



Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce Education-Focused Annual Breakfast

**Given by Kenneth A. Jessell
On November 17, 2022.**



These remarks were given at Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce Education-Focused Annual Breakfast by President Jessell on November 17, 2022.

Good morning, Coral Gables! I am delighted to be in the City Beautiful and in the company of so many friends and supporters of FIU.

I know there are FIU alumni among you... am I right? I hope I will see some of you tonight at our Torch Awards, where we honor high-achieving Panther alumni making a difference at our university and in our community.

It's also great to see many of our Miami-Dade students from local public and private schools! Each of you represents a future that is bright and full of hope and achievement... and I hope that in the coming years I'll see you on our FIU campuses as students!

This morning, I'd like to begin by thanking the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce for giving me the opportunity to share with you a little bit about myself and, more importantly, about all that is happening at FIU.

And, let me tell you, there are many exciting things happening at FIU.

As many of you may have heard, I was confirmed just last week as the proud sixth president of FIU, Miami's public research university. I've been a proud Panther for 13 years, serving as Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer. And next year, I will celebrate 40 years as a university educator. I am also a professor at the College of Business, which I find very rewarding.

After 10 months of service as Interim President, I decided that leading FIU permanently was a path I wanted to take. In many ways, it's a dream come true. My connection with Florida's State University System spans almost a half century, beginning with my freshman year at Florida State University and culminating as the humbled and honored leader of FIU.

Like many of you, I was a first-generation student, and never would I have dreamed I would be going to graduate school to become a professor, let alone a university president. That is the power of a state university education, where we transform lives and make dreams come true.

And this is especially true for FIU, where we have turned dreams into reality for almost 300,000 graduates over our short 50-year history.

I am grateful to the Presidential Search Committee, the FIU Board of Trustees, and the Florida Board of Governors for placing their confidence in me.

I begin my presidency on a very high note for FIU. 2022 has been a year of excellence and achievement for our university. As a Carnegie R1 (very high research activity) institution with \$250M in annual research expenditures, FIU is focused on making an impact where it matters most – student success, research excellence, and upward mobility. And our work is being recognized across the country.

On September 19th, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of FIU's opening. On that day in 1972, we opened our doors to 5,667 students, the largest opening day enrollment of any institution of higher education at that time. Now we have over 56,000 students.

FIU is the fastest-rising institution in the nation among U.S. News & World Report public university rankings in the past 10 years. FIU is now #72 among public universities in the nation – a six-spot climb in one year. We also are ranked among the Top 5 universities for social mobility, a testament to FIU's commitment to providing significant upward mobility to our students on a path of success and prosperity. 50% of our students are Pell-eligible and graduate at the same rate as our non-Pell students. In addition, FIU is among the Top 50 best-value public universities and among the Top 15 most innovative public universities. Several of our programs also ranked among the best in the nation. Perhaps you have heard that FIU is #2 in the nation in international business! That's right! Here, in South Florida, we have one of the best business programs in the world.

When it comes to the impact of a university, it's important to measure what graduates are doing with their degrees. It turns out that FIU is among the Top 25 universities nationally for the economic return on graduates' investment, along with Princeton, Stanford, and MIT, according to Degree Choices.

There is no doubt FIU is experiencing incredible momentum, and we are proud to be among the nation's most prestigious institutions.

FIU embodies what it means to be a successful 21st-century university, and as president, I commit to ushering FIU to new heights in our quest to be among the Top 50 public universities nationwide. Inspired by our past and propelled by the hopes and dreams of tomorrow, I am energized and optimistic about all that FIU will accomplish.

This morning, I want to invite each of you to be part of FIU's success story. Our partnerships with leaders at the local, state, and national level are instrumental in ensuring FIU has a seat at the table when debating the issues that matter most. Equally important, these partnerships offer our students unique internship, employment, and mentorship opportunities that make them workforce-ready.

I just returned last night from a two-day trip to Washington, D.C., where we held the ribbon-cutting ceremony for our new FIU in D.C. headquarters. At this state-of-the-art facility, I met with students, interns, elected officials, and community leaders to discuss the many ways in which our partnerships are moving the needle to address society's biggest challenges.

At FIU, we are proud to be a leader in solving the most complex problems of our day, all while giving committed and hardworking students in our community the opportunity to succeed.

At FIU, we are committed to providing our students with a world-class education and preparing them for great careers; we are committed to expanding knowledge and developing innovative solutions to complex problems; and we are committed to making FIU a major driver of workforce development and economic growth.

I firmly believe that where there are opportunities, there are successes, and FIU is all about fostering the opportunity to make a difference and move the needle when and where it matters most.

I am grateful to the faculty, staff, students, alumni, and our community for helping FIU succeed. I am also grateful to individuals like yourselves, who support our university and our students.

As I begin my new journey as president, I have committed to focus specifically on student success, research excellence, sustainable resources, and affinity and engagement.

There is still so much to accomplish, so many lives to change.

FIU is up for the challenge, and I hope you will join me as we look ahead to FIU's Next 50!

Thank you and Go Panthers!