



**Presidential Investiture Ceremony**

**Given by Kenneth A. Jessell  
On May 17, 2023.**



Office of the President  
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

*These remarks were given at the Presidential Investiture Ceremony for President Jessell on May 17, 2023.*

Watching those powerful images, I am reminded that, from day one, FIU has been forward-thinking, innovative, unstoppable.

Today, I stand here on the shoulders of those who came before me. Beginning with Charles E. Perry, our founding president who half a century ago, knew that FIU must be a different university, in order that it may be a better university.

Today, 50 short years later, FIU is a university of excellence and opportunity, one that accepts every challenge and makes the world a better place.

From a single building on an abandoned airfield, FIU opened in 1972 with 5,667 students. We are now one of the largest research universities in the country, with 56,000 students, 300,000 alumni, and annual research expenditures of almost 300 million dollars.

Welcome to FIU, the university of the future.

I want to begin by thanking the university presidents, state college presidents, delegates, performers, our combined Honor Guard and faith leaders participating in today's investiture ceremony.

Thank you, Father Luis, for the beautiful invocation. And thank you to program participants, FIU Faculty Senate Chair Deanne Butchey, Student Government Association President Alexander Sutton, Board of Trustees Chair Dean Colson, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, Chancellor Raymond Rodrigues, Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nunez, and Representative Daniel Perez. You all have made this a very special day for me and for FIU.

I also want to thank Chair Colson, Vice-Chair Roger Tovar and the entire FIU Board of Trustees – tireless supporters of our students, faculty, and staff – for their confidence in me and for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime to serve our great university.

To the Florida Board of Governors, Chair Brian Lamb, and Chancellor Rodrigues, thank you for your leadership in advancing our State University System institutions. Your leadership is why the State University System of Florida is the number one system in the country for the last 7 years.

I want to thank our elected officials for their continued support of FIU which ensures that we continue to provide the education and research that is critical for the economic prosperity of this great state.

I also want to recognize the dedicated and passionate faculty and staff of FIU. You focus every day on ensuring our students succeed, and you change lives in very meaningful and remarkable ways through innovation, outstanding teaching, and pathbreaking research. Together, you make our communities better.

To our students, who are determined to learn, to help others, and to achieve their goals, I thank you for choosing FIU as the place to turn your dreams into accomplishments. Your success is our success.

I want to thank our alumni, who carry forward our legacy of excellence and achievement, and our donors and community supporters for their continued support of FIU.

I want to thank my leadership team for all they do to support FIU. Great leadership is a team effort, and ours is the best of the best. Every day, you make FIU shine.

I also want to thank the many team members and volunteers who planned this investiture ceremony. You have created a lasting memory.

Finally, I want to thank my friends and family for their love, support, and sacrifices over the years including Patty, Debbie, Carol, Tom and fraternity brothers Mike and Charlie. Thank you so much for being here today. And, especially, my daughter, Amanda, son-in-law Jeffrey, and grandson James, my son, John, and, above all, the love of my life, Lori, my beloved wife of 46 years. Lori, I have learned more from you than you will ever know.

I am proud to recognize some special individuals here today who had big dreams for FIU and played a major role in making these dreams come true.

With us this morning is FIU's first First Lady, Mrs. Betty Perry. Please join me in recognizing Mrs. Perry and her family for their invaluable contributions to FIU.

While Dr. Perry was the first of FIU's presidents, those who have occupied this office since continued our founder's legacy. Two of them are here today. Dr. Modesto A. Maidique, our fourth president, served from 1986 to 2009, during a transformational time for FIU. His vision set the course for the research university that we are today.

And Dr. Mark B. Rosenberg, our fifth president, served from 2009 to 2022. His focus on student success set a standard for urban institutions nationwide.

Thank you both for being here today.

We will continue to prioritize pathbreaking research and the academic and career successes of our students.

As I look around the convocation center today, I take great comfort and strength in being in your company on this memorable occasion, both for me, personally, and, more importantly, for this great university. You are the champions and advocates of FIU, whose contributions of time, talent, and treasure have helped our university become an institution of hope and opportunity for so many.

I also feel great pride, as an alumnus of the State University System of the great state of Florida – the number one higher education system in the nation – to be entrusted with the honor of serving as your president.

As an 18-year-old college student at Florida State University almost 50 years ago, I could never have imagined I would be standing before you today. However, as with all important milestones, they create an opportunity for reflection.

I was a first-generation student – the first in my family to attend college, just like many of our students and many of you attending today.

My story is the FIU story: one of grit, resilience, and drive.

The opportunity to earn a baccalaureate degree is life-changing for so many of our students. I know it was for me. And it sets families on a new course. This is why I have devoted my entire professional career to higher education, where we provide opportunities, hope, and prosperity.

There is no university that does this better than FIU and that is why today, with the support and encouragement of all of you, I humbly serve as the sixth president of this great institution, with an overwhelming sense of optimism for what is possible for FIU in this new era...optimism that I see every day in the faces of our dedicated students, faculty and staff.

I know each of you is here today because you also believe in the power of FIU. Your passion for our mission is evident in everything you do to make our students successful in the classroom, in our labs, and in their careers.

This is the reason why, over the past 10 years, FIU is the fastest-rising institution, according to U.S. News & World Report public university rankings. This is the reason why FIU remains a top performer in Florida Board of Governors performance metrics, with the highest graduation rates our university has ever seen. This is the reason why FIU is ranked number eight in the country, among public and private universities for the economic return on investment our graduates receive from their degrees, joining the ranks of Princeton, MIT, Stanford, Harvard and Yale.

The reason is you. It is the reason why this university, F-I-U, is a place like no other.

The sense of togetherness, excitement, and enthusiasm felt here and now is palpable. As we commemorate five decades of incomparable success and recognize the contributions of each of you, and those who came before us we go forth, together, to build a university of the future.

At only 50 years young, FIU is a university of impact, firmly rooted in this beautiful global city of Miami, and strategically positioned to affect change locally, nationally, and around the world.

As one of the most dynamic research universities in the country – and Miami’s only public R1 research institution, FIU is at the forefront of innovation and invention, with one of the fastest-growing public university research programs of the past decade and more than one billion dollars in research expenditures in the last five years.

Our faculty, researchers, students, and alumni are literally changing the world – from the Everglades to the Arctic – pioneering solutions to the problems of today and tomorrow.

FIU is a powerful economic engine for our community and the state of Florida, providing new generations of professionals the knowledge, tools, and vision needed to strengthen our local, state, national and international economies.

Governmental entities and industry leaders continuously return to FIU seeking to hire our graduates. They understand the grit, tenacity and skillsets of our students.

They are mayors. They are judges. They are Grammy, Emmy, and Tony award winners. They are MacArthur geniuses. They are Pulitzer Prize winning journalists and New York Times best-selling authors. They are CEOs and entrepreneurs. They are Teachers of the Year and among Time Magazine’s Most Influential People of the Year. They are physicians and nurses. They are acclaimed artists and performers. They inspire me.

Universities are about learning and understanding – about breakthroughs that shape the future. And 50 years in, we’re just getting started.

Guided by the vision of our founders, and the leadership of our Board of Trustees and the Florida Board of Governors, FIU continues to be a fearless leader and innovator, keenly focused on the success of our students, the creation of new knowledge, and innovative solutions to real-world problems.

We just announced an initiative to expand and enhance healthcare delivery and education in South Florida, which we believe will be a transformational endeavor creating a first-class health care system with local, national, and global impact. Through our current and ongoing dialogue with Baptist Health System, and our work with all our clinical affiliates, FIU intends to drive clinical, research and educational advancements that will benefit South Floridians for generations.

FIU is also leading the reimagination of our innovation economies, by creating a robust pipeline of top-tier talent – out-of-the-box thinkers -- who will lead the growth and development of today’s – and tomorrow’s – emerging technologies.

Building upon decades-long partnerships with elected public servants and community and industry leaders focused on addressing the pressing needs of our region we are proud of our latest collaboration – the Innovation Engineering Complex. Two new buildings on this campus will enable FIU researchers and students to expand upon their vitally important work like creating personalized heart tissue to replace heart muscle that has been lost after a heart attack and developing next-generation materials to protect machines on the lunar surface from extreme radiation and tackling our nation’s infrastructure woes.

This is research that is destined to impact our world in profound ways.

Our Knight School of Computing and Information Sciences is employing an increasing number of researchers...individuals who are developing life-impacting advances such as AI-powered machine learning models to predict brain seizures and new methods to diagnose autism and ADHD and subject matter experts who study how to detect disinformation that harms our society. These are the visionary thinkers educating FIU students to meet the unprecedented growth and demand for future-forward leaders.

As Kaseya CEO Fred Voccola recently stated,

*FIU has been unbelievable at working with us. I’ve never seen a university around the world, in my experience, that actually listens to the companies in what they are looking for and takes their input. FIU looks at the real world.*

FIU is the State of Florida's University of Distinction in Environmental Resilience. A reminder that we are at the forefront of mitigating the effects of climate change and other threats to our natural and built environments. This includes our vital work restoring the Everglades and ensuring that our region does not run out of fresh water as well as our efforts to save Biscayne Bay. It encompasses our work protecting our oceans.

But our work in environmental resilience doesn't stop there.

At FIU, we are rethinking the best way to build safely and responsibly in the face of more powerful storms. With more than \$400 million in funding for resilience research in the past decade, we're working together to solve multi-layered problems here at home and around the world.

Of course, our commitment to culture and the humanities is woven throughout all that we do.

History and philosophy ground us in what it means to be human, giving us the means to reflect and think in a world that often moves too fast. Our nationally recognized creative writing program, our visual and performing arts programs, our noted public affairs programs, our three museums...each of these remains critical as we shape a world worth living in.

Unique ways of learning and interacting are the hallmarks of a dynamic campus, and we take that seriously.

Our vision for an enhanced Honors College has taken hold, as we prioritize a new building that will nurture collaboration among majors from across the university. Some of our brightest students working together to dream new ideas that will impact the world in real and relevant ways.

In essence, we are focusing on solving the challenges of the future *right now*.

A well-rounded student experience extends to opportunities in sport, whether you participate as a scholar-athlete or as a spectator who revels in the spirit such endeavors can foster.

Likewise, student life must include moments to gather in camaraderie through clubs and organizations, among them sororities and fraternities, which can lead to lasting relationships.

Thank you to my FIJI brothers, some of whom are here supporting me today.

Success is embedded in the DNA of every Panther, as evidenced by the nationally recognized accomplishments of colleges and programs university wide.

New rankings recently confirmed the rise in the stature and reputation of our College of Law, our Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine, our College of Business, our Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing and Health Sciences, our Robert Stempel College of Public Health & Social Work, our Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs and our Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management.

And while national rankings are by no means the only measure of achievement, our impressive rise in recent years is a recognition that our faculty, staff, students, and alumni have met every standard and have gone beyond to serve as examples for us all.

Friends, colleagues, Panthers...

Hope and optimism fill this room – and our hearts – today.

Regardless of what connects us to this university each of us is now part of FIU history.

And it will be up to all of us to ensure FIU's continued rise among America's great research universities as an epicenter of excellence and impact...a place where leaders are nurtured in an environment of learning that shapes the future.

We will achieve these goals by continuing to invest in the success of our students, our research enterprise, and our community.

And today, more than ever before, this university will lean into your knowledge, your guidance, your talents.

Together, let's remain active partners in this grand experiment that is Florida International University, a university that is different and better.

The opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative is the American dream. And our commitment to our students and to our community – is just that; working together, we are building the university of the future.

We are unstoppable, Panthers.

Paws up!