SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY AND A&M COLLEGE SYSTEM
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June 30, 2017

Dear Southern University Community:

On Wednesday, June 27, 2017, the faculty and staff of the Southern University Baton Rouge campus had the great occasion of engaging with one another in celebration of their committed work and in keeping with our aim to launch a major customer service initiative. The setting was the Employee Appreciation Day event which brought together more than 600 colleagues to whom we had the pleasure of recognizing for their diligence in advancing the interests of this great institution.

On that day, we had envisioned highlighting the accomplishments of the year. The fact that for the first time in a decade we are now able to enjoy stable higher education funding, thanks to our Governor, Legislators, and many friends and advocates of SU. We were prepared to note the 408% increase in funding dedicated to support capital improvements on the SUBR campus, the realignment of colleges, the initiation of the Freshman Academy that promises to have a significant impact on retention, the resurrection of the Athletic Department whose outcomes now provide for 10/15 teams being eligible for post season competition as opposed to 13/15 one year ago that were ineligible. And indeed, we wanted to call out the major technological upgrades across campus, the renovations in the student union (dining hall, game rooms, printing and mail services, and soon to be bowling alley), and of course, we wanted to share that the University will advance an across the board salary adjustment for all faculty and staff after a hiatus of nine years.

Most in attendance found the event successful and as I observed, it became apparent that several found the engagement to be an opportunity to exhale. As one may assume, it certainly would be applicable in light of the scrutiny to which the University has endured over the course of recent weeks.

Accordingly, I felt it important to address you, the entire Southern University family directly about the recent events. Specifically, On Tuesday, June 20, 2017, the University was made aware of a private video featuring a member of our staff and rumored to include another that was posted to the Internet without the owner's consent. Additionally, on June 23, 2017, a public warning was issued by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), the accrediting body for the University.

In accordance, you should know, that the University immediately began investigating the video matter to determine if any University policies or procedures had been violated. Those investigations are ongoing as well as a thorough and complete review of the procedures, practices, and activities of the Southern University Baton Rouge Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. Not to distract from the investigation, the vice chancellor for student affairs and enrollment management has been placed on administrative leave.

Furthermore, and exclusive of the aforementioned occurrence, the SACSCOC warning was a part of our recurring five-year review process that all accredited institutions undergo. We typically look forward to our review process and welcome the feedback from SACSCOC, as it assists us with identifying areas of improvement necessary to provide the highest level of service to our students as possible.

In this case, SACSCOC noted four areas that require the University to provide additional evidence for compliance with the Principles of Accreditation. While all the areas are important to address, the most serious issue that caused the institution being placed on warning speaks to providing evidence that the University has sufficient faculty to carry out its mission.

Relatively speaking, I could argue that in the past, the result of nine consecutive years of state budget cuts has impacted the campus to the extent that we impose on our quality faculty to do more with less without the benefit of maintaining a competitive salary nor the financial resources to recruit additional colleagues. Instead, I suggest that today, we have engaged in a comprehensive review and are currently engaged in budget presentations from the colleges that provide us with additional data to inform us on faculty hiring needs, the imperative to control faculty overloads and the appropriate mix of full and part-time faculty. We have made much progress and I say with great certainty and confidence that we will meet the expectations of SACSCOC given the next scheduled review. Let me offer additional assurance, Southern University and A& M College at Baton Rouge will never lose its accreditation.

I, therefore, ask the Southern University family to continue its commitment to the University and to support our efforts to uphold our legacy and mission of providing a great education to all who come through our doors.

It was once cited by a great orator, that "*If there is no struggle there is no progress.*" Well, the Southern family has seen its fair share of struggle and distractions in recent weeks, and I cannot promise that it is over. I can, however, promise that the University will use these challenges as teachable moments, and learn from them to put the University on a path to be even stronger for the next 137 years.

And, as we prepare to celebrate our nation's birth, I wish everyone a safe and enjoyable holiday.

With Regards,

Ray L. Belton, Ph.D.
President-Chancellor
Southern University System