

From: Wilcox, Ralph
Sent: Monday, October 06, 2008 11:46 AM
Subject: Message to the Faculty



October 6, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

As we near the midpoint of the Fall 2008 semester, I wanted to take the opportunity to provide you with an update on matters essential to the future of USF. As you are undoubtedly aware, student enrollment remains strong this Fall with 46,164 students enrolled across the USF System. This represents a 2.3% growth over last year, with the most significant increases witnessed on our regional campuses: at USF St. Petersburg (+6%), USF Sarasota-Manatee (+4%), and USF Polytechnic (+38%). While student demand for admission to USF continues to grow, I am acutely aware of the challenges that expanded enrollment creates for our faculty, particularly in the wake of the significant budget reductions that we've had to absorb during 2008. With 39,099 students enrolled on USF's main campus, we recognize that we are near capacity and will continue to carefully manage undergraduate enrollment while striving to enhance the proportion of graduate students, particularly at the doctoral level.

The academic profile of our Fall 2008 freshman class is most satisfying, with average SAT scores (1160 overall and 1353 for students enrolled in the Honors College) and high school grade point average (3.73) registering all-time highs. We also enrolled more National Merit (24), National Achievement (4), and National Hispanic (8) Scholars than ever before. Just as encouraging is our freshmen retention rate which has climbed above 85% for the first time in USF's history and up from 81% just a year ago. These data are clear indications that our efforts to recruit, retain, and graduate a more academically capable cohort of students are beginning to bear fruit. Of course, one might reasonably argue that the best indicator of student success is the scholarly preparedness and future placement of our graduates – and it is to you, our faculty, that we must attribute such future successes. Thank you for your understanding of our need to balance Florida's increased demand for access to higher education with the need to preserve and ensure academic quality and integrity. I expect to be seeking guidance from the Faculty Senate on this and other emerging higher education issues in the coming months.

We all recognize the sometimes difficult path that we've had to navigate over the past year in seeking to balance our budget. While the structural metamorphosis of Academic Affairs continues in some corners of campus, I am pleased to share with you that our newest college, the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences, has created a strong sense of academic community under the leadership of Dean Junius Gonzales. I support the ongoing deliberations occurring during this time of transformation, as faculty across every college are exploring novel ways in which they can more directly contribute to USF's future.

At the same time, USF-wide faculty task forces are tackling such institutional priorities as *Faculty Roles, Responsibilities and Rewards; Integrated, Interdisciplinary Inquiry*; and the *USF World* initiative. I thank you for your leadership and engagement in these important initiatives and for your commitment to institutional progress. I continue to be immensely impressed by the success of our faculty in the research, scholarly, and creative arenas. Our three signature interdisciplinary research programs, announced recently by President Genshaft – *Sustainable, Healthy Communities; Integrated Neurosciences*; and *Diabetes and Autoimmune*

Disorders – are built upon USF’s strengths and promise to help cement our position among the nation’s leading research institutions. I strongly encourage you to avail yourselves of opportunities to actively engage in one or more of these important initiatives.

In addition to balancing student learning, generating new knowledge, and expanding global engagement, the coming months promise to occupy all of us as we prepare our five-year response to the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Integral to this process is our participation in the *Voluntary System of Accountability*TM project, a partnership between the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). Just last week, we joined other universities in launching our institutional *College Portrait*TM. Intended to provide prospective students, parents, guidance counselors, and other stakeholders with access to basic, comparable information about student characteristics, costs, student experience and learning outcomes, USF’s portrait is now available [online](#).

As we continue to immerse ourselves in the day to day activities of university life, we do so in the shadow of a looming dark cloud, one cast by the declining economic climate in Florida and across the nation. While we have, in part, prepared for future anticipated cuts, we do not expect the full magnitude of the economic downturn on Florida’s public universities to become evident until after next month’s elections. Meanwhile, we have launched searches to fill upward of 75 new faculty positions (on USF’s main campus) essential to restoring the base of intellectual talent at USF. Unlike in years past, we will be seeking to fill a large number of senior faculty appointments. Also included in this important recruitment effort are critical leadership positions – Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Vice President for Research and Innovation, Director of the School of Architecture and Community Design, Director of the Institute for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean, and Assistant Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness – the latter deemed essential to our continuing regional accreditation by SACS.

Of course, funding for these new faculty positions is drawn from a precious and limited pool of recurring resources. Every new appointment will be important in supporting USF’s mission. I have asked our deans to ensure that each search committee documents its intentional efforts to recruit a strong and diverse pool of candidates, particularly through nominations and solicitations to HBCUs, HSIs and women’s colleges. In the case of senior appointments at the associate and full professor ranks, immediate strategic performance outcomes (e.g. federal R&D, postdoctoral support, national faculty awards, and high impact citations) must be assured. As you can see, we have a rare yet wonderful opportunity to recruit a cohort of dynamic, innovative, and productive scholars who promise valued contributions toward advancing our vision for the future.

At the same time, faculty retention remains my top priority. While I am disappointed that collective bargaining efforts have not yet settled on a contractual agreement for our faculty, I am hopeful we will not have to wait too long to reward our deserving colleagues. We remain committed to bargaining in good faith with the goal of reaching a broad agreement soon. Meanwhile, and even though we have only a small pool of recurring funds (the only source available for base salary adjustments) available to us, the Board of Trustees has authorized the immediate distribution of base salary awards to in-unit faculty within its discretionary authority granted in the status quo collective bargaining agreement. These awards will be based upon sustained research, scholarly, and creative excellence. Please refer to the attached document that provides more details.

Finally, I would like to remind you Fall Commencement is scheduled for Saturday, December 13, 2008, at the USF Sun Dome. There will be three ceremonies:

- 9:00 a.m. – Undergraduate students from the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences
- 1:30 p.m. – Undergraduate students from the Colleges of Business, Education, Engineering, Medicine, Nursing, and Visual and Performing Arts and Undergraduate Studies

- 6 p.m. – Graduate students from all colleges (this includes Masters, Master of Fine Arts, Education Specialist, and Doctoral)

Please “stay tuned” as I will be sending you more details on Fall Commencement shortly. Meanwhile, I hope that you will be able to join us at one or all of the ceremonies.

Thank you again for all that you are contributing to the education of our students, the important needs of the communities we serve, and the enhancement of our status as a top-tier public research university.

Best regards,

Ralph

Ralph C. Wilcox
Provost and Senior Vice President