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New Dean Delivers Inaugural State of the College Address

GREENVILLE, N.C. (Aug. 26, 2014) — Dr. William M. Downs, dean of the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences, delivered his first “State of the College Address” Monday, Aug. 25, at the college’s 51st annual convocation. Downs said this was an important “moment of renewal” for Harriot College and that he was “delighted to be working with the college to craft its future.”

“The state of the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences is in many important ways strong, it is vibrant and it is full of promise,” said Downs. “I arrive at my optimism for our future only after careful consideration of our position within the University, after gaining an appreciation for our traditions of excellence in both research and teaching and after a clear-headed analysis of how vital our disciplines are to the people of this state and to the demands of a 21st Century workforce.”

During his address, Downs touched on various aspects of what makes the college great; what it does and provides that is important to the university, the students and the region.

Three key concepts discussed, included:

1) “Harriot College is a central and indispensable motor for achieving East Carolina University’s broader institutional mission.” – Given the size and scope of Harriot College, Downs said Arts and Sciences can lead the way for ECU to be a national model for maximizing student access and success, for preparing a new generation of graduates to be tomorrow’s leaders and to be a catalyst for regional transformation.

2) “Harriot College is rich in human capital.” – The faculty and staff in the college are experts in their fields, are dedicated and passionate about their work, and provide leadership and service. They provide students with a broad scholarly experience and mentorship beyond the classroom. In addition, the college is home to successful, nationally and internationally recognized researchers. According to Downs, the research and creative discovery mission of the college is “crucial to the impact that we make on our community, our region, our world.”

3) “Harriot College is vital to the 21st Century.” – Harriot College includes some of the academic world’s oldest disciplines, which are the ones that are needed to address contemporary challenges. Graduates from the college are prepared to succeed in the globalized, knowledge-based economy of the 21st Century because they are taught to be critical thinkers, solve complex problems, communicate effectively, and understand and appreciate context and differences.

Even while touting the strengths of Harriot College, Downs expressed the need to continue to work with fellow colleagues in other areas across campus.
“We are just one part of a large, dynamic institution,” said Downs. “We are a natural partner for our colleagues in the other academic colleges and professional schools, and we can and must work in concert with our partners on campus in support of a shared institutional mission.”

Downs also discussed ways the college can ensure a bright future, even in challenging times. In discussing the future of the college, Downs touched on eight points:

1) “Harriot College will be committed to our own process of ‘strategic planning’ at both the college level and at the level of academic departments.”
2) “Harriot College will develop strategies for growing majors in our 15 departments and 16 interdisciplinary programs.”
3) “The college will work actively with department graduate directors, chairs and the Graduate School to develop strategies that reverse the decline in graduate enrollments.”
4) “We will envision a college where our students take part in one or more ‘signature experiences’ before they graduate.”
5) “The college will commission a new committee to assess our capabilities for contributing to economic development and regional transformation.”
6) “We will sharpen our contribution to leadership by exploring the possibilities of developing support for an endowed professorship in leadership studies.”
7) “We will develop a new marketing and communications strategy for the college.”
8) “We want to do a better job building and sustaining relations with our alumni, friends in the community and our donors.”

“This is a full plate,” said Downs. “I’m committed to each of these next steps.”

In closing, Downs addressed the group by thanking all the faculty and staff for what they do in research, in teaching and in service.

“Thank you for your commitment to your student and to your community,” said Downs. “Congratulations on your accomplishments over the course of the past year and best wishes for continued success in the new year.”

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