Greetings,

The start of the year did not disappoint. Faculty and staff began the semester on January 2 and the students began classes on January 4. It is great to see more students roaming the campus this year than at this same point last year. The recent abnormally cold weather may have slowed us down for a short spell, but it certainly cannot stymie all of the excitement. We recently celebrated an anniversary; Fisk University is officially 153 years old and we are still dedicated in the pursuit of our mission.

We started the semester by launching a partnership with the Educational Advisory Board (EAB) to implement the Student Success Collaborative. Our first guiding principle in our strategic plan, Transformations 2018-2022, is Transformational Student Experience. We must be very informed and sensitive to students needs at the earliest possible stage to retain at higher rates and elevate the overall satisfaction level of their experience. The Student Success Collaborative is a comprehensive software system which enables faculty and staff to more seamlessly collaborate and communicate regarding students’ needs as well as pinpoint when they may be struggling to produce early alerts. We are working sedulously to ensure we can fully leverage the technology this fall. We are ecstatic about the capabilities it provides to amplify our reach and pool our collective knowledge.

On January 4, I traveled to Phoenix, Arizona to participate in the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) President’s Institute. It was a three-day institute which focused on the commonalities, challenges, and opportunities which are mostly unique to private institutions. I often hear about how higher education is changing, and the opportunity to hear those changes along with the accompanying adjustments real-time are very beneficial. I really enjoyed the institute due to the discussion about presidents being able to conceptualize the unforeseeable, plan for the uncertainty, and see the challenges as opportunities. Some of my Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU) presidential counterparts also spoke of how to harness our collective buying power to enjoy better rates on campus-wide purchases. There certainly was much to digest and reflect upon as we started the new year.

The annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Convocation was held on Thursday, January 17 in the Fisk Memorial Chapel. We were delighted to welcome our convocation speaker, Vann Newkirk II, to campus to impart some words about Dr. King’s legacy. Newkirk II reminded us of all of Dr. King’s legacy and how he had the uncanny ability to empathize and inspire because of his unwavering dedication to being an activist for the most disadvantaged groups. Vann talked about the “sight” Dr. King developed due to prolonged study and deep reflection. Reverend King was able to function as a mirror or megaphone when our community
needed it most. I believe our speaker did a marvelous job of highlighting the lesser known facets of King’s legacy and encouraged the audience to ensure we do not forget the points of his life which were not the inflection points, but the points in between which sustained the effort to immortalize a very caring man. I believe the overarching message was received and I hope everyone in attendance knows it is more about what you do between the high points which ensures you continue to have an impact.

During the evening of January 17 our Office of Career Planning and Development (OCPD) hosted a Fisk Executive Leadership Program (FELP) networking event at the Jefferson Street Café. The event provided our students the opportunity to interact with dozens of our corporate partners, and major Nashville employers, in a more intimate manner to increase their exposure and sharpen their networking skills. I was very impressed with our students’ presence, comportment, and preparedness. Many students parlayed the experience to secure interview opportunities for jobs or internships. We are so thankful to have such meaningful relationships in the Nashville metropolitan area that enable us to have successful events with our students as the central piece.

This semester I have made a commitment to have a student dinner each month. I hosted my first student dinner on January 24. I always enjoy conversing and interacting with our students as they offer a very informative perspective; they are never bashful about sharing their opinion. I believe it is quite important students have an opportunity to speak directly to the source. The mood was light, many laughs were shared, and our students asked perceptive questions while raising some great points throughout out lengthy dialogue. In fact, we exceeded the allotted time for the occasion and neither the students nor myself felt inconvenienced in the slightest. We had many takeaways to follow up on. My experience and grooming comes from student affairs. I do not get the opportunity to convene with students as much as I used to, but I cherish each opportunity because it is a reminder that much progress has been made, and much progress is
Dr. Rome pictured with students at his first student dinner

I would be remiss if I did not encourage everyone reading this communique to make Black History Month (BHM) a month of earnest recognition, reflection, and education. I trust your celebration of the month is sincere and impactful, particularly considering the climate which exists in the United States right now. Affirmation and consideration in this unique time can be a very powerful and positive force. Please attend events, review history, and entertain dialogues about the significant contributions of Black Americans.

We exist for our students and our community. We always have, and forever will, cultivate scholars and leaders.

Fisk today. Fisk tomorrow. Fisk Forever!

All my best,

President Kevin D. Rome, Sr.

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