



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Today, I come to you from our beautiful campus during an unprecedented time for our communities and our families, as the entire world continues to fight against the spread of the coronavirus. I am saddened that we are still unable to be together, in-person. Over the past nine months, while I have received a warm welcome and best wishes from many of our faculty, students, alumni, and external friends, I look forward to the opportunity to meet with all of you, on the campus, and experience the electrifying energy of the Eagle Nation.

The Coppin spirit of community and social responsibility have been a source of strength and motivation that will carry us through this pandemic and into the future. Recently we have not had many opportunities to talk about the future, we have been focused on addressing the challenges of the day.

One thing this pandemic has allowed us the opportunity to take stock—to acknowledge and preserve what we value most about our beloved Coppin. It has allowed us to, creatively, reimagine the future of Coppin State University, and the wonderful days, ahead. My optimism stems from knowing that, we have met adversity head on with strength and resiliency. When I think about Coppin whether it is years past, the present or the future that we envision, one thing is certain, very few institutions derive strength from adversity, like Coppin. As stewards of our university, we must always take a long and short view of both our history and future. A history that has prepared us, for a bold future that is ours to create.

There is no question that, 2020 was a tumultuous year for our nation. We experienced crises of growing political divide, the spotlight was intensified on racial and social injustice, and we faced the first pandemic of modern times. Despite these obstacles, I am proud of how the Coppin community remained engaged and leaned-in, and our students, across the campus, made themselves available to advocate and share their thoughts, encouraging and empowering their fellow Eagles to exercise their civic responsibility.

During this pandemic, our faculty used technology to share their voices and expertise, expanding the national dialogue and interjected solutions on how to address systemic racism in our country. And with the leadership of our Health Center staff, students and faculty from the College of Health Professions, and Coppin's COVID-19 Task Force, we protected our campus community, which led to the successful completion of our 2020 fall semester.

They say you learn a lot about those around you during times of crisis...and what I have learned about us...is that we are a dynamic university. We have, converted teaching modalities, redesigned classrooms, adjusted our sanitization methods, developed sound COVID-related policies and procedures, implemented a new HR notification system, and established an on campus COVID testing program – allowing more than 12,000 tests to be administered, since August. Our positivity rate has drifted from a peak of 1.6 percent in November down to zero percent, in February. We have been able to keep our positivity rate below that of city, state, and national thresholds.

Moving ahead, we will continue to monitor and make any necessary adjustments, as the financial fallout from the pandemic continues to impact state and university revenue. This year, the General Assembly is projected to reduce our state appropriation by nearly half a million dollars. We also faced a decline in enrollment revenue, that has impacted our auxiliary enterprises such as dining, residence life, and athletics. Despite these challenges, let me be clear – the university’s financial situation is stable – thanks to careful reductions in expenditures and more strategic use of revenue. CARES Act funds we have received have helped steady our university during this health crisis, and we continue to use these one-time funds to support areas of need, as we plan for the next fiscal year.

Our faculty are doing amazing work within their respective disciplines. Whether engaged in groundbreaking research, or exemplifying outstanding leadership, Coppin’s faculty continues to rack up local, national, and global recognition for their work. Last fall, Dr. Leshell Hatley, Associate Professor in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, received the NSF, Historically Black Colleges and Universities - Undergraduate Program (HBCU-UP) award for the work that she did, along with colleagues from Howard University, Morehouse College, and Winston-Salem State University, to launch an NSF HBCU-UP Broadening Participation Research Center. The central goal of the Center is to cultivate a more direct path that will lead to educational improvements, increased achievement, and participation in STEM, for African Americans.

Dr. Kavita Hegde, Associate Professor of Biology in the Department of Natural Sciences, co-authored a study uncovering what could be a new, early diagnostic option for discovering degenerative eye disease in its earliest stages. Dr. Hegde is part of a team of researchers that includes scientists from the University of Maryland School of Medicine and Queen’s University Belfast, in the UK.

United States Senator Cory Booker, of New Jersey, introduced legislation establishing the nation’s first-ever U.S. Truth Racial Healing and Transformation Commission. Coppin’s very own, Dr. Lopez Matthews Jr., has been appointed as a senior adviser to the leadership group of the Truth Racial Healing and Transformation Movement, a national initiative advocating for the formation of a major U.S. racial justice and healing commission.

In an effort, to curtail street and gun violence, Dr. Johnny Rice II, Assistant professor in our Department of Criminal Justice, as a research fellow through our Bishop L. Robinson Sr., Justice Institute, was awarded a grant to study contemporary causes of gun violence, specifically exploring why young Black males, ages 15-24, in marginalized urban communities—carry firearms. This research is facilitated through the Thurgood Marshall College Fund and underwritten by the National Collaborative for Gun Violence Research consortium.

We will commit ourselves to advancing our foundation of research at Coppin. I want to thank and congratulate the faculty and staff in Academic Affairs as our external research, grants, and contracts continue to increase. Last year, our external funding nearly exceeded \$3 million. This is an increase of over \$560,000 from the previous year.

I was honored to officially establish our Center for Nanotechnology, Center for Organic Synthesis, and the Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship. In doing so, our university has better standing for research and partnership opportunities. We are also working to establish a tech transfer unit to work with licenses and patents through the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research, led by Dr. Dianna Vass. Our research and engagement will have little value if we cannot demonstrate impact. This is why, I will be challenging our researchers to engage in more translational research; thus, elevating Coppin's significance as a research university. In doing so, we will soon begin talks about our internal operations and assess the needs to expand our research growth.

At Coppin State University, we are building a College of Business for the 21st Century. The Percy Julian Building is currently under renovation and will serve as the future home of the College of Business. Accredited by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), our College of Business has earned a prestigious recognition. Under the leadership of Dean Sadie Gregory, the faculty, staff, and students are shaping a new vision and direction to serve as a frontrunner in business education. Beyond classrooms, beautiful courtyards and atriums, and executive meeting spaces, the new College of Business will house a Center for Career Excellence, Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship, a Data Science and Data Analytics Lab, and a VITA/Wealth Building Center. In February, the College of Business announced a fundraising campaign that included naming of Centers, labs, classrooms and other gift opportunities. I want to thank Dr. Sadie Gregory for her personal donation of \$50,000, in this effort and, the executive conference room will be named in her honor.

In our efforts to broaden our pool of student talent and boost enrollment, we will continue to seek ways to enhance our academic programs, while also developing and implementing new, high demand academic program offerings, such as: Master of Science in Health Information Management, Bachelor of Science in Data Science, Certificate in Enterprise Systems, Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity Engineering, Master of Science in Applied Molecular Biology and Biochemistry, and Master of Science in Polymer and Materials Sciences. Also, we are developing more online degree programs to make earning a degree from Coppin more flexible and convenient. This fall, we will finalize three, fully-online degree programs: The Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems, Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management, and the Doctorate of Nursing Practice.

Over the years, our campus has had multiple conversations regarding the financial state of our athletic program. The pandemic has hindered the program's ability to generate revenue from ticket sales, concessions, and merchandise. The division has made considerable adjustments to daily operations. Athletic Director Derek Carter is developing short-term and long-term strategies that will support our commitment to having a successful D-I program. He will focus on having our teams, consistently, compete at a high level, increase our sponsorships, enhance the fan experience, expand our fan base, and collaborate with Student Affairs to develop sports traditions that will help to cultivate an engaging and exciting Coppin sports experience, on campus.

This year, we will also enter the growing phenomenon of eSports. eSports is competitive, organized videogaming that attracts players and students, from around the world. Some 77 percent

of students identify themselves as gamers and having an eSports program can increase enrollment. The program will be managed as a club sport, through Student Affairs. We have also built-out an eSports certificate program through the College of Business, and I want to thank Dr. F. Michelle Richardson, Dr. John Magness, and Mr. Rahim Booth for their leadership.

Coppin's athletics is an important part of the university – attracting outstanding student-athletes, and supporting the spirit of the Eagle Nation, both on and beyond campus. It is notable that our student athletes are not only setting records on the field of competition, but they also set records of academic achievement, in the classroom. For the first time, 13 of our 14 athletic teams earned a GPA that exceeded 3.0, in fall 2020, 68 percent of all of our student-athletes earned over a 3.0 and 16 student-athletes earned a 4.0.

Last spring, we began laying groundwork to transform our Women's Basketball program. This past summer, we hired NCAA Champion and WNBA 1st Round draft pick, Laura Harper, to lead Women's Basketball and regain our championship-caliber. Congratulations to all of our student-athletes and coaches: we enjoy watching you perform, and the Eagle Nation is with you, 100 percent!

We have been able to share these impressive accomplishments far and wide. This great work that we continue to do must be used to impact the enrollment growth of our university. After all, enrolling and educating students is what we are here to do. While our first-time in college cohorts increased by 11 percent, between 2016 and 2019, and we saw our transfer and graduate decline. Under the leadership of Vice President Michael Freeman, we are developing a strategic and comprehensive enrollment plan, through an enrollment committee led by Mr. Sha-Ron Jones that will outline specific strategies to develop the right growth mix for Coppin at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The plan will include components that outline how we will increase application pool, expand our recruitment footprint, proactively target prospective students, deliver earlier admission decisions, and other key factors. For fall 2021, our enrollment team has a goal to enroll no fewer than 900 new students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Our enrollment team is getting much needed assistance from our new Constituency Relations Management System (CRM). Working along with the Information Technology Division, they will implement the system which will enhance our interactions by tailoring communications to prospective students and parents during the application process, financial aid packaging, orientation, advising, and registration. I want to thank our IT team, led by Dr. Ahmed El-Haggan, and everyone else who participated in trainings over the summer, to get ready for this rollout.

We also launched the development of our new Coppin State University website. The new site will be a more informative, visually engaging, and interactive presentation of our University. The new site will foster our effort to recruit, retain students, share messages, and illuminate the best of Coppin. The growth of our university, over the next several years, will depend heavily on our ability to Recruit, Retain, and Recruit Back. Retaining and graduating students is just as important as recruiting them. A primary component to increasing retention and graduation rates is the students' connection to campus. When we foster an environment where students feel valued,

supported, nurtured, and a sense of belonging, they achieve higher GPAs, higher retention and graduation rates, and have a more satisfying college experience, overall.

Under the leadership of Provost Leontye Lewis, we are developing a comprehensive retention plan, through a retention committee led by Mr. Steve Delice. They will outline specific, targeted student success strategies that will drive the improvement of our advising, academic support services, policies and procedures, and customer service. Along with this plan, we have set aggressive, but attainable, retention and graduation goals. For the 2020-21 academic year, we have a second-year retention goal of 68 percent, a third-year retention goal of 55 percent a fourth-year retention goal of 42 percent, and a six-year graduation goal of 38 percent, by 2026. And while these goals may be aggressive to some, we are trending in the right direction.

Thanks to the hard work of everyone, across campus, our spring 2020 six-year graduation rate reached a historic high of 31 percent. This is an increase from 25 percent, in 2019, and 21 percent, in 2018. Congratulations Eagle Nation! This is, precisely, the type of result we can achieve when we continue to place students at the core of everything we do and commit ourselves to a “We over Me” mindset.

It is always exciting to see our students—our Coppin Eagles—soar, and they are doing just that. In December, the First-Year Experience program inducted 18 students into the Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society which recognizes the academic excellence of students who achieve a 3.5 GPA or higher, during their first year of college. Under the leadership of Ms. Ihsan Mujahid, the Student Activities team have established a chapter of the National Society of Leadership and Success on campus. The society provides life-changing leadership programs that helps students achieve personal growth, career success, and empowers them to have a positive impact in their communities, and I am pleased to announce that Ms. Mujahid and her team are working to induct our inaugural class, this May.

Last Fall, we watched with excitement when ESPN’s *The Undefeated* featured Coppin State University’s Veronica McCoy in a special HBCU Day virtual event that celebrated the 2020 graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). We cheered when alumna and Coppin State University admissions counselor, Janel Harris, was named Bernard Wynder College Representative of the Year for 2020 by the Baltimore CollegeBound Foundation. And we were all Coppin Proud when Montaze Cooper published his first book, *The Shift In Me*. Believe me, it is a powerful read. These Coppin students and graduates are all representative of the commitment that we make to nurture and educate them to become future change agents.

Much of this commitment is supported through raising external funding which is essential to the university. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the number of alumni and friends who continue to believe in our mission, has grown. Last year, our Institutional Advancement team led by Vice President Ahmed El-Haggan, raised over \$1.5 million which exceeded our goal of \$1.3 million. We are on track to exceed our fundraising goal this year, but we are not yet there – and we need your support. To date, the total number of donors who have given to support our students and university has increased by 28 percent, over the past two years, and the total number of gifts we have received has increased to over 63 percent. I want to thank everyone who helped us achieve

these significant accomplishments. Your contributions allow so many of our deserving students to achieve their educational and lifelong dreams.

In keeping with this momentum, Institutional Advancement has a goal to increase alumni giving to 8 percent by 2024, and while the number of alumni who gave, last year, reached a record high of 6.5 percent, this is still a small fraction of those who are deeply committed to the institution. In fact, even at 8 percent, we still will be outpaced by many of our peer institutions. Therefore, I am calling on the Eagle Nation to help us achieve this goal. This is a great opportunity for us to showcase the strength of our alumni. When we give to Coppin, it creates a sense of engagement and ownership in the success of the university we love. In addition, Institutional Advancement, along with our Coppin State University Foundation Board, will develop a strategic plan that increases our corporation, foundation, and industry partnerships. And I want to thank Tara Turner, Assistant Vice President of Institutional Advancement and Alicia Ritchie, Chair of the Coppin State University Foundation Board, who will help lead this effort.

It is also important that we take more ambitious steps to grow our endowment so that we can weather future financial storms and become more resilient to the changing environment around us. You will hear more about these efforts, in the coming year. Our commitment to providing access and opportunity for Coppin students is unwavering. We will continue to work to deliver a high-quality education with affordable tuition. This will help to keep the costs of college more affordable so that our graduates are not burdened by excessive student debt. And while I believe we can do more to help drive down student debt, I am pleased to say that last year, we awarded almost 2 ½ million dollars in merit and need-based scholarships. And while this is certainly no small amount, I know we can do more, and we will do more.

This fall, in collaboration with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners, we will embark on the development of our new university strategic plan--one that continuously evolves as it guides and measures our progress towards our vision of becoming a leader in urban higher education that transforms the lives of students, from all backgrounds. Through this exercise, I will challenge us to reimagine Coppin. To chart a bold and inspiring course forward for our university. The success I envision for Coppin can only be achieved by our willingness to be ambitious and do the difficult and important things.

Enhancing “Institutional Excellence” will be at the core of our work, in the coming years. The goal of Institutional Excellence is to align the university strategic priorities in the most effective ways. We will work to eliminate the barriers, the unnecessary work-flows and redundant efforts that can manifest in any organization. I want to challenge everyone to find ways to be more agile and embrace the mindset of seeking continuous improvement.

It is important for us to embrace the responsibility of preparing our graduates before they leave Coppin with certain minimum skills and abilities: effective communication, creative inquiry, critical thinking, intercultural competencies, and thoughtful expression. Skills and abilities that will enhance the quality of their lives and position them to meet the workforce development needs of our state, nation, and drive the 21st Century economy.

A degree from Coppin prepares and positions our students to succeed in all areas of human endeavors, and they become the problem-solvers and innovators of tomorrow. This is why we will implement more innovative ways to prepare our traditional and non-traditional students, through the use of expanding interdisciplinary education, developing stackable credentials, and competency-based education.

We have the opportunity to come together and cultivate an intellectual climate that encourages the creative exchange of ideas and enhances the collegiality and quality of the professional environment on campus. We will renew our commitment to excellence in teaching and engagement, student services, research, and student success. Now is our time to do something great, at Coppin, and for thousands who place their hopes and dreams in the administration, the faculty, and the staff of this University. Let everything we do be driven by an unwavering commitment to excellence and integrity. Let's work to take Coppin to new heights and live out our motto – "Nurturing Potential...Transforming Lives." It's an exciting time to be an Eagle... enjoy Homecoming, Let the Transformation Begin and GO EAGLES!