



Address at the Faculty Convocation 2014

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
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This speech was presented to the FIU Faculty at the annual Faculty Convocation on October 2, 2014.

Good Afternoon! “That place changed my life”. These comments are from an accounting major that went on to work at one of the country’s leading accounting firms. Then a little later, he became chair of the acquisitions committee at the Tate Museum in London, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and more recently the Perez Art museum in Miami. Today this person is one of the country’s leading collectors of contemporary art, and annually gives away millions of dollars to foster the arts throughout the United States.

Who is this person? He is the first college graduate in his family; the first to graduate from high school in his family. He is Dennis Scholl, an FIU graduate in accounting. What place? The FIU art museum, then in the basement of Primera Casa. That’s the place that he credits with changing his life! He classifies himself as an arts zealot, because his appreciation for the arts started later in life, at FIU, while he was hustling to get this accounting degree.

We work in a world of contrast. Mayhem is everywhere. Dark weapons and grim acts of violence are drivers of discourse and social media from the local to the global. Yet, here we are, doing what we love:

- Working with some of the most determined and appreciative students anywhere.
- Honing our curriculum to prepare students for the 21st century.
- Providing more and better internship every year.
- Graduating our students at higher rates every year.
- Carrying out our research with an ever-growing confidence
- Developing win-win partnerships here and abroad that add value
- Building community confidence in our work.

What is going on here? Truth be told, your work, now for over four decades, has impact! It has given hope and opportunity to thousands who have shared this precious real time or virtual space with us. Listen to Dennis Scholl, “That place changed my life”.

Let me introduce you to Norma and Richard Tchir. Norma graduated in 1992 with a degree in English literature and Richard in 1989 with a degree in MIS. They are here this afternoon at my invitation. They are living proof of your power. Your power to inspire, to empower, to advance their learning and knowledge, to get great jobs, and as importantly, to live a good life.

How good you might ask? Meet their two daughters, Sofia and Katherine. They just started five weeks ago as freshman. They were the first students to be admitted to the Class of 2018 by Dr. Havens and her team of admissions specialists during last year's Open House. I know that you might take their presence for granted. Don't! Let me assure you that these ladies could have gone anywhere. Anywhere! Together, their combined SAT scores are just points shy of 4800. They also bring in significant Advanced Placement credits.

They chose FIU. They chose you! You know why? Because we are a university that has found itself. FIU is an institution that has a soul. This is where our passions of the mind often fuse with the passions of the heart. Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Tchir for entrusting us with not only your education, but also that of your daughters. We will not disappoint you!

We embrace that our geography and our demography give us an identity of value. We embrace this reality of who we are and where we are. We embrace the radical idea that we take responsibility for the advanced education that eligible students in our community deserve. This is regardless of the zip code or country of birth or the location of their high school. We embrace that we, too, have weapons. The weapons of great teaching, learning, research, creativity, mentoring, counseling, guidance and empathy. With these bright weapons, we can keep hope and opportunity alive for countless thousands who may not have so many choices as the Tchirs, but have their same aspirations and expectations for us.

Years ago, our founder, Chuck Perry, gave an interview in which he pointed to our essential purpose. That era, the early 1970s, was laden with intense conflict epitomized by the classic movie, *Apocalypse Now*. Chuck said this about FIU: "We really are going to plan for the first time to have an institution that is responsive to the urban needs of Miami Dade County". His clarity about our purpose then is part of our DNA today. It helps to anchor our efforts today, so different in parameter about performance largely because of the changing accountability and competitiveness metrics imposed on us by our fiduciaries and stakeholders.

We are in the middle of a fast moving river of change. Change in the very definition of what a higher education is today. Change in how our effectiveness is measured and rewarded by students, governments, funders, employers and colleagues – locally, nationally and globally. Somehow you find a way to continue to show each other and our community that we are indeed mindful of our many responsibilities and opportunities presented by the intersection of our global community and our energized institution.

So as we rededicate ourselves to our profession and institution this afternoon, let us be just as confident in our ability to animate the hope and opportunity that bring the Tchirs and 54,000 students to our campuses and our on-line learning. Let us dream that one day, these students will repeat what Dennis Scholl often says: "That place, FIU, changed my life". Take a moment to recall one of the students whose life you've inspired. Now think about the students whose future awaits you this year.

Thank you, faculty, for being the drivers of that change with the weapons that you possess, the blessings of knowledge, and your passion for learning. All things are possible, one class, one research project, one study abroad program, one courageous feedback session, one student at a time. For all the years that our institution is blessed to serve, you will always be the key. And that is why we celebrate your efforts today.