know that service learning provides a competitive advantage for our students, who more fully understand how they can lead within their area of interest and how they can contribute to the world around them.

What does an engaged learning environment look like? Engaged colleges are robust and layered. Engaged campuses are passionate within and outside the classrooms. And engaged learning is deepened through application and community involvement.

Engaged learning does take place within the Buffalo State classroom—when lively discussions occur, when projects are developed and completed, and when students turn to their labs or studios to pursue and further their work.

At Buffalo State, engagement within our classrooms and within our broader community is a part of who we are. Our commitment to engagement enriches the student experience and produces a platform for Buffalo State to be a leader in understanding and propagating the benefits of engagement within higher education and beyond.

The Buffalo State experience also sits on the bedrock of excellent undergraduate and graduate education. We reach for the stars of excellence. Each member of our community strives for individual excellence, and together we support the success of all students.

The road to accomplishment and distinction is not always a straight or smooth path. Our students come to us from small towns and large cities, from around the corner, and from across the world; however, regardless of how they arrive on campus, our mission brings unquestionable support for all students as they move toward their goals.

Buffalo State understands that excellence is cultivated in a high-touch environment. Our faculty and staff members take the time to get to know their students, nurture their intellectual development, and guide their academic and programmatic inquiry. Excellence is encouraged not only through the high-quality teaching that typifies

Buffalo State College, but also in the many ways we mentor our students. Our faculty, staff, coaches, administrators, and alumni strive to gently guide our students to success.

As stated so well by Nelson Mandela, “There is no passion to be found in playing small, in settling for a life that is less than one you are capable of living.” Excellence for Buffalo State is supporting achievements beyond what was imagined.

Excellence also means pursuing opportunities that enrich the learning process. One such opportunity is student research. Our undergraduate and graduate students are engaged in experiences alongside faculty members who are teacher-scholars. Student research at Buffalo State explores the factors affecting economic trends, the patterns and behaviors of rare salamanders, the factors influencing fashion design, and much more. Students discover the pleasure of exploration and discovery as they work on projects that illuminate their understanding of their disciplines, applications in their fields, and issues that affect the broader world.

Many years ago, when I was an undergraduate at the University of Kansas, it was the experience of participating in undergraduate research with Dr. Dan Batson, a well-known psychologist studying helping behavior, that shaped a long-term love of research and transformed me into the teacher-scholar that I became. The mentorship he provided and our thoughtful discussions

transformed and informed my professional life and established the direction that led me to be at Buffalo State today. He believed in excellence, and he encouraged me to do the same.

The Buffalo State experience is grounded in excellence, forged and focused on relevance to our community, situated to address our mission as an engaged urban campus, and committed to producing leaders who are cross-culturally competent and globally engaged.

At Buffalo State College, we know that we have sitting in our classrooms the leaders of tomorrow, leaders who represent the diversity of our communities and who embody the talents required for our city, our state, and our world to move forward. Within the walls of our campus, we press students to reach further than they might have imagined—to become the innovators, scientists, artists, protectors, and stewards of our communities.

We believe that social responsibility is the duty of an educated person. Civic and social responsibility begin with a commitment to community, and as students' talents grow, their sphere of influence widens. Students, faculty, and staff at Buffalo State work to share their gifts, talents, and expertise to shape a world that is ethical, is environmentally sustainable, embraces social justice for all, and endorses our shared responsibility for the world we inhabit.

Our social responsibility takes many shapes, and it matures as the reach of our campus expands. From our desire to support new immigrants to our city, to our voter registration and food drives, to our development of technology that advances our communities, to our collaborations that take us to Rwanda, Chile, or China, we seek to understand, support, and create a

world that values all living things and champions ethical and sustainable behavior. We teach, assert, and argue for a just and sustainable world that exists not just in the science fiction books we read or the movies we watch, but in the world we inhabit.

At Buffalo State, we reach for the stars of social responsibility and justice—and we ask that those stars shine brightly on Buffalo State College and our world. We believe, as Anne Frank did, “How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

As we reach for the stars, we will advance our commitment to engagement, excellence, and social responsibility. We will advance and secure our leadership among our peers within the SUNY system and around the world. I believe we are ready, prepared, and eager to reach for a level of leadership, stewardship, and excellence that will benefit our campus community and the many communities we touch.

Our faculty and staff will continue to hold steady the ladder for our students as they reach for the stars. Each member of our community will demonstrate the commitment, the passion, and the grit to move ahead. We will seek, develop, or find the courage to lead, to excel, and to demonstrate our excellence and our ability to lead within our fields and areas of expertise.

At Buffalo State, I believe we can fly. I believe we can touch the sky. Buffalo State College is ready to build on its successes and manifest leadership in engagement, excellence, and social responsibility.

We are ready to touch the stars.

Thank you.