

April 22, 2008

An Open Letter to the USF Community

As the Spring semester draws to a close, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for your many valued contributions toward enhancing USF and to making our community a better place to study, live and work.

These are difficult economic times for the State of Florida, and there is little doubt that USF along with other state universities will be changed organizations by the time the new fiscal year starts on July 1, 2008. As we've received budget cuts throughout the current year, we have engaged all stakeholder groups in developing responsible budget reduction recommendations that are intended to preserve our core commitment to serving the needs of currently enrolled students and to providing the support that our professors so richly deserve.

To this point in time, we know that the state's investment in USF has been reduced by 5.4 percent or \$19 million in the current year, and we are waiting to hear what next year's budget will bring. With the state's economic health in continuing decline, we anticipate further cuts (perhaps as much as another 5-10 percent) to our budget beginning July 1, 2008, with the possibility of even more reductions by the beginning of 2009 if we don't see an upturn in our economy. Accordingly, President Genshaft has asked us to prepare a 15 percent budget reduction plan for a \$52 million cut across the USF System.

With reduction planning still underway, no final decisions will be made until USF has received its 2008-09 budget from the state Legislature.

On the Tampa campus we must prepare to serve nearly 40,000 students with \$34 million less next year. We have sought input from faculty and the Faculty Senate (through the Budget Priorities Advisory Task Force), department chairs, deans, students and staff. We've been guided by the principles of equity and transparency. We are carefully evaluating programs based upon quality, alignment with our strategic priorities, demand, and viability for the future. This is not an easy process but one that is essential to our future growth and prosperity.

At the same time, we continue to explore administrative cost-saving measures—in advancement, business, communications, information technology, research, and student affairs, along with the offices of the President and Provost—initiatives that may allow us to mitigate

the impact of budget cuts on our core academic and research activities. We are also seeking new sources of revenue.

It is important to point out that we are committed to the following:

- **Continuing delivery of all undergraduate and graduate degree programs—no degree programs are being targeted for elimination, and**
- **Retaining all tenured and tenure-eligible faculty.**

We have already received some recommendations from deans and have frozen a large number of vacant faculty and staff positions. Presently, we are carefully reviewing all small departments, schools, centers and institutes, to explore how we might realize operational and administrative efficiencies and cost-savings, while preserving their identity. We are also exploring new academic alignments that promise continued and improved services for students, faculty and staff, streamlined and non-duplicative curriculum delivery, shared resources, and greater synergy, in anticipation of lean times ahead.

As I wrote earlier this semester, it would be naïve for any of us to think that we will be able to balance our budget without transformative shifts in the way we look, deliver our core academic and research programs, and conduct our business activities at USF. Change is inevitable and necessary.

Over the past months, I have sought to keep our faculty and others informed of developments through letters (<http://www.acad.usf.edu/>), small group meetings and, just last week, a series of open "Campus Conversations" that were attended by faculty, students and staff. If you have questions or are unclear about the messages that you may be hearing, I would encourage you to contact me at <http://www.acad.usf.edu/Office/Provost/send-note-provost.htm>. Meanwhile, I am confident that together we will successfully navigate these difficult waters and emerge as a stronger university community.

Sincerely,
RALPH WILCOX, PHD
PROVOST AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

 UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA