Ralph C. Wilcox, PhD
Provost and Executive Vice President

Fall Faculty Address
August 18, 2011

#1 <Title slide – Faculty Assembly>

Transforming Higher Education for Global Innovation
#2 <USF Strategic Plan Cover>

Accomplishments in AY 2010/11:

The 2010/2011 academic year was a banner year for USF thanks, in large part, to the remarkable accomplishments of our faculty, staff and students. From USF’s ranking as a high impact global research university, to our emergence as a national leader in patents, and our students’ unprecedented record in earning prestigious appointments as Freeman, Fulbright, Gilman, Goldwater and Hollings Scholars, a more complete story is told in my letter to faculty, of last month, that you can read on my website.

As we anticipate the arrival of 40,000 students at USF, and perhaps an additional 8,000 across the USF System, next week, I’d like to begin by refocusing our attention on Student Success.

#3 <Cover of Student Success Report>

Led by Paul Dosal and colleagues in Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and from across campus, the Student Success Council has made significant strides in the past year, yet we cannot relax our focused efforts.
It’s a story of INPUTS, THROUGHPUTS, OUTCOMES and OUTPUTS and remains a work in progress even as we celebrate our recent impressive gains.

We must work harder to institutionalize student success as a permanent priority at USF for until we ALL OWN Student Success – from professor to student, librarian to advisor, athletic coach and counselor, custodian and parking attendant – our targeted progress will be slow to come about.

Significant gains are being made in recruiting and enrolling the “right” students – those that show the greatest likelihood of success – as we work with high schools as well as Florida’s community and state colleges to ensure that our incoming students are appropriately prepared to succeed in college.

From curriculum re-design, to changes in academic policies, investments in our institutional research capacity, enhancements in professional academic advising and mentoring including the installlation of DegreeWorks, an expansion of our very successful Living and Learning Communities and faculty-in-residence programs, The Learning Commons and 24/5 Library services, Tutoring and Learning Support Center, the WDF initiative, classroom capture and the embrace of emerging technologies, and the Take 15 campaign which encourages more students to enroll full-time – USF’s comprehensive reform movement to improve student success is drawing national attention.

At the same time, new and upgraded instructional facilities from this impressive, state-of-the-art Interdisciplinary Science Teaching and Research building, to the All Steinway School of Music, and significant improvements to Cooper Hall, College of the Arts, Engineering, and Marine Science facilities promise to increase access and markedly improve the student learning environment at USF. Focused on the “life cycle” of Student Success, an impressive landscape, safety and environmentally friendly makeover for our campus community, along with upgrades to research facilities and USF’s Career Center, and amenities to enhance campus-life, round-out the impressive list of capital improvements greeting us at the onset of this new academic year.
The good news is that we’re making a real difference in the lives of our students. Student academic profiles, retention and graduation rates all show signs of significant improvement and we expect to see lower student debt and higher levels of student satisfaction as this important work continues. We remain mindful of the economic difficulties that so many of our students, and their families, are facing and will place a special emphasis on financial aid leveraging during the coming year, to ensure that our scholarship awards and other financial aid align with our strategic and enrollment plans. And you can help by creating and promoting new on-campus employment opportunities for our most needy students.

**Priorities for AY 2011/12:**

While USF’s characteristic and impressive performance trajectory has continued in the past year, we cannot ignore the serious challenges that higher education is facing in the World today. Foremost, in the face of a shift in funding paradigm for public higher education, is the need for budget stabilization, that is assuring an appropriate and predictable resource base to support USF’s strategic priorities in the future.

When we entered the Great Recession in the midst of the 2007/2008 academic year, we adopted a balanced and measured plan to identify efficiencies and eliminate non-essential expenditures, to seek new streams of revenue, and to judiciously allocate cash reserves and, subsequently, federal economic stimulus funds, to bridge or offset our budget deficit.

Our laser-like focus and discipline around strategic priorities, combined with fiscal belt-tightening, has resulted in a remarkable record of institutional progress over the past three years as we held true to recruiting, retaining and rewarding our most precious asset, our students, staff and faculty!

Like many, we anticipated an economic recovery within 2-3 years, and some even thought a return to practices of the past. Through managing our enrollment and supporting our core academic enterprise,
containing our costs, preserving existing streams of tuition and research revenue, and generating new sources of funds, we expected an acceleration toward our bold strategic vision.

Alas, it is now clear that a continuing dependence on non-recurring reserve funds to “fill the gap” is not sustainable and that building a robust, all-source, recurring base budget to support our strategic plan, our faculty and students will be essential to assuring USF of a strong future. This, I believe, represents our foremost challenge for this coming year.

Yet we also have other important work underway, including the search for new deans of University College, and the colleges of the Arts, Behavioral and Community Sciences, and Business. You can learn more about these searches on the Provost’s webpage and I encourage you to actively participate in the process.

At the same time we must continue our efforts to strengthen our student-to-faculty ratio at USF.

#5 <Student to Faculty Ratio>

Like most public universities in Florida we have much work to do, for we know all too well the direct and positive impact that an improved ratio will have on student learning as well as research, scholarly and creative productivity. In so many ways, it is true that the faculty are the “means of production” at research universities, for without our talented professors, our students would not select and enroll in our classes USF, our alumni and donors would not see fit to give their precious dollars, and federal government agencies would not choose to invest in research and development at USF.

Thus, recruiting, rewarding and retaining our most talented and productive faculty members remain foremost priorities for our college deans and I. It is the reason why our Board of Trustees has, even in these most challenging of economic times, committed precious resources to recognizing the performance of our faculty, and have made investments that reach beyond that initially bargained with the United Faculty of Florida. We care deeply about the USF community.
Tomorrow afternoon, I will greet the charter class of Provost’s Scholars. As you may know, we have launched an innovative and accelerated 3-year degree completion opportunity that promises significant cost savings to students, families, the university and state. While not for everyone, these carefully selected, highly motivated, focused and well-prepared students will forge a new path for USF. Afterall, I’ve never quite understood the logic behind 120 semester credit hours, or 4 academic years of study spread most commonly over two semesters. It seems that such practices were anchored in the early traditions of British universities and the constraints of an agrarian calendar, both adopted by Harvard College in 1652. Surely, in 2011, we know enough to adapt through being guided by a student’s demonstrated level of knowledge and skill competency?

#6 <USF World>

During the upcoming semester, you will be invited to participate in the much anticipated launch of USF World. Senior Vice President Holbrook’s vision promises to truly globalize USF through enhanced international services and activities; academic programs and area studies; as well as international research partnerships and global engagement. Growing numbers of international students and scholars, world languages, cross-cultural perspectives, and expanded opportunities for education abroad will find a central place in the life of our academic community as we seek to prepare our students for success in the 21st century.

#7 <US Dept of Commerce: STEM>

At the same time, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics have become essential ingredients in strengthening the competitive position of our university, state and nation. Embraced by the Board of Governors’ vision for New Florida; a report released by the US Department of Commerce just last month projected a 17% growth in STEM occupations between 2008-2018, compared to a 9.8% growth in non-STEM occupations. Moreover, the study found that two-thirds of STEM workers had a college degree, compared to just one third of non-STEM workers; their annual earnings were 26% higher than their non-STEM counterparts; and unemployment was markedly lower for those with a STEM education. The report concluded with an assertion that
read: “Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workers drive our nation's innovation and competitiveness by generating new ideas, new companies, and new industries”.

I share these findings with you, not because we have overlooked important developments, or neglected to engage in critical STEM initiatives at USF, but to suggest that we must redouble our efforts in the months and years ahead. In the coming weeks, I will be announcing a University-wide program aimed at further connecting, consolidating, and leveraging, the numerous yet often disparate STEM initiatives, at USF. Initiatives that cross the educational lifespan, from enhancing K-12 preparation in STEM, including USF’s participation in the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities’ (APLU’s) Science & Mathematics Teacher Imperative (SMTI), to an array of successful student recruitment initiatives in STEM, including the National Science Foundation’s STEP program anchored in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, and the Bridge-to-the-Doctorate facilitated through the College of Engineering. The “cycle” is completed by USF’s recent membership of CIRTL (the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning), led by the Graduate School, where we will join the likes of Michigan State University, Texas A&M, Vanderbilt and Wisconsin, Madison, in advancing the professional development of future STEM faculty members.

Of course, it is important to point out that, at the same time as we seek to more effectively coordinate our STEM initiatives at USF, we will continue to strengthen our programs in the Arts, Humanities, Education and Business, since we recognize the value of a comprehensive array of high quality programs at USF.

As you know, in spite of the immense challenges higher education has faced in recent years, USF has continued to “live” its Strategic Plan. As the once distant horizon of our current plan closes in, we will begin to collectively engage in shaping our roadmap for the next five years.

**Changing conditions:**

#8 <Adapt or Perish>
“Adapt or Perish”– Change and Resistance in the Academy

These are uncertain times for many in higher education and we might do well to heed H.G. Wells’ advice, “Adapt or Perish”. While I am not advocating capitulation to those who would impose ill-founded or arbitrary reform upon the academy, I am urging serious self-assessment and nimble action. It’s at times like these that I am reminded of those words most often attributed to Benjamin Franklin, “When you’re finished changing, you’re finished”.


As we contemplate USF’s future, we must recognize that both the internal and external conditions we face today, are quite different to those we experienced in May 2007, when our Board of Trustees approved USF’s current Strategic Plan – Transforming Higher Education for Global Innovation.

Make no mistake, as futurist Bob Johansen has suggested, today’s world is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – and it’ll take vision, understanding, clarity and agility to survive and flourish.

The recent pace of worldwide change in higher education has been swift and, at times, even turbulent.

#10 <Higher Education Book Collage>

A review of recent higher education titles tells the tale. From Going Broke by Degree, to University Inc., Unmaking the Public University, Excellence Without a Soul, Our Underachieving Colleges, Declining by Degrees, Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money, Saving Alma Mater, Steal this University, and Riptide: The New Normal in Higher Education, what is one to think?

And let there be no doubt that public higher education in Florida (and across the nation) today, is radically different from the universities that all of us, even our newest Assistant Professors, remember from our days as an undergraduate! There is no denying that recent, powerful national
and statewide politico-economic shifts have already had a profound impact on USF.

Yet it is worthwhile pondering the words of Nicholas Kristof who, writing recently in the *New York Times* (July 16, 2011), reminded us that: “The United States supports schools in Afghanistan because we know that education is one of the cheapest and most effective ways to build a country. Alas, we’ve forgotten that lesson at home. All across America, school budgets are being cut, teachers laid off and education programs dismantled... The immediate losers are the students. In the long run, the loser is our country”. The same is true in higher education.

Yet, while budget shortfalls and continuing economic uncertainty are a reality in Florida and beyond, we must accept responsibility for taking public higher education to the next level. It’s my belief that even if the state and national economies turn around quickly, we’re unlikely to see a return to lawmakers [re]investing vast amounts of public dollars in higher education, at least in ways that they might have in the past. If public subsidies do return they will most likely follow performance outputs (retention and graduation rates), rather than inputs (enrollment growth).

#11 <Eroding Public Support>

The story at USF is clear and patterns that of public universities across much of the nation, with the State’s share of funding falling from 72% in 2007/2008 to 59% in the current academic year. In the near term, as our economy falters, it is likely that we will witness a continuing erosion of public support, from declining state appropriations to a reduction in Pell Grants and other sources of need-based financial aid.

To offset these losses, we will continue to see greater dependence on private giving, auxiliary fees for service, direct and indirect revenues for research and development, and student tuition. Today, a full-time undergraduate resident student will pay approximately $5,800 in annual tuition and fees at USF. Even though this represents a sharp proportional increase over time, Florida’s tuition remains among the lowest in the nation.
#12 <Resident UG tuition: FL and other>

Even still, we must not lose sight of the annual cost of full-time undergraduate attendance at USF which, including tuition & fees, board & lodging, books, and transportation, exceeds $20,000 a year.

#13 <USF Cost of Attendance>

As tuition increases, including higher non-resident, self-funded and market-based costs, so do “consumer” expectations. In addition to re-opening the debate over “public good versus private gain” in state universities, new paradigms appear to support the commodification of higher education and reinforce the notion of students as customers. Like it or not, more and more, students and parents are investing in higher education with a singular purpose in mind, that being a well-paying job! Our role ought, in part, to be that of job creator rather than simply graduating job seekers.

#14 <Funding FL Higher Education: A Shifting Paradigm>

The main problem for Florida’s state universities is that even with proportionally steep increases in tuition over the past 4 years, new tuition revenues haven’t come close to offsetting losses in state funding meaning that today, we have fewer dollars to educate a USF student than we had in 2006/2007 even as students and parents rightly expect more for their higher tuition payments.

#15 <Diminishing Investment, Increased Productivity>

What’s remarkable about USF’s story over the past five years is that even as our budget has shrunk so have our outputs increased, with impressive upward trends in student enrollment (as measured by FTE), the number of degrees awarded, and growth in research expenditures.

Although WE understand the worth of a university education, and strive hard to improve scholarly attainment and completion rates, the value of a degree appears to be increasingly “under fire”. We must tell our story more effectively! By the way, for those interested in better understanding the changing form and fortune of American higher
education, I strongly recommend Louis Menand’s essay “Live and learn, Why we have college” in the June 6 issue of The New Yorker.

We know that, by 2018, nearly two-thirds of the nation’s jobs will require some level of postsecondary education or training. Indeed, one goal that our leaders in Washington and Tallahassee agree upon is that in order for our nation and state to meet employer workforce needs and maintain global competitiveness, the proportion of Americans with a college degree must grow significantly.

We know that median lifetime earnings and quality of life improve with education. Today, a baccalaureate yields $2.27 M in lifetime earnings, compared to $2.67 M for a Master’s degree, $3.25 M for a doctoral and $3.65 M for a professional degree.

#16 <What’s It Worth: Cover Page of Georgetown Workforce Report>

You may have noticed that the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University has garnered much attention of late, with its 2011 report entitled “What’s It Worth? The Economic Value of College Majors”. To quote the authors: “...while we found that any degree is better than no degree, we also found that there are significant differences. For example, the median earnings for full-time, full-year workers with Bachelor’s degrees... vary dramatically – from $29,000 for Counseling Psychology majors to $120,000 for Petroleum Engineering majors”. The study goes on to detail the “economic value” of 171 specific undergraduate majors.

Moreover, we know that improved health and life expectancy tends to follow those with a college degree, as do lower unemployment rates. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in April 2011 (at a time when the national average was between 9-10%) for those with less than a high school diploma was 14.6%; while it was 9.7% for those with a high school diploma; and 4.5% for those with a baccalaureate degree or higher. In Florida, that percentage was 18.3% for those with less than a high school diploma; 13.3% for those with a high school diploma; 6.5% for those with a baccalaureate degree; and just 4.7% for those with a graduate or professional degree. In other
words, you are more than twice as likely to be unemployed, in Florida today, if you have not earned a university degree.

In spite of what we know, transparent accountability will remain paramount to all we do, and quality assurance, demonstrated performance efficiency and outcomes will represent our best response to those that continue to question the relevance, value, and impact of higher education.

#17 <Median SAT Score>

At USF we will continue to shape our enrollment profile with a focus on more high ability students, those demonstrating the scholarly aptitude to academically succeed. Next week, we expect to enroll the strongest freshman class ever in the history of this campus as measured by HS GPA, SAT/ACT scores, and the number of Academic Success Factors.

We will strive to enroll a more geographically diverse student body, bringing regional and global experiences and perspectives to bear on the quality and relevance of a USF education.

And we will continue our drive toward 25% graduate enrollment, consistent with the profile of a top-tier national research university and, I believe, increasingly important since it seems that a graduate degree, and not a baccalaureate alone, is essential to competing successfully in the contemporary global marketplace of ideas. Indeed, today’s Job Want Ad pages say it all, “bachelor's required, master's preferred”. It's why graduate recruitment, graduate certificate and degree programs will be so essential to USF’s and Florida’s future.

And the market is demanding more, not less today. In addition to traditional critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills, an enhanced knowledge base and job specific skill sets, employers are seeking enhanced levels of global literacy; highly developed communication skills; an embrace of emerging technologies; innovation and and creativity in problem-solving; partnership and collaborative skills; and unquestionable integrity.
Most important, we will strengthen our resolve to accelerate levels of student progress, persistence, completion and placement.

#18 <Freshman Retention Rate>

Today, USF finds itself at or about the national average for 6-year graduation rates.

#19 <6-Year Graduation Rate>

But USF is NOT an average university. We have much work to do and all indications are that we'll continue to build on the 3% increase in graduation rates we’ve witnessed this year.

For a metropolitan-based university, that has proven itself indispensable to the communities it serves, USF’s future is, in so many ways grounded in entrepreneurial collaboration.

#20 <Public-Private Partnership Collage>

Already, we can point to successful public–private partnerships, such as INTO>USF which appeared in a front page story of this week’s Chronicle of Higher Education, research collaborations with Draper Labs and SRI, along with exciting work in USF Health: CAMLS (the Center for Advanced Medical Learning and Simulation), and joint ventures with Lehigh Valley Health Network, and The Villages.

#21 <Changing Landscape of Higher Education>

Finally, we will continue to be challenged (yet, I hope, not distracted) by the seemingly ever-changing landscape of higher education in Florida, from shifts within the State University System, the Florida State Colleges, the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida, as well as others.

For those unwilling to take–up the challenge, confident and eager reformers are already hard at work. They come in all shapes and sizes armed with proposals for a $10,000 degree (and that’s not $10,000 per year) and “No Frills U”, a bare bones, low cost, high volume model of
higher education. They come in the form of Shai Reshef’s free, global University of the People, made possible through academic volunteers, free “courseware”, the power of peer-to-peer learning through social networking, and $2.0 M of Mr. Reshef’s personal philanthropic contributions. Even if not yet accredited, UoPeople already claims 1,000 students in 115 countries.

As you might imagine, many of these models advocate for disruptive innovation in higher education, a widespread embrace of emerging technologies and a rapid expansion of online learning. Some may have read of the Seven Breakthrough Solutions for higher education, crafted by the Texas Public Policy Foundation and championed by the state’s Governor. Arguing that college costs are skyrocketing out of control and research universities, in particular, have “lost their way”, it’s perhaps not surprising that this market driven approach to higher education is finding appeal in state capitols across the nation.

Calls for change in public higher education are certainly warranted, in response to broader shifts in society, and we must take seriously our stewardship of both public and private resources. Moreover, we have a responsibility to ensure that academic quality and relevance, and not simply the quest for a cut-priced product, becomes the force that drives change in higher education if we are to bolster Florida’s competitive position in the global knowledge and innovation economy.

I urge you to take up this challenge, and I look forward to working with the Faculty Senate and other key stakeholders, to help shape USF’s future. We cannot bury our heads in the sand and nostalgically dream of a return to public higher education’s salad days. And surely we cannot wait for those outside the academy to determine our destiny. While I recognize that this may suggest a daunting challenge to some it is in so many ways what USF stands for: transformation through innovation.

To borrow from the title of a recent book, Reinventing Higher Education: The Promise of Innovation, the needle has shifted. Other volumes including Riptide: The New Normal in Higher Education, and
Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses have sounded the alarm. It’s time that we awaken and step up to the challenge. I remain confident that, because of who we are and in spite of external constraints, USF’s future looks bright. We must and will adapt to change and flourish!

Thank you.