



**2014 Torch Awards Gala**

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg  
on March 08, 2014**



*This speech was presented to attendees of the FIU's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Torch Awards Gala on March 8, 2014.*

Thank you all for being here! Can we please acknowledge the presence of our patron and benefactors Dr. Herbert and Nicole Wertheim. Talk about a family “all-in” for FIU and always pointing us toward the Next Horizon! I also want to thank the Grant Family, the Pozo Family and the Cornish Family for their deep commitment and support as well! What a great opportunity to celebrate our amazing university and all that has been accomplished in our short history! Speaking of accomplishment – help me recognize excellence.

Will our Model United Nations team of students please rise? Our Model United Nations team of students just returned from their latest competition at West Point. There they beat the cadets and every other university to take first place! Our Model UN Team exemplifies excellence – we are ranked Fifth in the United States.

We are the top-ranked public university in this country and have been for the past few years. Please recognize the future! I want to thank the planning committee – led by Mike Acosta. What a great job you have done to make this the premier event for our FIU!

The Great Gatsby? The Roaring Twenties? There are many parallels and many contradictions! We should celebrate the high expectations and the unabated passions described in the Great Gatsby novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald. But ultimately that novel is about excess, the end of the American dream, and about emptiness and moral decay. Nothing could be further from our reality at FIU. We are about providing a way for our hardworking students and their families to achieve the American Dream. We are about purpose: about doing the right thing. We are about getting things done – about taking responsibility.

Like Jose Marti knew, “every human being has within himself or herself an ideal person...” Are there better personifications of who we are than our Torch Awardees this year? What an amazing group of Torch Awardees. You now live and work in Washington, DC, Abu Dabi, Atlanta, Columbia, S.C., Maastricht, San Francisco, and our energized Miami. What links us all together? – our connection to our FIU! Our commitment to being Worlds Ahead by taking responsibility.

A few months ago, a reporter from the Chronicle of Higher Education asked me what I obsessed upon in my work. How would you have answered this question if you were in my shoes? Would you have identified the necessity to provide high quality education and career opportunities for students? Would you have pointed to the

urgency of using our research and creative energies to improve the world? I made it simple for the reporter! My answer? – at FIU we obsess on “impact.”

Ladies and Gentlemen: It is critical that we find a way for our FIU to impact our students and our community – we must leave it better than we found it. So let me share with you three examples of our impact.

Fact: Until several years ago, our public school system was lagging behind major national indicators. Today, it is now a national symbol of public education success, and I am proud that we have played a role. You see we have established a partnership with the Miami Dade County Public Schools to promote and enhance student achievement. The centerpieces of this partnership are initiatives at Northwestern Senior High School and Booker T. Washington High School. There we collaborate with their hard-working teachers to raise the graduation rates and expand the number of students eligible for college or university study. We can do this thanks to the generosity of JP Morgan Chase for Northwestern, and more recently Lennar for Booker T. Our impact at Northwestern is notable – quintupled number of eligible Northwestern Students attending FIU! Helped to raise graduation rates nearly ten per cent in two years! This year Miami Northwestern received it’s first-ever “A” grade in state rankings. We are having an impact--we are willing to take responsibility for helping to improve the quality of teaching and the quality of our schools. And we refuse to shut the door of opportunity to eligible students in these schools because of the accident of their zip code of residence.

Fact: The Huffington Post reported that the number of American battle wounded from Iraq and Afghanistan has passed 50,000. This is a grim milestone. More than a decade of war and killing. War has an enduring human cost. Imagine all of our university enrollment as wounded – that is the human toll brought home. Nearly 16,000 have had crippling battlefield wounds. Nearly 1,500 brave patriots have had limbs amputated, lives disrupted. So what can we do? Plenty!

Our faculty and students have partnered to create Robo Cop – a robot specially designed to help disabled veterans return to the field and meaningful work. Thanks to a small personal investment by US Navy Lt. Commander Jeremy Robins and 3D Designer and lab manager Mangain Prabakar, along with Janghoon Kim, Director of our Discovery Lab and eleven undergrad students and a volunteer from the MAST Academy. We have built this telebot, weighing 80 pounds and with a 360 degree camera that allows it to collect and transmit live data to the controller or Teleoperator. We hope to put Telebot into production in two years. Imagine putting disabled veterans back in the field through the use of our Telebot. This is impact ladies and gentlemen. This is how we use our blessings of research and creativity to take responsibility.

Fact: In this country, there are thousands of foster kids who deserve a university education. However, data reveal that fewer than five percent of foster kids actually

graduate with a university education. But then again, you have not yet met Alyssa Moyer – one of our students who found hope and opportunity at our FIU. Listen to her story.

Alyssa was born in 1990, two months premature. She was born to an HIV positive mother who died two weeks after her birth. She was adopted by a loving single mother, where she lived for eight years. However when the mother learned that her oldest son was sexually assaulting Alyssa, she was taken away and put in foster care. To Quote Alyssa, “I went from suburban America to what one might call the hood.” From here Alyssa went into a downward spiral. Almost all her belongings were stolen by foster kids she lived with and she was shot within the first week of being in foster care. She bounced from home to home, was in juvenile jail by the age of 11, and essentially homeless.

In 2002, in 7<sup>th</sup> grade in Broward, she was discovered by her schools assistant principal, who took responsibility. This lady got Alyssa into school sports – which according to Alyssa made her want to keep her grades up. She graduated from Plantation High in 2008, went to FSU, flunked out, transferred back to Broward College, then to Miami Dade College, then back to Broward, and now to FIU.

At FIU, she has a 3.0 GPA. Alyssa identified one of her faculty – Professor Eva Frank from our College of Education as being critical to her success. She took responsibility. According to Alyssa, transferring to FIU and living on campus has been a great experience. She hopes to become a coach for foster kids and get into social work. Best of all – she beat the odds – that she would not complete. You see in just a few short weeks our Alyssa will graduate from FIU. Helping children from zip codes where few attend and graduate from College, helping disabled veterans, helping Alyssa. That is who we are; that is what we do. In just a few weeks, I have the honor of leading our Spring graduations – we will have ten this April and May! All-in this academic year – nearly 12,500 graduates including our Alyssa from FIU!

At each of these graduations, I will make three requests of our graduates! Here is what I am asking them: I am asking them to take responsibility! Here is what I am asking you: To take responsibility!

- 1) Tell your FIU story.
  - Tell the story of how the education you received at FIU prepared you for your career and for success.
  - Tell how FIU keeps the American Dream --alive
- 2) Pay it forward.
  - Support current and future FIU students.
  - Come back for Panther Alumni Week to speak to our students.
  - Show them what success looks like.
  - Tell them how they too can take the tools of their FIU degree and achieve their dreams.

- Create internships for currently enrolled students.
  - Hire a recent FIU graduate
  - Buy FIU season tickets to support the Blue and Gold.
- 3) Support FIU by getting involved in the Next Horizon Campaign for FIU!
- Our Campaign Goal is \$750 m.
  - You can look to your right and left – thinking that they will help – but this begins with you!
  - There is so much good we can do together!
  - You take responsibility by giving every year to FIU cuz you know we make good things happen.
  - We gotta send the message that we understand the crucial role played by FIU in generating opportunity!

So repeat after me: We can do this! We can raise \$750 million! So are we about purpose? YES! Are we about purpose and doing the right thing? YES! Are we about the American Dream? YES!

On behalf of Alyssa, hundreds of eligible students from Northwestern and Booker T. and countless zip codes where there had been little hope, and wounded war veterans who just want a chance to show they can make a strong contribution to society. I want to say – thank you, God Bless, and believe with us that FIU will continue to turn the impossible into the inevitable as long as you are actively involved! As long as you take responsibility!