

WSSU to roll out five-year plan to create state-of-the-art liberal education



Dr. Robinson



Brown



BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem State University plans to begin a rollout this month of its new five-year strategic plan to prepare students for the future.

The plan's goal, according to Chancellor Elwood Robinson, is to make WSSU into a state-of-the-art liberal education institution preparing the workforce of the future.

"This strategic plan is a plan we're going to put in place to make sure each and every student that comes to Winston-Salem State University leaves with those skills in order to be successful," he said.

The plan elevates things once thought of as soft skills - critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, ethics and teamwork - to "essential skills" required for every student.

"It's about making sure students come here and get the type of quality education that they need, and when they leave they become leaders, they become change agents in an ever-changing global technologically information driven society," said Robinson.

According to the plan, all students will "experience significant undergraduate research experience, internship, study away opportunity, or experimental learning engagement." These types of things, often experienced by a small percentage of college students, will be the experience of every student at WSSU, said Robinson.

"We don't want a small percentage of our students to get that type of education, but we want each and every one of our students to get that type of education," said Robinson.

Along with strengthening liberal education, the plan seeks to enhance the quality of graduate and professional programs, enhance revenue and stewardship of resources, enhance the quality of physical and operational infrastructure, and build a commitment to social justice through community engagement locally and abroad.

The plan was approved by the WSSU Board of Trustees on Dec. 11. The university will begin the rollout toward the end of the month with a promotional campaign and the development of measuring metrics to determine the plan's progress when implementation begins later this year.

Though it is resource intensive, Robinson said that he doesn't anticipate increases in tuition because of it. He said the university will be looking for additional and expanding partnerships to help with things like internships.

Students will be seeing an unrelated tuition increase next school year. The increase was approved in 2014 by the Board of Trustees and most students will see a three percent increase in tuition. Housing costs will increase one percent and meal plans by 2.7 percent. Robinson said the university remains affordable compared to its peers while having the best outcomes among the UNC system for undergraduates finding jobs and for the income they earn.

The strategic plan included faculty, students and alumni feedback in its extensive planning process. WSSU Student Government President Kyle Brown, who is also on the Board of Trustees, said students had a large voice in the plan.

"I think Dr. Robinson and Provost Allen have done a wonderful job of including everyone in the community," he said.

ECSU

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Dr. Jones that her future was no longer at ECSU, or forced UNC System administrators to change their view that she was the right leader for the school. The answer may lie in the tawdry mix of politics that has infused itself in the 32-member all-Republican UNC Board of Governors; the demands of the GOP leadership in the state Legislature who once seriously considered shutting ECSU down; and the troubled history of a struggling historically black university in an economically impoverished region of the state.

Add to that mix Stacey Franklin Jones' own controversial history in academia, and the ultimate answer for her resignation could be any combination of the aforementioned.

The popular meme thus far as to why Jones resigned is that she was given no choice when she resisted attempts by those in the UNC System administration to dictate the direction of the school she was appointed to lead, a direction that already seemed to be chosen once her interim successor took office Monday.

If there is one thing clear about Stacey Franklin Jones, it's that she took her ability to independently chart a course for the future, based on her vision, very seriously.

There is no question, based on published reports and discussions with ECSU alums and others, that the institution has gone through rough periods with enrollment dropping by over 50 percent in the past five years (from 3307 in 2010, to 1867 currently) since UNC System-wide minimum admission standards were raised. Tuition revenues and state appropriations dropped by nearly \$10 million; uninvestigated campus sexual assaults mounted; and even the purpose of the school's mission was questioned.

ECSU has a proud history, since it's establishment by the N.C. General Assembly in March 1891, as being a training facility for African-American educators. From 1891 to 1937, it experienced tremendous growth, becoming a four-year teachers college at one point. In 1969, after broad-

ening its educational curriculum, the school was formally named "Elizabeth City State University," becoming a constituent institution of the UNC System in 1972.

Today it offers a wide variety of baccalaureate programs in business, arts and humanities, education and criminology, among other disciplines.

Ironically, one of the reasons why Tom Ross chose Dr. Jones to head up ECSU was because, "[She] brings to the role of chancellor a rare blend of leadership experience in higher education, industry and government, as well as a practical understanding of how to guide institutions through serious challenges, whether academic or financial in nature."

At 53, Jones certainly came to ECSU with an impressive academic and professional record.

She was a summa cum laude graduate of Howard University in Washington, D.C., and held master's degrees in numerical science and technical management from Johns Hopkins University and a Ph.D. in computer science from George Washington University. She then spent several years in the private sector.

Jones was a management and technology consultant just before taking the ECSU appointment. She had also served on the faculty at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and Benedict College in Columbia, S.C. Prior to that in 2010, Jones was appointed provost and vice president for academic affairs at Bowie State University.

But when she took office as ECSU chancellor in Sept. 2014, some questioned the appointment.

An article titled, "North Carolina Chancellor Choice Sparks Controversy: UNC Chancellor Choice is Asking for Trouble," written by Jay Schalin for See Thru Edu, the online publication of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, blasted the UNC Board of Governors for hiring Jones in spite of her two controversial tenures at both Benedict College and Bowie State.

As a dean of the School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics at Benedict during the mid-2000s,



Photo provided by Cash Michaels

Former ECSU Chancellor Stacey Franklin Jones and former UNC System President Tom Ross are shown in this photo.

Jones fired two professors who refused to implement the school's "Success Equals Effort" policy, which based student grades more on effort than actual classroom results.

"By firing [the two professors], Jones committed an egregious offense against academic freedom and integrity, but the real problem is that her conduct exhibited an utter lack of judgment and ethical standards," wrote Schalin for See Thru Edu.

She left Benedict College in 2009.

In November 2010, Jones left her position under fire at Bowie State University after just four months as provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. The Faculty Senate charged that she "did not include [them] in important decisions" like reorganizing staff assignments, and gave her, and the school's president, a vote of no confidence. The Faculty Association head told the Washington Examiner that Jones resigned because "... the faculty would no longer work with her."

"UNC System officials picked Jones because, not in spite of, her record of short executive stays punctuated by infighting with faculty and staff, along with a startling lack of acuity for higher education management," HBCU Digest opined.

So how was Jones' tenure at ECSU shaping up?

A recent state audit of the school's fiscal standing as of June 30, 2015 showed no evidence of financial mismanagement, and despite a decrease in state appropriations, a \$4.5 million budget cut had helped to steer the school toward profitability again. State lawmakers had just approved \$3 million to help stabilize the school in the short-term.

The crime rate was down, student recruitment was being better managed, and campus efficiencies were reportedly on the upswing.

Jones had also been promoting ECSU as on track to being "the state's premier interdisciplinary science university by 2020," and hoped to have 23 new degree programs approved by the governing boards.

According to State Rep. Robert Steinburg [R-Chowan], Jones, who he felt was doing a good job, had to make some difficult decisions that "didn't make her popular with everyone," he told The Daily Advance. "We're all painfully familiar with the mess that she inherited."

Two ECSU alums - Inez Eason of Wilmington and Eddie Davis of Durham, both said while many have been discussing

Chancellor Jones' situation, and many had expressed concerns about some of the changes Jones was instituting, they were in a wait-and-see mode since she was still new to the Viking community.

Members of the ECSU Board of Trustees claim that they were as broad-sided by Jones' sudden departure as everyone else, and insisted that if there was pressure for her to leave, it came from the UNC System board, not them.

Thomas Conway, formerly chief of staff at Fayetteville State University and one of the finalists for ECSU chancellor in 2014 when Dr. Jones was ultimately selected, was immediately chosen to become the interim chancellor as of Jan. 1. Published reports indicated that the UNC Board of Governors is actually prepared to select Conway as the permanent chancellor at their next board meeting on Friday, Jan. 22 at N.C. A&T University.

Conway told The Daily Advance that one of ECSU's priorities now is to grow. Apparently a plan was already in the works, with Conway's blessing, that East Carolina University, along with NC A&T University, UNC-

Charlotte, Fayetteville State University and NC State University, will work with ECSU to help the HBCU "build greater capacity throughout ECSU's student support and operational units."

"There was even discussion [during the 2014 legislative session of turning ECSU into a branch campus of East Carolina University rather than continuing as an independent institution with its own administration." (See Thru Edu reported Sept. 12th, 2014.)

Indeed, there are indications that there will be a stronger effort to recruit more white students to ECSU, as has happened at other historically black UNC campuses like Fayetteville State University and North Carolina State University. More whites means a greater, more consistent revenue stream, some observers say, since many black students, unfortunately, cannot meet the upgraded system academic requirements, or student loan restrictions.

The UNC Board of Governors, with both the appointment of Interim Chancellor Conway and the multi-campus plan to assist in operations, have now made it known since the departure of Chancellor Jones that, "Elizabeth City State University is an important and essential institution to the University of North Carolina System."

There are some in the ECSU Viking community who do not like the sound of that, and are concerned that it could be the precursor for ECSU to be merged with another UNC System campus, or dramatically changed into something much different than it's HBCU tradition.

Have a Story Idea?

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Correction

The Chronicle apologizes for an error made in a story written by Cash Michaels and printed in The Chronicle on Dec. 31. The article, on page A2, has the headline "2015 ends with more police injustice." The Chronicle erro-

neously reported that the 2,000 teenagers who reportedly rioted at Mall St. Mathew near Louisville, Kentucky, on Saturday, Dec. 26 were "white." Subsequent local reports by area media have proven that in fact, black teenagers were involved. The Chronicle regrets any misunderstanding that may have resulted from this error. The Editor

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