



UNIVERSITY of GUYANA

The University of Guyana

Dreaming Renaissance, Doing Renaissance

Investiture Address

By

Professor Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith, BSocSc, MA, MPhil, Ph.D.

Tenth Vice Chancellor and Principal

I. INTRODUCTION

Excellency, President David Arthur Granger, Honourable Prime Minister Moses Nagamootoo, Chancellor Eon Nigel Harris, students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends of The University of Guyana, Honorable Ministers of Government, members of the Judiciary, members of the Diplomatic Corps, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen, all. First, permit me to thank you for your gracious presence and for the individual and institutional salutations. I deeply appreciate them, and I am confident that I shall benefit from the prescience that they capture.

II. DREAMING AND DOING

My installation as Tenth Vice Chancellor and Principal of this valued institution is not just about me; it is an occasion for institutional renewal; it is an important part of our Renaissance. Mine is the charge to lead us into part of the future, and I readily accept that charge. Yet, I am cognizant of the fact that we did not just magically arrive here. Our educational enterprise began with bold individual and institutional dreams in humble circumstances. There was dreaming and doing, in less than propitious circumstances.

I refer to the dreaming and doing by then Premier Dr. Cheddie Jagan, whose brainchild it was to create a basis for citizens of the then-colony of British Guiana to leverage tertiary education for individual social and economic mobility, and to provide a fillip to national economic and social development; the dreaming and doing by Minister of Education Cedric Nunes, founding Chancellor Edward Mortimer Duke, Founding Vice Chancellor and Principal Lancelot Hogben, and countless other nationalists and educators, bureaucrats and businessmen, international agencies and foreign governments. I refer to the dreaming and doing of then Prime

Minister Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, who guided the establishment of this campus, and who championed the provision of free university education, with just one year of National Service as payment. I myself was a beneficiary of this largesse.

It was dreaming and doing that led from an inaugural class of 164 students pursuing degrees in Faculties of Arts, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences in 1963, to current enrollment of over 8, 650 students pursuing undergraduate and post-graduate programs in Earth and Environmental Sciences, Education and Humanities, Health Sciences, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Technology. As well, it was dreaming and doing that led to the recent establishment of the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation. However, as President David Arthur Granger rightly declared this past Monday in his Keynote Address to the inaugural Diaspora Engagement Conference, UG began with a considerable number of birth defects. And, one of our national intellectual treasures, Professor Emeritus Sister Mary Noel Menezes captured, with levity, some of the humble and inauspicious circumstances in her “A Brief History of The University of Guyana” when she wrote: “Professor Bill Carr realistically captured some of the nostalgia of the Queens College days ‘with its stairs and rooms smelling of boys, stale buns, split sweet drinks, and assorted vermin.’”

Thus, this Tenth Vice Chancellorship builds on the tremendous work of those who labored long and hard in the educational, political, and financial vineyards of the almost five-and-a-half decades—the previous lecturers and staff who have taught, mentored, and nurtured our students; the Chancellors, Pro Chancellors and Council members who have provided policy governance; the Vice Chancellors and other administrators who have managed the education and economic enterprise, sometimes performing administrative gymnastics just to survive, much less

to thrive; the political and administrative leaders who facilitated resource acquisition and more, the graduates who have paid forward by giving back; the business and civic leaders who aided the pursuits of the institution in various ways; the international organizations and diplomats whose contributions made a difference in many ways. I pay tribute to them all. Moreover, I applaud the current faculty, administrators and staff, and other stakeholders for their laudable endeavors in aiding the transformation of the lives of young and not-so-young dreamers.

I am thankful to the members of my family and to friends and supporters for coming from near and far to celebrate this occasion of institutional renewal. Francille and I have two wonderful children: Shakina Aisha, who lives in New York, and Ivelaw Lamar, who lives in California. And we are blessed now with a granddaughter, Harper Julienne. Thank you for not just being here, but for sharing the sacrifice entailed in my being away from the family as I serve my native land. Other family members are here too, as are long-standing friends, such as Dr. Godfrey Springer from the Bahamas, a friend of some five decades.

Special thanks to the friend who hails from far off Africa: Professor Ophelia Weeks, President of The University of Liberia. This is the maiden visit to Guyana for Shakina, Ivelaw, Harper, and President Weeks. I know they will return. This event has involved a tremendous amount of thoughtful planning and execution by a committee of university and community stakeholders, notable among the latter being Banks DIH, ANSA McAl Trading, Healing Arts Foundation, and ELLE Flowers. The work was led by our indefatigable Registrar, Dr. Caesar Nigel Gravesande. Please give Dr. Gravesande and the entire committee a thunderous expression of appreciation.

III. WHY PROJECT RENAISSANCE?

In reflecting on the individual and institutional dreaming and doing at UG, I am reminded of some of the words of one of our literary giants who graced the campus grounds with his presence when I studied here. I refer to the poet Martin Carter and his “I come from the Nigger Yard.”

“I come from the nigger yard of yesterday

leaping from the oppressors' hate

and the scorn of myself;

from the agony of the dark hut in the shadow

and the hurt of things;

from the long days of cruelty and the long nights of pain

down to the wide streets of to-morrow, of the next day

leaping I come, who cannot see will hear.”

This institution’s recent yesterdays have been characterized by neglect and stormy seas, with an interlinked three-dimensional predicament, which revolved around Resources, both in relation to acquisition and management; Esteem, internal as well as external, and notably in relation to academic credibility and brand; and Perspicacity, in that the University had lost its intellectual spunk when it comes to critical inquiry and theoretical and applied research. In other words, UG has had a REP—Resources, Esteem, and Perspicacity—problem. I am quite mindful

of the prescient proposition of Writer and Philosopher Rabindranath Tagore: “You cannot cross the sea simply by standing and staring at the water.” Thus, on assuming the Vice-Chancellorship, rather than lament I launched Project Renaissance, which aims to rebuild UG’s educational and economic enterprise and enable it to become a consequential national and international educational stakeholder.

Project Renaissance is both a Dreaming project and a Doing project. Why dream, some have asked, when this University has suffered such neglect and for so long? I invoke Harlem Renaissance literary giant Langston Hughes to answer that question, and he does so poignantly in his 1926 poem, “Dreams,” where he implores us—nay—commands us to:

“Hold fast to dreams

For if dreams die

Life is like a broken-winged bird

That cannot fly.

“Hold fast to dreams

For when dreams go

Life is a barren field

Frozen with snow.”

IV. IMPERATIVES AND RESULTS

This Renaissance Bridge Building Project has four main pillars, called Imperatives, and six Values. The first Imperative is Capital Investment, which involves human capital, physical capital, and brand capital. The second—Academic Enhancement—entails improving instructional credentials, curricula and andragogy and introducing new educational programs and research to address national and regional business, civic, and overall development needs. The Economic Viability Imperative is the third pillar. It requires fortifying the major existing revenue streams—government subventions and tuition fees—but also expanding the revenue base, through alumni and corporate giving, grants, and merchandising. The fourth Imperative, Alumni Engagement, entails reaching out to UG graduates within and outside Guyana, celebrating their accomplishments, and inviting them to aid the continued pursuit of our mission and goals.

As one might suspect, pursuing Project Renaissance has daunting, Herculean elements. It entails Facing and Fixing, to quote writer James Baldwin, and it involves pursuing new ventures and setting new baselines, some of which are new to UG and to Guyana, although not new to the academy in many parts of the world. Understandably, then, decision-making often has been—and will be—tough. But, as Roy Disney once averred—and correctly so, in my view: “It’s not hard to make decisions once you know what your values are.” Our Renaissance pursuits are guided by six cardinal Values: Respect, Integrity, Excellence, Transparency, Inclusion, and Efficiency. These cannot be merely platitudinous incantations; they must be lived. In relation to Excellence, for example, Aristotle reminds us of the importance of habituation: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit,” he said. Living these values is particularly important at this period of Guyana’s contemporary history, as our nation has a

considerable Respect-deficit and Integrity-challenged profile. The onus is on us at the University to aid the alteration of this profile over time.

Notwithstanding the challenges and criticisms faced, I am pleased to report that our Renaissance efforts have begun to show notable results. A scorecard will be posted to the UG website. Suffice to say here that the achievements include improvement of physical facilities and of WiFi access at Turkeyen, Tain, Dennis Irvine Hall and elsewhere. We also modified the service hours of the Bursary, including opening on Saturday, and partnered with GTT to offer Mobile Money to enhance both the time-efficiency and cost-efficiency of services to students; published an electronic newsletter to showcase the work of students, staff, and alumni; held the first Race for PACE, which raised G\$4.1 million to establish a Student Support Fund; inaugurated Distinguished Lecture Series to celebrate the work and workings of three academic giants—Professor Clive Thomas, Professor Sister Noel Menezes, and Dr. Ulric Neville Trotz—and to inspire others to emulate their pursuit and achievement of excellence; hosted the First Education Resource Ambassadors conference and established the Vice Chancellor’s Fund for Strategic Initiatives; launched a new UG website; and established the Education Resource Ambassador (ERA) program, in which academic, civic, and business stakeholders lend their time, talent and treasure to supporting the Renaissance.

For example, a few weeks ago, one Guyana-based ERA donated G\$600,000 worth of plants for our campus beautification efforts. Moreover, the ERAs in New York and New Jersey recently established a 501 c (3) non-profit organization called Alumni and Friends of The University of Guyana, and they will be having their inaugural Renaissance Gala on September 9 in Queens, New York. I encourage you to support their efforts. This year also witnessed the

cultivation of beneficial relationships with business, government, and diplomatic stakeholders; restoration of the Walter Rodney Chair; the début of the Etiquette Training Program for Student Leaders; and promotion of the Arts, including the appointment of music icon Keith Waithe as the first Distinguished Visiting Artist-in-Residence since Martin Carter last held the position on a permanent basis. As well, infrastructure work has begun on a new Students' Social Complex, extension of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, a new Maintenance Complex, and renovation of the property at Pere Street, Kitty to become an entrepreneurial facility.

Also noteworthy have been the reorganisation of the university's senior leadership, with the creation of Deputy Vice Chancelleries for (1) Academic Engagement, (2) Planning and International Engagement, and (3) Philanthropy, Alumni and Civic Engagement, and an Office of Strategic Initiatives; creation of Turkeyen and Tain Talks as a bi-monthly series to facilitate conversations with the community on important national and international subjects; establishment of the Undergraduate Research Programme, and the hosting of the successful inaugural student research conferences at Turkeyen and Tain.

As well, we are proud of the commissioning of a feasibility study that led to the creation of the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (SEBI); and establishment of the University of Guyana Press, as part of efforts to boost research and scholarship. Quite significant—and historic for both UG and the nation—was the successful convening of the First Diaspora Engagement Conference and the launching earlier today of the Caribbean Diaspora Engagement Centre. The conference attracted 260 people from Guyana, Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia, Ghana, Nigeria, Canada, British Virgin Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, the United

Kingdom, and the United States—from Maryland, California, New York, New Jersey, Texas, Georgia, Florida, New Mexico, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Michigan; and Ohio.

V. FROM YESTERDAYS TO TOMORROWS

For the University of Guyana to have salutary “tomorrows” that go beyond crisis management survival and that avoids its leaders being practitioners of the science of muddling through, the Renaissance Bridge Building must be sustained for at least the next three years. We are obliged to sustain the initiatives that have been launched, and turn attention to other areas that warrant urgent consideration. Therefore, let me outline a few areas that will be the subject of Dreaming and Doing in Year II of Project Renaissance.

It is useful to share a few thoughts about context first, though. In my Values and Vision Statement, which has been shared both on and off-campus, even before assuming office, I share a powerful proposition made in 1980 by a former UG Chancellor, who then was serving as Commonwealth Secretary-General. In delivering his speech to the Commonwealth Education Conference in Sri Lanka, Sir Shridath Ramphal declared: “We have learned that education, when it is not geared to the needs of real development, and when it is not accompanied by progress in other spheres, can lead more to despair than to development, more to frustration than to fulfillment, and more to social tension than to social advance.” I share this view in its entirety.

Mindful of the Ramphal Proposition, I take the opportunity in my Values and Vision Statement to offer a role proposition for our University; that is must:

1. Serve as a facilitator of educational and economic development—for both individual citizens and society as a whole;

2. Foster dreaming and doing about changed personal and societal realities;
3. Serve as an agent of change; and
4. Provide a platform to explore opportunities and innovation.

Moreover, I argue that UG cannot operate in a silo; that it is vital for both private- and public-sector sustenance and development. Thus, I am in full agreement with President Granger who espoused that view while addressing the Diaspora Engagement Conference on July 24 that the University of Guyana must become the University for Guyana. I also see significant roles and opportunities at the Caribbean regional level and beyond. Indeed, our being an Associate Institution of CARICOM under the treaty that created that institution is a strong indication of a regional role that was contemplated earlier. That role is even more vital now.

In terms of specific areas of attention, as a university and a nation, we are in a near-crisis mode in relation to the hard sciences and engineering, in relation to instruction, research, and the synergistic utility linkages to multidisciplinary spaces such as Biodiversity. Thus, I shall be establishing a 15-member Renaissance STEAM Task Force to examine comprehensively the state of affairs in that cluster, and offer recommendations to address the extant issues. I am delighted that the following two distinguished Education Resource Ambassadors have agreed to co-chair the Task Force: Professor Suresh Narine, Director of Guyana's Institute of Applied Science and Technology and Director of Trent University Centre for Biomaterials Research, and Professor Norman Munroe, Professor of Mechanical & Materials Engineering and Director of the Office of Student Access and Success and of the Center for Diversity in Engineering & Computing at Florida International University.

Other members of the Task Force identified so far are Dr. Raquel Thomas-Caesar, Director of Resource Management and Training at the Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development; Professor Terrence Blackman, Dean of the School of Science, Health & Technology at Medgar Evers College of The City University of New York; Professor Walter Edwards, Director of The Humanities Center at Wayne State University in Michigan; and Professor Lynden Archer, James A. Friend Family Distinguished Professor of Engineering and co-director of the KAUST-Cornell Center for Energy and Sustainability.

This past year I initiated a series of actions to support the arts. These include using Renaissance House, my residence, as a gallery to showcase the painting and sculpture of our students and lecturers, hosting the inaugural Painting, Music and Poetry session at Renaissance House, and appointing the first Distinguished Artist-in-Residence, on a visiting basis, since Martin Carter held the position permanently decades ago. Music icon Keith Waithe, who is here with us, is doing his second stint in this position. This coming year we shall formalize the Artist-in-Residence (AIR) Program. In this respect, I am pleased to make two announcements.

First, that music legend Dave Martins will be joining us as a Distinguished Visiting Artist-in-Residence. I have indicated to Dave and to Deputy Vice Chancellor Paloma Mohamed, who will be managing the AIR program, that it important that we extend the geographical reach beyond Georgetown and Berbice, to Lethem, parts of Essequibo, Linden, and other areas. Dave already has some fascinating topics for some of his edu-performance sessions. Second, I am delighted that we are working with the Indian High Commissioner to support an important component of the Program.

My reorganization plan of October 2016 catered for the establishment of a deanship for Research and Graduate Studies, a Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence, and an Office of Legal Counsel. Budgetary and other constraints precluded actualizing these. They will need to become priorities in Renaissance Year II. A UG mobile app also is on the cards for next year. I am pleased, as well, that feasibility work will begin on the establishment of an Institute of Food and Nutrition Security. A distinguished Guyanese-born chemist will be spending her sabbatical year with us, and has agreed to lead this effort, and I have secured the collaboration commitment of the Director of UWI's Centre for Food Security and Entrepreneurship at Cave Hill. As well, efforts to re-energize biodiversity teaching and research and the collaboration with the Ministry of the Presidency and with Iwokrama must be taken to a higher level. Important, too, will be efforts to improve the compensation to faculty and staff, mindful of the importance of performance and accountability. Improved campus security also must become a priority.

Finally, we shall begin to address the multiple challenges facing our invaluable Law Department, with two initial initiatives. First, I shall commission a comprehensive review of that department. I truly appreciate the agreement by Professor Velma Newton, a former UWI law dean and current Director of IMPACT Justice Project and head of the Caribbean Law Institute Centre (CLIC), to head the review team. I have nominations from the Law Department, but I shall defer announcement of others in the review panel until the full team has been empaneled. Second, we are working towards establishment of a Jurist-in-Residence Program, and I am pleased that former Acting Chancellor of the Judiciary Carl Singh is likely to be the first Jurist-in-Residence.

VI. CONCLUSION

Are we dreaming? Yes, we are. For the skeptics within and beyond these walls, I commend to you the words of wisdom by the late, noted American Educator Benjamin Elijah Mays, who said: "The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't a calamity to die with dreams unfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream." But Project Renaissance is not merely about Dreaming about better tomorrows; it also is about Doing to actualize those better tomorrows.

Comfort should be taken in the fact that Renaissance Year I provided verifiable evidence that Project Renaissance is not about Moutar; it is about Guitar. When I think of the successes of Renaissance Year I and the bold aims being set for ensuing years I am obliged to recall some advice proffered by Education Resource Ambassador Selwyn Collins in his book *The EarthHeart Knows*: "Leap that you might fly! Know that envy and jealousy disguise as caution because they fear your transformation. They know and fear you will erode their relevance and render them insignificant."

So, Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I let me end with the literary luminary with whom I began, with Martin Carter:

"I come from the nigger yard of yesterday

leaping from the oppressors' hate

and the scorn of myself

I come to the world with scars upon my soul

wounds on my body, fury in my hands

I turn to the histories of men and the lives of peoples.

I examine the shower of sparks the wealth of the dreams.

I am pleased with the glories and sad with the sorrows

rich with the riches, poor with the loss.

From the nigger yard of yesterday I come with my burden.

To the world of to-morrow I turn with my strength.”

Thank you for your attention.

Turkeyen,

Guyana

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