



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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The Evolution of Marshall University

Jerome A. Gilbert, President
Marshall University

Dr. Jerome A. “Jerry” Gilbert became the 37th president of Marshall University in January 2016.

A Mississippi native with a background in biomedical engineering, President Gilbert previously served for nearly six years as provost and executive vice president of Mississippi State University. Before that, he was the university’s associate provost and associate vice president for academic affairs for six years.

He joined the Mississippi State faculty in 1988 and attained the rank of professor in 1993. From 1989-2005, he also served as adjunct clinical assistant professor of orthopedic surgery (research) for the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

President Gilbert was a graduate assistant at Duke University and held previous academic appointments at North Carolina State University and University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) School of Medicine.

In 2014, he was elected to the inaugural board of directors of the Association of Chief Academic Officers. A member of the College of Fellows of the American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering, he also was inducted in the inaugural class of Fellows of the Institute of Biological Engineering, an organization for which he served as president in 2005.

He has a bachelor’s degree in biological engineering from Mississippi State and a doctorate in biomedical engineering from Duke.

I grew up in the Deep South. The hardest thing for Southerners to accept is change. As William Faulkner said, “The past is never dead; it’s not even past.” Change is the antithesis of the order of that region. But I know that those who will succeed and prevail will be those who are able to embrace change.

When I arrived in West Virginia 18 months ago, I discovered it was very southern in many ways, including, sometimes, that reluctance to embrace change.

I learned that Marshall is in healthy financial shape, but that its state funding had been cut \$11.5 million since 2013. I also recognized that the university’s long-standing funding model was close to being non-sustainable.

Something had to give.



Marshall Students pose with the statue of Chief Justice of the United States John Marshall (1755-1835)



A university-wide effort, called Marshall2020, was already in place and had saved \$6.8 million by eliminating 136 vacant positions, consolidating some administrative functions and initiating energy-efficiency measures. But even more needed to be done if we were to transform Marshall into an institution that could thrive in the decades ahead.

It was clear to me that we needed to quickly grow enrollment, expand our base of research funding and increase private giving. All of these revenue-increasing measures involved some level of change in our approach to managing the university.

For enrollment, I set a target of 15,000 students in five years – a 10 percent increase over our current numbers. It is an aggressive target, but one that is attainable if the university can focus strategically on getting our name and message in front of prospective students and their parents. Knowing that communicating our message would be important to our enrollment goals, we rolled out a new marketing campaign around the notion of being a son or daughter of Marshall. This was a tested message that is being received quite positively in West Virginia and strategic national markets. The campaign features television and radio spots, print advertisements, kiosks in airports and shopping malls, billboards and digital advertisements on websites and



Old Main, a symbol of the University, is the oldest structure on the Marshall Campus

As we grow internally as a university, I also want Marshall to be a more engaged and relevant university. We are designing a number of initiatives to connect with municipalities, government agencies, industry and economic development authorities to help stimulate growth in our region. Higher education is a powerful force for the future because it generates new ideas and creates an environment where innovation can flourish.

The goals I have articulated here are all about advancing Marshall to make us a more viable and renowned, comprehensive institution. To succeed, we need to do things differently and evolve with the times.

Our people will be one of the keys to our success. I have spent time over the last year showing our students, alumni, faculty and staff that my intentions are genuine. My goal is to earn their trust because I believe trust of a leader is necessary for people to accept change and be ready to embrace a different approach.

Big changes are beginning to occur at Marshall and will be a driving force in helping make West Virginia an even better place to live and work as we advance education, research and development, as well as outreach to our communities.

In spite of budget challenges at the state level and dynamic changes in higher education at the national level, I think Marshall University's future is extremely bright. So with apologies to Mr. Faulkner, I must say that Marshall will not merely endure: It will prevail. ♡



A Marshall faculty member provides students with an in-class demonstration

social media. The digital advertisements alone have already driven more than 400 applications for admission to Marshall.

I also undertook a step to position our research enterprise for growth. External funding for research at Marshall was \$23 million in 2015 and my goal is to double that amount in five to ten years. We have hired a consultant to help us interface with federal agencies and the staffs of our congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. This effort has already resulted in an uptick in funding to \$29 million in 2016.

In addition to the increased revenue from growing enrollment and expansion of our research base, it was clear to me the support of our alumni and friends also would be vital. The leadership of the Marshall University Foundation Inc. and I have been discussing the need for a comprehensive campaign to engage alumni and friends of the university. One of the priorities in our fund-raising efforts will be need-based scholarships, which will be increasingly important as state funding continues to decrease and tuition necessarily goes up.