Good afternoon, and thank you President Levy for your kind remarks and introduction. As you rightly point out, close alignment and collaboration between USF leadership, the Faculty Senate and, indeed, Student Government and other stakeholders is essential to the University’s continuing strategic progress. I know it’s a commitment shared by President Genshaft and I am proud of the “progress through partnership” we have made of late, particularly in updating our tenure and promotion guidelines for the first time since 1998.

This is the seventh occasion upon which I, as provost, have had the privilege to welcome our faculty to the beginning of a new academic year – to reflect upon the recent past, to celebrate our collective accomplishments, to gauge the landscape of higher education in Florida and beyond, and to frame our collective agenda for the coming year.

Today, innovation and tension continue to permeate higher education as universities seek to adapt to changing conditions, inside and outside the academy:

- New students,
- New and competing providers,
- New questions about the nature, necessity and relevance of higher education,
- New expectations, especially with regard to enhanced performance accountability,
- New technologies, and
- New political and fiscal realities.

While the rapid period of transformation that we have witnessed in higher education over the past six or seven years has been variously described as Disruptive Innovation or Creative Destruction, the truth is that today most universities likely find themselves positioned somewhere in between.
Although the recent past has been characterized as uncertain, turbulent and even, at times, hostile toward higher education, for USF and many other universities across Florida and the nation, it has also been immensely satisfying as we have responded with a strong and characteristic sense of optimism and creativity, accounting for a remarkable record of strategic progress around our priorities of Student Success, Research and Innovation, Partnership, and Strengthening our Financial Base.

We have solidified our Carnegie classification as a doctoral university with very high research activity, and advanced toward our vision of being “a global research university dedicated to student success and positioned for membership in the Association of American Universities”. All this as the USF System led the 11 state universities last year in performance on the three-metric model, and earned a second-place position based on this year’s 10-metric model.

Our biggest challenge in the coming years will be to balance these performance expectations by further reinforcing our top tier Carnegie classification; continuing our drive toward AAU eligibility and Florida Pre-eminence; while keeping our eye on those important metrics tracked by the Florida Board of Governors – performance against which promises future funding for our university.

I am confident that USF is prepared to meet this challenge. Finding the right balance will require careful planning, strategic investments, disciplined execution, and transparent accountability. This time last year I concluded my remarks with nine (9) broad goals, ranging from recruiting, rewarding, retaining, and optimizing intellectual talent, USF’s primary asset; to continuing our impressive gains in research and student success; expanding innovative education; “landing” the Florida Center for Cybersecurity; growing partnerships, including internships, with business and industry; and strengthening our institution’s financial profile.

We have made much progress on these goals due, in large part, to the efforts of so many in this room today. Of course, we must thank the state legislature for its support of performance funding, establishment of the Florida Center for Cybersecurity and additional funding for the Florida Institute of Oceanography, along with capital investments in the USF Heart Institute and the Morsani College of Medicine. When we combine new funding for USF St. Petersburg and USF Sarasota-Manatee, along with statutory changes to assure affordable access to
Florida’s public universities for veterans and children without legal status, the 2013 Legislative Session was far and away USF’s most successful in recent history. Today, we are witnessing much greater stability in support for higher education in Florida.

In addition to finding ourselves on a much firmer financial footing, in the past year, together, we have:

- Cemented our position in the National Science Foundation’s top 50 research universities based on total research funding and #2, public or private, in the State of Florida,
- Earned a ranking of 12th in the world among universities granted US patents,
- Established the Florida Center for Cybersecurity within USF,
- Achieved unprecedented performance in Student Success,
- Ranked #7 nationally on Sierra Magazine’s list of “Cool Schools”,
- Retained our strong institutional credit rating by Moody’s, and
- Ratified a 3-year agreement with the United Faculty of Florida that will allow the university to reward our faculty’s performance at a level not seen in recent years.

Speaking of our faculty, over the past year, we have celebrated the election and/or appointment of six (6) AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) Fellows, seven (7) NSF Career Award winners, a two-time GRAMMY nominee, a National Humanities Center Fellow, a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, an Institute for Advanced Study Fellow, two (2) Sloan Fellows, a Rome Prize winner, a Hench (American Antiquarian Society) Fellow, and twelve (12) Fulbright recipients. Each one of these awards supports our AAU aspirations. While our faculty have shone, so have our students.

Through support from the Office of National Scholarships (ONS), USF students continue to lead the state in the number of Fulbright, Gilman, Goldwater, Hollings, Marshall, NASA, Pickering, Tillman and Udall scholars. We will continue to strengthen ONS in the coming year while expanding and seeking to more fully integrate opportunities provided by the Office of Undergraduate Research allowing students to fully leverage the advantage of studying at a top tier research university.
**Student Success**

The story of undergraduate Student Success remains a point of great pride for USF as our student profile, retention and progression, completion and placement rates have followed very healthy trends. Indeed, there are few, if any, universities across this nation who have registered the impressive gains in graduation rates that we have over the past few years. Thank you for your good work to this end, and to Drs. Paul Dosal and Tom Miller for their leadership. There remains much work to be done: for while we expect to enroll well over 600 freshmen in our Honors College next week, which will be the largest or second largest class ever, we want to see improvements in our overall student academic profile, along with continuing gains in geographical diversity. And, while we are proud of our improvements we are not yet satisfied, for too many of our students are graduating with debt and with excess hours which carries a heavy penalty for both student and the university.

As we continue our path toward higher levels of student achievement, you will see space improvements in our 24/5 Library, including the Media Center and our Academic Success Center that delivers tutoring, our revolutionary SMART Lab, and the Writing Studio. It’s interesting to note that over the past 5 years we have seen the number of students stopping by the Academic Success Center almost triple while the total number of student visits has increased twelvefold. That’s a good thing! Today we are just as likely to find a B+ student who is striving for an A, entering the Academic Success Center, as we are the student who is struggling “to keep his or her head above water”.

While we are contemplating the launch of the Fall 2014 semester, our Office of Admissions is already working on the Fall 2015 class of incoming students as they continue their efforts in support of high ability in-state, out-of-state, international and veteran student recruitment. Expanding the geographical diversity of our student body is essential to a global research university like USF.

In addition to further developing Ellucian’s *Degree Works* to more fully implement degree audit and ATLAS tracking applications, we have recently joined the *Civitas Learning Community* in utilizing big data to yield predictive analyses in helping to better prepare and place our students and to guide them more effectively to graduation.
In the coming year we will continue our disciplined approach to enrollment management with a focus on student quality input, throughput and output. Our goal is to yield more full-time enrollment and, thus, realize an accelerated and more cost-effective path to graduation. Students will be supported by new “Wintersession” and “Maymester” offerings, innovative Summer@USF programming, a widening menu of Education Abroad opportunities, together with an expanded array of online learning. Today, 63% of USF students take at least one course online, with distance learning enrollment growing 9% year-over-year. Last academic year, 104,000 “seats” were filled in 2,800 online sections accounting for 24% of the total enrollment at USF. Most importantly, USF students can now complete their general education requirements online. In the past year, Innovative Education has invested $1.4 M in statutorily-managed distance learning fees, in the development and delivery of new online courses and more investment is planned for the coming year. Yet, even as we hear the mantra “more clicks, fewer bricks” reverberate across higher education, I am not convinced by the doomsayer who would render the traditional college campus obsolete.

Nevertheless, embracing emerging technologies such as robotics, gamification, 3-D scanning and printing, advanced visualization, along with augmented and virtual reality, as constructive complements to student learning and research will continue to be important at USF. Yet, as we know, technology mediated learning raises a host of questions ranging from student authentication, to classroom capture, privacy and IP ownership. Accordingly, I will be working closely with the Faculty Senate in the coming year in an effort to address these important matters.

While it is true that our Student Success efforts have primarily focused on our undergraduate student population, I have tasked Dean Dwayne Smith with leading a USF-wide study of graduate student success. As we acknowledge the different expectations associated with professional and research pathways to a postgraduate degree, the key questions are not dissimilar to those at the undergraduate level: Are we attracting the most talented students? Do we need to consider curriculum re-design? How can we better support our students along their path to academic success? And how do our retention, progression, completion and placement rates compare with those at aspirational universities? With approximately one quarter of our students now pursuing a graduate degree, we must bring greater institutional focus to their success.
Indeed, my primary goal is to see all USF students complete an intellectually rigorous and highly valued degree on a timely pace, without debt, and equipped with the knowledge, skills and experiences essential to competing successfully along their path to graduate and professional school or into the workforce.

Affordable access will remain a top priority and we will continue to carefully balance quality and value. Many of you have identified the high cost of textbooks as a growing financial burden for our students. While copies of all textbooks are placed on short term loan in the Library, we will explore the possibility of extending affordable access to e-textbooks at USF. Moreover, today I am announcing the launch of a new pilot program for USF faculty members interested in authoring their own digital textbooks for use in class. Beginning with applications this Fall we will, through support from Innovative Education and the USF Libraries, provide faculty release time and technical support during Spring and Summer 2015 to create high quality, open source textbooks for use in high demand online classes.

At the same time, our faculty must engage meaningfully in the nationwide dialogue around credit for prior learning and experience known as competency-based learning, although I much prefer the term “mastery-based learning”. The Atlantic recently selected “Earning College Credit for What You Know” as one of its top five higher education trends for this year, and even MIT has identified it as a priority for their “institutional futures” task force. Higher education continues to be blamed for the gap between the traditional four year, 120 credit hour model for baccalaureate degree delivery and workforce needs. With a growing lack of confidence in learning outcomes, or the knowledge, skills, and competencies that the 21st century workforce demands we, like others, must take a critical look at our offerings. Accordingly, I have asked Dean Bob Sullins to work with faculty to better understand the potential of such personalized, curricular innovation at USF so that we are ready to respond to the call for greater relevance while assuring academic quality associated with a USF degree.
Research & Innovation

While students remain our primary raison d’être, it’s our commitment to research and innovation that differentiates us from so many other colleges and universities across Florida and the nation.

We continue to grow our total and federal research expenditures, positioning USF among the nation’s top 50 public or private research universities. With $443 M in Total Research Expenditures in FY 2012, the National Science Foundation ranked USF 43rd nationally and 27th among public universities.

Yet one must reach beyond these numbers to fully appreciate the impact of our colleagues’ work. A tour of USF research, scholarly and creative pursuits might take you to the Florida Panhandle to witness the work of Drs. Erin Kimmerle, Antoinette Jackson, Christian Wells and their students who are seeking answers to long held questions surrounding the Dozier School for Boys; to the pages of Nature to better understand the significance of Dr. Jason Rohr’s research that uncovered amphibians’ “acquired resistance” to fungal pathogens; or Dr. Lorie Fridell’s timely work on racial profiling and police officers; Derek Harvey’s widely read scholarship on ISIS and warring factions around the world; to the recent winner of the Cade Museum Prize for Innovation, Dr. Daniel Yeh and his NEWgenerator technology that turns waste into fertilizer, renewable energy and clean water; or Brian Andres and colleagues who discovered and named the earliest and most primitive pterodactyloid that flew above the earth some 163 million years ago. As you well know, I would thoroughly enjoy devoting this whole hour to highlighting equally significant contributions made by hundreds of USF professors and students to science, scholarship, and the betterment of society. Please know that every contribution you make has a positive impact on USF, Florida, and the lives of people across the world.

At the same time, our performance on measures associated with commercialization of discovery: through disclosures (185>190); patents (from 76>113); licenses (75>91); and new startup companies (9>11) have shown impressive gains over the past year (from FY 2013>FY 2014), placing USF as one of the nation’s leaders in technology transfer. Today, our students can nurture their own startups through USF’s Student Innovation Incubator.
Our commitment to innovation is perhaps no better evidenced than through the establishment of the National Academy of Inventors, the brainchild of Dr. Paul Sanberg. Next month, Tampa will host the inaugural celebration of the Florida Inventors Hall of Fame, when the first six inductees, including Thomas Edison, John Gorrie “the father of air conditioning”, and USF’s own Shyam Mohapatra will be recognized.

While USF claims a proud record in research we must continue to “raise our game”, competing more successfully for external funding to support basic and applied work, together with exploring innovative pathways to the marketplace.

As we continue to reinvest in our research enterprise at USF, we must ensure that our labs and instrumentation remain on the leading edge, allowing our scientists and engineers to compete with those across the globe. Together, USF leadership is building a sustainable plan to expand, equip and support state-of-the-art research space and, most importantly, to recruit and retain the talent we need to grow.

I am firmly convinced that one of USF’s distinct advantages is interdisciplinary collaboration. Today’s most exciting, complex and pervasive problems are frequently found in the space between disciplines, departments and colleges. Accordingly, the most promising solutions will be found through partnership. Federal agencies recognize this, and Dr. Lockwood and I are committed to working with the deans across USF Health and Academic Affairs to reduce barriers to collaboration and to leverage USF’s complementary strengths. This will mean more joint appointments and cluster hiring to avoid duplication of talent as we focus on matching USF’s strengths with regional, national and global priorities including, climate change and oceanography; natural hazards, the environment and sustainability; the utility and seeming ubiquity of big data analytics; data assurance and cybersecurity; global health and infectious diseases; globalization, civil society and conflict; diabetes and autoimmune disorders; drug discovery and innovation; and integrated neurosciences.

As the number of competitive federal grant proposals increase we are confident that USF’s research enterprise will also flourish.
Partnerships

Interdisciplinary partnerships across USF represent only one collaborative dimension. I have no doubt that, second only to the intellectual capital represented by our faculty and students, our location in the Tampa Bay region represents a powerful competitive advantage. Tampa Bay, along with the state’s other most populous regions, in Orlando and Miami, is the reason that you will be hearing more and more about the combined power of the Metropolitan University Consortium of USF, UCF and FIU. These institutions are “home” to nearly half of the students enrolled in the State University System; 48% of the degrees awarded and 44% of STEM degrees; 38% of degrees awarded to African Americans, 66% of degrees awarded to Hispanics, and 51% of degrees awarded to Pell recipients. You will recall, it was USF, UCF and FIU that, in partnership, won $8.5 M (or 57%) of the TEAm Grant funding awarded this year by the Board of Governors to help close the state’s workforce gap in Accounting and Information Technology.

Closer to home, we can count on a vast range of opportunities and support presented by business and industry, a significant network of healthcare providers, CENTCOM and SOCOM at MacDill Air Force Base, and the 8th largest school district in the nation.

As a Carnegie-designated Community Engaged University it makes good sense that we provide more internship, co-op and residency opportunities to strengthen our students’ likelihood of employment upon graduation. To this end we have, in partnership with Student Government and Student Affairs, significantly ramped-up Career Services at USF. It is my expectation that the range and quality of experiential learning programs will soon become the very reason why (a) many students choose to enroll at USF, (b) employers hire our graduates, and (c) employers invest in our university’s academic and research programs. Preparing a talent pipeline to meet the needs of Tampa Bay’s workforce, and conducting relevant research on behalf of our local stakeholders, is the reason why USF is the regional economic engine for Tampa Bay.

At the same time we recognize our responsibility to prepare leaders for the global marketplace. Under Dr. Roger Brindley’s leadership, and with support from INTO USF and International Admissions, USF World has done a remarkable job in
expanding the global diversity of our student body. While Education Abroad provides our students and faculty with a widening array of opportunities to explore different countries and cultures. The story of INTO USF is particularly impressive. Launched in Fall 2010 with just 450 students, this week the Center expects to welcome upward of 900 international students to their Academic English and pathway programs. Just this past year, an estimated 150 former INTO students graduated from USF.

Oftentimes, our students are fortunate to be supported by hard-earned national scholarships, such as Fulbrights, Gilmans and Marshalls, along with USF-sponsored “Passport Scholarships” as they venture out into the world. We also rely on international sponsored students to bring new ideas and perspectives to USF so you can imagine how thrilled I was to learn that, beginning in 2015, the US-UK Fulbright Commission will sponsor both a PhD student award and a postdoctoral fellow award at USF in the name of President Judy Genshaft. This is to my knowledge the first award of its kind.

There is no more important time to embed global literacy into our curricula than the present. Recognizing the seemingly constant political instability around the world today, we have a responsibility to examine sometimes uncomfortable and dissenting viewpoints, and to engage through intellectually honest and robust debate guided by the principle of civil discourse. As part of our SACS reaffirmation process, USF students, faculty and staff have selected the *Global Citizens Project* as the theme for our required quality enhancement plan. Throughout the coming semester you will be hearing more about this important initiative from Dr. Karla Davis-Salazar, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Chair of USF’s QEP Steering Committee.

**A Strong and Sustainable Economic Base**

Few of these accomplishments would have been possible, and certainly our vision would be but a dream, were it not for a strong and sustainable financial future. While we can all acknowledge that higher education’s economic path has been bumpy over the past few years, today we find ourselves in a much stronger position.
Again, we are grateful for the state’s investment in USF, a university that has consistently been a top performer. Most recently, the USF System scored among the top 3 of 11 universities in 8 of 10 metrics coming 5th in 6-year graduation rate ~ which we know remains on an impressive upward trajectory, yet in 9th place, with only 56% of our students graduating without excess hours. The good news is that we landed second in the state university system overall even though we still have much to do!

New performance-based funding has allowed us to reinvest in financial aid, information technology and academic tracking, while hiring new faculty in the coming year.

Through the leadership of John Long and Nick Trivunovich, USF maintained its credit rating this year at Aa2 or very strong (the same as UF and FSU) even as the likes of the Universities of California, Illinois and Kansas experienced a downgrade by Moody’s. In fact, Moody’s downgraded three dozen 4 year colleges and universities in the past year. So why does our credit rating matter? First, it is important that we align with fiscally healthy peers. Because these ratings take into account such factors as enrollment, student demand, affordability, state support, sponsored research, institutional debt, cash and investments, the ratio of debt to operating revenue along with private giving, and we should all be excited at our progress toward the $1.0 B goal of USF’s Unstoppable fundraising campaign. In short, it represents a reasonable gauge of the university’s general health and wellbeing. And, of course, viewed as an institutional “credit rating” it impacts the cost of loans that the university can secure, especially for capital development.

And so…

The more than 40,000 students who are expected to start classes here beginning on Monday (with closer to 50,000 expected across the USF System), can be confident of having selected “a global research university dedicated to student success” for the current leg of their educational journey.

A university that is committed to continuing gains in (a) student success (b) faculty success through research and innovation, together with (c) local and global partnerships to enhance USF students’ competitive position to enter graduate and professional school or the workforce
In addition, this year will bring added focus to developing a clear, coherent and coordinated plan to leverage our complementary strengths through a USF System STEM Collaborative. Today, USF is second in the State University System for both undergraduate and graduate STEM degree productivity, measures associated with performance funding. There is impressive STEM-based research being conducted here as well as at USF St. Petersburg and USF Sarasota-Manatee. USF and the Tampa Bay Region can, and should, become a statewide and national hub for STEM activity, and I invite you to engage in shaping the future of STEM education and research in our region through this Collaborative that will launch in a few weeks.

It’s quite remarkable that I’ve made it to this point with barely a mention of our upcoming reaffirmation of accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This was a focus of mine last year and, quite frankly, continues to be the highest, non-negotiable priority for all of us. Guided by Dr. Steve RiCharde, our self-study is undergoing final review by the leadership team prior to submission and we will welcome the SACS visiting team to campus next Spring. In the past, I’ve urged us to be guided by the principles of access, affordability and accountability. As we begin the new academic year I ask that you please keep rigor, relevance and responsibility foremost in your mind.

Before closing, let me invite you to attend President Genshaft’s 2014 State of the USF System Address, scheduled for Wednesday September 24 at 2:00 pm in the Marshall Student Center.

As many of you have heard me say before, our university would be an empty place without the intellectual capital that represents the heart and soul of any great academic community – it is you, along with our talented students, and dedicated professional staff who lay claim to the quite remarkable and successful story that USF has told throughout President Genshaft’s tenure. It is your collective contributions – in the classroom, the laboratory, and the wider community – for which I am most proud and grateful. Thank you for allowing me to serve and represent you, and I wish you well for another outstanding academic year.