

## **Moving forward with partnerships on higher education**

It is fashionable these days to be critical of public education and its effectiveness. Who could forget the second presidential debate this year when the opening question to the two candidates came from a student who worried that he might not be able to find a job upon graduation?

The implication: That somehow the student's education was inadequate and therefore a waste of time and money.

In Florida, recent initiatives right here in Miami-Dade County as well as statewide augur well for our higher education enterprise.

Gov. Rick Scott launched College and Career FIRST (Focusing Investments on Results for Students and Teachers) aimed at improving the way we prepare our children for college, and the Board of Governors created a new Commission on Higher Education Access and Attainment to ensure that Florida's population is well educated by the year 2025.

Underlying these initiatives: how to better educate more people in a world of shrinking resources; how to close achievement and learning gaps that threaten U.S. competitiveness against countries that outpace ours in competency, particularly in STEM areas; and how to generate more and better jobs even as automation and deindustrialization threaten the traditional high standard of living of communities throughout the country.

As these debates and initiatives unfold, we at FIU have planted a stake in the ground to anchor forward-facing initiatives that will help our community to grow and prosper. In a sea of uncertainty and debate about whether education matters, we are certain that we

play a critical role in fostering job creation, community well-being and hope.

Our partnership strategy empowers us to forge ahead — the world will not wait on our state or community to figure things out. Here are three specific initiatives that will focus our efforts in the New Year.

**STEM.** FIU leads the country in the production of minority graduates in the nationally critical areas associated with science, technology, engineering and math or STEM. Our demographics are the shape of things to come in this country. Our intention is to be a model for the nation. To ensure that we continue to improve, this year we launched the STEM Transformation Institute, a multidisciplinary partnership that will help pave the way for student success in science, technology, engineering and math. Traditionally, Hispanics and African Americans have not been well represented in these key fields of the modern economy.

Thanks to faculty initiatives, we are using innovative teaching methods that could become a national model. And we focus not just on college students' success, but on educating teachers who will help fill the pipeline with motivated, curious and well-prepared middle and high school students. New partnerships with Miami-Dade County Public Schools are enabling change and improvement where it matters — in the schools themselves, where the next generation of community job creators are being taught.

We are particularly proud of robust dual enrollment initiatives throughout the system, and a path-breaking community school relationship funded by JP Morgan Chase with Miami Northwestern Senior High School.

**Internships.** Students who participate in internships while in college tend to do better in the job market once they graduate. We are redoubling our efforts in this area so that all of our students

have access to internships. We have nearly doubled internship opportunities for our students during the past three years. New partnerships with Florida Power and Light, Miami-Dade County government, and numerous companies throughout the community give students an early opportunity to get practical experience working side by side with accomplished professionals in their chosen fields.

Entrepreneurship. The basic challenge before us in this new century is to do a better job of preparing our students to create good jobs, not just take good jobs. Part of what makes America great is innovation and creativity that people around the world admire and emulate. Much of this creativity takes place in startups — small companies founded by bright young people who have that spark to change the status quo. Google, Apple – you have heard the examples.

At FIU we are being very intentional about exposing our students to entrepreneurship courses and giving them access to successful entrepreneurs from our community. We are implementing an institution-wide mandate for entrepreneurship education that will deepen our students' ability to develop and support start-up companies in their chosen fields. Just as we have been a “start-up” university during the past four decades, so we must inculcate a “start-up” culture among our students.

As 2013 begins, we must be introspective about the role of education in community well-being. At FIU, we are focused and moving ahead, sensitive to and respectful of the political concerns and signals around us while certain that there is no time to lose, and that working together, we can overcome obstacles in our way.

**-MARK B. ROSENBERG**

**President, Florida International University**