2017 FALL FACULTY ADDRESS
Ralph Wilcox, Provost and Executive Vice President

Treading a Path of National and Global Prominence

Thank you for your kind introduction Dr. Garey – that is Trustee Garey – and for your energized and valued leadership as President of the USF Faculty Senate. 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 that has proven so vital in advancing USF’s academic mission. To my faculty colleagues, I urge you to give careful consideration to actively engaging with your Faculty Senate.

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

➢ Chuck Adams, Dean of the Honors College
➢ Bob Bishop, Dean of the College of Engineering
Roger Brindley, Interim Dean of the College of Education and Vice President for USF World

Jackie Dixon, Dean of the College of Marine Science

Eric Eisenberg, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Moez Limayem, Dean of the Muma College of Business

Charly Lockwood, Dean of the Morsani College of Medicine and Senior Vice President for USF Health

James Moy, Dean of the College of the Arts

Govindan Parayil, Dean of the Patel College of Global Sustainability

Donna Petersen, Dean of the College of Public Health

Victoria Rich, Dean of the College of Nursing

Julie Serovich, Dean of the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences

Kevin Sneed, Dean of the College of Pharmacy

Todd Chavez, Dean of the USF Libraries

Bill Cummings, Interim Dean of Undergraduate Studies

Dwayne Smith, Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Dean, Office of Graduate Studies

Kofi Glover, Vice Provost for Human Resources and Space Planning

Terry Chisolm, Vice Provost for Planning, Performance and Accountability
➢ Pritish Mukherjee, Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for Strategic Talent Recruitment, University Reputation and Impact

➢ Cindy Deluca, Associate Vice President for Innovative Education

➢ Peter Stiling, Assistant Vice Provost for Strategic Initiatives

➢ Mark Harlan, Director of Athletics

➢ Joe Hice, Chief Marketing Officer

➢ Jose Hernandez, Chief Diversity Officer

➢ Gerard Solis, General Counsel

➢ Mark Walsh, USF System Assistant Vice President for Government Relations

➢ Paul Dosal, Vice President for Student Affairs and Student Success

➢ Sidney Fernandes, Vice President for Information Technology

➢ Nick Trivunovich, Vice President for Business and Finance and Chief Financial Officer

➢ Calvin Williams, Vice President for Administrative Services

➢ Ed Funai, Senior Vice President for USF System Initiatives and Chief Operating Officer, USF Health

➢ John Long, Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

➢ Joel Momberg, Senior Vice President for Advancement
➢ Paul Sanberg, Senior Vice President for Research and Innovation, and last but not least,

➢ Moneer Kheireddine, our Student Body President and Trustee.

Collectively, this team represents an amazingly talented group of professional colleagues that I learn from daily.

Of course, we all owe a great debt of gratitude to our university president with whom I’ve had the privilege of working for longer than any other in my career and there’s a very good reason for that. USF is indeed fortunate to have a visionary, and tireless advocate who, most importantly, embraces the core values of the academy grounded in excellence and understands the essential role that the faculty must play in building a great research university. As she begins her 18th year at USF, 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 and has set us on what is nothing short of an extraordinary trajectory of success and optimism for the future. I hope that you will join us for the USF System President’s Annual Fall Address at 2:00 pm on Wednesday September 6th right here.
In preparing for this afternoon’s remarks, which incidentally represents my 10th consecutive address to the Fall Faculty Assembly, I looked back on what sage words I had to offer in August 2008. Some may recall, those were very different times as the great economic recession was taking a stranglehold on the nation and on higher education. At that time we could not have imagined the impact that extensive budget cuts, along with the uncertainty and disruptive changes that universities would face on the horizon. Years later, it is clear that, through careful planning and innovation, USF weathered the economic downturn better than most universities in Florida and across the nation.

Today, we can be grateful for our Legislature’s renewed investment in our University as we have earned a significant infusion of new funding through Performance Based Funding, Emerging Preeminence, World Class Scholars, together with Professional and Graduate Enhancement programs. Meanwhile our students will benefit from unprecedented levels of state financial aid.

The purpose of this assembly hasn’t changed over the years for, as I suggested in 2008, it’s “a time for us to come together at the beginning of a new academic year, to review our accomplishments…, [to anticipate the challenges that lay ahead] and… to sharpen our collective focus on shared priorities for the coming year…”
CELEBRATING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2016-2017 represented another remarkable chapter in USF Tampa’s extraordinary progress toward national and global prominence. In the coming weeks we expect to report the highest 6-year and 4-year graduation rates, and the highest freshman retention rate, in the history of USF. Our Student Success Initiative has become a model for the nation, as USF has been (1) recognized over the past year as a recipient of Eduventures’ Innovation Award, (2) highlighted by The Education Trust as #6 in the nation and #1 in Florida for “Black Student Success”, and (3) selected by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems as “a Mentor University” for its Foundation for Student Success initiative. And (4) just this week, The Chronicle of Higher Education ranked USF first in the nation among colleges with the greatest improvement in 6-year graduation rates between the years 2011 and 2015.

As you know, I am particularly proud that we have effectively eliminated the 6-year completion gap for African American, Hispanic and White students at USF, along with Pell grant recipients and those from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Please allow me to take a minute and introduce you to some of our most recent graduates:
The USF students highlighted in the video include winners of highly-competitive national Fulbright, Goldwater, Gates-Cambridge, NIH Oxford-Cambridge, and Rangel Scholarships, as well as Frost Scholarships which cover all costs associated with completing a postgraduate degree at Oxford University. In all, USF students won 66 nationally competitive awards last academic year, including 10 Student Fulbright awards, the most ever at USF and more than any other Florida university.

Apparently our students took note of the pride with which we celebrated the *Chronicle of Higher Education*’s announcement, in February, that USF was the *Nation’s Top Producer of Fulbright Scholar*.

I thank you for the passion and dedication you show daily in supporting our students’ accomplishments and I ask that you continue to guide your most talented and curious mentees to the USF Office of National Scholarships.

We are equally proud of our faculty winners of national honors and awards as we “reeled in” more national honors including *AAAS Fellows, NSF Career Award winners, American Council of Learned Societies Research Fellows,* and *Sloan Research Fellows.*
USF’s stature as a top tier, global research university also continues to grow. #2 in the state for Total Research Expenditures-and Federal Research Expenditures, our faculty proudly lead the State University System for research spending per Full-time Tenured/Tenure Track Faculty as well as for Citations. Also, with a high value placed on technology transfer and commercialization of discovery, USF is a national leader in patents awarded, licenses and options executed, and new start-up companies. A recent study by The Milken Institute ranked USF 19th in university commercialization worldwide and 10th among American public universities.

As you can see, it is through the care, pride and dedication of our professional staff, the hard work and achievements of our world class faculty, and the remarkable accomplishments of our students – perhaps the best measure of any great university – that USF is ranked among the Top 50 US Public universities by (1) the Top American Research Universities, (2) Washington Monthly: National University Rankings, (3) Times Higher Education World University Rankings (in the UK), and (4) the Academic Ranking of World Universities (in China).

This year, USF proudly found itself ranked 34th in the world, and 8th in the US, in the Times Higher Education’s new listing of Golden Age Universities founded between 1945 and 1966. I should also point out that Industrial and Organizational
Psychology (at #2), Public Health (#8), Audiology (#13), and Rehabilitation Counseling (#22), all find themselves ranked in the top 25 in their field at public universities by the *US News and World Report Best Graduate Schools*.

Moreover, we are proud to be ranked first in the nation, by *Military Times*, for *Most Veteran Friendly*, number three by the Peace Corps for graduate program alumni volunteering worldwide and number 18 among large schools for the Peace Corps’ “Top Volunteer-Producing Colleges and Universities”. In the coming year we will be placing a renewed focus on telling our story as we develop and launch an exciting marketing campaign to enhance USF’s brand identity and reputation. With that in mind, I invite you to pick-up a copy of the *USF Tampa by the Numbers* document that I hope you will use to share the USF story with your colleagues across the nation and around the world.

**THE CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY**

As we look out across the national higher education landscape today and witness the apparent erosion of support to public higher education in Illinois, North Carolina and Wisconsin, for example – states that have historically been viewed as leaders – and others, including the states of Louisiana and New Mexico – each struggling to maintain their commitment to students and support for faculty and
staff – we must ask the question: “Why is it that colleges and universities appear to be under assault in some states today?”

Moreover, reading the higher education literature over the past year one can’t help but think that public trust in higher education has fallen to an all-time low. While our experience at USF, and as a member of the State University System of Florida has arguably been quite different, we would do well to identify and understand the challenges facing higher education today.

The results of a Pew Research Center study released last month, showed that 55% of respondents registered positive views of higher education. That’s the good news. The poll further noted that while 72% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents felt that higher education had a positive impact on the nation, 58% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents felt colleges and universities had a negative effect. In fact, only 36% of Republicans said higher education had a positive effect. This unfortunate partisan divide, which appears to mirror that of the nation, is in part explained by a belief that the return on investment in higher education has greatly diminished. After all, how often do we hear about college- graduates returning home to live with their parents? The cultural and political gap regarding confidence in higher education is further fueled through missteps by some universities in response to controversies over such matters as race, gender, and speech on campus – controversies which, we might agree, have not always
been well-handled elsewhere. And then there is higher education’s fundamental core commitment to the search for truth, where logic, reasoned discourse, rigorous scientific research and empirical verification continue to be valued against a seeming backdrop of popular “sound bytes,” amplified by social media that appear to prompt a growing reliance on “feelings” over “facts”.

The value of higher education is further challenged today by the “skip college” narrative proferred by a handful of successful entrepreneurs ignoring the compelling, data-based evidence that college graduates are indeed happier, healthier, wealthier, are more often employed, and benefit from a retirement plan, job safety and occupational prestige, higher life expectancy, lower crime and incarceration rates, and exhibit higher participation rates in volunteering, philanthropy, voting, together with political, community, civic and religious activities.

Other challenges facing universities across the nation, and which may have a direct or indirect impact on USF include, but are not limited to, (a) declining state support and increasing privatization of higher education; (b) affordability and skyrocketing student debt; (c) sliding enrollments, particularly in northern “rust belt” states, (d) institutional productivity especially as it pertains to degree completion (e) the relevance of our existing curriculum; (f) the tension between an
education grounded in the liberal arts and a growing urgency to promote technical training for career, job placement and economic development; and (g) the divide between the expectations of higher education, by business and political leaders, sometimes prompting unprecedented “interest” and even intrusion into university life. Added to that (h) an assault on faculty governance and tenure in some states, and (i) campus concerns surrounding homelessness, food security and hunger, undocumented and DACA students, international student mobility, Title IX, sexual assault and campus climate issues, and campus safety and campus carry, then surely university leaders can be forgiven for the occasional misstep?

Even as the challenges facing higher education today may appear all-consuming, we must also assess whether or not to adopt emerging trends in our sector such as (a) competency-based learning, and adaptive learning to personalize education through self-paced and self-directed curricular; (b) the incorporation of artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality into the classroom; (c) the introduction of non-traditional credentials including badging. I share these observations to underscore the importance, in this dynamic and competitive market space, of being both agile and proactive in our leadership and engagement at USF.

While here at USF we have not blindly embraced “the next best thing,” we are fortunate to find ourselves on the “leading edge” in so many ways, serving as a national model for (a) Planning, Performance and Accountability; (b) utilizing
Canvas and the Civitas big data predictive analytic platform to measure and improve student performance; (c) adopting open educational resources (OERs) and other strategies to reduce textbook costs; (d) developing a case management platform to pinpoint student needs to be addressed by a cross-campus care team; (e) launching 3-year accelerated degree programs and expanded 2+2 FUSE GradPaths to increase student access and success; (f) expanding high-quality online education degrees; (g) engaging multiple constituents in action-based dialogue around Mobilizing the Dream; (h) supporting a USF Food Pantry and a “Don’t Stop, Don’t Drop” emergency fund for needy students; (i) leveraging the broader Tampa Bay Community as a living laboratory in support of experiential learning; and (j) designing, investing in, and launching an innovative program to improve support for student mental health needs on campus.

Importantly, our innovative ideas, hard work, and progress continue to be recognized and rewarded by our elected officials through earned investments. Some of that state investment is most clearly evident in our built environment. A decade ago we were celebrating the opening of this remarkable building, along with the Frank and Carol Morsani Center for Advanced Healthcare on campus, and we were looking forward to completion of the School of Music, the Patel Center for Global Solutions, the Interdisciplinary Science Building, and the Juniper-Poplar student residence.
Earlier this year we christened the long awaited Research Vessel W.T. Hogarth, which, as it enters service with the Florida Institute of Oceanography, will provide a state-of-the-art sea-going research platform for faculty and students at USF and across the State University System. This week we opened Phase I of The Village a transformative living and learning community.

As we look to the future, the new home for the Morsani College of Medicine will begin to rise in the Water Street District downtown and finally, because some of you have asked me about the recently published renderings for a Football stadium on campus, I want to share with you that these are very early days and the product of a feasibility study requested by the USF Board of Trustees. Many more steps need to be taken before this long-discussed project becomes a reality, not least of which is a financial plan because, as you’ll appreciate, such facilities cannot be supported by educational operating funds or student tuition.

**STUDENT ACCESS & SUCCESS**

Of course, a world class campus experience and student success remain at the very heart of our university. Building a high performance team across the Student Affairs and Student Success organization has been the highest priority for Vice President Paul Dosal this past year.
Earlier this summer, college deans and university leadership dedicated a full day to reimagining student talent acquisition at all levels.

With a goal of enrolling even more high-ability undergraduate and graduate students from Florida, across the nation and around the world, you should expect to see the launch of a fresh strategy in the coming weeks with a focus on expanding the pool of diverse, qualified applicants, and converting, yielding and ultimately enrolling more talented, curious and engaged learners in 2018. A collaborative effort between Admissions, Communications and Marketing, Decision Support, Financial Aid, Information Technology, Innovative Education, and, of course, the colleges, a new digital communication campaign will be driven via social media platforms and will include an exciting new virtual tour of campus.

While, as we’ve seen, few, if any, universities in the nation can match USF’s gains in student success over the past decade, there remains much work to be done if we’re to achieve our ambitious goals.

Affordable access continues to be a high priority for USF, recognizing full well that approximately 40% of our undergraduate students qualify for need-based Pell grants. In the academic year 2014-15, USF disbursed $166 M in Pell Grants, placing us among the top 10 public universities in the nation. While we know that a full-time, Florida resident, undergraduate student pays approximately $4,500 in
tuition each year, and $6,400 including fees, which is among the lowest in the country, the costs associated with transportation, housing, textbooks and instructional materials drive the annual cost of college above $21,000. We expect the State of Florida’s generous increases in both merit and need-based financial aid, and the federal government’s decision to make Pell Grants available year-round in 2018, to ease the financial burden on our students and their families. Yet, our students’ greatest savings can, perhaps, best be yielded through our *Textbook Affordability* and *Finish in Four; Save More* initiatives.

Our efforts to drive down the cost of textbooks, while not compromising the quality of instruction or effectiveness of student learning, will require each and every one of our instructors to carefully consider whether one or more of the following strategies before you can be adopted:

I want to congratulate Dean Bishop for steering the College of Engineering toward a negotiated eTextbook pilot in fall 2017 that promises to save nearly 1,000 students more than $200 per course. It’s my hope that other colleges will step up and negotiate similar savings for their students. If you have further ideas or questions, please reach out to Todd Chavez, Dean of the USF Library. Equally important, reducing the cost of textbooks at USF will help us improve our standing on the new Performance Metric 3.
As both access and affordability improve at USF, so do programs intended to enhance our student retention, persistence and completion rates. Even as we continue to eclipse our prior performance year after year, the task becomes more challenging and demands more sophisticated strategies and tactics. Foremost of the new initiatives this year is the Case Management Platform developed in close collaboration with Information Technology. Allowing members of a multidimensional Care Team (comprised of academic advisors, student success advocates, mental health counselors, financial aid advisors, and other professionals) to zero in on those students in greatest need of support, this tool has become the foundation for a new Finish in Four tool that promises to provide students with confident 8-semester pathways to graduation. Presently this platform is being piloted with the 2014 FTIC cohort. It is important for me to point out that these efforts would not have been possible without the combined effort of a dedicated and talented high performance team led by Dr. Cindy DeLuca and our CIO Sidney Fernandes, a team that was laser-focused on finding a creative solution to a high-priority yet complex problem, demanding cross-organizational communication, mutual trust and respect, confidence, and an acceptance of shared responsibility.

Described by The Chronicle of Higher Education as “An Epidemic of Anguish”, and our own Florida Board of Governors as “A Mental Health Crisis”, the
skyrocketing demand for enhanced student mental health care at USF reflects a national trend. Not surprisingly, we consider mental and physical wellbeing as essential elements of our Student Success initiative. Whether manifested through an increased incidence of anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties or stress, through the leadership of our health and wellness team, we have designed a more comprehensive, tiered program for the coming year. Called MWell4Success, it seeks to enhance broad-based mental health literacy (for students, faculty and staff), develop student resiliency and coping skills through hiring mental health coaches and social media communication professionals, improve early diagnosis through increasing the number of mental health counselors and adding satellite centers with extended hours across campus for early identification and intervention, and provide for more integrated and intensive tertiary level care.

While the important work of our student care team is essential to improving student persistence, progression, and completion, ensuring that USF graduates possess the knowledge base and competencies to prepare them for graduate school and success in the twentieth century global workplace must remain a strong focus.

This time last year, I challenged the Faculty Senate, and especially the General Education Council, to critically evaluate USF’s core undergraduate curriculum, framed around the principles of student centeredness, intellectual rigor, relevance, and curricular coherence. Led by Dr. Kyna Betancourt, supported by Interim Dean
of Undergraduate Studies Dr. Bill Cummings and Dr. Michael Decker, Chair of History, guided by broad-based stakeholder input from across campus, and informed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities value learning outcomes, the Council’s recommendations will lead to extensive curricular re-design and enhancements in the coming year.

Their proposal blends the state mandated requirements at its foundation, with core elements in creative thinking, information literacy, along with human and cultural diversity each grounded in the liberal arts that will, in turn, support a problem-based and interdisciplinary approach to ethical reasoning and civic engagement.

The required completion of at least two intellectually robust high impact practices or HIPs, such as research, internships, education abroad, and service learning experiences, is intended to add even deeper relevance to our students’ general education. These exciting enhancements will also (1) embrace our quality enhancement plan, the Global Citizens Project, and (2) open-up additional curriculum space for departments to enhance their own major requirements through increased synergy with the core curriculum, which will be “rolled out” for incoming freshmen beginning fall 2018. In particular, it is my expectation that each major provides a distinctive career track, with a required field-based component, for those undergraduate students whose personal goals or academic record, by the middle of their junior year, suggest the unlikelihood of progressing
to graduate, law or medical school. It is clear that we have a busy year ahead and I have asked our deans to personally take the lead in “steering” general education and major curriculum enhancements in their colleges this year.

As we continue our commitment to performance improvement, USF’s Student Success message remains clear: “we will strive to increase student retention, graduation, and competitive placement rates along with salaries, while decreasing student costs, time to degree, excess hours, and student debt”.

I sometimes don’t brag enough about the significant achievements of our graduate students. While I’ve already touched on the national rankings of graduate programs at USF, you should know that today we are enrolling and graduating unprecedented numbers of masters and doctoral students in both highly competitive research programs and professional programs that serve the needs of business, industry, and public sector agencies. In fact, you’ve probably noticed that graduation now takes a little longer than it used to, due to the increased number of PhD students being hooded. That’s a good thing! Today, USF leads the state in the proportion of graduate degrees awarded in STEM and Health, as the quality and impact of their work is reflected in higher levels of publication and the increased “hits” to our electronic thesis and dissertation website from around the world.
RESEARCH & INNOVATION

As you recognize, our graduate students play a very important role in advancing USF’s stature as a global research university, a reputation that helps distinguish us from most other universities both public and private across the State of Florida.

While we continue our growth in both Total and Federal Research Expenditures (+4%) year over year, we must be mindful of a further decline in effective F&A overhead rates at USF, and talk of capping such rates by some in our nation’s capital. While such an approach might even seem appealing to faculty researchers, we cannot lose sight of the essential support indirect costs provide for our research enterprise at USF and elsewhere, from keeping the lights on, to providing state-of-the-art research laboratories and instrumentation, to IRB and compliance services.

Our USF Research Strategic Plan (2017-2021) provides a roadmap for future investments and interdisciplinary collaboration through matching our faculty and programmatic strengths and societal needs in areas of research focus:

Above all, at USF, we remain deeply committed to pursuing the truth through rigorous science and scholarship, as together we strive to improve the health and wellbeing of the communities we serve.
In the coming years we plan a significant investment in growing our faculty cohort at USF Tampa. Ever cognizant of the need to enhance our students’ educational experience and grow our research, scholarly, and creative outputs we aim to further reduce our Student-to-Faculty Ratio from 22:1 (last Fall) to 19:1 over the next five years. To achieve that goal we estimate the need to hire 250 more faculty members, mostly in the College of Engineering, the Muma College of Business, and the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics where current ratios are less than optimal, along with adding 50 new positions in the Morsani College of Medicine by 2022. This presents an incredibly exciting opportunity, and I want to report that we are off to a very good start in building upon an already impressive community of world class scientists, engineers, and scholars across campus.

The profiles you’ve just seen are a snapshot of an incredibly talented and deeply dedicated faculty at USF – including a member of the National Academy of Medicine, a Core Fulbright US Scholar, a Sloan Research Fellow, and a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

I remain convinced that the Tampa Bay Community – viewed as a living laboratory – represents one of USF’s greatest assets and most competitive advantages as we target and recruit more proven engineers, scientists and scholars to our university. Through the work of the recently-established Office of
Corporate Partnerships, providing a long-awaited streamlined and welcoming portal or “point of entry” to USF for business and industry, we will expect to see increased collaboration between companies and USF faculty; expanded opportunities for meaningful internships for USF students; partnerships that provide shared strategic benefit; growth in the amount and share of industry-based research funding; and more companies moving to USF’s Research Park.

Of course, the USF Research Park has long been the home for startup companies in particular, yet more recent developments reveal new models for collaboration. First SOFWERX, in Ybor City, is providing mutual benefit and “a collision of ideas” through solutions-oriented research for faculty and students across the State of Florida. While it is true that the majority of university talent is drawn to USF’s own “footprint” at SOFWERX – from the College of Engineering and the Muma College of Business – it is my expectation that future opportunities will demand wider engagement from faculty and students in other colleges. A second and quite unique relationship is that which REVATURE brings to our campus. Based in Reston, Virginia (with other university-based centers in New York City and Scottsdale, Arizona), REVATURE provides qualified USF graduates, and especially those from the College of Arts and Science, an opportunity to enroll in “a coding boot camp” and, upon successful completion, assures employment with a
Fortune 500 company. Unlike other “coding boot camps” that you may have read about recently, REVATURE pays the student’s full tuition and living expenses in advance of placement in high need, high skilled, and high paid jobs. The USF REVATURE partnership has realized early success, and the feedback from our graduates has been most gratifying.

Meanwhile, our international academic and research collaborations continue to thrive. With more than 5,000 international students contributing to our campus community, and the number of USF students enrolled in Education Abroad closing in on 2,000, the maturing relationships we have with leading institutions in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America will only strengthen our students’ experiences, our professors’ scholarship, and our university’s reputation. Beginning this fall, USF will proudly join Oxford and Cambridge Universities as the choice destinations selected by the University of Ghana, itself one of the Top 5 universities in Africa, for a Carnegie Corporation funded program entitled “Building a New Generation of Academics in Africa.” Framed around our earlier and successful “Global Academic Partnership” (GAP) with the University of Ghana, this highly competitive program intended to enhance research collaboration will pair early career Ghanaian Scholars with USF Faculty members. I ask that
you give careful consideration to contributing to this important partnership and welcome our visiting colleagues into your classrooms.

**CONCLUDING COMMENTS**
My comments of August 2008 resonate as loud today as they did then. “Nothing will be more important than holding true to our core values – shared governance; academic freedom; promoting diversity and inclusion; integrity and responsibility; collegiality and civility…”

The frightening events witnessed at the white supremacists’ “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, and on the University of Virginia campus, last weekend, should remind us all that such blatant racism, intolerance, hate and violence must never find a place at USF. While I will staunchly defend the right to free speech and encourage a diversity of ideas and ideology, including the expression of viewpoints with which we may strongly disagree, each one of us has a greater responsibility to preserve a safe and secure community within which sometimes uncomfortable debate and discourse can flourish. We must, as a community, resist reacting to efforts aimed at inciting conflict and provocation through extremist voices and actions and rather, hold true to our commitment that all students, faculty, and staff members regardless of age, disability, gender identity and expression, national origin, race and ethnicity, political and religious belief, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, socioeconomic level, and veteran status – and zip code – deserve to
feel safe, welcomed, and respected at USF. And we will continue to support the success of our DACA students to the extent of the law. Ours is, and will remain, a caring and compassionate university community, and one that proudly values diversity and inclusion.

As more than 40,000 students arrive on campus next week – coming from all 67 counties across Florida, 50 states, and 145 different countries, I ask that you take the time to reach out and welcome them to USF. And please encourage them to actively engage in our Week of Welcome activities intended to more fully introduce them to their chosen academic home.

As you can see, our university has set a clear and confident path forward. Guided by our current Strategic Plan, our seven key priorities for the coming year are, I hope, quite clear.

Once again I want to invite you, as you leave the auditorium today, to please take with you a copy of the *USF Tampa by the Numbers* brochure that (a) highlights our current performance in the context of statewide PBF and Emerging/Preeminence criteria and AAU institutional benchmarks, (b) summarizes our goals for the coming year and (c) begins to make the case for more AAU-member institutions in Florida.
In closing, I’d like to reiterate words I shared a decade ago: “We have a bold agenda ahead of us… and much rests on the shoulders of the faculty, as you are the very heart and soul of the university”.

Each day, you do an amazing job, and I couldn’t be more proud of serving each member of our academic community – our talented students, our dedicated professional staff, and world class faculty.

And finally, I can think of no better time to convey my firm belief that our achievements and our challenges can and only be addressed by working together as a community – a diverse and talented community where EVERYONE is welcome. I thank you for all you contributions to the success of our students; for your creative, scholarly, and scientific contributions; and to growing the national and global prominence of the University of South Florida. I look forward to an exciting year ahead. Thank you.