



A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT ROBERT MICHAEL FRANKLIN '75

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Alma mater is the familiar Latin phrase used to refer to a college home. The words mean abundant or providing mother. That is an arresting thought. If Dear Old Morehouse is the mother, the nurturer who continually gives to all of her sons, then what does that suggest about how we should respond to that mother, alma mater, who has given us so much? Morehouse is calling you home.

First 100 Days

I decided to use the occasion of my first 100 days in office to frame what I have seen and heard at Morehouse. This list of issues is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather suggestive of some key concerns. We intend to place these issues into our process for revising the strategic plan. At Morehouse, we do not get stuck on discussing challenges and problems, but regard them as opportunities and move forward to design and implement solutions. To move beyond simply identifying challenges to solving them, I have added initial report briefs that we intend to execute. Also, the order of these items roughly approximates the frequency of mention in various discussions.

Opportunity 1: Engaging 100 Percent of Alumni

Our alumni are our greatest asset and our most influential ambassadors. We appreciate the many ways in which they contribute to our mission—with their service, community involvement, talent and financial contribution.

Some alumni have told me that, apart from being asked for money, they do not feel needed or important to the College. Others have said that a bad experience with the College has led them to “sit on their wallets.”

Response: Let me assure all alumni that you indeed play a vital role in the life of the College. Although many alumni are engaged and active with the College in several ways, I have heard some alumni indicate that, apart from making their financial contribution to the College and paying Association dues, they can and want to make an even greater contribution. I have asked that

a Discussion Board be established to learn more about how alumni wish to engage with the College.

During Homecoming, we expect thousands of alumni to return to Dear Old Morehouse to become inspired, reinvigorated and re-energized. We intend to reach out to all alumni with the message that this is your alma mater and we must stand with her, defend, improve, protect and support her in every way we can. If you have an unresolved issue with the College, I ask that you give us another chance to build a stronger relationship. Brothers, your College needs your intellectual capital, social networking skill and other talents, as well as your financial generosity. And, I will need your assistance to be effective as your president.

Opportunity 2: Preparing Parents for the Cost of College

Considering the cost of an Ivy League and Ivy Plus (Stanford) education, Morehouse is an educational bargain. Still, many students and their parents find the \$30,000 per year for tuition and fees, books, room and board a challenge. Unfortunately, we're watching an unsettling trend emerge as more households experience greater difficulty in paying our tuition rate.

Response: Our Opportunity Fund is designed to fill the financial gap for juniors and seniors who have run out of options for funding their education. We have recently begun an e-mail campaign to increase support for this important initiative---one that will help more men of Morehouse attain their degrees and, in the process, improve our graduation rates.

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We will double our efforts to provide financial aid counseling and financial planning information to assist the parents, guardians and sponsors of our students. Also, we will continue to leverage Morehouse's influence on Capitol Hill and other public and private sectors to encourage additional funding for college-age people.

Opportunity 3: Improving Infrastructure

Most of the College functions well; however, the information technology system does not yet function at peak performance. An unreliable IT system complicates the management of information that is essential for effectively serving our publics.

Response: The good news is that we are in the process of upgrading our IT system. Professor Kenneth Perry and Vice President Karen Miller are skillfully driving the implementation of a new and improved system. Also, I have convened a President's Advisory Task Force on IT to ensure that our go-forward plan and steps are cost-effective and capable of meeting our long-term needs. Further, we are executing a rapid search to fill our current CIO vacancy. We continue to ask for and appreciate the patience of all stakeholders in establishing our new and improved system.

Opportunity 4: Anticipating Demographic Change

According to some data we've examined, there will be a decline in the number of college-bound, African American men over the next few years. We need to prepare for the intense competition with other institutions for our share of these students. We intend to do everything possible to ensure that the 'House remains the college of choice for African American men.

Response: Among our tactics will be strengthening our relationships with the top feeder high schools and academies that are preparing our students, and strengthening our Web presence and admissions material. Also, we will work to expand our recruitment efforts, particularly our outreach to international students.

Opportunity 5: Enhancing Campus and Community Security

Safety is a major issue on college campuses across the nation. Considering our urban location, Morehouse must remain proactive with its security and safety measures, especially as the campus expands further in the community with the construction of the Morehouse College Center for the Arts on West End Avenue.

Response: Campus Police Chief Vernon Worthy reports that 17 surveillance cameras will be installed around and in the Leadership Center building. This will provide surveillance on West End Avenue, where many students currently park their cars. Additionally, two call boxes for the area have been ordered and Chief Worthy has added a police officer to patrol the area during late evening hours.

We are coordinating more strategically with our neighbor schools and continuing to interface with the Atlanta Police Department. We also will intensify efforts to orient students to some of the challenges that must be anticipated on urban streets.

Opportunity 6: Growing Our Endowment

For a school of our size and reputation, our endowment is inadequate. The endowment is the principal source of unrestricted dollars we need to operate. The key to guaranteeing our long-term stability is growing the endowment corpus.

Response: One of the many ways we will accomplish endowment growth is through increased alumni giving, especially through planned major gifts (bequests, insurance policies, trusts, etc.) and the Opportunity Fund, which has the added benefit of helping Morehouse men complete their education.

Also, we must identify more high net-worth individuals who share an affinity for the Morehouse mission. We are asking alumni to contact us about your own plans and dreams for how your financial plan could help your alma mater thrive long into the future.

Opportunity 7: Restoring a Culture of Dignity and Decorum

Not all expressions of hip hop culture are negative and we must be careful about painting youth cultures with a broad brush. That said, some of our students enjoy the fashion styles associated with the so-called thug or “gangsta” lifestyle.

Response: Because we are concerned about some styles of dress and conduct that are not becoming of the man of Morehouse, we have called for a refocus on dignity and decorum. Thanks to the efforts of the Office of Student Services, headed by Vice President Kevin Rome, all incoming freshmen received an attractive maroon blazer that bears the College seal. Our intent is to provide blazers for all students. Here, again, we will need alumni to step up and assist in meeting this very achievable goal.

Final Notes

It has been a great 100 days. New faculty and staff appear to be settling in nicely. Most students have completed mid-term exams and are ready for Homecoming. I've enjoyed good visits with a much energized group of Los Angeles-area alumni, as well as with 120 Atlanta-area alumni who secure our home base.

My wife, Cheryl, and I were guests of Bob and Faye Davidson at a fabulous appreciation dinner for several West Coast donors. We also attended the

recording of the UNCF Evening of Stars, where legendary Motown artist Smokey Robinson was honored (look for the show to air in January).

We enjoyed a wonderful visit to Nashville, where parents and alumni hosted several impressive events, including a wonderful reception at Dr. J. Sheats' home. Students from our Business Administration and Economics Division dazzled a group of business, professional and community leaders with their polished presentation of the Morehouse story. We toured the impressive facilities at the Meharry College of Medicine and Vanderbilt University.

I also traveled to Washington, D.C., for a fruitful conversation with parents who offered promising suggestions on how we can strengthen our brand and attractiveness there. While there, I stopped at Howard University to appear with Bill Cosby on a panel hosted by the Children's Defense Fund on the topic “Breaking the Cradle to Prison Pipeline.” During a subsequent visit to the Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Conference, an impressive number of Morehouse alumni posed insightful questions during a session devoted to restoring the educational aspirations of young black men. In fact, the Rev. Jesse Jackson was moved to observe humorously that nearly all of the brothers who posed questions were Morehouse Men. It was an impressive sight witnessed by a national audience of participants.

We look forward to welcoming alumni back to campus for Homecoming.

“The world is equally balanced between good and evil... Your next act will tip the scale.”

—Rabbi Hillel



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