August was a Worlds Ahead month for FIU.

We began the month by welcoming our newest – and largest – class of future doctors at the third White Coat Ceremony for the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine on Aug. 5. That day, 82 medical students formally began their journey toward becoming physicians who will practice medicine in a compassionate and comprehensive manner in their communities, many of them right here in South Florida.

We then celebrated our first-ever Summer Commencement on Aug. 13 and had the honor of conferring a Ph.D. in history to the oldest graduate in FIU history, Richard M. Smith. Dr. Smith, who just turned 88, is a decorated World War II veteran, successful businessman, and a dedicated father, grandfather and great grandfather. Dr. Smith, who started his doctoral studies in his 80s, was part of the crew of a four-engine B-24 Liberator aircraft. And he was one of thousands of young brave men and women, including my father, who were part of what Tom Brokaw called the “Greatest Generation.” Dr. Smith and his fellow soldiers saved the world and today, Dr. Smith serves as a shining example of determination and passion for learning. We are proud to have him among our newest alumni.

Shortly after celebrating the accomplishments of Dr. Smith and more than 3,400 new graduates, on Aug. 22 we welcomed our largest student body ever – 46,000 students. What a way to kick off the fall semester! Our record number of students brought with them more Panther pride than ever, energizing student life. FIU’s Panhellenic sororities had record recruitment with more than 750 students applying, 595 participating during recruitment week and 390 receiving bids to join. Our sororities and fraternities are highly involved in university life and in our community and are among the campus organizations that develop leaders at FIU. Hundreds of students and their parents also came to the Reagan House for a welcome reception for our new students. Our students also joined other FIU fans in packing Alfonso Field at FIU Stadium for our home football games and this FIU pride carried through Homecoming – our biggest and best yet!

All of these August accomplishments set the stage for a groundbreaking academic year for FIU, one that is focused on student learning, innovation and collaboration. I know I can count on your support to make this year Worlds Ahead.