

2015 ECSU Honors Day Speech
“Honors: A Proud Legacy of Academic Excellence”

Good Afternoon Fellow Vikings & Friends:

Academic excellence, leadership, and success are all defined as a mark of true faithfulness and dedication. The successes we honor and celebrate today stem from many forms and sources of dedication.

Part of success comes from a personal dedication to life as a student and your future as a contributing member of a larger global society. Allow me to state what most students see as obvious: academic life at Elizabeth City State University is rigorous. Not in a bad way, but in a way that facilitates challenges, pushes the boundaries, and tests the unknown. The proud legacy of academic excellence encourages, **no**, requires each of you to:

1. Live **ahead** of contemporaries.
2. Live **above** circumstances.
3. Live **deeper** than your calamities.
4. Live **beyond** capabilities.

Many students begin their ECSU career as former high school valedictorians - students used to high achievement and academic success. Earning good grades in high school was not much of a barrier for many current Vikings. College however, has been a new experience. For some, it is the art of studying. Essays are longer, tests and exams have become more difficult, and free time is shortened.

Outside the classroom, activities are vast and time-consuming. A balance between academic work, organizations, athletics, service activities, employment, and a social life began as a new and unfamiliar obstacle that continues to test you every year. This balance is not easy, but extremely rewarding.

Look at the daily lessons in academic excellence or leadership. In the classroom people follow those whose leadership they respect. The less skilled follow the more highly skilled. In general, followers seek those who are better leaders than themselves.

Great leaders look at this process by summarizing the word **R-E-S-P-E-C-T**.

1. **Respect** yourself and those with whom you associate. Demonstrate a healthy respect for yourself.
2. **Exceed** the expectations of others. Go the extra mile.
3. **Stand** firm on convictions. Be willing to join the journey.
4. **Possess** uncommon security and maturity. Don't grab all the credit for a job well done, give as much as possible to others.
5. **Experience** personal success. Win the battle before enlisting others to fight.
6. **Contribute** to the success of others. Lend guidance and resources where needed.
7. **Think** ahead of others. Establish a plan of overwhelming victory.

Honors given today **are not** for merely making it through road blocks, these honors are for learning and growing from them. By using these hurdles as learning experiences and stepping stones, you have been empowered to grow and develop as student-leaders. This first form of dedication, personal dedication, is important, but not sufficient for academic success.

So why else are you here? Although the demands of an education have, at times, seemed relentless, the honors received today **do not** come only from your own motivation, will, and personal dedication. Allow me to share a brief story. It was a fall morning in 1971 and classes at ECSU had just begun for the year. While it was a normal morning for most students, this particular day started with an unexpected event that affected students who were in Lester Hall, the math/science building. The complex experienced a major gas leak causing morning science classes to be cancelled. As I walked past Butler Hall however, I noticed something unusual. It wasn't the smell of gas fumes or the influx of maintenance personnel.

Instead what caught my eye was the distant sight of Dr. Herman Cooke, biology professor...standing outside of Lester Hall...broadcasting a physiology lecture at the top of his lungs to nearly 30 biology students who may or may not have hoped for a return to bed that morning. **Relentless? Sure! Dedicated? Absolutely!**

You have been fortunate enough to receive the gift of dedication from a supportive group of family, friends, faculty, staff, and alumni that believe in you. Their dedication, along with your own, is necessary for success as

a student. While the academic journey may be a challenge to you, it certainly isn't easy on them either. Parents are great listeners, but needed patience to listen to constant worries about difficult classes, impossible deadlines, the GRE, and the seemingly never-ending process of graduate school applications. Growing up, education was always an emphasis in my home, and I think it's safe to say the same holds true for everyone gathered here today.

Notice my experience, when I left home in 1969, my second set of parents, the faculty and staff were right here waiting for me at ECSU. High school counselors helped me choose a major-mathematics that would assist in accomplishing my goal of attending graduate school at the University of Kentucky, Old Dominion University, and The George Washington University. Dr. Louise Sutton, chair of the mathematics department provided the timeline I needed to succeed. Dr. Sohinder Sachdev, Dr. Latif Choudhury, Dr. Thaddeus Beasley, and Coach Thomas Caldwell offered comfort, support, reassurance, and advice when it was needed the most. Supportive alumni of our university made my education possible through scholarship funds and state-of-the-art buildings. Chancellor Marion D. Thorpe and Mrs. Lula Thorpe spent many years molding, guiding, and growing the enriching environment that makes ECSU the great place that it is today. These are just a few of the never ending acts of dedication given as a gift from our family at home and at ECSU. In short, personal dedication, while necessary, is not sufficient. Acts of selfless dedication by family and faculty helped bring us here today.

Let's take Honors Day celebration a step further. Another challenge involves channeling work and support from others into something meaningful. I urge each of you to take today's honors not merely as recognition of personal dedication or proof of the dedicated support received, but as an invitation and opportunity to pay it forward.

As the recipient of a gift, use it as something that can be shared with others and returned as the favor granted. Used solely for the advancement of a personal career, much of the gift is wasted. Used for the benefit of society, the gift is multiplied, spread, and sustained. In a world where only a small percent of the population has a college education, you have something extraordinary and unique to offer.

As honor students, you are distinguished by the capacity to achieve with an appetite for success. As scholars bound to academic professions and intrepid leaders who are unfettered by adversity, you are uniquely positioned to engage in the collective struggle to overcome life's temptations.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, there is a *“sense of affirmation generated by the challenge of embracing struggle and surmounting obstacles.”*

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.”

The **primary** goal of education is to produce human beings of good character, commitment and consciousness. The **secondary** goal of education is to produce, create, teach, and enhance critical thinking skills. The function of education is to produce **Harmony** with the world, **Understanding** of the world, and **Enlightenment** about the world and your place in it. The process of education should produce:

COMPETENCE - the level of skills to function well

CONFIDENCE - knowing that you are able to handle anything in life

CONSCIOUSNESS - irrevocable awareness of who you are in the world

“Science investigates; religion interprets. Science gives man knowledge, which is power; religion gives man wisdom, which is control. Science deals mainly with facts; religion deals mainly with values. The two are not rivals.”

In closing, I would ask that each of you to reflect on hard work, but most importantly, thank the people lending support continue the rewarding process of paying forward the great gifts received. To much is given, much is required to give back. Life as a student is just the beginning of this fascinating phenomenon.

There are four Kinds of people

He who does not know and knows that he does not know...

A child, lead him.

He who knows and does not know that he knows...

Asleep, awake him.

He who does not know and does not know that he does not know...

Is foolish, avoid him.

He who knows and knows that he knows...

A leader, follow him.

During these challenging times, **embrace** the struggle, don't fear it. **Seize** this opportunity to rediscover yourself; an opportunity to reconnect with future goals. Take time to **recommit** to purpose. **Eulogize** unhealthy habits. **Liberate** your mind from toxic thoughts. And by all means, continue **the proud legacy of academic excellence**, choose well and finish strong!

ECSU's motto-“To Live Is To Learn”.

Keep rising, Mighty ECSU scholars!

Viking PRIDE! Viking PRIDE! Viking PRIDE!