

**From:** Wilcox, Ralph  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 01, 2008 5:07 PM  
**To:** Academic Affairs-College Faculty; Academic Affairs-Unit Faculty  
**Cc:** Genshaft, President Judy; Visot, Cynthia; White, Karen A.; Goodman, Marshall (USF Lakeland); Guilford, Arthur (USF Sarasota-Manatee); Hoad, Michael; ACAD-Vice Presidents; Acad-COD; Cash, Jacqui; Acad-Support  
**Subject:** Letter to the Faculty



Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to begin with a note of congratulations to our colleagues in USF's College of Education, College of Nursing, School of Physical Therapy, and the Department of Psychology whose programs have recently been recognized by US News & World Report's magazine, [America's Best Graduate Schools 2009](#). The College of Education is ranked at #45, while the College of Nursing appears at #72. For the first time, the School of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Sciences is ranked at #69. USF's graduate program in Industrial and Organizational Psychology retains its perennial high ranking at #10 nationally. At a time when we are faced by many challenges, it is my sincere pleasure to acknowledge the accomplishments of these wonderful programs, their faculty, staff, and students.

What follows is, I know, a rather lengthy update on important matters that promise to have a major impact on the future of USF. While you will notice that several important questions remain unanswered at this time, it is my hope that resolutions will be forthcoming by the close of the current legislative session. **I strongly encourage you to read this update and develop a better sense of the climate, both political and economic, that Florida's public universities are facing today.**

At its March 20, 2008 meeting, the USF Board of Trustees approved a blueprint for the future of the USF System entitled [Path to Mission Differentiation](#). Shaped by faculty across all four campuses, the document underscores USF's commitment to strengthen its global research profile while serving the broad and diverse higher education needs of the nation, state, and the Tampa Bay region. This action lays out a clear and coherent plan for building a higher education system of distinctive, complementary and interdependent campuses at USF in the years to come.

Anchored by a doctoral-granting, nationally-ranked research campus in Tampa that offers excellence in both undergraduate and graduate education, the USF System envisions three regional campuses that deliver a broad array of higher education programs across the region. In addition to high quality baccalaureate and masters degrees to support regional workforce needs and economic development, they offer distinctive programs which strengthen the communities they serve. The plan is for each campus to report data separately to the federal government (which allows for each to have a distinctive national classification through the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), to participate separately in the Voluntary System of Accountability, and to secure separate regional accreditation through SACS and professional associations.

While new to Florida, the future of the USF System is, in part, modeled on multi-campus systems that have proven to be successful at the universities of Michigan, Minnesota, Pittsburgh, and Washington, where established, globally competitive research institutions are complemented by distinctive regional campuses that have flourished in becoming “the best they can be” among their national peers. You can view my [presentation](#) to the Board of Trustees online.

While much academic and scholarly progress continues at USF, the dark cloud of the state budget continues to hover above Florida’s public universities. We continue to plan for a 15% base budget reduction from July 1, 2007 to July 1, 2008 (amounting to approximately \$52 million across the USF System), even as we have already seen our budget reduced by 5.4% (or \$19 million) in the current year. The nation’s general economic malaise continues in Florida, and we do not anticipate a rapid turnaround. Presently, our elected officials in Tallahassee are seeking to build a [balanced budget](#) for the 2008/09 fiscal year. At this time, the Florida House of Representatives is recommending an [additional](#) 5.85% reduction for the state’s public universities, while the Florida Senate’s recommendation is at a 6.3% reduction. It is generally recognized that unless the economic downturn reverses itself rather quickly, we will need to prepare for further cuts following the elections in November 2008.

In the coming days and weeks, I expect that in addition to finalizing decisions on next year’s budget for USF, to begin July 1, 2008, the Florida State Legislature will be setting undergraduate tuition for the 2008-2009 academic year, finalizing its allocation for construction funding, acting on higher education governance in the State (including the future of the Florida Board of Governors and the creation of a State College System), establishing guidelines for distance learning fees, and determining the future of the *Byrd Alzheimer’s Center and Research Institute*, among other matters of interest to USF.

Meanwhile, I continue to work with faculty, chairs, deans, vice presidents, and other stakeholders to address our fiscal challenges and to ensure a strong future for USF. It is important to point out that, as fiscally autonomous units, USF Health and the regional campuses may be following a different budget reduction planning path than that which I will describe. You can [track developments online](#) as we continue to shape responses to balancing our budget and to better align USF to meet the bold ambitions of our [strategic plan](#).

Consistent with our commitment to transparency, the responses of chairs and directors to the report of the *Budget Priorities Advisory Task Force* have been posted and are being carefully considered along with both empirical and qualitative data from a variety of other sources. As a reminder, and to date, we have worked with colleges to implement the Fall base reduction of 3.6%, and we are in the process of identifying a further 3.0% of recurring funds from academic budgets. Meanwhile, we are holding undistributed reserves and the vacant rate on unfilled faculty and staff positions, as the freeze on non-essential expenditures continues. Again, I ask that where allowable, you utilize funds in carry-forward, indirect cost recovery, and foundation accounts to meet your obligations at this difficult time. At the University-wide level, we are exploring the cost benefits of consolidated purchasing, a restructuring of IT support and services, and potential savings in revised business practices.

We continue to explore the prospect of program consolidation, reduction, and realignment to eliminate operational inefficiencies in Academic Affairs; and we remain cognizant of the University’s commitment to meet the needs of currently enrolled students, to support faculty scholarship, and to preserve academic programs along with tenured and tenure-eligible faculty, whenever possible.

While our future commitment to delivering high quality education may, in part, be eased by a revised enrollment plan, this will not be enough. The ongoing discussions about potential restructuring are not just about cost-savings. Equally important is our determination to strengthen our position for the future in anticipation of lean times ahead, along with the need to leverage interdisciplinary strengths and cluster hiring

opportunities. Indeed, I commend those faculty leaders, departments, and colleges that are exploring the possibility of creative realignment that will promise a brighter future through assuring themselves a critical mass of colleagues, stronger interdisciplinary partnerships, and operational efficiencies through the leveraging of research core facilities, and the potential consolidation of curricula. Led by our deans and chairs, I strongly encourage all faculty members to become fully engaged in these important discussions. As recommendations emerge, I am eager to ensure that the broader USF community is provided a meaningful voice through participating in one or more of the following “Campus Conversations” – I hope that you will add these important dates to your calendar:

- Monday April 14, 5:00-6:30 p.m., in the USF Preview Room (ADM 185), for Mathematics, Sciences and Engineering;
- Tuesday April 15, 5:00-6:30 p.m., in the USF Preview Room (ADM 185), for the Arts, Humanities, Behavioral and Social Sciences; and
- Thursday April 17, 5:30-7:00 p.m., in the USF Preview Room (ADM 185), for Professional Colleges, Schools and Programs.

What has become abundantly clear is that with an anticipated \$52 million base budget reduction, Academic Affairs in the future will both look and function differently than it has in the past. If the budget picture improves beyond that anticipated, then we will seek to judiciously reinvest in those Academic Affairs units that have recognized the need to reshape their future in support of USF’s strategic plan. While it is my plan to announce any broad structural and functional shifts in Academic Affairs for FY 2008-2009 before the end of this semester, such timing will depend on whether the Legislature and Governor are able to finalize an appropriations package in timely fashion.

Concurrent with our efforts to balance the budget and fulfill our fiscal responsibility, we have been actively preparing for the future. The *Budget Planning Workgroup* (an extension of the Faculty Senate’s *Budget Priorities Advisory Task Force*) is preparing to (a) re-set academic budgets for 2008-2009 in alignment with USF’s strategic plan, (b) establish appropriate rules for budget and fiscal management, and (c) shape a transparent and sustainable planning process for the future. As the 2008-2009 academic year begins, it is my hope that departments, schools, and colleges will embark upon the compact planning process which, given our present budget challenges, was delayed at the onset of the Fall 2007 semester. As you may recall, compacts are short term (18-24 months), focused planning agreements negotiated between accountable officers (e.g. chairs) and their supervisors (e.g. deans). They are intended to align broad University goals with the priorities, investments, and actions of campuses and colleges, as well as academic and service units. Compact plans are intended to be the outgrowth of regular and thoughtful engagement with all stakeholders. They are expected to promote shared understanding, decentralized authority and accountability, support institutional values, and embrace one or more of the following USF emphases:

- Community Engagement;
- Global Literacy and Impact;
- Integrated, Interdisciplinary Inquiry;
- Research and Innovation; and
- Student Success.

The [compact planning process](#) will be transparent. We will seek consensus regarding unit goals and priorities, translate these goals into specific actions, include cost-benefit analysis in terms of resource investment, and promote collegiality by engaging those members of the USF community (including faculty and key staff) who will implement the plan.

Moreover, I anticipate that the next academic year will see considerable institutional effort devoted to the *Task Force on Faculty Roles, Responsibilities and Rewards*. While you will be hearing much more about this in the coming months, the primary purpose will be to conduct a comprehensive study of faculty roles, responsibilities, and rewards at the University of South Florida. Our intention is to bring the faculty's academic experience, expectations, and rewards into alignment with the institution's strategic plan. Among the topics to be explored are strategies for shaping an AAU-like faculty, recruitment programs – for excellence and diversity, cluster hiring, professional development and faculty mentoring, faculty retention strategies, valuing interdisciplinary collaboration and joint appointments, faculty classification (tenured/tenure track, full-time, adjunct, courtesy, research, clinical, and affiliate), along with roles and responsibilities, tenure and promotion, flexibility on the tenure track (e.g. maternal/paternal leave) and “stopping the tenure clock,” as well as defining and valuing community engagement. To this end, I am presently convening a *Faculty Steering Committee* (with recommendations from the Faculty Senate) which, in collaboration with the Office of the Provost, will more clearly define the structure and scope of the *Task Force's* charge, proposed process, membership, timeline, and expected deliverables.

Before I close, I would like to further extend an invitation to stop by and share your thoughts with me. I am pleased to welcome you for a cup of coffee on Monday April 21, from 8:30-9:30 a.m., in my office. I can assure you that the Academic Affairs leadership team relishes the opportunity to exchange ideas with you on such occasions. For our colleagues on the regional campuses, I am very much looking forward to my visits to USF Sarasota-Manatee on Thursday April 10, and USF Lakeland on Tuesday April 15.

Finally, I truly hope that you will be able to accept my earlier [invitation](#) to attend one or more of USF's Spring Commencement activities at the Sun Dome, on May 2-3, 2008. The deadline for registration (electronically, or by telephone at 4-1816) is April 11, 2008. This will provide an opportunity for our graduates and their friends and families to thank you, while we acknowledge their accomplishments. Together we will contribute much toward strengthening a sense of academic community at USF.

As you enter the final month of the Spring 2008 semester, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest appreciation for all that you do at USF in contributing to the education of our students, the creation of new knowledge, and the needs of the communities we serve. There can be no great university without a great faculty, and I hope that I have anticipated (and answered?) many of the questions that you and your colleagues have been asking yourselves in light of the challenging economic climate that American higher education is facing today. In spite of the challenges, and guided by our strategic plan and shared values, I remain confident that we will prevail and position ourselves in a more focused and stronger fashion to further advance the University of South Florida.

Best regards,



Ralph C. Wilcox  
Provost and Senior Vice President