

Inaugural Address by President Brian O. Hemphill, Ph.D.

The Inauguration of Brian O. Hemphill, Ph.D. as the Seventh President of Radford University

October 13, 2016 Investiture Ceremony

I am honored and humbled to have an opportunity to stand before you as the 7th President of Radford University.

Today is a day to reflect.

- A day to reflect on and celebrate the rich academic traditions and the proud history of Radford University.
- A day to look with hopeful eyes to the promise of change and a prosperous future for this Great University.

From the time my family and I arrived on campus, we have been embraced by smiling faces, open arms, and Highlander pride.

To the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of Radford University, we say thank you!

You have provided constant support, unwavering passion, and sincere optimism as we have navigated the past few months, both personally and professionally.

Without question, the New River Valley is a place where family and community come first.

As you drove into Radford today, you may have noticed a sign that reads “Radford is the heart of the New River Valley.”

With unwavering support from the entire Radford family, I cannot adequately express what it means to be the President of our University.

When we began this journey together on July 1, 2016, we made a commitment – a commitment to excellence, accountability, transparency, and student-centeredness.

With this commitment, we have pledged to focus on six areas:

- Brand Identity
- Academic Excellence and Research
- Student Success
- Strategic Enrollment Growth
- Economic Development and Community Partnerships
- Philanthropic Giving and Alumni Engagement

This commitment and areas of focus hold remarkable importance as we consider the challenges ahead not only for Radford University, but also for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

In the coming years, we will witness significant changes across business and industry and at all levels of education.

Policymakers and educators must be prepared to focus time and energy on meeting demands, especially in the growing areas of need such as allied health, technology, and business to name a few.

The United States continues to lag behind industrial countries around the world in educational attainment rates.

And, when the numbers are examined, it is a narrowing pipeline from kindergarten to baccalaureate education and beyond.

It is a major concern!

But, I am proud to say to each of you that Radford University has already begun to make strides in this area, but we must do more in the years ahead to ensure that we have the skilled workforce needed to foster creativity and innovation and drive our economy to higher levels of promise and prosperity.

In the realm of higher education...access and opportunity for all Virginians is key to this promise, regardless of race, creed, color, or economic background.

Access must remain a top priority.

No one should be denied an education based on affordability.

An education is priceless, because one's ability to learn and adapt never ends.

Learning is, indeed, a lifelong pursuit and one that should not be taken lightly.

Our universities are not only learning centers, but also economic engines for the Commonwealth and our nation.

It is important that we acknowledge their impact on the growth of the local, regional, state, and national economies.

When we commit to do all we can, which the Radford family has proudly pledged to do, collectively we can bridge the knowledge and skills gap and provide new opportunities for our students and our citizens.

In order for Radford University to play its role, we must take several important steps.

- First...we must continue the journey of being student-centered...it must be an aspect of everything we do!

Let's take a moment to applaud our students!

- Second...faculty must be active partners in the governance of this Great University!

Would all of the faculty please stand? Let's applaud our faculty!

- Third...we must be a data-driven University with clear measures of success and accountability at our core!

- And, finally, we must adjust to the speed at which society is moving!

For this to occur, we must focus on innovation and being responsive to societal needs.

In terms of student-centeredness, we have to be nimble and committed to working with all of our students regardless of their profile.

Anyone can admit students with perfect SAT scores and tout their successes.

That is not the real world!

We must embrace our public mission and be dedicated to ensuring student success.

Today's reality: individuals want an education, but do not want to destroy their financial lives and futures to earn a college degree!

Students want less time to degree completion at affordable rates.

In essence, they have the same hopes and dreams that each of us here today had...as college students!

So, how will we respond?

How will Radford University emerge as a leader with regard to these challenges?

Higher education is operating under an industrial model in a post-industrial society.

And, without question, we must examine our cost and model of delivery and be committed to providing alternatives!

It is clear!

We must respond in order to thrive!

The profile of the Radford student has changed over the last decade.

Our success must be based on the achievements of those who we admit and the quality of our graduates.

So, how will we engage them in and out of the classroom?

How will they leave this University?

Will they be prepared to serve as strong citizen leaders?

That is what fundamentally matters!

In order for these efforts to be successful, we must engage the Radford family in its totality in planning and executing a bold and innovative agenda, which positions us for the future.

We must be innovative in every aspect of our work!

Innovation must be our new normal.

How will it drive our work?

How will it shape the future of Radford University?

Why is innovation important?

As a University, we must continuously evolve to stay ahead of the competition.

Competition is key!

Our success will ultimately be determined by the commitment of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends to think outside of the box!

For innovation to come to life in our organization, we must be willing to move beyond our single focus and look for new opportunities and niche markets.

This will allow us to have meaningful conversation regarding delivery models, interdisciplinary programs, and student success in bold and new ways!

In looking to the future, it is important to face our current reality.

There is increased competition from public, private, and for-profit universities.

Folks, we have embraced the tradition and, now, it is time to envision the future!

Remember that the core of innovation is about the process of thinking in new and profound ways to improve results!

Therefore, we will allow innovation to drive our strategic planning, and witness our vision and mission come to life.

As we think about our future, we cannot be complacent in arriving late and embracing a model that society has already passed.

So, what am I saying to each of you?

We should not try to be like any other institution in the Commonwealth!

We have to be the very best Radford we can be!

So, as we prepare to travel a road of innovation with students at the heart of every decision, we will serve the Commonwealth as a model for innovation and creativity with a keen eye toward our six areas of focus!

In doing so, something special will happen on our campus!

We will transform Radford into an innovative, premier University in the Commonwealth of Virginia and beyond with a keen focus on teaching, research, and service!

Now...we will encounter challenges – I can promise you that!

But...I am confident that, together as one Radford family, we can accomplish amazing things and advance our University.

This will only happen if we collectively embrace the fact that society has changed before our eyes.

The universities that embrace these changes and meet the needs of this great country will thrive and those that do not will fade away like a morning mist!

It happens every year all across this nation!

Universities and colleges are closing their doors!

But...as I stand on this stage before you, I am confident Radford University will thrive.

We will be a University on the cutting edge.

We will be a University prepared to lead!

Why am I so confident?

Because I have looked into the eyes of our faculty and our staff.

I have witnessed first-hand their dedication and commitment to the future of this Great University. I have been moved by each of them telling our story!

As I have stated on numerous occasions, “If we don't tell our story, someone else will tell it for us.”

I am proud to have an opportunity every day to tell our story.

In recent months, our story has been one of forward-looking!

Folks, this is just the beginning!

I know that, by working together, we will take Radford University to unprecedented heights by embracing the tradition and envisioning the future!

A future that will make a difference for the students who come to this campus with a desire for discovery and a dream of a better tomorrow!

Ladies and gentlemen, the students are why we are here today.

They are why I dedicated my career to higher education.

They are why I am standing here as your President.

Their intellect and creativity drive me each and every day.

To work harder...

To make a difference...

To push myself beyond the expectations that others have for me and the expectations that I have for myself as your champion and as your leader!

The enormity of the trust you have instilled in me is my constant companion.

It is present in every action and every decision that I have made and will make on behalf of the University.

I promise to serve Radford University and guide the Radford family by furthering our commitment to civility, unity, and respect – the hallmarks of this family!

I pledge to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of President each and every day.

I make this pledge today in front of those who have entrusted me with the future of Radford University.

It is my pledge.

It is my promise.

It is our future!

Thank you, God bless, and GO HIGHLANDERS!