Dear Colleagues,

I trust this finds you well-rested following an extended holiday weekend, even as some of you are continuing your Summer School assignments and others are hard at work advancing research, scholarly and creative agendas. While the past academic year has lived up to the anticipated challenges, I continue to be amazed at the remarkable accomplishments you and our students have made since my annual Fall Address last August. Eleven months ago, I spoke of the radically shifting funding paradigm for public higher education in the United States, the questions we would face with regard to access and affordability, and the quality, relevance and value of an education at a research university. Moreover, I challenged us all to engage in radically transforming student success at USF, to embrace the university’s global passage through USF World, and to focus on our graduates’ role as job creators rather than simply job seekers. Quite clearly, the generation of high skilled, high wage jobs and our direct contribution to economic renewal through a commitment to New Florida will continue to be at the forefront of the state’s public universities’ agendas. Even though none of this is unique to USF or Florida, we have much to learn from the recent experiences of other states and nations. Throughout the challenges of the past year, we have remained true to our strategic path and have continued the remarkable progress that has become a hallmark of USF. If you have not already done so, I invite you to peruse the document, Advancing USF’s Strategic Plan, which tracks our performance against public AAU institutions across the country. I also hope that you take time to follow the achievements of our faculty, staff and students on the USF News Channel and the Provost’s page.

The following sections contain a considerable amount of information that I trust you will find helpful. I ask your indulgence in carefully reading these since they serve to chart our many accomplishments over the past year and provide a candid assessment of the challenges that we will face in the year ahead.

**Campus Improvements Continue**

While you are hard at work this Summer I ask that you “please forgive our appearance” as we continue to enhance our campus environment and build the infrastructure so essential to achieving the goals of our faculty and students. During the past year we have opened the Kiran C. Patel Center for Global Solutions, and the new All Steinway School of Music, as well as having made significant improvements to the learning and research environments in the Library, Cooper Hall, the College of Business, the College of Marine Science, and the Faculty Office Building which is home to INTO>USF, along with build out of a new Advanced Materials research cluster in the Interdisciplinary Research Building.
More recently, the Honors College and the Graduate School have relocated to the Administration Building, and work has begun on the long awaited renovation of the Sun Dome amidst a significantly improved athletic district. Next month, we will open the landmark Interdisciplinary Science Teaching and Research Facility along with an expansion to the Campus Recreation Center. Of course, while the question is often asked of me, regrettably the source of funds utilized for these campus enhancements doesn’t lend itself to further investment in growing and strengthening USF’s faculty cohort.

Raising USF’s Profile

Even as we seek to strengthen the university’s infrastructure, our instructional and research outputs continue to grow. During the 2010-2011 academic year USF witnessed improvements in our student retention and graduation rates, we awarded well over 11,000 degrees – more than ever before, and USF’s research profile continued to climb. First, USF was ranked 110th in the world (and second in the state) among 1,000 global High Impact Universities and, more recently, emerged as 27th among public institutions listed in the Top American Research Universities. Then, just last month, USF appeared as one of only 14 universities on a list of 300 organizations awarded the highest number of U.S. patents last year. One of only two Florida organizations on the list, USF was the only university statewide, and found itself in good company with 12 public and private AAU members along with a Chinese university. We have much to be proud of in the accomplishments of our faculty.

At the same time, USF has maintained its interdisciplinary investment in signature research programs. Our efforts to design and build Sustainable Healthy Communities (with a focus on water, clean energy, healthy oceans, the built environment, and public health), are complemented by the impressive achievements of the USF Office of Sustainability and such exciting initiatives as Team Florida’s FLeX House entry in the 2011 Solar Decathlon. Diabetes and Autoimmune Disorders, Integrated Neurosciences, and Veterans’ Re-Integration round out USF’s major research initiatives in the STEM field. At the same time, we continue to build and support complementary and distinctive strengths in the arts and humanities. If you haven’t yet seen them, many of our academic programs are highlighted in a series of “webisodes” which, although designed for our fundraising campaign, offer broad applicability.

The contributions of our faculty, in the classroom, in research and the broader community are truly remarkable. Earlier this year I was pleased to announce the selection of Professors Emanuel “Manny” Donchin, Department of Psychology, and Lawrence “Larry” Hall, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, as USF’s 2011 Distinguished University Professors. Additionally, as your nominations of colleagues continues more and more USF faculty members are being selected as recipients of prestigious national and international awards.

The same goes for our talented students. USF’s Office of National Scholarships is the place to direct your “best and brightest” undergraduate and graduate students. This Summer, moreso than in the past, USF students are dotting the planet, availing themselves of hard-earned and highly competitive opportunities thanks to Freeman, Fulbright, Gilman, Goldwater, Hollings, and other scholarships.

Celebrating Our Students’ Success
Our commitment to Student Success has taken on a new level of importance in the past year, as we have begun to institutionalize it as a permanent priority at USF. This comprehensive effort has already yielded significant outcomes. Academic Affairs’ successful, active partnership with Student Affairs ensures that all enrolled students are adequately prepared to succeed at USF, are provided the support to maintain timely progression, and to graduate with high levels of competency and satisfaction along with low levels of debt. These attributes will be essential to securing a strong future for USF. The Library has transformed itself from a book repository to a Learning Center, where students can find tutoring in math, sciences, foreign languages and writing, along with the new home for Undergraduate Research. USF’s Office of Student Success has been working on overdrive, focusing its efforts on the WDF initiative and course redesign, as well as implementing a new, branded web application, increasing on-campus student employment opportunities, developing a financial aid leveraging model, and launching Degree Works to facilitate personalized academic auditing. With your support, we are beginning to see a real difference, with improvements in undergraduate retention and graduation rates. I ask for your continued assistance through challenging our students in the classroom and along their academic path. With the most academic talented freshman class in USF’s history anticipated to enroll this Fall, you can help by urging our students to Take 15 and enroll full-time. At the same time, and while many of our graduate programs are ranked among the best in the nation, we are witnessing a slowdown in enrollment growth at the master’s level which will need our attention if we’re to achieve our goal of 25% graduate enrollment at USF.

**Stabilizing Our Resource Base**

Maintaining our student headcount at 40,000 (on the Tampa campus), and shaping a more talented, full-time, and geographically diverse student enrollment profile will be essential to our future stability. The loss of federal economic stimulus funding coupled with a further erosion in state appropriations has created a budget gap that will not be filled by new tuition revenues. Once again, we will draw upon our remaining cash reserves to partially bridge our budget shortfall yet, with the pool of reserve funds almost depleted, the coming year will challenge us to establish a more robust recurring base budget to support our future growth.

It is clear that the funding paradigm for public higher education, in Florida and beyond, has undergone a radical shift in recent years characterized by rapidly diminishing public investment, a steep growth in tuition, and a continuing threat to the availability of need-based financial aid. This shift has prompted renewed discourse around access and affordability along with growing public accountability focused on faculty compensation, teaching loads and research productivity. In Florida, the early focus has been on improved articulation, coordination and coherence in academic delivery across the State University System, with an assessment of low producing degree programs and opportunities for collaboration. Efforts elsewhere, led by the likes of The Center for College Affordability and Productivity, have helped elevate the dialogue around higher education accountability to a new level.

Today, like no time in the past, we are challenged to balance quality assurance with optimal efficiency and to seek new opportunities for revenue generation. Indeed, it seems that our experience is increasingly becoming that of the private university, one that will likely challenge our fundamental values of serving the public good, assuring access and affordability, and promoting academic freedom. From the implementation of new fees, differential and market-based tuition, to the expansion of public-
private partnerships, and the creation of University College (providing a more entrepreneurial model for academic delivery free from state subsidy), USF is adapting to these new conditions. Yet we must remain vigilant and demonstrate sound stewardship of the public’s investment in USF. For that reason I have asked our deans to ensure that all non-tenure track Instructors and Lecturers are carrying a full instructional assignment equivalent to four classes each semester. The same goes for tenured facultymembers who have, in the determination of their chair and/or dean, failed to demonstrate an appropriate and sustained level of scholarly productivity over time. Being able to document equitable and productive workloads is essential to our owninstitutional integrity as we take pride in USF’s position as a high impact, global research university dedicated to student success.

While I am confident in USF’s strategic alignment with New Florida, our commitment to generating new knowledge, new companies and new jobs must be carefully balanced against creating a talented and highly skilled workforce to support the state’s economic future. That having been said, I remain convinced that USF’s greatest asset is its intellectual capital, our talented students, faculty and staff. Faced by difficult economic conditions, we will continue to balance available need-based financial aid (to ensure that all qualified students are provided the opportunity to benefit from a USF education), and we will sustain our commitment to recruiting, rewarding and retaining our highperforming faculty and staff. To this end, I am pleased that we will soon distribute a 2% salary pool, based uponperformance, to enhance faculty salaries, and I hope that we will soon awardmerit-based bonuses from a 1% salary pool to faculty, and a similar bonus from 2-3% for our highly valued staff. This continues our pattern of commitment to rewarding faculty and staff during what has been the most difficult economic period in USF’s history.

The Year Ahead

Now that USF’s midterm report has been submitted and accepted by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), we can turn our sights to planning for reaffirmation in 2015. Meanwhile, our next phase of Strategic Planning, for the period 2013-2018 has begun, as we focus on our top priorities to (a) stabilize our recurring base budget for the future, (b) enhance our student-to-faculty ratio, (c) build a robust infrastructure to support our students, faculty, staff and programs, and (d) improve our students’ graduation rates.

For now, I ask for your assistance in several important initiatives that are already underway. First, it is imperative to have faculty support as we search for a founding dean of University College, and for newdeans for the Colleges of the Arts, Behavioral and Community Sciences, and Business. As these searches unfold, details can be found on the Provost’s homepage. I ask that you take an active role in these searches by contacting colleagues around the world and forwarding your nominations of qualified, highly talented academic leaders to the appropriate search consultant.

Second, please don’t forget to register to participate in this year’s Summer Commencement. It will be held on Saturday August 6, 2011 beginning at 2:00 pm, in the St. Pete TimesForum.

Additionally, I would be remiss if I didn’t remind you of the characteristic instability of the weather descending on Tampa Bay community during the Summer months and those of early Fall. If you haven’t
done so already, I encourage you to sign-up for MoBull alerts and please remember that we post Emergency Updates as they become available.

Finally, I look forward to welcoming you to a new academic year, at the Provost’s Fall Address scheduled for Thursday August 18, 2011 at 3:30 pm in the auditorium of the new Interdisciplinary Science Teaching and Research Facility (further details to come). Meanwhile, I ask that you please send a copy of your recently published books to me (hard copies preferred) for inclusion in a new display on the fourth floor of the Patel Center for Global Solutions.

Once again, I thank you for your valued contributions to the University of South Florida and wish you well for a restful yet productive remaining few weeks of the Summer term.

Best regards,

Ralph

Ralph C. Wilcox
Provost & Executive Vice President
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