

President's Report at USF Board of Trustees Meeting

As Prepared for Delivery

June 4, 2024

Good morning, Trustees. I am happy to provide an update on what has been happening at USF these past few months.

On Current Events

There has been considerable attention nationally and across our state on-campus protests and the right to free expression. We had our own experiences with demonstrations on campus this past academic year, the vast majority of which were peaceful and ended without incident. I want to use this opportunity to reiterate our position on some of these issues.

Free expression and the exchange of ideas are central to the mission of a university, and we are proud to say it is among the core values that define our institution. We recognize our obligation to permit constitutionally protected speech, even if we strongly disagree or find some of what is said to be offensive.

But I want to be explicitly clear that even though we must tolerate free expression in public spaces on campus, we condemn hate speech and incidents of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and bigotry. The university's obligation to permit free speech carries a reciprocal obligation on the speaker to be peaceful and to comply with the law and USF policies.

We will not tolerate violent, disruptive, or aggressive acts by protestors because the safety of the USF community is our highest priority. We must also protect the rights of members of our community to attend class, prepare for exams, and attend important ceremonies, like commencement, without disruption.

As we always have in challenging times, it is critical that we strive to uphold our university's values and keep our focus on how we carry out our institutional mission. We urge everyone to do their part to ensure that USF

continues to be a safe and peaceful place where we treat each other with respect, even when we have opposing views.

USF Commencement

One of the university and state's priorities was to ensure that our spring commencement ceremonies proceeded as scheduled in the days after the protests. I am pleased to share that our ceremonies were safe and highly successful.

Over four days of ceremonies, we conferred more than 7,000 degrees. The newest class included graduates from 46 states and 89 nations. It also featured 168 student veterans and 114 King O'Neal Scholars — our undergraduate students who earned a perfect 4.0 GPA.

Our youngest graduate, who is 17 years old, earned a bachelor's degree in health sciences. And our most experienced graduate, who is 69 years old, earned a master's degree in history.

I was also very pleased to participate in the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine's commencement ceremony, where 177 students earned their medical degrees. The Class of 2024 was the first to start and finish medical school at the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine and Heart Institute located in downtown Tampa.

For many of our graduates, these ceremonies were especially meaningful, as they missed previous opportunities due to COVID-19. I give my sincere thanks to our staff and volunteers, who worked diligently to ensure that all graduates and their guests had a safe, memorable, and enjoyable experience.

Proposed College Focused on AI, Cybersecurity and Computing

We recently announced our intention to create a college focused on artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and computing. Our goal is to position

the Tampa Bay region and the state of Florida as a national leader in these rapidly evolving fields.

This announcement has already generated a lot of interest and excitement. USF is the first university in Florida and among the first in the nation to announce plans to create a college dedicated to AI and cybersecurity, and it presents a unique opportunity to leverage the expertise found across all three USF campuses.

The formation of a new college is subject to continued consultation with faculty through shared governance processes and approval from this Board. We are committed to coming back to you with more details as we develop our plans.

USF Giving Week

I am thrilled to share with Trustees that USF's annual Giving Week broke all records set in previous years.

Among the highlights:

- The USF Foundation received more than \$7 million.
- Of the record-setting 9,259 Giving Week donors, 1,408 gave to the university for the first time.
- The overall total included a 70% increase in alumni donors from the previous year.
- Collectively, this year's Giving Week donors supported a total of 370 causes at the university.

We are extremely grateful to our alumni, friends, faculty, and staff, whose incredible generosity makes such a difference for our students, faculty, and programs.

Sarasota-Manatee Student Center/Residence Hall Naming

I am pleased to share that progress continues on the new student center and residence hall in Sarasota-Manatee, and that the residence hall now has a name: Atala Hall, after the rare tropical butterfly that feeds and breeds in the landscaping on campus.

The name was selected after a campus committee of students, faculty, and staff considered numerous possible names; an online survey that drew more than 300 responses; and a final review and selection by Sarasota-Manatee campus Regional Chancellor Karen Holbrook and me.

On-Campus Stadium Groundbreaking

As Chair Weatherford mentioned, we are looking forward to the groundbreaking ceremony for our on-campus stadium during Homecoming Week.

Our plans call for the stadium to open in time for fall 2027, and we can't wait to make USF history with the groundbreaking ceremony in October.

Updates on USF Athletics

I have lots of great news to share with you from USF Athletics, starting with the success of our student-athletes in the classroom.

All 18 men's and women's programs posted a spring semester GPA over 3.0 for only the second time on record. That extended the streak of an overall departmental GPA over 3.0 to 19 consecutive semesters. Our student-athletes' collective GPA for the spring semester was 3.31, also the second-highest GPA on record.

This is a great reflection of the commitment and hard work of our student-athletes, and I want to thank the outstanding academics staff and our coaches for the mentoring and guidance they provide.

I am also very pleased to tell you about two more conference championships won by our athletics teams.

After winning their first indoor conference championship in February, the men's track and field team won the outdoor championship last month. This was the first time a men's team won both titles since Houston did it in 2019.

Congratulations also to the women's track and field team, which finished third in the outdoor championship, their best finish since placing third in 2013.

I am happy to say USF's track and field season is not over. A program record 12 student-athletes, eight men and four women, will compete for NCAA championships in seven events beginning tomorrow in Eugene, Oregon.

We are also very proud of the men's golf team, which won their sixth American Athletic Conference championship. The Bulls have now won the AAC championship a conference-leading six times in the first 10 years of the tournament.

Appointment of New College Deans

I have one more update to share with you, regarding the appointment of outstanding leaders for two of our colleges.

Dr. Elizabeth Spiller will be the new dean of our largest college, the College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Spiller has more than 10 years of experience as an academic leader, having served most recently as the executive vice chancellor and chief academic officer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

We also look forward to welcoming Dr. David Blackwell as the new Lynn Pippenger Dean of the Muma College of Business. He comes to USF from the University of Kentucky's Gatton College of Business and Economics, where he has served as associate dean for professional graduate programs.

Both of our new deans will officially join USF in July. I want to thank Provost Mohapatra and his staff, and the members of both Search Advisory Committees, for their time and commitment.

Budget Workshop

I look forward to the budget workshop we will hold following this meeting. This will be an important discussion as we consider our budget for not only next year but as we look ahead to our vision over the next several years and determine how we can allocate our resources to maximize our impact.

Closing Comments

There is one final update I would like to share with you this morning. We are delighted to welcome Snowbird, the St. Petersburg campus's first-ever comfort dog, to the USF family.

Snowbird is a Goldador – a mix between a Golden Retriever and a Labrador Retriever – and he is here with his handler, Officer Mark Lickenfelt from the USF St. Petersburg University Police Department.

Snowbird comes to us from Dogs Inc., formerly known as Southeastern Guide Dogs. USF St. Petersburg has had a strong partnership with them for many years and we are grateful for their continued support.

He will be an important resource for students who may be experiencing some type of mental health challenge, such as the transition to college, the stress of exams, or some other form of distress.

Snowbird lives with Officer Lickenfelt, and together they will attend campus events and respond to requests from students, faculty or staff for the goodwill and compassion a furry friend can provide.