



Address at the Access and Debt Student Forum

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
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This speech was presented to the attendees of the Access and Debt Student Forum, on February 8, 2017.

Good afternoon, and thank you. Education is a powerful force for good in our world. It has always been the key that opened many doors. It has empowered us to discover broader perspective, cooperation, compromise, and common ground between all people. It has encouraged the types of innovation and ideas that have transformed our lives and our society. It has inspired us to dream, hope and work toward a better future.

Now more than ever, FIU plays a critical role in our community's – and nation's – future. We know our best days are ahead. Why? Because of you – our students! You are our future leaders, entrepreneurs, business owners, researchers, health care professionals, artists, storytellers and journalists. We refuse to be the obstacle or stumbling block that gets in the way. We're committed to being a stepping stone. This is our mission, our purpose: to set every FIU student on a path to success. Every student!

From the beginning, FIU has always been about access. We believe that no one who is driven and determined deserves to fall through the cracks. We measure our success by who we include, not exclude. Anyone who wants to work hard and get a degree should not be prevented from doing so, based on zip code, race, ethnicity or background. We know the voices out there are loud. That's why we work hard to provide the support you need to keep going – even when it gets tough.

Maybe you're a first generation student – or a first generation American. Maybe you're from Liberty City or from Cuba. Maybe you're working full time to support yourself and your family. Maybe someone once told you that you'd never get a degree... No matter who you are or where you come from, we're here for you. Your FIU family cares! Every student who comes here counts. As I tell our incoming class every year at freshman convocation: You belong here.

Without you, our students, we're not FIU. You uplift us, you make all of our efforts possible! Each and every one of you has what it takes to succeed. Our FIU community is committed to helping you achieve your dreams and change your life.

We want you to get to that special day when you walk across the commencement stage – to the cheers of your family and loved ones. During your four years here, we will shine the light on the path forward, we will be the stepping stone. You're never alone on this journey. You're going to make a difference. You're going to make an impact. We promise you.

Our goal has always been to get every student to graduation day. A degree is the evidence of your education. It gives you access to countless opportunities and the self-confidence to follow your heart. If you earn that degree, believe you can do anything!

Now, as a public institution, FIU reports to the state, and to the Board of Governors. The BOG oversees the entire State University System. They have certain expectations for us. In 2014, the BOG proposed a new performance funding model. The Governor and Legislature have since codified the Board's metrics into law.

What that means is that funding for our FIU is linked to how well we do in fostering timely student graduation – and in preparing our students and helping them find and create good, high paying jobs. We don't get funding unless a student graduates, and students will now be expected to graduate in four years. This is an issue we are mindful of and that we're always working to do more about. It might be a challenge, but it does not change our commitment to our students. It reconfirms our efforts!

Timely graduation is a win-win for everyone: for you, and your future, our local businesses that employ our students, and our FIU! Graduating on time gets you closer to your dreams and goals...and to your future! Dreams are not meant to be delayed, deferred, or put off for another day, but pursued.

So, with the many challenges in life...

how do you graduate in four years? Maybe you're asking if it's possible for everyone. Let me tell you... You might have heard me talk about the 4-30 plan: 4 years + 30 credit hours per year. That may seem like a lot, but it's possible! Our dedicated advisors are here to work with you to figure out how to spread out those 30 credits over a year.

Now, we know that every student has different circumstances. That's why we're committed to meeting you where you are. There should be no such thing as "one size fits all" education. This is why recently Dr. Luisa Havens, Vice President of Enrollment Management and Services, and Dr. Elizabeth Bejar, Vice President for Academic Affairs, developed "Personalized Education Pathways." These pathways will allow our new, incoming students to find their own customized plan... A path that works for them, their life, their situation... not the other way around!

So, how does this work? It all starts with applying to FIU. New students can apply to start at FIU at three different times – Early Fall, Fall or Spring. The minimum admission criteria for all three start times is based upon high school GPA and SAT/ACT scores. We use a scale that emphasizes GPA over test scores. That's because we have found that students that are admitted to FIU with higher high school GPAs have the best opportunity to succeed! A bad test score should not prevent you from getting into a good school!

One of our specialized pathway options is the Supported Transition to Excellence Program – or STEP, for short. We created this program because we know that the way to a degree is paved with hard work. You have to take it one-step at a time.

We also know that for every hour you spend in class, you spend another two hours – or more – working on homework, research or studying. This time must be considered when determining the right credit load for our students. It's a delicate balance – finding the right amount of classes, where our students won't be overburdened and overwhelmed, but successful!

Students who are admitted into this program are limited to a certain number of credit hours. For example, for the first summer and fall semesters of the program STEP students will be at less than full time enrollment. Over time, their course loads will increase.

STEP students will also be required to participate in at least one student success strategy – like the First Year Experience course; major and career exploration; or a workshop on notetaking or financial literacy.

And, there is a benefit to sticking with this program! Students who successfully earn 30 academic credits and a 2.0 GPA after one year will receive a \$500 success grant to apply to their tuition costs during their sophomore year at FIU! The 4-30 plan pays off, literally!

Freshmen aren't our only students that need our help. FIU also is here to help our transfer students. FIU has a strong partnership with local area colleges to help these students, who have earned an associate degree, complete their education, right here at FIU!

This program, called Connect4Success Program, enhances Florida's 2+2 Pathway to Success Program. What's different about Connect4Success? With the 2+2 program, a student completes their associate degree, and they are provided guaranteed admission into one of Florida's state universities, but not necessarily the one of their choice. With FIU's Connect4Success, there is guaranteed admission to FIU! And, there are added benefits! They get to attend workshops and have personalized advising to keep them on a clear pathway to graduation!

Being able to pay for college is also a barrier to student success. We know how important financial assistance can be when it comes to achieving your dreams. It gives that extra pat on the back – that much needed encouragement.

FIU is making a promise to our students! Starting with the Early Fall 2017 class, Freshmen will be eligible for FIU's Golden promise. This means that we will guarantee enough grant aid to cover 100% tuition and fees to students who are Florida residents and have an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of zero. It will provide grants that cover 30 credit hours per year – for all 4 years. The Golden Promise increases the likelihood that students will graduate on time and debt free. Again, the 4-30 plan pays off!

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?