

Vice President's Remarks at the 1st Convocation

Karen A. White
Karen A. Steidinger Auditorium
Florida Marine Research Institute
September 24, 2003

Good afternoon and welcome.

Please join me in congratulating our honorees in teaching excellence – one more time. This kind of recognition is one of the benchmarks we set for ourselves as educators. Excellence and quality as denoted in these awards must be key indicators in the measurements we devise to chart our achievements as individuals and for this university.

The Board of Trustees, Dr. Genshaft and the faculty, staff, and students of all campuses of the University of South Florida embarked on a strategic planning process in 2002 that noted current institutional achievement and charted goals for the next 5 years. That plan presents strategies for building on the strong foundation of a Metropolitan Research I University in ways that will “propel USF toward our goal of being one of the nation’s very best public universities.”

The University of South Florida St. Petersburg continued the campus strategic planning process last year by identifying its specific mission, vision, values and goals within the context of the USF Strategic Plan. We continue that process this year as we denote key indicators of success in attaining our goals, define action items, and create assessment measures to tell us when we have achieved our goals. The development of appropriate benchmarks is a key part of our SACS accreditation process.

Historians illustrate benchmarks by placing achievements and events into the context of place and time. Our forty-year evolution from the Florida Institute for Continuing Studies to the University of South Florida St. Petersburg is a terrific story; and the faculty, staff, students, alumni, and civic and political leadership that worked assiduously are to be applauded. This kind of university development and maturation does not exist in a vacuum nor is it accomplished by just a few people. We appreciate all those who came before us and worked to create this fine institution.

Today’s convocation provides opportunity to note current achievements and set forth future goals. Many of you know that I am fond of quoting the maxim, “In God We Trust, all others bring data.” We are most frequently judged by rankings

and numbers, but I would also hope that our data include qualitative descriptors that fully describe the complexity of our enterprise.

The legislation that provided distinctive autonomy to USFSP also charged us with responsibility and authority for our actions. Part of the action to advance the institution was the creation of three colleges: Arts and Sciences, Business, and Education as a frame for our academic activities. Concurrent with the action to delineate colleges, I heard clearly the faculty desire to maintain the collegiality, student centeredness and the multidisciplinary approaches for which this campus is known. I believe our deans are sensitive to those issues and continue to instill those values into the missions of the colleges.

Faculty of these colleges grew from 120 to 170 in the last year and those hires enabled us to enhance the academic capabilities of our 45-degree programs, expand the expertise in the Programs of Distinction, and address more broadly the general education needs of the campus. Our many distinguished veteran faculty are joined by an enthusiastic cohort of highly qualified professionals.

I believe the diversity of our administrative group and faculty is greater than at any other point in the history of the institution. 16% of our current faculty/administration are persons of color and 47% female. 21% of our new hires last year were persons of color.

The employee base of USFSP has grown 61% in the past 6 years and the payroll of the university and its partners exceeds 48 million dollars a year. The 62 faculty and administrators hired last year encompass about \$4 million in salaries. An economist friend of mine asserts that a commonly used multiplier of 2.5 on that \$4 million base would bring an annual economic impact figure of \$10 million to the region, and that in forecasting a value of those salaries in present value terms the long-term impact could be over \$100 million dollars.

I am not sure I want to defend forecasting values, but the infusion of dollars for salaries at USFSP and the overall university budget have an astounding economic impact on our community. If you read the analysis of the popular author, Richard Florida, he identifies skilled and knowledgeable people as the "creative class." These new hires and their spouses and significant others add new dimension to the creative class of our city and region.

Our students are the reason for our existence, and today, USFSP has a headcount of over 4,600 students. This is an all time high for enrollment and as exciting as that is, the more interesting data is in the mix of part and full-time students and the increase in degree-seeking students. From fall 2002 to today, we note about 16% increase in total undergraduate headcount and 15% increase in graduate headcount.

More interesting to me is the significant increase in student credit hour production. Lower division schools increased 34 %; telling us that more undergraduate students are choosing full-time enrollment in our four-year degree programs. The median age our first-year students is 18; this tells us that we are attracting a more traditional age student population among that group. Also, 2/3 of our students are female, a few points above the national average.

We project an annual increase of 9% in student headcount for future years; and I encourage each of you to engage in the recruitment and retention of qualified students. We are all responsible for shaping the profile of our student body; and I ask each of you to visit a high school, write letters to prospective students in your academic field, and call or email those students you identify as academically talented and encourage them to come to the University of South Florida, and especially USFSP.

A new opportunity for life-long learners will start in October at the Science Center of Pinellas County. Everyone is invited 'back to school' in the USFSP Senior Scholars program designed to provide adults with practical instruction in computers and other non-credit courses. Tell your friends and neighbors of our terrific programs and the opportunities for students of all ages to learn and excel.

I seek your help to set new benchmarks for academic quality among our student population. Be demanding teacher/scholars and continue to expand the caring academic community for which USFSP is noted. I ask your leadership in creating additional service learning opportunities and internships for students to enrich their academic environment and to prepare them to apply their classroom skills in the real world. Your connections to our community are valuable in providing those opportunities to our students.

Finally, let us review the new construction and facilities that were made available this year: the Welcome Center, Williams House, the Terrace Union facilities with a new multicultural center, and the college homes in Davis and Coquina Halls and Bayboro Station. And, yes, the Piano Man building conversion to science labs will be finished soon.

These enhancements to our campus master plan are terrific, and the future will be even more dynamic. The new parking garage with a Barnes and Noble Bookstore as anchor will provide much needed campus parking as well as a retail establishment complementing the new, downtown retail corridor along Second and Third Avenues.

With the purchase of the Fountain Inn, extensive planning is underway for a student services facility to be built opposite the library and the first phase of residential housing. The bonds for these two projects will be funded by non-state

revenue and will be the first major construction projects on the campus since the opening of the Poynter Library and the Florida Center for Teachers.

We are also seeking state support for a \$30 million Science and Technology building to be shared by USFSP and the College of Marine Science. When the environmental and marine science research capabilities of USFSP, Marine Science, US Geological Survey, and Florida Marine Research Institute are combined with the major science facility we envision, the nation might know St. Petersburg as the “city where marine and environmental science thrive.”

Today we recognized teaching excellence; and I plan that we will have parallel recognition next year for achievements in research and creative activity and professional service. The faculty of USFSP is engaged in exciting research and meaningful interaction with our community and regional partners. We need to recognize those benchmarks of excellence as well.

One of my mentors once wrote, “Ultimately our universities will be judged not by what they say they are and do, but what they actually are and do.” We must continue to assess every aspect of our institution to state in quantifiable and qualitative terms, what we have achieved and what we still need to improve. I ask you to contribute your expertise, energy, and assistance in that process as we benchmark for the future.