

## HBCU Speech outline

### Considering Governance: Why HBCU's can't wait.

It is great to be here and I am delighted to be under the tutelage of Dr. Spearman.

I don't need to tell you and, indeed, you have heard it already here today: These are exciting and challenging times in higher education. That, I think, is why this panel is so important and so timely.

As you all know, HBCU's operate in an increasingly challenging environment. For one --

Issues of cost, quality and accessibility are more pressing than ever. HBCUs now must function in an environment that demands ever more vigilance on admissions standards, finances, enrollments, hiring, academic quality, development, and many other fronts.

Meanwhile, the marketplace, if you will, has never been more competitive. HBCU's are now only one of many choices available to students across the country.

Post- Enron, there is also an accountability revolution going on. The public is concerned that college costs are getting too high and, in a time of restricted resources, are calling on college and universities to innovate and find savings internally.

And there is a growing expectation that institutions of higher ed be run in conformity with the basic standards we expect of business – transparency and accountability.

But it's not just challenges. **It's also great possibilities.**

HBCU's offer unique potential for greatness. They are special institutions, centers of excellence and access, offering a sustaining and nurturing environment. They are producers of outstanding and innovative leaders; they are institutions, in the words of Lerone Bennett on Sunday, indispensable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

That's why there is an increasing focus on rethinking HBCU governance, rethinking our institutions and exploring ways to make them stronger, more innovative and better. That's why we are here today to discuss governance, what ideally I believe can be described as "How Presidents and Boards Can Work Together."

**Or, said another way, how trustees can have an engaged and active partnership with their presidents.**

Since there are both current and past presidents on this panel and in the audience, I think we should acknowledge that this concept of more engaged trustees is sometimes viewed with some real skepticism.

Most presidents have a vision of where the institution can go and they are on campus each and every day;

They know all about their institution and their faculties. They are familiar with the academic programs and buildings. So why even worry about a strong board?

Lay trustees, after all, often have had little or no experience with higher education; they have little familiarity with the special protocols that govern the campus, insufficient grasp of academic freedom, faculty governance, etc. When they get involved, they often micromanage and interfere.

**I dare say that there are many presidents who see no reason to have a strong board; the less interference the better.**

But that's why we are here today, to rethink that concept.

An institution that – through its governance system – cannot ensure transparency and accountability will have trouble attracting the public confidence, support and investment that it needs in the increasingly competitive higher ed marketplace.

An institution that fails to capitalize on the potential talents and perspective of citizens who make up the board -- expertise ranging from fundraising to business development and community support, to just plain common sense – is missing out on immense resources that can help establish an effective institution that can move forward confidently with a vision and a mission.

When a board is weak, the only source of pressure comes from the faculty. A strong board allows the president the creative room to balance board and faculty. A strong board also provides the feedback and reality check that a president needs. A rubber-stamp boards fails to provide the needed balance that will protect a strong president from him or herself. A more engaged board is a more supportive board.

Engaged boards working with presidents and senior administrators, can

- identify what the university's goals and objectives are;
- Allocate resources accordingly;
- Develop metrics for measuring the achievement of those objectives;
- Ensure accountability;
- And do all of this in an inclusive way that reduces distrust among affected constituencies.

While many trustees are committed to this goal in theory, it is clear that getting there is not always so easy.

**That is why college and university trustees working with the American Council of Trustees and Alumni launched, the Institute for Effective Governance** and asked it to provide support and assistance to boards of trustees.

**They turned to IEG to help create an engaged and active partnership between presidents and trustees.** Trustees and presidents can benefit from sound outside guidance on such matters as board effectiveness, fundraising, developing community support, and strategic planning.

Briefly, how can this new concept of governance be implemented? First, boards need to familiarize themselves fully with the governing documents and policies of the institution. They need to understand the college budget and be familiar with the academic programs of the institution. What must students take before they graduate? What “value” has been added during their years in the college? What is being done to attract more and better students? What is being done to attract more and better faculty? Time and dedication to the job are critical.

They also need to understand unique protocols in higher education. What is academic freedom? What is shared governance?

Once informed about the essentials of governance, board members should work with their presidents to define the mission of the institution, to establish a niche, and pursue strategic and development plans. How can we raise more money to achieve that mission? What can we do to develop greater business and community support? How can we enhance our financial stability in the years ahead? What can we do to inform legislators and the public about our excellent work?

IEG works as a facilitator, if you will, to help boards and presidents work through these questions. We’ve had the good fortune to work with many boards, including Ron’s board, and I think he can testify to these efforts. [Forgive a bit of boasting, but I felt that we helped VSU move toward a truly effective strong board- strong president model of governance.]

With Ron, we worked on a retreat, a vehicle that offers a superb opportunity for board members to address key issues in a sustained way as they take the steps necessary to update their institutions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Retreats are the very best way for boards to define the mission of the institution, and to establish strategic and development plans that they can implement with the president.

A strong, responsible board sets policy, but it depends on the president to carry out its policies and run the show. One of the president’s jobs is to make sure the board understands the points of view of the faculty and other campus constituencies. Together,

the president and board can make the tough decision to achieve their common vision for the institution.

IEG was formed to help boards – working with presidents – achieve their goals. Working together, trustees and presidents can build strong institutions with strong academic programs and a strong financial base. In this way, HBCUs can ensure their place as indispensable players for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thank you for letting me be with you today and I urge you to take a look at the folders we have brought for you.