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Hooks Conference Will Tout Education as a Civil Right and Economic Driver

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National and local leaders will gather at the University of Memphis next week for a conference that will explore the idea that a quality education should be a constitutional right and create economic opportunities for individuals and their communities. "Education as a Civil Right and Economic Driver: Empowering Individuals for the 21st Century and Beyond" will run April 8-9 in the Rose Theatre. It is sponsored by the University's Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change and is free and open to the public.

Sessions of the conference will cover such topics as the critical role of science education in maintaining U.S. competitiveness, legal challenges and remedies for deficiencies in public education, the economic mobility created by a postsecondary education, and educational reform initiatives in Memphis.

"The timing of this conference coincides with efforts underway both locally and nationally to re-evaluate the outcomes of our educational institutions," said Daphene R. McFerren, director of the Hooks Institute. In a July 2009 report, the Business Leads Institute of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce reported that among 2,000 high schools in the United States, approximately 40 percent of students drop out. In its review of the 2000 Census, the Greater Memphis Partnership Strategic Planning for Community Development reported that for the City of Memphis, approximately 25 percent of 16- to 24-year-old African-American males are neither in school nor employed.

"These statistics show that our local community and our nation are losing some of their most valuable resources, the talents and skills of our youth," said McFerren. "This loss deprives us of the resources that are required to create new technology, to make scientific discoveries, to create businesses and industries, and to enrich our cultural and artistic lives. If not corrected, these losses could have devastating consequences for our future."

Richard D. Legon, president of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges in Washington, D.C., will deliver the plenary address April 8 at 6 p.m. Legon will focus on how higher education can advance the public good.

Steve Perry, founder of Capital Preparatory School in Hartford, Conn., and a CNN education contributor who was also featured on CNN's *Black in America*, will deliver the keynote address April 9 at 6 p.m. Since founding Capital Preparatory, 100 percent of his graduating students have gone on to attend four-year colleges. Perry is recognized for his advocacy for school reform and his commitment to academic excellence, especially with respect to African-American students.

Other nationally known figures who will speak include Bruce Fuchs, director of the Office of Science Education of the National Institutes of Health in Washington, D.C., and John Morton, managing director of the Pew Economic Policy Group of the Pew Charitable Trusts in Washington, D.C.

Speakers will also represent the Southern Education Foundation in Atlanta, the Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, the law school at the University of Baltimore, and West Chester University in Pennsylvania.

Local leaders who will participate in the program include representatives of Shelby County's Office of Early Childhood and Youth, the Memphis New Teacher Project, Leadership Memphis, the Knowledge is Power Program, the Collegiate School of

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Memphis, and Memphis City Schools.

University of Memphis faculty will serve as moderators. They include Provost Ralph Faudree, Dr. Beverly Cross, Dr. Marian Levy, Dr. Andy Meyers, Dr. Daniel Kiel, and Dr. Jonathan Judaken. Other moderators will be members of the Hooks Institute’s advisory board. Coordinating the event is Daphene McFerren.

For more information, contact McFerren at 901-678-3974, or visit the Hooks Institute’s Web site, <http://benhooks.memphis.edu>