The Dawning of a New Era: Mapping USF’s Future in the Context of Consolidation

Thank you for your kind introduction Dr. Boaz, and for your valued leadership as President of the USF Tampa 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.

Before I begin my remarks, and as has become customary, 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
- Paul Atchley, Dean of Undergraduate Studies & Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Student Success
- Bob Bishop, Dean of the College of Engineering
- Todd Chavez, Dean of the USF Libraries
- Jackie Dixon, Dean of the College of Marine Science
- Eric Eisenberg, Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences
- Rob Knoeppel, Dean of the College of Education
- Moez Limayem, Dean of the Muma College of Business
- Charly Lockwood, Dean of the Morsani College of Medicine & Senior Vice President for USF Health
- James Moy, Dean of the College of the Arts
- Govind 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 & Community Sciences
- Kevin Sneed, Dean of the College of Pharmacy
- Dwayne Smith, Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Dean, Office of Graduate Studies
- Terry Chisolm, Vice Provost for Planning, Performance & Accountability
- Jim Garey, Vice Provost for Human Resources & Space Planning
- Pritish Mukherjee, Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for Strategic Talent Recruitment, University Reputation & Impact
- Cindy Deluca, Associate Vice President for Innovative Education
➢ Valeria Garcia, Associate Vice President of the USF System Office of Decision Support

➢ Peter Stiling, Assistant Vice Provost for Strategic Initiatives

➢ Glen Besterfield, Dean of Admissions

➢ Danielle McDonald Assistant Vice President for Community Development and Student Engagement and Dean of Students

➢ Joe Hice, Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer

➢ Gerard Solis, General Counsel

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

➢ Karen Holbrook, Regional Chancellor, USF Sarasota-Manatee

➢ Roger Brindley, Vice President for USF World

➢ Haywood Brown, Vice President for Diversity, Inclusion & Equal Opportunity

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

➢ Sidney Fernandes, Vice President for Information Technology

➢ Michael Kelly, Vice President of Athletics

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

➢ Calvin Williams, Vice President for Administrative Services

➢ David Lechner, Senior Vice President for Business & Financial Strategy

➢ John Long, Senior Vice President & Chief Operating Officer
Collectively, this team represents an amazingly talented group of professional colleagues that I learn from daily. And of course, it is to our visionary leader to whom we owe so much – Dr. Judy Genshaft, who joined the University of South Florida as our 6th president on July 1, 2000.

Today, she is in the midst of an unprecedented 19th year as President and continues to deliver the inspiration, hard work, and tireless advocacy, to further advance the university. A staunch supporter of our core academic values she, perhaps better than anyone, has demonstrated the essential role that faculty must play in building a great research university. As Phil Baty, with the Times Higher Education wrote earlier this year: “There’s this phenomenal energy and drive here at USF. You can see it at the top in President Genshaft, and it permeates through the whole university. There’s a real sense of belief,… of being bold and agile…”

I’ve had the great privilege of working with President Genshaft since 2001, and as Provost since 2008. It’s difficult to imagine USF without Judy, whose energetic style, dogged determination, and unwavering commitment to our mission and
vision has guided us through periods of uncertainty and has set us on what is nothing short of an extraordinary trajectory of success and looking toward an optimistic future. As you know, the search for our next President is underway, chaired by a USF alumnus and generous donor, Trustee Les Muma.

In preparing for this afternoon’s remarks, which incidentally represent my 11th consecutive address to the Fall Faculty Assembly, I re-read The Vision of a Contemporary University, a book first published in 1982.

Co-authored by Dr. Russell Cooper, former Dean of USF’s College of Liberal Arts (from 1959-1971) and Margaret B. Fisher, it was intended to be something of our university’s history from the opening of our doors to 1,997 students on September 26, 1960, yet it really is much more. Yes, it presents a sometimes romantic and, perhaps, rather distant view of USF’s early days where sightings of deer, bear, and puma on campus were reported (p. 65), however what struck me is that many of the challenges we and others in higher education face today were also present during USF’s formative years, including matters of access and 2+2 articulation with community colleges, diversity and integration, student mental health concerns (p. 202) and, yes, even performance accountability. Indeed, just 15 years after USF first opened its doors “Some remarked cynically that productivity had displaced academic work,… To others, the assembly-line model of freshmen-
in/graduates out seemed to have displaced participation in learning…” (pp. 70-71)

From shared governance and academic freedom to an “Accent on Learning”, that meant personalized learning not training, the importance of interdisciplinary inquiry and team teaching was early considered when, in 1958, President Allen (who, incidentally, was a transplant from Gainesville) wondered “How can faculty, specializing in several fields, be organized so as to avoid the dangers of departmentalization without jeopardizing the scholarship and security which comes from close working relationships with others in the same disciplines?” (p. 36)

And even consolidation arguably received a veiled mention by the authors, writing that “The University’s learning network runs through all sorts of other places across the service area. The seconding of faculty to regional centers assures a quality of outreach instruction in keeping with that of the Tampa campus… moving with the mainstream of higher education toward greater diversification and dispersion of teaching and learning… Having become a network for learning, USF also has to learn how to make a network sustain identity and cohesiveness…” (p. 68).

USF’s undergraduate preparation was, from the outset, solidly grounded in the liberal arts and sciences although it would be 45 years on, from USF’s first application to Phi Beta Kappa in 1973, before our faculty would be awarded
Florida’s Eta Chapter of this nation’s oldest and most prestigious academic honor society.

What is noticeably missing in the *The Vision of a Contemporary University* is any substantive reference to USF’s role as a research university. Yes, a division of graduate education and research had been created in 1966 along with the first of six research centers in marine science, gerontology, exceptional children and adults, clinical speech pathology and audiology, leisure, and rehabilitation (p. 150). This, in turn, led to the establishment of the Office of Sponsored Research in 1972. Yet, it appears that research was barely on the minds of the university’s founders. Modeled after Clark Kerr’s *California Master Plan for Higher Education*,

“Governor LeRoy Collins felt strongly that Florida should concentrate research and graduate study in [what he considered to be] the leading universities of Tallahassee and Gainesville”. (p.8 ) Governor Collins could not have imagined the USF of today – ranked #2 in the state and #29 among public universities for total research expenditures, #5 among public universities for US utility patents and, then, he certainly didn’t know our president. You see, President Genshaft must be credited with leading USF into the uppermost echelon of national research universities. Today, we know that it will be through our scholarly, scientific and creative contributions to bettering society that USF will differentiate itself from so many other institutions of higher learning across Florida and around the nation.
What *The Vision of a Contemporary University* tells us is that while the first two decades of USF’s history was devoted to building a robust educational base, the most recent two decades have built on that foundation in establishing a sound national and international research institution. And so, USF’s next chapter begins as we welcome the dawn of a new era.

Ten years on from the Great Recession, these are still not easy times for higher education as uncertainty persists and recent studies suggest plummeting public confidence in our nation’s universities – the result of widespread assault on many fronts from skyrocketing tuition costs and questionable return on investment, to a tendency toward anti-intellectualism, anti-science, and claims of fake news in some quarters, as well as a troubling climate of incivility, heightened rhetoric, and continuing political divisiveness.

According to a recent Pew study, published in July of this year a majority of Americans believe that higher education is headed in the wrong direction, mirroring the results of a Gallup Poll that showed falling confidence in higher education, from 57% in 2015 to 48% this year. Even though 81% of Pew respondents had a positive view of their local university – key to our contention that a great city needs a great university – both Democrats (52%) and Republicans (73%) had little good to say about our sector and expressed concern that “students
are not getting the skills they need to succeed in the workplace”. Democrats focus primarily on “the university as marketplace”, centering on declining public investment, increasing tuition costs, and a focus on private gain over public good. With annual resident undergraduate tuition and fees amounting to approximately $6,500 across Florida’s public universities, and a resident student’s average net investment over four years at USF, after financial aid, falling well short of $10,000, the data suggest that we may not be their “poster institution”. For Republicans the primary target is free speech and political intolerance on university campuses. A prickly topic indeed and one which our Office of Student Affairs and Student Success is, in part, confronting through its’ “Love over Hate” campaign.

Perhaps Nicholas B. Dirks, former chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley presents it best when he wrote recently that, “As we defend the university, we must speak out against hate speech, but we have an urgent imperative to open the university up further: to new ideas, to more-vigorous debate, to more and different types of students, to engagement with the world, and to the public more generally, for whom the idea that college is still a public good needs stressing, and demonstrating, today more than ever. This means protecting the rights of those who argue against the values we hold dear — even when they spew hate.” (Chronicle of Higher Education, November 2018).
If higher education is to prosper in the coming decade we must listen to our critics and address their concerns. We cannot simply be dismissive. Rather, we must be responsive in reimagining the future of higher education. While the next generation of top tier public research universities should not ignore the conventional path forward, it is crystal clear that prior paradigms will not move us to our future destination. As a “University Shaping the Future”, we have a significant responsibility to both higher education and society.

As the state’s third and most recently designated Preeminent Research University, USF is best positioned, along with a handful of other public universities across the nation, to launch into a new era along its path to membership eligibility in the Association of American Universities (AAU). Like others, we will need to take a different path – in unconventional fashion and with characteristic velocity. As our students sometimes remark: “Bull Speed Ahead”.

This has been a watershed year for USF, from Preeminence, to Phi Beta Kappa, ranked #5 among U.S. public universities in the Times Higher Education’s list of “Golden Age Universities” founded since 1945, and rising 10 spots to #58 in U.S. News and World Report’s most recent ranking of National Public Universities (incidentally, there are only 4 younger universities ranked higher: UC Irvine #7,
1965; UC San Diego #12, 1960; UC Santa Cruz #26, 1965, and Stony Brook University at #32, 1957) – we find ourselves at the doorway of a new era.

Today, we are a widely-acknowledged national leader in Student Success with a 91.3% freshman retention rate (up 9% points from 82% a decade ago – even though we must do better in retaining freshmen in good academic standing), a 6-yr graduation rate of 73.4% (up 17% points from 56%) and a 4-yr graduation rate of 60.4% (compared to just 29% in 2006) – each representing the highest performance in USF’s history and, at long last, comparing well with our national peers. The most dramatic gains, however, are reserved for the % of students graduating without excess hours that is less than 110% of credits required. In 2013 that number was 58.2% while, for the most recent graduating class, it rose to 80.6% (a gain of more than 22% points in just five years) – saving our graduates thousands of dollars and accelerating them into the workforce and onto graduate and professional schools. Yet our work is not done. Even though we have effectively eliminated the 6-year completion gap for African American, Hispanic and White students, as well as for First Generation and Pell Grant recipients, a significant inequity continues on the basis of gender, with women graduating at much higher rates than their male counterparts. This is just not acceptable and, collectively, we must immediately take up the challenge and redouble our efforts to better support our male students along a more successful path to graduation.
Meanwhile, while the focus of both the State Legislature and the Florida Board of Governors has shifted to the 4-yr graduation rate, we will continue to track the 6-yr rate, which includes both part-time and full-time students, is essential to our national rankings, and has been approved as our new “Trustees’ Choice Metric” for Performance Based Funding. Today, as we enroll a higher profile and diverse class of Gen-Z students who expect more of their preeminent USF experience, including equity of access for success, a relevant and rigorous balance of knowledge and skills acquisition, managed costs, along with an earnings premium as they enter the workforce and/or the promise of advancing to top flight graduate and professional programs we will, as an academic community, be rightly held to even higher performance expectations.

To this end, I have long wondered why we haven’t provided our students with a coherent path to graduation through year-round education. While not for everyone, I think you know that since 2011 we have been proudly graduating more and more students enrolled in our Provost’s Scholars Program in just three years. We have now graduated five cohorts of Provost’s Scholars, each of whom have been required to complete Undergraduate Research, Education Abroad, and Leadership experiences.

Beginning in 2019 we will be offering a Summer B pilot for incoming FTIC students, along with a new 12 week term. The College of Engineering and
Department of Mathematics & Statistics have been at the forefront of designing the 12 week term and we hope to soon identify other units that see possibilities in better serving their students in this way.

While we will continue to improve on the success of our undergraduates, both first time in college as well as FUSE and other transfer students, today, we owe our graduate student population the same level of focused attention.

*Graduate Student Success* is one of three university-wide, strategic priorities that we’ll be focusing on in the new calendar year, the others being *Faculty Success*, and *Building a Digital Ecosystem*.

Significantly enhancing the graduate student experience must be a very high priority for USF. Our students deserve nothing less and we recognize that a research university’s reputation, both at home and abroad, is so often tied to the experience and accomplishments of our graduate students. This multi-year initiative will focus on:

- Recruiting a highly talented and diverse cohort of graduate students – at the master’s level to meet the needs of the advanced workforce, professional, and research students pursuing the PhD degree,
- Creating an academic community in which graduate students can thrive,
• Reviewing current graduate curricula with a critical and constructive eye to improvement,
• Better understanding postgraduate needs such as certificates, nanodegrees and micro-master’s programs,
• Re-evaluating the nature and quality of graduate student “scholarly products”, including publications, theses, and dissertations,
• Strengthening the mentoring of graduate students,
• Supporting talented graduate students along a timely path to success, and
• Improving the “value-added” of graduate credentials in the professional arena and enhancing the placement of PhD graduates at the very best universities, as well as in Silicon Valley, the Research Triangle, on Broadway, and Wall Street.

Just as important is providing our faculty with the support needed for them to be successful. We will bring greater attention to recruiting, hiring and onboarding, supporting and mentoring, rewarding and retaining a world class and diverse faculty at USF. This multi-year initiative will focus on:

• Improving strategies essential to recruiting top faculty talent,
• Re-examining USF’s faculty classification system to ensure that we are implementing an optimal, differentiated staffing model for a top tier 21st century research university,

• Assessing the culture, climate and satisfaction of faculty members at USF,

• Identifying and mitigating barriers to enhanced faculty productivity, tenure and promotion for Assistant Professors and mid-career growth for Associate Professors,

• Addressing the critical need for expanded research laboratories, state-of-the-art instrumentation, graduate student and technical support,

• Re-designing and investing in professional development and mentoring programs for faculty and academic leaders including department chairs and deans,

• Working together with faculty to publicize their scientific, scholarly, and creative work,

• Supporting the expansion of national and global research collaborations for USF faculty,

• Institutionalizing prospect identification, nurturing and nomination of USF faculty members for highly prestigious faculty awards, fellowships, and memberships, and
• Creating a plan to competitively reward and compensate faculty success, at a level consistent with that of our national peers.

Most important, and essential to elevating USF’s stature and reputation as a national and global research university is the quality and impact of the faculty’s research, scholarship, and creative portfolio. With our designation as a Preeminent State Research University, the bar has been significantly raised. We must expect more of ourselves and of our colleagues across the wide realm of research. It is true that, last year (from July 1, 2017-June 30, 2018), Total sponsored research expenditures climbed 3% over the prior year, Federal sponsored research expenditures were up 4% and we saw our effective F&A rate creeping up to 19.47% (from 18.17% in the prior year). Moreover, we are continuing on a positive trend through the first quarter of this year. Just as important, however, is the impact that the published work of our faculty and students has throughout the international academic community. As we move from a national to a global stage, where research funding is often considered less significant, we must place a renewed focus on citations. Important across all our disciplines, from the arts to medicine, and the humanities to engineering, peer acknowledgement and utilization of scholarship conducted at USF to inform the work of others is a powerful measure of an institution’s impact.
Today, more and more scientific and scholarly outcomes are the product of collaboration and we know that coauthored works tend to be more highly cited. The National Academies have fostered the idea of convergence that being the integration of knowledge, tools, and thinking from multiple disciplines and across sectors to tackle complex challenges. Sir D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson early recognized the power of this approach when, more than a century ago, he wrote:

“…if you dream… of future discoveries and inventions, let me tell you that the fertile field of discovery lies for the most part on those borderlands where one science meets another…”

Most important, as the State University System of Florida prepares to present the State Legislature with a model for investing in Academic and Research Excellence, framed around three big ideas: Healthy Florida, Secure Florida, and Prosperous Florida, we would all do well to pay careful attention to how USF faculty might best collaborate in contributing to the State’s future. It will be especially important to map USF’s strategic research strengths and priorities, simply stated as Brain, Data, Heart, Security, Water, and Translation, against those of the State.

As a comprehensive research university, the responsibility lies with us to create an institutional culture and to build the mechanisms necessary to encourage, promote and reward convergence.
Our third strategic priority, to be formally launched in January, is based on the recognition that USF’s future success will, in large part, be dependent upon a comprehensive, robust and responsive digital ecosystem. As Tom Friedman has shown us in Thank You for Being Late (2016), digital innovation is accelerating at a pace unknown in earlier times. We all feel it and we must find a way to adapt at a faster rate in order to remain relevant. From helping to secure a safe campus environment, to strengthening student, faculty and staff talent acquisition, supporting faculty assignment and evaluation – to facilitating access to success in student learning, advising, timely progression to graduation and placement, enhancing business and communication practices, including branding and marketing, and elevating research productivity – USF, like other top tier research universities, will necessarily become reliant on an integrated system of data tools and analytics to inform and support our institution’s strategic path forward. This will become even more important as a consolidated USF competes with a new tier of peer and aspirational peer institutions, most of them well-established and better resourced.

Yes, you may have noticed that I slipped in mention of Consolidation after focusing almost exclusively on USF Tampa until this point in my remarks.

As you know, following passage through legislation earlier this year, the USF Board of Trustees has provided us with an important set of principles to guide our
plan for consolidation, a plan that will lead to *one university geographically distributed across three campuses*, with a shared mission, under a single regional accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), strengthening our stature as a Preeminent State Research University, and putting the needs of our students and communities foremost – all by July 1, 2020.

The authors of a recent TIAA publication noted, “The decision to consolidate or merge institutions is never an easy one, and the process is nearly always painful and costly.” (*Mergers in Higher Education: A Proactive Strategy to a Better Future.* TIAA Institute, 2017). While many of you have felt the “pain” first hand, because I know you are intimately involved in the planning process, I am confident that consolidation will eventually come to represent a win – win – win, for our students, our communities, and our university as, together, we work to make the borders between our campuses and the world at large much more porous (Michael Roth, President of Wesleyan, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 26, 2018). To be clear, this is not about compromising on preeminent performance, whether by students, faculty, or staff, but rather holding ourselves and one another accountable to a consistently higher academic value proposition for all members of our USF community, whether their home campus is in Tampa, St. Petersburg, or Sarasota-Manatee. Consolidation is about leveraging the distinctive and unified strengths of
all three campuses. Importantly, throughout the process of consolidation we must remain disciplined and focused on strengthening our positions for Performance Based Funding, Preeminence, and AAU.

And so, as we witness the dawning of a new era at USF, one that rightfully places us alongside two much older state research universities – with a singularly accredited university on the near horizon, and bold ambitions ahead of us, we might argue that 60 years on, our work has just begun. Today, as we stand proudly at one of this nation’s most dynamic public research universities, an acknowledged leader in student success, and a model for higher education rigor and relevance in the 21st century I urge you, perhaps like no other time in our history, to hold true to our core values: as, collectively, we champion academic excellence, advocate for freedom of inquiry and expression, actively support unfettered and civil discourse, all while recommitting ourselves to seeking both truth and innovative solutions through discovery.

In closing I know of no better message than that shared by President Genshaft earlier this semester – please remember:

“Nothing has ever been handed to us. We’re not entitled by land grant. We’re not bound by storied traditions. Everything we have achieved, we have earned. At USF, we shape our own future. Go Bulls!”
President Judy Genshaft, September 5, 2018.

Thank you for the continuing privilege of serving you as USF’s chief academic officer and I wish you all a very happy Thanksgiving holiday next week.