

**From:** Wilcox, Ralph  
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**Subject:** Message to the Faculty



January 19, 2009

Dear Colleagues,

As I welcome you back to a new semester, I would like to extend my best wishes for a healthy and productive 2009. I hope that you have managed to find some time to rest and regenerate your energies since I last [wrote](#) to you before the holidays.

As we prepare to begin the third week of classes, I am putting the finishing touches to this update on a national holiday dedicated to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the leadership role he played as a champion of change and tolerance through this nation's civil rights movement. Today is also the eve of President Barack Obama's inauguration. To the extent that your class and work schedules permit, it is my hope that members of the USF community will choose to "tune in" tomorrow and witness history in the making. We are proud to broadcast the Presidential Inauguration at a number of sites across all campuses. Sponsored by the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement, the doors of the Ballroom of the Marshall Student Center will open at 10 a.m., with the Oath of Office scheduled to begin at 11:30 a.m. If you prefer, you should be able to watch history unfolding on your desktop. More information about campus viewing locations can be found on the [2009 Presidential Inauguration](#) page provided by Information Technology.

Many of you, along with students and support staff, have inquired about university policy with regard to this rare and wonderful opportunity to witness an event that will change and, in so many ways, define this nation now and in the years to come. Since this is not an official holiday, we have no such policy. While I certainly recognize the significance of the moment and the opportunity it provides us to witness a milestone in American history, academic requirements and performance (including course attendance, participation, and completion requirements) remain the strict prerogative of the instructor. Accordingly, I have every confidence that you will, on a class-by-class basis, consider the educational relevance of these historical and political events to the academic content you are delivering as well as the broader educational value for our students, and determine whether to provide all enrolled students with an equitable opportunity to witness the presidential inauguration live.

### **A time for change and celebration**

Given the continuing global unrest and the dismal economic news we have witnessed over the past year, which is surely destined to remain with us for some time to come, the inauguration of America's 44<sup>th</sup> president has ushered in a broad sense of hope and optimism across the nation.

At USF, we recognize the challenges associated with a deteriorating economy yet continue to celebrate our achievements. Enrollment remains strong this semester, with a one percent increase in student headcount and a two percent increase in student credit hours across the USF System. While we have deliberately sought to manage enrollment on the research campus in Tampa, we have witnessed a four percent growth at USF St.

Petersburg and USF Sarasota-Manatee, and double digit growth at USF Polytechnic. You can review enrollment details for each campus at the [USF e-Profiles](#) site.

Of course, such incremental growth is something new for USF where, since the beginning of this decade, we have witnessed a 70 percent increase in student applications, a 40 percent increase in student enrollment, and a 50 percent increase in degrees awarded. Yet, as we wrestle with a 15 percent reduction in our state appropriated budget since July 2007, successfully managing our student enrollment is critical to ensuring our ability to deliver a high quality education.

Earlier this month, [The Princeton Review](#) named USF as one of the nation's 50 "Best Value" public colleges and universities for 2009. While this may be considered a questionable distinction for some as it is, in part, related to Florida's low tuition rates, there is no debating the effect this will have in directing more high ability students to USF in these difficult economic times. Once again, I thank all of our faculty and staff for the commitment they make to ensuring that our students continue to receive the high quality educational experience that they have come to expect from USF.

As you know, just last month the USF Board of Trustees approved the 2008-09 Collective Bargaining Agreement with the USF Chapter of the United Faculty of Florida. The agreement provides for a two percent competitive pay increase to all employees in the bargaining unit who were employed at USF on June 30, 2008, and who had a "satisfactory" or better evaluation in the last annual review. An additional 0.4 percent merit pool will be distributed to individuals in this group with at least a "strong" or better performance. Furthermore, the university has the authority to grant discretionary raises and bonuses for special achievements, excellence, and market equity adjustments up to one percent of the in-unit salary base. While out-of-unit faculty members are not covered by this agreement, we will ensure equitable opportunity and distribution of salary increments for these faculty members as well. However, it is important to share with you that, given the economic challenges we are confronting, out-of-unit faculty members classified as deans or higher (including, but not limited to, the president, vice presidents, associate/assistant vice presidents, associate/assistant/vice provosts, and equivalent regional chancellor/vice chancellors) will not be eligible for merit or discretionary salary increases at this time.

Finally, and on a related matter, we will shortly be hearing from the Office of Human Resources with the guidelines and application process pertaining to the paid parental leave program for faculty. I am delighted that we have finally established such a program, one which represents an important agreement between USF and UFF, and will certainly strengthen the university's position as a family-friendly workplace.

### **New funding opportunities and the need for thoughtful and shared planning even as Florida's budget woes continue**

Like most states across the nation, Florida's economy continues to deteriorate, with December's tax collections bringing to 21 (beginning in April 2007) the number of consecutive months in which general revenue has fallen short of initial or revised expectations. Every day, we read reports of universities across the country cutting enrollment; closing faculty searches; terminating academic programs, departments and colleges; furloughing or laying-off faculty and staff; and even closing their doors. This is a statewide and national problem that will demand local and federal solutions to ensure that American higher education recovers and regains its rightful competitive place on the global stage.

The recently concluded special session in Tallahassee resulted in a further \$16 million cut across the USF System (and an additional \$114 million for the State University System), bringing the [university's total budget reduction since July 2007](#) to more than \$52 million. Once approved by the governor, we will await his proposed budget for FY 2009-2010, and the outcome of the regular legislative session that begins in March. Suffice it to say that we know the state's budget deficit is growing, and we anticipate further cuts in the coming months.

Last year, we embraced an engaged and deliberative approach to budget planning and intend to continue to do so as we prepare for future reductions. To date, we have been able to preserve all tenured and tenure-earning faculty members, all degree programs, and all academic departments. My commitment to continue this course of action remains strong for the coming term, even as we strategically reinvest precious resources in seeking to fill upward of 75 new faculty positions. The past 12 months have not been easy, and Florida's current economic condition portends more of the same. However, today I am convinced that, due in large part to prior belt-tightening and thoughtful academic restructuring, we find ourselves in a stronger academic position as we witness a most satisfying growth in interdisciplinary collaboration (both in the classroom and research, particularly in the sciences), emergence of novel clusters, and much greater synergy. I urge you to continue to explore innovative solutions that will, in a sense, allow us to redefine USF guided by a core commitment to quality enhancement and cost containment.

On the federal level, I am sure that like me you found it refreshing to hear President-Elect Obama in his address on ["American Recovery and Reinvestment,"](#) emphasize that the nation's universities must be a part of the solution to restoring the nation's economy and confidence. As a result, it seems clear that universities will be eligible to receive a portion of the \$825 billion economic stimulus package being developed by congress. Focusing on a sizeable investment in scientific research (with increased funding for the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Energy), I urge you to start giving careful thought to the development of prospective competitive proposals in anticipation of future funding opportunities. The initial stimulus legislation also proposes a substantive investment in clean and alternative energy research and demonstration projects. Likewise, we anticipate new opportunities to strengthen higher education infrastructure, support the construction of "shovel ready" university facilities that promise long- and short-term new job creation (a plan we have been working on at USF for some weeks now), to enhance broadband access and information technology, and to improve need-based financial aid by increasing the Pell maximum and federal work study funding.

As we await further news about the state and federal budgets and their potential impact on USF, we will continue to systematically plan for our future. Recently, President Genshaft announced the formation of a USF System Budget Planning Advisory Committee that brings together USF's faculty, staff, students, and leadership to ensure sound and well-informed budget planning across our university system. I am pleased to chair the committee which will "assure that the budget reflects USF's strategic priorities," by embarking upon planning in an open and transparent fashion and providing all stakeholder groups with ample opportunity for input. Throughout our deliberations, I anticipate we will be guided by the principles of academic quality, centrality to USF's strategic plan, addressing demand (by students, faculty, staff, and the broader community), and future viability.

### **...and what about USF's "unrestricted net assets" that we've heard so much about?**

While writing of budget planning, and because much has been made of the availability of non-recurring carry-forward funds, it is important for me to reiterate my earlier observations regarding the use of such funds to address our budget needs in Academic Affairs. From the outset, the judicious spending down of these cash reserves has been an important and integral part of our plan to balance the budget and to adequately resource our academic colleges and departments. In short, we have already strategically allocated unrestricted, non-recurring funds to pay for non-permanent instruction (i.e. visiting instructors, adjuncts, and graduate teaching assistants), summer school instruction, staff bonuses, departmental operating expenses (including faculty travel), new faculty start-up costs, renovations and space build out (e.g. the Interdisciplinary Research Building), the enhancement of library collections, instructional technology upgrades, equipment/technology replacement, support for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, and other strategic priorities, including USF's signature research programs. Of course, a portion of these funds must be held to cover statutorily mandated reserves and other fiscal obligations, including leave payouts. It is perhaps most important to point out that non-recurring, cash resources cannot be used to cover recurring obligations such as base salary increases for employees.

I hope that you will rest assured that I will continue my focus on academic quality assurance in meeting the needs of our students and supporting the needs of our faculty. Continuing and future investments will be made with a careful eye to their impact on enhancing performance in federal research and development expenditures; total research and development expenditures (including USDA, state, and industrial); postdoctoral fellow counts; citations; the number of doctorates awarded; the number of national academy members; National Research Council faculty quality ratings; faculty arts and humanities, awards, fellowships and memberships; and the index of undergraduate and graduate student access, selectivity, progress and success (including the academic profile of enrolled students, diversity of the student body, student retention and graduation rates, national student scholars, and the residential student population).

### **Building a vibrant academic community**

We will continue to work with the Faculty Senate to strengthen the academic community at USF. In this regard, I would like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Laurence Branch, President of the Faculty Senate, and Drs. Liz Bird, Eric Eisenberg, Pritish Mukherjee and Dwayne Smith for their collaboration in crafting a *Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Principles, Guidelines and Procedures for Major Organizational Restructuring of Academic Units at USF*. This document, pending review by the Department Chairs' Council, defines the advisory role of the Faculty Senate and outlines the consultative process to be followed in future academic restructuring in Academic Affairs on the Tampa campus.

I look forward to visiting with students, faculty, and administrators on our regional campuses in the coming weeks. I plan to be at USF Polytechnic on Thursday, February 19, and at USF Sarasota-Manatee on Thursday, March 5.

In spite of the darkening economic clouds overhead, I remain extremely optimistic about USF's strategic path forward as we refuse to retreat and as new opportunities emerge.

Based on recommendations emanating from a task force co-chaired by Dr. Michael Barber, Past President of the Faculty Senate, and Dr. Dwayne Smith, Senior Vice Provost, we have developed a new and competitive benefits package for postdoctoral fellows and their dependents. Complete information will be forthcoming from Sandy Lovins, Associate Vice President for Human Resources, Associate Vice President Graham Tobin, and Interim Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Vice President for Research and Innovation Karen Liller.

Furthermore, while many of the deadlines have passed for the coming year's cycle of [national faculty honors and awards](#), now is the time to plan and prepare for next year's application/nomination cycle. Those requiring institutional nominations should contact [Dr. Graham Tobin](#).

Exciting opportunities continue for our students. I ask that you please encourage both graduate students and undergraduate juniors/seniors who have demonstrated a passion for public service to apply for the State of Florida's [Gubernatorial Fellowship Program](#). Please contact [Dr. Tapas Das](#), Associate Provost, with any questions.

I'd like to remind you that I continue to host occasional tea and coffee hours in my office. This provides an important opportunity for faculty to connect with the Provost's leadership team. Remaining dates for Spring 2009 are Friday, March 6, from 9-10 a.m., and Friday, April 17, from 2-3 p.m.

Finally, I urge you to place [USF's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Diversity Summit](#) on your calendar. Scheduled for Thursday, February 5, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in Traditions Hall of the Gibbons Alumni Center, this year's theme is *Mentoring and Diversity: Building a Community of Excellence*. Our guest speaker will be Dr. Stacy Blake-Beard, Associate Professor in the School of Management at Simmons College. Please [RSVP](#) online by Monday, February 2. I hope you will be able to join us for what promises to be a very productive program.

Meanwhile, I wish you all the best for an exciting and productive Spring semester.

*Ralph*

Ralph C. Wilcox  
Provost and Senior Vice President