Freshman Convocation Shares University Traditions
By: Alyson Seligman
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About 200 people, including more than 55 students, attended the first system-wide Freshman Convocation formally welcoming incoming freshman Sunday, August 22 at USF St. Petersburg. Speakers, including distinguished members of the USF system, shared university traditions, campus academic statistics, and information about campus.

Keynote speaker, Thomas Smith, PhD, the 2003 Excellence in Teaching award winner, welcomed students and parents and gave them an immediate heads-up about USF St. Petersburg. “… classes are still highly personalized. For better or worse, all your professors will know your name.” Smith said that students will have an extraordinary opportunity to learn from such a diverse base of professors who have come to this campus from around the world.

“(USF St. Petersburg) values creative and critical thought. We celebrate argument. We cherish debate. Curiosity is rewarded. Our minds are open to new possibilities,” Smith said.

Dubbed the “seal ceremony,” James Malek, PhD, interim regional vice chancellor for academic affairs, explained the seal’s significance. The seal is “the signature of a university, and what a university holds dear.” USF’s seal, which was created to symbolize education on a global level, encompasses five major elements, each with a special meaning. They are the sun, a lamp, a globe, and the words, “truth” and “wisdom.”

During the ceremony, each student received a commemorative plaque and had the opportunity to meet USF St. Petersburg’s deans, Regional Chancellor Karen A. White and Judy Genshaft.

Other speakers at the convocation were Student Government President Tom Piccolo, Faculty Council Chair H. William Heller and Charles Brown, regional vice chancellor for student affairs. Laura Davis, class of 2001, sang America the Beautiful to open the ceremony and closed it with the university Alma Mater.

After the ceremony, guests were invited to a reception and students and families met with faculty, deans and staff.