MEMORANDUM

TO: University Community

FROM: Mark B. Rosenberg, President

SUBJECT: Transitions - From Steve Sauls to Michelle Palacio

DATE: Monday, July 28, 2014

Constantly in motion, our FIU is ever-changing. Accomplishments, milestones, and transitions mark the human drama that is our institution. We have been blessed with thousands of thoughtful and impactful students, faculty and staff who put heart and soul into their stay at FIU — often for decades — to build careers, opportunities and our institution. They may physically depart the institution, but their legacies often persist thanks to the infinite memories and hopes that bind us together.

So it is with Steve Sauls, our Vice President for Governmental Relations, who has informed me that he intends to retire in December 2014.

As he steps down from a remarkable run at FIU, we transition to new leadership in government affairs. Accordingly, I am pleased to name Michelle Palacio, a veteran FIU governmental affairs specialist, as our new Vice President for Governmental Relations effective December 15, 2014. Mrs. Palacio is an intuitive strategic thinker and bridge builder who has deep working knowledge of our institution and the political landscapes in which we operate.

Michelle is currently Assistant Vice President of Health Policy and Governmental Affairs at FIU. She is responsible for providing leadership for all aspects of governmental relations for the FIU Academic Health Center, including the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine, the Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing and Health Sciences, and the Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work.

She began her FIU career in 2004, serving as Director of State Relations, and played a key role in developing the authorization and funding strategies for our Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine and the Academic Health Center. During her tenure, she helped us secure legislative approval of new academic facilities (2005-2010), obtained key funding to hire Life Sciences faculty, and provided early catalytic leadership for the College of Engineering’s Wall of Wind.
Prior to joining FIU, she was a governmental relations consultant for Becker & Poliakoff, P.A., and before that served as Chief Legislative Aide for U.S. Senator Marco Rubio when he served as House Majority Leader in the Florida Legislature. Michelle holds a BA degree in Education from FIU, and is a graduate of the inaugural class of the Women Leaders Program in Executive Leadership Development of FIU’s Center for Leadership. She has also studied at the University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business in the Leadership and Judgment Program.

We are excited about the contributions that she has already made, and the certainty that we will continue and enhance our momentum under her leadership – so please wish her well as she assumes the mantle from her mentor Steve Sauls. More details to follow.

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About Steve Sauls:

Steve’s career at FIU spans three decades. He is almost as much a founder as many who started FIU in the 1970s, largely because he pioneered our government relations efforts in both Tallahassee and Washington. He started at FIU in 1990 as an Associate Director in the Center for Citizenship and Public Policy Studies (the Gordon Center). He later served in the Office of the President as Director of Operations and then as Associate Vice President for Public Affairs. Throughout his time at FIU, he also served as a leader and advocate in our United Way campaign.

When he started at FIU, Steve brought with him a political savoir-faire and a studied, can-do attitude that were welcomed by many of us dreaming about our institution’s next horizon; optimistic, but inexperienced in the rough and tumble of intentional political agenda setting to build our FIU. But his keen insights on government affairs and his on-the-ground policy experience in both Washington and Tallahassee, coupled with his appreciation of the academic art form, were too important to ignore as FIU expanded and raised its sight on becoming a major public university.

Working shoulder to shoulder with President Modesto A. Maidique, Vice Presidents Tom Breslin and Paul Gallagher, and our faculty, Steve crafted a credible Washington presence that enabled FIU to expand its federal research portfolio, especially with the U.S. Department of Energy. His fingerprints are on virtually every major initiative at FIU since the early 1990s, from the establishment of the International Hurricane Research Center following Hurricane Andrew in 1992, to helping to secure state funding for the acquisitions of the Engineering and Computing Center, and the Wolfsonian Museum.
Sauls played key roles in the development of our first strategic plan—Reaching for The Top; in the fight to receive authorization for the College of Law and in the initiative to establish and fund the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine; in the initial funding for the FIU storm surge model; for the State Department funding that led to our first-ever federally-funded research on Cuba carried out by the Cuba Research Institute in the early 1990s; and in the funding that enabled the creation of our African and African Diaspora Studies program.

He also expanded and built our state relations team of in-house and contract lobbyists who have helped to tell our story in Tallahassee and throughout the state. He is the go-to leader behind our transformational University City/TIGER initiative with Sweetwater, and he is a driving force behind the nascent and successful consortium relationship with UCF and the USF. Our Washington fellows program owes its existence to his vision and, as a consequence, hundreds of FIU students have had meaningful internships in the nation’s capital and many have taken permanent jobs there. We have a mirror program in Tallahassee for our students thanks to Steve’s vision and persistence. He has been a strong force behind the growth and evolution of the Washington D.C. Alumni Chapter and he is one of the strongest advocates for the FIU’s national STEM profile and recognized leadership.

But FIU is much more than the countless institution-building initiatives critical to the growth and maturity of our education sanctuary. Many staff members have given generously of their time to mentor and develop our students—and so, too, it is with Steve.

Consider for a moment a few of the many who have benefitted from his mentoring and care: Patty Maribona ‘93, who was the first FIU graduate to attend Harvard Law School; Mercedes Viana Schlapp ’94, the first FIU graduate to have a full time position in the White House; Danny Pino ’96, television series lead for Cold Case Files, Law & Order: SVU, and numerous films; Florida State Senator Anitere Flores ’97, who also served our institution in governmental affairs and external relations; Christin “CiCi” Battle ’11 ’13, former BBC SGA President, now state-wide Youth Engagement Coordinator in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice; Bill Wilson ’04 ’06, former aide to Speaker Rubio, now Director of Legislative & Cabinet Affairs for the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity; Rainier Gonzalez ’95, former MMC SGA President, now Chairman & CEO of Pacer Health; Bryan Roberts (current student), 2014 intern, now aide to State Rep. Cynthia Stafford; Bryan Morera ’14, student assistant in Governmental Relations and soon to attend LSU College of Law; George Corton ’03 ’14, FIU’s first federal relations intern, now Assistant Vice President of Development for FIU; Anthony Rionda ’09 ’11, former MMC SGA President, now Chief of Staff at the FIU College of Law; Melissa Tapanes Llahues ’00, university student leader, now a practicing attorney at Bercow Radell & Fernandez; Carlos Becerra ’98, former MMC SGA President (twice), now FIU Director of Federal Relations; Adriana Pereira ’05, former FIU federal intern, now FIU Director of Governmental Relations; and of course, Michelle Palacio ’03, who will soon assume his duties. What a remarkable cohort of mentees for Steve - a testimony to the range of contributions that he has made during his three decades at FIU.

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There is never a good time to announce the departure of a long-trusted friend and colleague, particularly one who has worked side by side with so many in our quest to build our institution and serve the community better. What is remarkable about Steve has been his uncanny ability to focus on the big picture, craft strategy and tactics to advance our agenda, and to shrug-off the small-ball politics often characteristic of the political environment where he has excelled.

Steve Sauls wants to spend time with his extended family in Brazil, travel, and perhaps take on a project or two here upon his return. Steve Sauls has helped us to turn the impossible into the inevitable, many times over, so please share your gratitude as he makes this next transition.