



Faculty Convocation Speech
Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
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Office of the President

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

This speech was presented to attendees of the faculty convocation awards ceremony on September 17, 2009.

Mr. Chair, Members of our Boards, Vice Presidents, Deans, Faculty and Professional Staff - Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here.

Today we celebrate the accomplishments of our faculty. This celebration is about what we do as faculty – we teach, we carry out research and promote creative activity, and we use our research and creativity to address community needs.

Please join me in acknowledging the work of Morris Hollander, the President's Council and the Convocation committee. This award of outstanding faculty would not have been possible without their collaboration and commitment to our work. This convocation itself was introduced by Professor Judith Stiehm, when she was our provost. Thank you, Judith.

As many of you know, one of our own – Dr. Pedro Jose Greer, was just awarded the President's National Medal of Freedom, for his pioneering work to help the homeless in our community. Here is a colleague who has taken the blessing of his knowledge and merged it with his passion for social justice. The founder of Camillus House Health Concern, a health clinic for the homeless in Miami, Dr. Greer's approach to his vocation is simple: Dr. Greer asks all of us: "If we don't fight injustice, who will?" Each of us has the capacity to ask ourselves at a moment in time, *If I don't do this... who will?*

That is why my message this afternoon is this: Remember...no matter what is going on around you in the world today...your work matters! The life of the mind matters. In these times as we rise to meet the challenges of the 21st century we must not take our special role for granted as guardians of the life of the mind.

Today I stand before you - as you. I am honored to be the first FIU faculty member to be named as president of your university. When I was hired in political science in 1976 here at FIU, I never would have imagined that I would have the honor and responsibility to be your president.

As we near the Jewish New Year, we often speak of “La dor va dor” – from Generation to Generation. I have been tempered by generations of colleagues from FIU – they, you, built this place from the ground up – literally: as Professor John Stack said the other day at the installation-- one student at a time, one course at a time, one major at a time, one degree at a time, one life at a time. Although the FIU of yesterday is quite different from the FIU of today, there are some important continuities from then to today: we all want meaningful work and the ability to succeed professionally – with dignity and respect.

Our desire for meaningful work pivots around the “life of the mind.” Our third President--Dr. Gregory B. Wolfe first used this concept on campus. Greg had the imagination to turn a phrase into a powerful art form that was evocative and hopeful. John Stack helped us out last week at the installation – quoting Aristotle, he stated that the “energy of the mind is the essence of life,” and then continued that for us academicians, “the essence of life is the life of the mind.” So today let me spend a few moments on the life of the mind and then the next steps in this new era.

I. The Life of the Mind – from the perspective of a fellow faculty member:

In his work on the convergence of human and machine cognition, Raymond Kurzweil suggests that the pace of change in the first two decades of this century will be greater than the pace of change in all of the last century.

If this is so, then it presents faculty with real challenges: how at once to manage this change process so that we can meet our obligations to our students, to fellow faculty, to our disciplines and our professions even as we grapple with the rising uncertainties accompanying this new era.

As a fellow faculty, I am studying as much as I can the literature on change. From Kurzweil, to Clayton Christensen who writes about disruptive innovation and its impact on education, to Daniel Pink, who argues in his book, *A Whole New Mind*, that we are progressing from a society of knowledge workers to a society of creators, empathizers, pattern recognizers and meaning-makers. (I want to thank colleague and Professor Kathy Kerstetter for calling my attention to his work).

Rapid change already affects the life of the mind. We must understand how these changes will impact our ability to survive and thrive in the new environment.

II. As Your President

Today as your president, I am mindful that you are listening to me not just as a colleague, but also as one in whom you have given your trust to lead our constitution. The president is the ultimate institutional custodian of the “life of the mind.” Since I am fundamentally in awe of education in general and higher education in particular, I accept this role with gratitude and enthusiasm.

Let me be clear. I intend to do the things that a president does to advance his institution, his associates and his community. I accept the institution’s fiduciary obligations to use my responsibility and authority to make FIU better. I intend to be very purposeful and intentional in this quest.

I have always been proud to be associated with you the faculty and to be a part of you the faculty. We are building a great public research university that adds value locally and globally. Standing before you several years ago, Professor Stanley Fish declared that we were unstoppable. So what you do matters!

The life of the mind is ever-changing and will not wait upon us to sort things through. If we are to stay as guardians of the life of the mind, we must stay at the top of our game. That can only come if we have confidence and pride in each other.

But it’s more than just professional pride in you and our institution: just like many of your children or grandchildren, our two children are your students – that is about as purposeful as we can be about your worth and value.

III. FIU’s Accomplishments:

In the forty-year history of this institution, the faculty has accomplished so much. We know you just want to teach your students, conduct your research, carry out your creative activities, and work in the community – locally or globally – to help make it better. To build a great institution, this is a necessary condition. But it is not sufficient.

As a faculty, your ability to come together and get things done is impressive. We could not have moved as fast as we did, and turned the impossible into the inevitable, unless we were committed to a larger institutional purpose and the cross-disciplinary collaboration to get there.

Since I have returned from Tallahassee, I have been inspired by story after story about how faculty is coming together to make a difference:

- Our College of Medicine and our Frost Art Museum developed a rendering of DNA that helped the non-specialist to understand what it was and how it looks.
- Colleagues in our School of Nursing and in our College of Engineering are working together to share resources in a common project that will enhance driver safety. A whole new area of collaborative research could be opening up in the Lehman Research Center as a consequence of this initiative!
- Sixteen faculty members from six colleges and schools representing 15 different departments participated in FIU's Global Learning Foundations an intensive seminar during the Summer C term. As a result, six lower division courses will be offered in the core curriculum as part of our *Global Learning for Global Citizenship* Quality Enhancement Plan. They will begin to be piloted in Spring 2010.
- Professor Mario de la Rosa from Social Work led a multidisciplinary team initiative of colleagues from medicine, psychology, public health and nursing to submit a proposal to the National Center for Minority Health Disparities. If funded, the initiative will be based in the College of Medicine.
- For stimulus package grant proposals for core facilities, researchers from across the University are working together to submit a proposal to the NIH to expand our nano-laboratory in Engineering.
- Colleagues from political science and international relations for coming together in a new department.
- Colleagues at Biscayne Bay and across the university, are creating a new School of Earth and Societies to focus our efforts in this critical area.
- Colleagues in Global and Sociocultural studies – formerly geography, sociology and anthropology, are now cobbling together a 21st century curriculum.
- Colleagues in CARTA are now doing some really interesting collaborations that will improve their students' ability to deal with real world problems and opportunities.

You can count on me to support this spirit of collegial enterprise in this next phase of our institutional evolution. What you do – working together – matters!

IV. Expectations:

I have high expectations that you will continue to find newer and better ways to work with each other and to help each other. A rising tide lifts all ships. Here is what you can expect of me in terms of my style and values in working together to achieve our common goals.

You can expect me:

- To listen, to make sure that I have heard what I think you meant and not just what you said!
- To make sure that I have been understood in times when it's so easy to be misunderstood.
- To go the distance to find new ways to make the most of what we have...in funds, people, resources, buildings and in our ability to help one another across departments, majors, campuses! What we do ... together...matters!

In "Hit the Ground Running," I have put together a concept that cries out for your examination, debate, and revision.

As your president, I am proposing a vision for our new era that calls for a more student-centered university, pivoting around learning, research and creative activity, and using these blessings to enhance engagement locally and globally.

For us to move forward we need a shared sense of urgency about the institution's financial security, its academic excellence, enhanced research around strategic institutional and community priorities, and engagement to solve problems.

We need a shared sense of urgency about building stronger win-win partnerships with key institutions in this community. And we must confront and surmount three critical challenges: access, quality and sustainability.

We are taking some modest steps with the position papers that you have developed in response to Hit the Ground Running. The discussion tomorrow will be our first opportunity to address these issues as a community determined to continue our incredible momentum.

I am excited about working together with you to shape a plan for our new era!

However, a plan that has strong faculty input and oversight, no matter how insightful and forward looking it may be, is not a substitute for that which binds us together in this convocation of mind and spirit.

As communities of memory and hope we are committed to the life of the mind in our work here at home and in our presence in South Florida's hard-working neighborhoods and communities. We are bound together in recognition of our shared commitment to ideas, our determination to think creatively and in our belief that we make a difference in the lives of our students and the world that they inhabit.

There is so much to celebrate about our community and about our fine institution – as Chair Dotson calls it. In the end, I expect you to have high expectations of me. I have high expectations of myself, and of you.

Let's work together to craft the future of the university we love knowing that here in South Florida our commitment to the life of the mind helps us to illuminate the ideas that will shape the future – reaching well beyond our classrooms.

That is what we celebrate this afternoon in the achievements of our faculty awardees and in our recognition of the years of achievements of our colleagues who have preceded us.

Congratulations to our awardees, and thank you all for the opportunity to be your president, for your trust and for your commitment to FIU!