



2010 Faculty Convocation Presentation

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on October 7, 2010**



This speech was presented to attendees of the faculty convocation awards ceremony on October 7, 2010.

Thank you for being here. This is a joyous occasion. It captures the hope spirit and accomplishment of the Faculty. Thank our student leadership for being here!

In the last fifteen months, I have met with almost all faculty who are at this university – nearly 800 colleagues in about 30 separate meetings – nearly all in the comfort of the Reagan House.

My purpose? First to get reacquainted with many of you with whom I had previously worked; to get to know some of you with whom I had not worked; or to meet so many new colleagues. I came away from these conversations invigorated for our mission and purpose. I came away reassured that the next few years will be very rich and promising for all of us at FIU!

Let me share with you some observations that I take away from the consultations that I carried out with you since July 2009.

1. You care deeply about what happens at FIU. This care usually transcended the day to day challenges in your respective departments.
2. You are puzzled by the possible implications of rapid growth, you wonder if this is possible and why this is necessary.
3. You are concerned about the nature of our academic community and its viability across time in such a period of rapid change.

Let me address the issue of community, because it bears on what happens at FIU and certainly will impact and be impacted by our growth in the next few years, whatever it is. Face it – these are challenging times. Unemployment is as high as any of us can remember.

Fragmentation is the order of the day:

There is a recall movement in Dade County against the mayor. Public institutions are under attack and their credibility is questioned. The party in power in this country is divided. The party out of power is rent with division – divided in philosophy but united in opposition. Negative political rhetoric and divisive behavior is the norm. There is great uncertainty about our future. The academy itself has seen two significant critiques in recent months, --both by members of the academy itself. In one, the authors suggest that we have lost our way, --that we have lost sight of our primary mission – the education of young people.

This is where community comes in. As a consequence of the sustained conversation that we have had, I am convinced that we understand that we have something special – a community. This community pivots around the “life of the mind” – where we started last year. I am reminded of the excellent work on community in an essay by Grady Bogue published in 2002:

- “An Agenda of Common Caring: The Call for Community in Higher Education” (I want to thank Professor Erskin Dotton and his faculty learning community for alerting me to this valuable work.)

Bogue suggests that a sense of community signifies the presence of --an agenda of common caring and grace. This agenda embraces a love for soul, for standard, and for system.

There is reverence for the mission that brings us all together. There is a caring for the individuals in the community. There is a respect for the policy and physical systems in which men and women relate in both work and play.

There are shared values that shape and guide behavior. There is a space to generate discovery. There are spaces in the community to respect private interests and public interests. There is a space for intimacy and solitude. There is a space for laughter and joy. There is a space for the conflict of our differences. There is, according to Bogue, a space where moral purpose is celebrated.

Ultimately we exist for developing knowledge and skills in our students. And we are increasingly perceived by our students – whether we like it or not as a source of meaningful work when they graduate.

But our community is also a sanctuary for our values – truth, freedom, respect for diversity, responsibility, and excellence. And incubators of intellect and integrity, well-being and job creation:

In this rapidly changing world, we are flexible and positive anchors in a sea of uncertainty and change. Our convocation is not just about the wonderful accomplishments of our colleagues on stage.

I ask you – to pause and consider what you did this past week that helped to build and sustain our community:

- Did you help a student – how many?
- Did you finish that scholarly article or complete that long-awaited charrette?
- Did you identify a scholarly citation-- not for you –but for a colleague struggling with a new concept or finding?
- Did you reach out to a new member of the faculty;
- Or to a colleague grappling with a sick parent or the loss of a beloved pet?

- Did you compliment a member of our professional staff for their efforts above and beyond – do you even know the names of those who clean your offices and classrooms and laboratories?
- Did you tell the story of what your institution – FIU – has accomplished for our broader community?
- Did you wear our community's colors blue and gold on pride day?
- Did you attend one of the incredible events that your colleagues put on last week – the Life of the Mind lecture by Jose Gabilondo through our nascent humanities center or the CARTA opening events at the Frost? Or The Career Services fair where so many of your students went to learn about future job prospects?

As I asked last year, if you are not to be the guardians of the life of the mind, who will? If you do not build our community, who will? If you do not consume its valuable products, who will? If you are not spokespeople for our moral purpose, who is?

We have something special here at FIU. A deeper and more enthusiastic sense of community--will make us stronger, and more viable --as we change to meet the challenges of the time.

Our university is a community that gives meaning and belonging. It gives identity and identification. It--you-- gives hope and promise for the future.

And Our Convocation today is one of the many ways that we can celebrate--the stroke of genius that is a university, our university and all that it brings to a world – our world-- in escalating uncertainty.