2016 Fall Faculty Address

Ralph Wilcox, Provost and Executive Vice President

_Citius, Altius, Fortius: Affirming USF’s Future_

Thank you Dr. Teng, for your kind introduction and for your valued leadership as President of the USF Faculty Senate. I would be remiss if I did not extend my deepest appreciation to our outgoing SFC President and Trustee, Dr. Greg Teague for his tireless efforts in advancing USF. At the same time, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Jim Garey, Chair of the Department of Cell, Molecular and Micro Biology in the College of Arts and Sciences who, as the duly elected Vice President of the USF Faculty Senate and President of the USF System Faculty Council, will serve as Faculty Trustee this year. Faculty governance has been a key ingredient in USF’s emergence as a global research university and I will be the first to point out that it has been the Senate’s vision and thoughtful deliberation, as well as leadership’s constructive partnership with our faculty, which has proven so vital in advancing USF’s academic mission.

Before I begin my remarks today, I want to take a moment to introduce members of the USF leadership team who are in attendance. I ask that you please stand to be recognized and that the audience holds its applause until the end:

- Charles Adams, Dean of the Honors College
- Richard Berman, Interim Dean of the Patel College of Global Sustainability
- Robert Bishop, Dean of the College of Engineering
- Roger Brindley, Interim Dean of the College of Education and System Vice President for USF World
- Jackie Dixon, Dean of the College of Marine Science
- Moez Limayem, Dean of the Muma College of Business
- James Moy, Dean of the College of the Arts
- Julie Serovich, Dean of the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences
- Bob Sullins, Dean of Undergraduate Studies
- Todd Chavez, Dean of the USF Libraries
- Phil Kramer, Director, Florida Institute of Oceanography
- Sri Sridharan, Director, Florida Center for Cybersecurity
Collectively, this team represents an amazingly talented group of professional colleagues that I learn from daily – a team that will, in part, be renewed in the coming year as we seek new leadership in education, nursing, undergraduate studies, and the Patel College of Global Sustainability.

Of course, we all owe a great debt of gratitude to our university president with whom I’ve had the privilege of working for 15 years, longer than any other in my career, and there’s a good reason for that. USF is indeed fortunate to have a visionary, tireless advocate as president and one who, most importantly, embraces the core values of the academy grounded in excellence and understands and supports the essential role that the faculty must play in promoting freedom of thought and building a great research university. Please join me in thanking President Judy Genshaft, whose energetic leadership, dogged determination, and unwavering commitment to our mission has guided us through periods of uncertainty in higher education and has set us on what is nothing short of an extraordinary trajectory of success and an optimistic path to the future.
Okay, so looking at the title of this year’s Fall Address, you are probably wondering whether your Provost has simply become intoxicated by the stories and spectacle of the 31st Olympiad in Rio de Janeiro? Those sporting aficionados among you will recognize that *Citius, Altius, Fortius* – Latin for Faster, Higher, Stronger – is the Olympic motto which, I believe, you will find to be most apropos in describing the next phase of USF’s strategic surge forward.

As many of you know, we took one more BIG step forward this summer when the Florida Board of Governors designated USF as the State’s first Emerging Preeminent University, something you will hear more about during the President’s USF System Fall Address, right here, on Wednesday September 7, starting at 2:00 pm.

Today, I am more convinced than ever that the secret to our success (and that of other great research universities) has been, and will continue to be, our ability to first identify the potential, then unleash and harness the intellectual capital of our increasingly talented faculty and students, as we continue to cultivate and promote a climate of inquiry characterized by innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, contemporary relevance, and meaningful impact. Moreover, it’s been our thoughtful planning driven by focus and discipline in execution around our four strategic pillars: Research, Student Success, Partnership, and building a more predictable Financial Foundation that has brought us to this point. Yet the truth is, today we can and must do better!

A recent report entitled *Class of 2030: Which Universities will rise – and how will they do it?* spelled-out six essential ingredients for institutional success over the next decade:

- Differentiated Excellence,
- Local, Social and Global Relevance,
- Integrated Planning,
- People and Culture,
- Academic Entrepreneurship, and
- Research Quality.
Identified by the authors as young, innovative and nimble “Challenger universities”, I am pleased to share with you that we are “on target”, a reality brought home earlier this week when we learned that our ranking among US public universities in the annual Academic Rankings of World Universities (sometimes referred to as the Shanghai Jiao Tong rankings) has climbed to 42 up from 49 last year. Given the increasingly competitive landscape of higher education today, in the United States and around the World, satisfaction in what we’ve accomplished and complacency in our actions represent our greatest constraints. To be clear, even as we embrace a new budget model that will challenge colleges to be more thoughtful in resource allocation and accountable in performance, and will raise the expectations of support units to enhance the range and quality of services they provide, we WILL NOT veer from our well-worn strategic path forward. As we strive to improve our performance on statewide measures, and drive hard toward Preeminence and our vision of eligibility for membership in the Association of American Universities, we MUST RAISE our own expectations and those of our students and colleagues – and we have done just that this year by establishing clear, bold and measurable performance benchmarks for each college. Known as the Planning, Performance, and Accountability Matrix (or simply the PPA), college goals have been set for Student Enrollment (including Student Profile, Education Abroad and Online Education); Net Tuition; Student Success; Talent, Rankings and Reputation (including Philanthropic Support); along with Research and Innovation.

I have challenged our deans to work with you to conduct a comprehensive review of “like” colleges, departments and programs at public AAU institutions and to utilize Academic Analytics, InCites and other available tools to better understand “the competition”, their performance profiles, our relative position and what it will take “to move the needle”.

Lest there be any doubt, Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity IS the differentiator for USF as we strive to elevate our reputation both nationally and internationally. As you can see, USF is already well positioned as a leading research institution in Florida and compares well with public AAU institutions on such measures as Total and Federal Research Expenditures, Postdoctoral Appointees, Invention Disclosures, Patents, Licenses and Options Executed, and Startups.
Designated by the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities as an Innovation and Economic Prosperity University, and one of only 54 across the country, today the National Science Foundation ranks USF 25th in the nation among public universities for total research expenditures, and we’re ranked 9th for U.S. granted patents.

As USF’s research rankings and reputation have grown, so have the expectations of our local community, our statewide leaders, as well as our national and global partners. Today, we can take pride in the university’s first Research Strategic Plan, approved by the USF Board of Trustees this summer. Shaped by a broadly representative USF System planning committee led by Drs. Ed Funai and Sudeep Sarkar, it is framed around the core principles of Collaboration, Impact, and Visibility. The plan identifies six areas of research focus aligned with national and global priorities: (1) Brain and spinal cord (including aging, Alzheimer’s, hearing loss, and neuroscience), (2) Data science (including data analytics, digital humanities, health informatics, and visualization), (3) Heart (spanning basic, translational and clinical research – including medical engineering), (4) Human security (including cybersecurity, global security, food and health security, promoting civil societies, and social networks), (5) Research translation (focusing on the commercialization of discoveries, partnerships with business and industry, and startups), and (6) Water (including marine science, natural hazards, and sustainability). In shaping this framework, careful thought has been given to the complementary and valued contributions that can and must be made by faculty and students in the arts, humanities, social sciences and professional colleges, in addition to the natural and physical sciences, engineering and medicine. Indeed, it should be clear to all of us that the inherent complexity of the identified areas of research focus, will demand multidisciplinary perspectives and collaborative inquiry as together we search for innovative and high impact solutions.

Our research performance outcomes are clearly aligned with the USF Strategic Plan for 2013-2018, Florida Performance Based Funding and Preeminence benchmarks, as well as AAU priorities and so, together, we must ensure that USF’s increasing research productivity is more rigorous, competitive (particularly at the federal level), relevant and meaningful. Such will be essential to growing our national and global reputation. While the achievement of research expectations rests squarely on the shoulders of our faculty, students and dedicated professional
staff, they are integrated into the College PPA Matrices with the expectation of significantly raising our performance in such areas as the number, quality and value of competitive grant proposals submitted, total and federal research expenditures, effective “F & A” indirect rate, citation impact, doctorates awarded, postdoctoral appointees, invention disclosures, patents issued, licensing revenue and start-up companies. It is our collective performance in these metrics that will, in part, assure future earnings and will guide strategic investments in personnel, programs, instrumentation, and space. The formula is clear and faculty members, programs, departments and colleges must adapt to the “stepped up” role they play in advancing USF’s research agenda.

While USF’s gains in Student Success over the past few years have been without match in American higher education, we cannot afford to take our eyes off the goal. Your contributions, and those of our dedicated staff and talented students, have moved us closer to a position of respectability with our aspirational peers, yet we still have much work to do. Our admissions team needs your active support in recruiting the best and brightest students from throughout Florida, across the nation, and around the world especially as the pool of qualified applicants to four-year colleges in this country continues to shrink. After all, theirs is the raw, intellectual material that will challenge us all in the classroom, laboratory and wider community, eventually raising our profile and reputation. In particular, we must give much greater attention to graduate student recruitment and improving the business practices associated with graduate admissions at USF. If we are to enroll more talented graduate students we must change the paradigm at USF and engage more actively in the recruitment and decision-making process. You can be assured that our competitors are NOT waiting around.

In the coming weeks and months you will be hearing more about USF’s FUSE initiative, as we create, promote, and implement intentional 2 + 2 pathways to USF baccalaureate degree completion in collaboration with our Florida State College partners where, incidentally, enrollment IS on the rise. In much the same way that our College of Engineering has created an innovative curricula “bridge” for students beginning their studies at USF Sarasota-Manatee and graduating here in Tampa, so FUSE will allow us to admit students to USF, at the same time as they are admitted to any of seven regional state colleges, contingent upon their fulfilling the
rigors of a well-defined academic pathway into our university. Remember, these are “our” students from the outset and we will be calling upon you to connect with them even as they are completing their first two years at a state college.

While the thought of a 90 percent freshman retention rate appeared out of reach just a few years ago – and we are making remarkable headway – still, too many students stop out, drop out, or otherwise leave us. Together we must do a better job to engage and retain them at higher levels. We must continue to raise our graduation rates: 4 years for freshmen, 2 years for transfer students, and accelerate time to degree for graduate students, to a level consistent with the very best public research universities in the nation. At the same time, we expect a reduction in the number of excess hours (that is, coursework that is not required for degree completion), therefore making a USF education more affordable. We anticipate that these changes will further diminish the incidence and level of debt burden on our graduates, a reality that is rightly plaguing higher education today. This direction is, of course, aligned with the State’s mantra of “Finish in Four and Save More”, a goal that will ultimately better serve our students, their families, and our university.

As USF led the way in becoming one of the nation’s first institutions to appoint a Vice Provost for Student Success five years ago, so this year our examination of how we might provide a more focused alignment of support services led to the appointment of Dr. Paul Dosal as Vice President for Student Affairs and Student Success, effectively integrating the critical and complementary work of student affairs, student success, and undergraduate studies. Yet, as we have come to learn, Student Success cannot be a “top down” movement and the faculty-student relationship remains central to enhancing both the USF students’ experience and their academic success.

We expect to see more and more of our students (and graduates) earning prestigious national awards: Boren, Churchill, Fulbright, Gates Cambridge, Gilman, Goldwater, Udall, and eventually Truman, Marshall, and Rhodes scholarships, along with NSF Graduate Research Fellowships, so better positioning and supporting them for postgraduate study at the most prestigious graduate and professional programs around the world. This is a critical component in
strengthening our institutional reputation, and our Office of National Scholarships needs your help in identifying, nominating, and mentoring our most competitive prospects.

For those graduates who elect to enter the workforce upon graduation we have a heavy responsibility for assuring that their USF education has prepared them to compete and lead successfully in the global marketplace. To that end, we must continue to assess the RIGOR and RELEVANCE of our general education, majors’, and graduate curricula, to ensure they are meeting the needs of employers, providing our graduates with the essential knowledge base, workplace experiences, skills and competencies that match the requirements of high need, high skilled, and high paid employment. Grounded in the Liberal Arts and Sciences our curriculum must define what it means to be a USF graduate today, equipped with a broad base of knowledge and well-honed skills in such core dimensions as: critical thinking and analytical reasoning; communication (in written, oral and digital form); computational and data literacy (including data collection, verification, management and protection, manipulation and analysis, interpretation, reporting and visualization, utilization and implementation); complex problem-solving through research; teamwork; leadership and integrity; entrepreneurship and innovation; and global literacy. To this end, I have asked Dr. Bill Cummings, Professor and Interim Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives in the Office of Undergraduate Studies, to engage with the Faculty Senate, colleges and other stakeholders to lead a university-wide assessment of our general education program and to facilitate necessary adjustments to ensure that our curricula are best serving the needs of our students today as we seek to prepare them for a lifetime career and meaningful contributions through civic engagement. At the same time, I have asked deans to work with departments to ensure that ALL students who are contemplating employment upon graduation are provided an opportunity to complete a high value field-based experience: an internship, practicum, or residency, as part of their degree requirements.

Moreover, and as you have seen, each of our colleges have refreshed goals relating to increased student participation in Education Abroad. As we pride ourselves in being a globally engaged university, and promote the Global Citizens Project as our Quality Enhancement Plan, NOW is
the time to speak with your department chair, dean, Vice President Brindley and colleagues in USF World to plan for new and continuing educational abroad programs in 2017.

In short, we must demonstrate greater agility in our response to changing conditions and needs in much the way that we have in shaping new academic directions in behavioral healthcare, cybersecurity, data analytics, digital humanities and visualization. You, as faculty members, have a primary responsibility for critically assessing, reimagining, and redesigning your curricula in the coming months and our award winning team in Innovative Education and the USF Libraries are here to help – they will continue to serve as high value partners whether in expanding access and success through online degree and certificate programs or developing digital content and delivery platforms to enhance face-to-face learning. This time last year I profiled the creative, high quality work of Dr. Jennifer Schneider, Associate Professor in the College of Education, who was in the midst of developing a new, open source textbook entitled *The Inside, Outside, and Upside Downs of Children’s Literature... from Poets and Pop-ups to Princesses and Porridge.* I wanted to take a moment to update you on her progress. Jennifer, a recent Fulbright US Scholar, released her e-book earlier this year and, in the first four months, has registered 621 downloads worldwide. Most important, this project saved USF students enrolled in her Children’s Literature course this Summer, more than $17,000 and we expect these savings to grow to nearly $50,000 throughout this academic year. Textbook affordability continues to be a high priority for USF and is an integral part of our Student Success initiative.

The state-of-the-art curriculum design work continues at USF and I’d like to highlight a new open source textbook on *Statistics for Engineers* being authored by Dr. Kingsley Reeves, Associate Professor in the College of Engineering,

These are the kind of collaborative opportunities that we provide you, our faculty, through Innovative Education, the USF Libraries, and the Academy for Teaching and Learning Excellence, as you seek to more fully engage our Generation Z students through digital learning along their path to academic success.
Indeed, accelerating gains in research productivity and profile while continuing our improvements in student success will demand a renewed focus on FACULTY SUCCESS. Meeting our ambitious goals in the coming year will, in large part, be dependent upon our ability to recruit, mentor, support, reward and retain an optimal balance of full-time, research intensive and instructional faculty talent. We must embrace new strategies to compete successfully for new, high potential and proven researchers while ensuring that our undergraduate and graduate students continue to be provided a world class education delivered by more full-time faculty colleagues. Yes, it’s a difficult challenge yet one that, perhaps more than any other, we must “get right” and balance as we pave USF’s future to institutional excellence.

As we set our agenda for the coming year we must do so with the fullest recognition of a broader national and global backdrop, particularly in the face of heated political campaigns leading up to November’s presidential election. We must remain cognizant of the impact that they can, and likely will, have on our academic community. From patent distrust in political leadership; to racial, gender and religious intolerance; unemployment, wage stagnation, and economic inequality; immigration and the related debate between nativism and globalization – the resultant broad divisions and tensions are all the more reason why USF must remain focused and disciplined, guided by an institutional compass: our mission, vision, values, and goals.

Of course, that isn’t to suggest that somehow we seek to isolate ourselves in a utopian cocoon. Indeed, if we are to instill an authentic sense of hope and optimism across our campus community we must challenge the sometimes unhealthy and ill-grounded rhetoric and face up to a reality that can, as we have witnessed across this nation, serve to unravel an institution that has worked hard to value difference and inclusion while seeking to eliminate intolerance and prejudice. We must continue to encourage rational and civil discourse in and out of the classroom, to engage in debate and respect for the “other”, and to continue our tradition of facing up to the most difficult social, political and economic issues of the day. At USF we will continue to engage students, faculty and staff in constructive conversations framed around “Mobilizing the Dream”, as together we seek to better understand and find solutions to concerns that have been more broadly articulated by the Black Lives Matter movement in higher education:
recruiting and retaining more black students, faculty, and administrators; improving the black student experience; and working to strengthen cultural competency across campus.

Throughout, we will strive to provide members of our academic community with the safe and secure environment within which constructive debate can flourish. For that, we are grateful to our student and faculty leaders, and to our university police officers who daily bring their professionalism to bear in allowing us to live our university and community values. While I refuse to succumb to Pollyanna tendencies in the face of the harsh reality witnessed across the nation and around the World today, I am confident that with a shared commitment we WILL instill a climate of hope and optimism, as trust, respect, and pride triumph over prejudice in creating a caring and respectful community at USF.

In less than 72 hours, we expect to welcome upward of 42,000 students to the USF Tampa campus. Among them will be the most academically gifted freshman class, and cohort of MD students, in the history of USF. With a new freshman academic profile that averages 1226 on the SAT, and 28 on the ACT, along with a mean HS GPA of 4.08, and an average MCAT score of 34, placing the Morsani College of Medicine’s incoming class in the top quintile of U.S. medical schools, we have a lot to be proud of. These students, highlighted here by the current class admitted to the USF STEM Academy sponsored by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, will rightly challenge us all to meet their high expectations and will, in so many ways, be the class around which USF’s national and global reputation is built. As we begin a new year, I invite you to join us in WOW, a Week of Welcome, sponsored by New Student Connections.

Today, USF is exceedingly well-positioned to build on our strong foundation in Research and Student Success and I want to thank you, our dedicated faculty and staff, for bringing us to this point. However, it is now time to leave our satisfaction with incremental growth behind, to elevate our expectations and hasten our progress with a mind toward achieving breakthrough performance. To this end, you have my commitment, and that of our leadership team, that we
are here to serve and support you as, together, we embrace the Olympic motto: *Citius, Altius, Fortius* – Faster, Higher, Stronger – in significantly advancing USF’s position in the year ahead.

Thank you.