



**Address at the 2013 Faculty Convocation**

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg  
on September 26, 2013**



*This speech was presented to the FIU Faculty at the annual Faculty Convocation on September 26, 2013.*

Good afternoon. I welcome you to this celebration of faculty excellence. Your work matters. You are guardians of the life of the mind. You are truth seekers and truth tellers. You have a special mandate to utilize the blessings of your education to light the way in bringing new knowledge to bear. You have a special mandate to close gaps in awareness and information, to manage the challenges between pure and applied knowledge and to find ways to make the world a better place

This gathering anchors our sense of professional self in a rapidly changing world. This is a world where new information and knowledge multiplies exponentially; where our personal values are challenged locally and globally in the most personal of ways; and where we shoulder rising expectations from our stakeholders, beginning with our students, our funders, our boards of directors, trustees, our legislators, and our governors.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the “public” in public university in Florida is as much about intensified metrics driven accountability and oversight as it is about funding support. Just a few days ago, I had the thrill of meeting the Tschir twin sisters; they have already been admitted for the class of 2018. One had an SAT of 2300, the other of 2360. They are very excited about the opportunity to be your students both in the classroom and in the research laboratory. And so were their beaming parents, who are both FIU graduates.

And the 100 or so Freshman, in high school, students who are now enrolled at our new MAST Academy at Biscayne Bay Campus. They too have high expectations for how we can help them to fulfill their dreams. Your work matters. These days we are challenged to be more conscientious and student-centric about how we do things. It is becoming clearer that student well-being and success and our well-being are directly linked.

Nearly fifty percent of our freshman students do not graduate within six years. Nearly fifty percent of our graduates take on significant debt to receive their educations. This is a new reality for us, one that has practical and moral implications: Here are some questions that we need to answer: How can we improve our advising? How can we eliminate curricular bottlenecks that may be more about our preferences than a real concern for timely graduation? How can we better understand the imperative that most

students feel to use their degrees to help them get a better job as a result? How will we modify our business to the new market realities of on-line, prior learning, 24/7 and just in time learning? How can we link the educational experience at FIU to global awareness? Study abroad? To internships? How can we blur the bright lines between high school and college to ensure that motivated learners get early access to the best and most state of the art learning opportunities that we provide? What must we do, personally, departmentally, and institutionally to be prepared to deal with the rising tide of mental stress and learning impairments that are faced by many of our hard-working students?

I know that faculty recognized here today and those of you in the audience share my sense of urgency. Not just for preserving and improving our own conditions but for helping as many as possible to achieve their dreams and goals. Being student-centric is not just in our student's interest. It is in our interest.

We have something special here at our FIU. There is a sense of community at our FIU, and a spirit of collaboration, that is truthfully a necessary condition for success in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. A number of our awardees spoke to me about this last week: Listen to Erik Camayd-Freixas, from Modern Languages: He is particularly grateful to his graduate students for nominating him, and one in particular, who according to Erik, "pushes me to be a more effective mentor and is always full of good suggestions." Listen to Marissa Ball, from the Library: who likens her whole staff to a "family," here for the same reason: to serve our patrons in the library.

Then there is Ferdinand Gomez of the anatomy lab in the College of Medicine. He said that "I am giving back what the university gave to me." He credits two FIU professors, Bob George and George Dalrymple for inspiring his excellence. And I know that so many of you reach out every day in a spirit of collaboration and I want to thank you for that! Just a few days ago, I was inspired during a gathering in the Graham Center of faculty, administrators, and staff were convened to identify ways to enhance their leadership and improve communication. Focus groups reported out: what was really neat about this is that our colleagues avoided pointing to others to improve their communication, and agreed that improved communication was their responsibility too. If we want a better university, it starts with each of us!

To go to the next level, the Next Horizon, we can get there when we use the accomplishments of our colleagues here today as inspiration for our efforts; We must use their accomplishments as a personal benchmark for our improvement; and we must find ways every day to improve collaboration and understand that we are our brothers

and sisters keepers! It's the high touch that will make us Worlds Ahead. And each of us can do better in celebrating our colleagues' and student success as if it was our own! And by this I mean more intentionality in celebrating their victories and acknowledging all the great things they are doing.

So where do we go from here? We all want the same thing: a university that at once serves as sanctuary and solutions center; whose moral predisposition is to provide value and impact. A university revered near and far as an exemplary able steward of the responsibilities and opportunities that it shoulders. A university where students and faculty can thrive; where staff can be treated with respect and dignity and find fulfilling and challenging work; A university that ably addresses more than its fair share of the research and learning necessary to improve the lot of humankind. In just a few days we will celebrate the life of one of our founders, Dr. Paul Gallagher. Dr. Gallagher had a seminal role in our rapid evolution as an engaged research university. Paul was fond of the sunshine metaphor. As we salute our faculty colleagues today, let me borrow his metaphor to make sure that you know that you have a special opportunity today to recommit to utilize the blessings of your knowledge and creativity to light the way, to provide the light, the sunshine to so many who count on us every day to get it right and help them to achieve their dreams and aspirations.

Let's work together to leave this world much better than we found it! We can do this! One student, one research project, One creative initiative; One engagement partnership; One act of mentoring or advising at a time. That's who we are at our FIU and that is what we do at our FIU. Once again, Congratulations to our awardees! Thank you.