

D R A F T

TROY STATE UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION

I first came to know Troy State University in a personal way when I co-wrote a book, *The Effective College President*, with Dr. Martha Tack, a proud Troy graduate and former president of the student body. We were never together that she did not mention Troy in some way as her intellectual root. From that time, I paid attention to Troy.

Then, sixteen years ago, I came to know the Troy State University System in greater detail. In 1989, I chaired a team that was charged to evaluate the System; a kind of dispassionate kick-off for the new Chancellor. Since then, proof of my enlistment is my impressive collection of Troy caps, t-shirts and warm-ups.

A few years earlier, I had met the new Chancellor, a fellow Marine, Dr. Jack Hawkins, during his Presidency of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB). I had become impressed with AIDB because of the amazing turnaround that had taken place in such a short time frame. This, I thought, was a man to watch. The portent was an extraordinary match. Troy and Hawkins.

In 1989 Troy State was a good but loose-knit consortium of three separately accredited universities in Troy, Montgomery and Dothan. Since that time, I have watched what I believe has been the most remarkable university transformation in America as the Troy State University System has evolved from an increasingly remarkable three-part System into a single University - - a University where the whole is greater than the sum of its good but disparate parts - - an effort of many years inspired by an enlightened Board, faculty, students, alumni, elected and appointed officials and countless citizens.

The monumental task of the faculty and staff was to remove all barriers to student transferability; to develop and implement shared academic standards, policies and procedures; and to address advancement issues around the promotion of a world-wide brand identity for Troy.

A daunting assignment. Think on it. To dramatically change three good but distinct public institutions, each with a separate history and culture including faculty, students and alumni, - - to change the three into one better whole and to do so without undue rancor and conflict.

The years passed. Hundreds became involved, and remarkably the transformation was done with relatively little pain as each constituency became thoughtfully engaged in a "System-wide" planning process. After developing "A Case for Alabama's 21st Century University," in 2003, Governor Riley was enlisted and became an enthusiastic supporter.

Next, an outline was developed for what would be needed by 2005 to ensure "One Great University," whether in Hong Kong, Montgomery, Troy, Dothan or Phoenix. Although the course has been challenging, and reportedly at times intense, it has become

increasingly seamless for all, especially students.

And today signals the new **Troy University**, a single University, both more efficient and effective , the second largest university in Alabama; indeed, “One Great University.”

To date, the consolidation of this formerly “loose-knit consortium of three” has resulted in a common curriculum, common faculty/staff handbooks, a single catalog, dramatically improved internal and external communication, improved financial services, common tuition and contracts,
- - all delivered by a reorganized and more efficient administration. More, better on less!

Yes, there is more to be done by this remarkable entrepreneurial University community as this dedicated faculty and staff continue to think “outside the box.” Time, place, free education is here and more is coming, and I have every confidence that Troy will continue in the vanguard as you tentatively shape the model university of the 21st century. This shrinking world and a new global economy demand no less. Press on.

This is a joyous day for American higher education and for the state of Alabama, but it is also a solemn day, for the role of universities has never been more important. As a model university, Troy must remain restless, recognizing its fundamental role as an institution dedicated to educating the mind and at once preserving the precious values that bind us together. Let us remind ourselves today of these precepts: True, since the founding days of Bologna and Paris through the normal school movement of the 19th century from which the State Normal School, Troy was born in 1887. And they are even more important today.

Fundamentally, a university is a place of learning, of civil discourse; a place where truth and beauty are pursued but never fully found, and therefore gently and tentatively held, and modestly interpreted by teachers and students; a bastion of intellectual freedom where one is at once rocked back on cliché ridden haunches and finally more respectful of our worthy traditions.

It is from this liberating and empowering base that students become productive citizens. With further preparation, at Troy and elsewhere, they become teachers, lawyers, nurses, business persons, musicians, doctors, public servants and university board members.

And without this foundation, there would be no University; nor, in the grandest sense a good future for human society. Many years ago, John Masefield said it best, I think:

"There are few earthly things more splendid than a university. In these days of broken frontiers and collapsing values, when the dams are down and the floods are making misery, when every future looks somewhat grim and every ancient foothold has become something of a quagmire, wherever a university stands, it stands and shines; wherever it exists, the free minds of men and women, urged on to full and fair inquiry, may still bring wisdom into human

affairs."

This day then is both beautiful and profoundly important. It is a time for reflection, inspiration, and hope as well as joy, a time when we come together in celebration of our grandest earthbound institution. To the Board, Governor Riley, the faculty, staff and students, and all who helped to shape this day, congratulations on a splendid job. And, a special salute to one of the finest leaders I have known, Dr. Jack Hawkins.

Today I am privileged to join in celebration of the remarkable transformation that is Troy University.

I wish you God speed.