Homecoming 2012

As we welcomed new and returning students to Morehouse this fall, we were keenly aware of two looming realities. First, the Morehouse value proposition continues to be compelling to many of the nation’s best and brightest students. And second, the current financial model for private higher education is unsustainable and has created a crisis of affordability for many families, leading them to avoid additional student debt while exploring less costly means of education. I’d like to address briefly both issues.

As for the Morehouse value proposition, it is still compelling and commands national acclaim. In a national survey that examined the quality of the general education curricula of 1,000 schools (“What Will They Learn?”), only 21 schools received the top grade. Morehouse was No. 8 on that list. (See [link](http://www.whatwilltheylearn.com).) We continue to hold students to a very high standard and provide them a well-rounded education.

Although we strive unyieldingly to improve the proposition and are grateful for the input of alumni and students who are committed to nurturing a new and better Morehouse, we should also acknowledge the assets and quality of what the faculty, administration, board, alumni, and parents have developed over many years. During this transitional period, we must consolidate those strengths as we position the College on a path toward increased vitality and preeminence.

With respect to the fiscal environment of higher education today, we should note that our revenue model, like other colleges and universities, is heavily reliant upon tuition and student fees. This fall, our freshman and first-time student enrollment increased over the totals in 2010 and 2011. While this is an encouraging start to what we plan to become a trend, we nevertheless face an overall enrollment shortfall due to more stringent credit requirements imposed this year for the PLUS Loan. Of course, a decline in enrollment has a negative impact on operating revenues, a situation we are resolving. If you’ve been following developments in higher education, you know that the decline in enrollment was not unique to Morehouse. In fact, according to a recent article in Time magazine (“Why Is College Enrollment Dropping?”), 41 percent of liberal arts colleges saw enrollment declines in recent years. More families are opting for more affordable educational options, such as community colleges, state universities, and online education. The future of online and blended (classroom and online) instruction at Morehouse is a vital topic that the Morehouse faculty is analyzing and preparing to engage.

[link](http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2116059,00.html?artId=2116059?contType=article?chn=us).

Complicating the enrollment challenge has been the federal government’s tightening of eligibility requirements for the popular PLUS loan. Last year, our families saw a 60 percent approval rate. This year, that dropped to 46 percent. Many schools, especially HBCUs, were battered by this sudden and late change and have expressed this to the Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Secretary Duncan and his staff are working now to adjust this situation in time for spring semester enrollment.
With our brand and a lot of hard work, we will achieve our enrollment goals. We have a strong recruitment and admission team and plan in place, and they will lead the charge with your assistance in recruiting the young men who should be at Morehouse.

According to our Office of Financial Aid, our students will need approximately $600,000 in order to return for the spring semester. I am asking all alumni, parents of alumni, friends, and supporters to consider this urgent situation and make a generous investment in our collective future. Help us to resource the Renaissance by logging onto http://giving.morehouse.edu to review our institutional priorities and make your investment now.

Increasing enrollment is essential but not sufficient for our continued vitality. We must also cut costs wherever possible while protecting and advancing the quality of our educational offerings. The senior team is working now on strategic adjustments that will ensure that we operate with a balanced budget. More details about those plans will be shared soon.

**Ratings and Outlooks in Higher Education**

In July, Moody’s Investors Service (Moody’s) announced a change in its rating of Morehouse College from A2 to A3, with a negative outlook. In September, Standard & Poor’s Rating Services (S&P) announced a change in the College’s credit rating from A to A- with a stable outlook. We appreciate the seriousness of such assessments and are taking urgent, but strategic, steps to resolve and improve our creditworthiness.

According to a January report by a Moody’s senior executive, a negative outlook was expected for the bulk of rated colleges and universities that are dependent on state appropriations, tuition, or both. Our esteemed colleagues at Amherst College and many other great institutions also experienced downgrades. But the Moody’s report also observed that most higher education institutions have “demonstrated organizational nimbleness during a prolonged period of economic stress.” Our strategic recovery plan reflects precisely this quality of “nimbleness,” and Morehouse will be stronger and wiser at the end of this adjustment process.

**The Great Debaters**

At the first tournament of the season, the Morehouse College Debate Team impressed everyone by winning a first place standing overall. Also, each of our teams finished with a winning record. Morehouse debaters took the top three spots in the Debut Speaker category and accomplished the same in the Novice Speaker category. Kudos to the team and to the leadership of Coach Ken Newby and the entire English Department. We look forward to adding this trophy to the case. In fact, we would like to begin looking for a larger trophy case as this team is destined for greatness, something Presidents John Hope and Benjamin Mays would love.

The Debate Team is also preparing for an overseas tournament in the spring. I am asking alumni and friends to consider earmarking your gift to support the Morehouse European Debate Tour.

**Well-Balanced Scholar-Athletes: The Morehouse Way**

This National Football League season, we are all getting accustomed to hearing the Morehouse name on Monday Night Football, as one of our former Maroon Tigers, Ramon Harewood ’10, is a starting offensive lineman for the Baltimore Ravens. Of course, we take special pride in noting that Mr. Harewood majored in applied physics and engineering at Morehouse. His dual abilities are indicative of our values and philosophy, referred to by Trustee Ben Blackburn, MD ’61 as “balancing the psyche with the soma (mind and body).”

We are almost at mid-semester, and I am pleased to stop and acknowledge the young men who comprise the athletic teams, as well as the coaching staffs that shape them into the winners they are.

I’d like to thank the Maroon Tiger Football coaches and players for playing with great heart and spirit thus far in the season. We expect them to finish with another strong positive record. Already, our running back, David Carter ’14, has been recognized by the
SIAC as one of the most exciting players in the entire athletic conference. We look forward to seeing him—and each of you—at Homecoming (against Fort Valley State University) on October 27 at 2 p.m.

As of September 29, the cross country team has participated in five meets, including the Brooks Twilight Classic, the Fleet Feet Pre-Regional, the Mountain Dew Invitational, the Tuskegee Invitational, and our own Morehouse Invitational at Perkerson Park, here in Atlanta. Ranked No. 5 in the NCAA Division II, South Region, the cross country team finished sixth of 26 at the Brooks Twilight Classic, beating cross country powerhouse Harding University for the first time. The team placed third of nine at the Fleet Feet Pre-Regional and brought home an SIAC East Division Runner of the Week award.

We are proud of each of the young men who represent Morehouse in athletics, but even more important, the College is proud of our scholar-athletes’ record-setting academic performance and civility. Not only is their six-year graduation rate 70 percent (13 percent higher than their non-athlete peers), but over the last several years, our class valedictorians and salutatorians have been active participants in our athletics program.

I also offer well-deserved kudos to Athletic Director Andre Pattillo ‘79, Coach Rich Freeman, Coach Willie Hill, and their auxiliary coaches for their exemplary work in the Athletic Department. But equally important, I recognize their willingness to serve as upstanding mentors, role models, and leaders.

Honoring President Emeritus Massey ’58 and Shirley Massey

On Thursday, October 25, at 10 a.m., we will pause for a very special and exciting recognition of our distinguished ninth president and first lady. With approval from the Board of Trustees, the Leadership Center and the Executive Conference Center will be named The Walter E. Massey Leadership Center and The Shirley A. Massey Executive Conference Center in honor of our friend and colleague in higher education and his dynamic wife.

Please join Board Chairman Robert Davidson ’67, Cheryl, me, and the entire campus community on the Leadership Center plaza and Executive Conference

“Let there be light—et facta est lux. Let there be peace—et facta est pax. Let there be wisdom—et facta est prudentia. Let there be justice—et facta est equitas. Let there be Morehouse—et facta est Da ‘House.”

Dr. Robert Franklin, Opening Convocation address, September 2012