



A Futuristic Look at West Virginia
From the Sharing the Helm of the Mountain Series by Philanthropy West Virginia
By President Brian Hemphill, Ph.D. - Rising Leader

Dr. Brian O. Hemphill is President of West Virginia State University. He has contributed to numerous journal articles and professional presentations in the areas of leadership, crisis management, ethics, and diversity.

As we reflect on the 150th Anniversary of the state and ponder what shape West Virginia will take in the future, we must develop and articulate goals that allow us to further the workforce and gain economic prosperity for our great state. In our next 150 years, we will see monumental changes across business and industry as well as education. Our leaders and legislators have to be prepared to focus time and energy on meeting ever-changing demands, especially in the growing disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The socioeconomic divide creates a barrier to transforming into a more prosperous community will continue to weigh on our minds. As such, there is a concentrated effort in our state and across the nation to provide affordable health care options for those at a disadvantage and, with that, implementing preventative measures, so that our citizens are living healthier and longer lives. It is time to reengineer our minds in order to thrive in a future world where basic needs like fuel are unrecognizable compared to the form they take today. The face of industry will change and renewable energy initiatives will capture the creative and innovative spirit of West Virginia.

In the realm of higher education, it must be a top priority for us to ensure we are providing access and opportunity for all West Virginians, regardless of race, creed, color or economic background. 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 lifetime pursuit.

Our universities are economic engines for this state. It is important that we realize the impact they can have on the growth of the local, regional and state economy. When we commit to do all we can, we can bridge the knowledge and skill gap, specifically for jobs in some key areas in order to meet the needs of the state.

It will also be critical to engage young people in K – 12 with initiatives that launch leaders into emerging fields such as the STEM disciplines. This sets the stage to attract students who are prepared to matriculate successfully into our higher education institutions, to retain them with involvement in hands-on experiences, and to produce more degree holders to meet workforce demands. Leaders are very mindful that the delivery of higher education will be vastly different decades from now. West Virginia must remain ahead of the curve by analyzing trends and matching our delivery system to the ways in which our student audiences will be receptive. To ensure that West Virginia continues to prosper, I offer this advice. Invest in our people. Invest in our future generations. These are the individuals who will shape and define what West Virginia will look like in the year 2163. If we invest in providing robust, quality experiences for our young people, we will reap the rewards long into the future.

As West Virginia State University becomes the most student-centered, research and teaching, land-grant university in the state of West Virginia and beyond, I ask you to join me as we focus our efforts to make significant progress, and ultimately reach new heights, in the critical areas of education and workforce development. With all of us working together, we can grow into an even more wild and wonderful state.



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