Good afternoon!

I bring you greetings from the students, faculty and staff of North Carolina Central University, America’s oldest public liberal arts college for the education of African-Americans, founded more than 100 years ago.

Our highest priority is to create a culture of student success; a culture characterized by high levels of learning, retention and graduation.

I offer a special welcome to President Patricia Hardaway of Wilberforce University and President Roderick McDavis from Ohio University.

Welcome faculty from the Interlink Alliance!

As we gather this afternoon, 40 states have cut back on higher education.

Here in the state of North Carolina,

the 2011 budget cut $414 million from the public University of North Carolina system’s budget.

My university, North Carolina Central University, has lost $50 million in permanent budget cuts and reversions since I took office in 2007.

Six weeks ago, President Barack Obama told his University of Michigan audience, “tuition and fees have more than doubled....Colleges and universities need to do their part to keep costs down as well.”

NCCU has the lowest cost of all of our selected peer institutions from across the country, but yes, our tuition has doubled over the last decade.

If universities are not able to recover some of the dollars lost with tuition increases, then what?

The President suggests another Race to the Top in which states will be rewarded for keeping tuition costs down while graduating higher numbers of Pell-eligible students.
This is the conundrum I face every day as Chancellor of a low-wealth institution with a relatively small endowment.

In his Michigan speech, the President said, “states have to do their part by making higher education a higher priority in their budgets.”

While I appreciate the acknowledgement of the crux of the problem, I must confess I was hoping for less carrot and more stick in his approach to safeguarding the priority of higher education in state budget allocations.

If we are truly serious about reaching for the top, running the race cannot be optional.

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While the states have made cuts to public education, other nations have been investing in their future prosperity.

America has fallen to 16th place in the 2011 OECD survey of 36 modern countries.

This is in the ranking of the relative number of college graduates we have between the ages of 25 and 34.

In 2010, when I wrote my policy document titled *Strengthening America’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A Call to Action*, we were in 12th place.

To be globally competitive, America can’t afford to leave so much of the nation’s talent pool untapped.

That is why I wrote the *Call to Action*.

It was intended to be a positive and tangible outcome of NCCU’s national HBCU Symposium, held to mark our Centennial.

I distributed this document nationally to the federal government officials and to the governors of those states with HBCUs within their borders.

It was sent to the board members of major foundations, national education associations, and of course, to all HBCU presidents and chancellors.

I was seeking to initiate a dialogue regarding the contemporary relevance of HBCUs despite the changes in America’s social landscape.
As a result of distributing this document, I’m very grateful to have received numerous opportunities to speak, and through interviews with the national media, to tell the HBCU story.

I’m encouraging the creation of an HBCU Reinvestment Act to make explicit the necessary partnership between minority and majority institutions, the state and federal governments, corporations and philanthropic organizations for the purpose of revitalizing this essential sector of higher education.

It’s all about promoting increased collaboration.

To my recollection, the Alliance is almost four years old now.

It was a good idea in 2008 but now it looks brilliant.

I believe the concept of collaboration has become essential to our future success.

But I would argue that what we’ve accomplished so far is nothing compared to what we could accomplish.

For the purposes of this afternoon’s conversation, allow me to define cross-sector collaboration as between minority and majority serving institutions.

Let me call collaboration between the various minority-serving institutions — the HSIs, the tribal colleges and the HBCUs — inter-sector collaboration.

Then, collaboration within a minority-serving sector might be intra-sector collaboration.

There is unrealized potential in all these kinds of higher education collaboration to enhance our research capacity and faculty professional development.

In the case of cross-sector collaboration, I submit that, collectively, we have left hundreds of millions of research dollars on the table because we weren’t at the table!

Last year, with three partners — including Johns Hopkins University and two private sector research organizations — Morgan State University received the largest grant in its history — $28.5 million.

This was more than a one-quarter share of the $95.8 million invested by NASA in its Goddard Earth sciences project.

NCCU’s largest research grant in history was also the result of collaboration with a majority institution.
In this case, it was the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Lineberger Cancer Center.

We received $7 million of the $11.9 million grant to study racial disparities in the incidence of certain cancers.

Building capacity through grants like this contributed to our successful bid for a Ph.D. in integrated biosciences beginning this fall.

And just having the Ph.D. puts us in a whole different class of competition for federal research dollars.

Colleagues, I’m convinced that members of the Interlink Alliance can collaborate to achieve higher levels of success by having Ohio University serve as a major player in attracting research support.

If there is little cross-sector cooperation, there is even less inter-sector collaboration, and that is a travesty.

We have so much in common in our history and present day challenges.

Last week, NCCU hosted a conference for faculty and administrators from institutions serving African-American, Hispanic and American Indian students to see what successful practices we could share.

In this age of budget cuts, no one can afford to reinvent the wheel, least of all us.

Probably the most well known example of intra-sector collaboration among HBCUs might be the establishment of the Thurgood Marshall Fund.

But that was 25 years ago.

I see the potential for major HBCU collaborations in K–12 education, health disparities and cultural literacy.

How can we turn our commonality and breadth of reach and experience into funded research projects?

University administrators can promote collaborations but only faculty can make them a reality and sustain them over the long term.

Presidents and chancellors tend to serve more limited tenures.

We need our faculty to talk and collaborate with each other in critical disciplines where HBCUs can add unique value.
It is up to them to sustain the effort until it bears fruit, and our students reap the rewards of greater opportunities and better quality experiences.

I would like to turn now to a discussion of the primary areas of focus for renewal on historically black college campuses as I have laid them out in the *Call to Action*.

The first is **infrastructure**.

There is a critical need for investment in the infrastructure of our HBCUs.

Infrastructure plays an integral role in supporting the development and enhancement of academic programs, research, and day-to-day operations.

But infrastructure isn’t flashy or exciting and that low profile makes it hard to gin up support for it.

How does a corporation brand its investment in a campus HVAC system?

But no student wants to attend class in 100-degree heat when the air conditioning is out of service.

Similarly, HBCUs desperately need the savings in productivity we could realize with more and better use of technology in administrative operations like purchasing and payroll.

HBCUs must have facilities that are adequately equipped and maintained, and deferred maintenance problems must be eliminated.

What couldn’t HBCUs do with a level playing field?

Regarding the **curriculum**, HBCUs must become more competitive and responsive in our curricular offerings.

We need to plunge into the world of online education and to expand degree offerings in the STEM disciplines.

We must review, streamline and update existing program offerings to enhance their relevance to the global marketplace.
For the most part, our institutions are small, and should be more capable of transformational change.

Here at NCCU, we have only just begun, but we have nearly doubled the credit hours students take online.

We've established a distinctive research niche in the study of health disparities and, as I mentioned, we're introducing a Ph.D. program, our first in 50 years, in integrated biosciences.

We've begun a continuous process of review of all academic programs to guide decisions about which programs to eliminate, consolidate, expand or renew.

All HBCUs must offer more contemporary programs reflective of the dynamic social, economic, national and international landscape of the 21st century.

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Regarding research capacity, historically black colleges and universities have demonstrated a solid ability to address a number of problems that confront society in general, and minority communities in particular.

Based on their long-standing tradition of service, HBCU faculty possess the requisite experience and skills to assist low-wealth communities in addressing issues related to K–12 education, for example.

As I said, I believe the fastest and surest way to expand research capacity is through the establishment of cross-sector collaborations between HBCUs and majority institutions.

HBCUs must pay greater attention to learning styles.

Research shows that millennial students learn differently.

We must explore more contemporary modes of instruction delivery and invest in faculty professional development to accommodate these students.

Faculty learning communities, in which education experts facilitate group discussions about novel approaches to teaching, have shown potential here at NCCU.

The needs of our students must drive the choice of the tools and techniques we use in the classroom.
Faculty members may be masters of their content, but they can’t serve simply as sources of information.

Students already have millions of sources of information at their fingertips.

Faculty add value to the extent that they facilitate learning, analysis, innovation and critical thinking.

If students are consistently failing a gateway course in mathematics, the students are not the problem.

The problem is in the structure, implementation and pedagogy of the course.

We need our students not just to attend university but to graduate with a credential that has value in the marketplace.

Retention is critical.

Many HBCUs have retention and graduation rates that are unacceptably low.

For more than three decades, the national focus was on student access, with student success gaining attention only more recently.

HBCUs must significantly increase support services in both undergraduate and graduate programs.

They must raise the expectations for student graduation and ensure their students are graduating with the skills they need for success in their chosen careers.

HBCUs also must confront the issue of succession planning.

Who will replace the Baby Boom generation among the ranks of your faculty and staff?

HBCUs must identify and retain talented faculty who are committed to the mission of their institutions.

We must attract executive leadership that seeks to advance these institutions in productive and inventive ways.

These must be leaders who possess the passion, cultural literacy and the capacity to speak to the hearts and minds of their constituencies.

They must lead, not preside.
They must be facilitators of change rather than administrators of the status quo.

**Globalization** will continue to be the hallmark of this century.

Global warming, resource and food sustainability, pandemic disease — these are issues that the United States can’t solve on its own.

HBCUs need to lead the way in developing the international relationships and research collaborations that will pave the way for future cooperation and develop the language curricula and travel experiences to enable our students to engage their counterparts all over the world.

But first, the active recruitment of diversity on our own campuses would go a long way toward preparing our students for life after university.

If there is one lesson that I have learned in my four-decades-long career, it is that while everything is important, everything is not of equal importance.

When HBCUs think about where they need to invest their limited resources, their development office has to be high on the list.

We may be in the midst of a hiring freeze at NCCU, but I have moved critical resources into our Division of Institutional Advancement.

Regarding **private philanthropy**, we must take full advantage of the strategic cultivation of annual and planned giving among alumni, students, faculty and staff.

They must be encouraged to view their contributions as investments in the institution rather than as mere donations.

HBCUs must make their philanthropic expectations crystal clear for their key constituencies.

For example, students must be cultivated from the first day they step foot on campus until the day they cross the stage to pick up their degree and every year after that.

We have access to populations that the corporations desperately want and need — well-educated graduates.
Regarding board **governance**, HBCUs should reserve membership on our Boards of Trustees for those who will, as my friend Marybeth Gasman is fond of saying, “Give, get or get off.”

There is institutional governance, faculty governance and management and administration.

Sometimes these roles get confused.

I have mentioned several areas of focus for reinvestment and reinvigoration of the HBCUs that will enable this sector not just to survive but thrive.

With the development of a national HBCU Reinvestment Act and the collaboration of all the major stake holders, HBCUs can assume a leadership role in education.

With a level playing field, we welcome measures of accountability for our highest priority — retaining and graduating students with a competitive credential that enables satisfying careers.

Education is the engine of opportunity but also, as Herbert Spencer wrote a century ago, “Education...is the never-sleeping agent of revolution, is always fitting men for higher things and unfitting them for things as they are.”