

UF President Bernie Machen
State of the University Speech
Thursday, August 25, 2011(3:00pm)
Reitz Union Ballroom

Good afternoon. I hope your summer was restful and invigorating. And I hope you had the opportunity to visit some interesting places.

Chris and I have yet to take our vacation, but we leave Sunday for an adventure in the wilds of Idaho. We are going to spend a few days with no Blackberries, no TV, not even any electricity, in a location you can only reach by bush plane. In light of what we're experiencing here in civilization – high unemployment, hurricanes, presidential politics – the solitude of Idaho sounds like paradise. I'll have to let you know later whether it was worth a week of no indoor plumbing.

For this year's State-of-the-University address, I want to focus on three areas of concern. First, I want to talk about diversity at the university, and what we are doing to further our commitment to that core principle. Second, I want to update you on the university's progress in restoring the three-percent reductions from state employee salaries for retirement. Third, and most important, I will talk in some depth about an initiative to re-examine and renew our graduate programs.

We have filled a number of important leadership positions in the past year. **Dr. Zina Evans** has shouldered new responsibilities and is UF's new vice president for enrollment management. Zina, could you stand? Thank you. **Dave Kratzer** is our interim vice president for student affairs. Dave, please stand. We brought **Dr. Teresa Balsler**, dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, from the University of Wisconsin. Teri? We are pleased that **Dr. Tom Dana** is serving as our interim dean of the College of Education. Tom, would you stand? Tom will remain in his position until **Dr. Glenn Good** arrives from the University of Missouri to serve as our new permanent dean. Dr. Good will start late next month and is not present today. **Danita Nias**, from the University of Maryland, has arrived as executive director and associate vice president of the Alumni Association. Danita, would you please stand up? Thank you. Last but not least, **Dr. John Hayes**, not present today, is our new Interim Dean for Research at IFAS.

This spring, in what seems to have become an annual ritual, Florida lawmakers cut UF's **budget**. We'll fill the gap with new dollars from another 15-percent tuition increase, combined with operational, administrative, one-time and UF Athletic Association funds. We anticipate we'll avoid layoffs and program cuts this year.

While I am not going to talk about it today, we had another banner year in the quantitative areas of fundraising, endowment, research and student characteristics. I will post the data on my website at www.president.ufl.edu.

While we continue to make strong hires through our “**Jumpstart**” initiative, we have not made enough headway on improving faculty diversity. Actual numbers of female and Hispanic faculty are up slightly, but faculty diversity has been essentially flat over the past five years. Diversity is a core value of any great university – and the reality is that if we want to reach that pinnacle, we need to do better. We hope to gain new ground on this issue in future hires with guidance from the **President’s Council on Diversity**, whose members put considerable time and thought into the matter.

The council’s Diversity Action Plan, released earlier this spring, recommends a number of common-sense strategies that we will pursue in coming months. These include making university leaders more accountable for female and minority hires – and creating attractive incentives for academic units to increase diversity. Ultimately, UF’s students and faculty should mirror Florida’s population. The diversity plan will get us closer to that goal.

We will also soon finish recruiting for a new university equity officer to replace Larry Ellis, who is retiring. We expect our Office of Institutional Equity to play a prominent role in our new effort, and we anticipate the Office of the Provost will bear down on this issue as well. There is much to be done.

We’ve been working since this spring to offset the new requirement for state employees to pay three percent of their salaries by providing three percent raises for UF employees. In order to do this, we must find offsetting savings in employee benefits, and we have been seeking the right solution. The situation for faculty has proved considerably more complicated than for staff. As a result, we have elected to move our proposal forward in two stages – staff first and faculty second.

After listening to staff members’ feedback and considering all our options, we have a plan to pay for the three percent staff raises by capping staff members’ vacation payout. Under this plan, staff would be paid for up to 200 hours of unused vacation when they leave the university. There is to be no reduction in leave accrual –just leave payout at termination.

We anticipate the Board of Trustees will consider the plan on September 6. A “yes” vote will result in salary increases for staff on September 16, payable in their October paychecks. This is for **all** staff.

As for faculty, we will continue to discuss changes to benefits with faculty representatives this fall. Our goal is to arrive at an agreement, work through collective bargaining and have a proposal for the Board of Trustees to consider in December for faculty raises in January. Whether we can pay for faculty raises will depend on changes to faculty benefits.

Now, let’s turn our attention to doctoral education.

We often say UF is Florida’s oldest and best university. We know we are the state’s flagship. We tout ourselves as the foundation of The Gator Nation. But legacy and branding aside, what truly distinguishes UF is our doctoral enterprise.

We graduate nearly half of all the Ph.D.'s in the state of Florida and more than all but two other research universities in the nation. With 125 doctoral programs, we are among the five most comprehensive universities in the country. Our best scientific and scholarly papers depend on doctoral students. Our ability to woo promising junior faculty from out *there*, and convince distinguished professors to stay *here*, rests on the quality of our doctoral programs.

The university's research operation and growing propensity for innovation cascade from work at the doctorate level. Our governing body, the Board of Trustees, has twice voted to reaffirm our primary mission of research and graduate education. This takes nothing away from our commitment to UF's 35,000 undergraduate standouts, a commitment that will continue. But doctoral education is our spirit and our soul. It is who we are as a university, and has been since UF graduated its first doctoral students in 1934.

Despite this centrality – or perhaps because of it – our graduate and doctoral enterprise has for far too long operated on academic autopilot. It is large and decentralized and hard to evaluate. Inevitably, the budget and other urgent priorities intercede. So when the National Research Council last fall released a report rating graduate disciplines nationwide, I welcomed the news. Here was a rare opportunity to examine what we do.

The NRC survey gave us an outside perspective. I believed a serious inquiry also demanded an assessment from the inside. We assigned this task last October to a Doctoral Education Review Committee consisting of 10 faculty members, all of them distinguished professors. Dr. Ben Dunn, a distinguished professor of biochemistry and molecular biology, has done a first-rate job as chairman of the committee.

Over the fall and winter, Dr. Dunn and his colleagues carefully assessed 60 doctoral programs across UF's colleges, completing a report this spring. Their conclusions are troubling, thought-provoking and ultimately, I believe, hopeful. More than anything, they are a call to action – one that couldn't be more timely in light of the changing higher education climate nationally.

The report is available now for download at the president's website. Let me discuss the main conclusions first. Then I'll talk about how we wish to move forward.

When committee members analyzed the NRC survey, they found some UF departments performed exceptionally, and many others respectably. Taken together, however, it is fair to say that our programs fell short of expectations for the most prominent university in a bellwether state of nearly 19 million people. Of the 61 universities in the Association of American Universities, UF ranked 53rd in its percentage of programs that are among the best in their disciplines. What's more, UF ranked 28th out of 35 AAU publics. Predictably, UF did not perform as well as UC-Berkeley, the University of Michigan and the University of Wisconsin. We also ranked below Penn State, below Ohio State, below UT-Austin.

I am well aware of objections that the NRC survey relied on six-year-old data and flawed methodology. Still, the survey generated a great deal of attention. However problematic, it mattered, and matters still.

The Doctoral Education Review Committee considered the NRC survey along with a wealth of internal data gathered for four years by UF's graduate school. Dr. Hank Frierson, dean of the graduate school, led the effort to gather this data and vet it with departments. Dr. Frierson did a standout job assembling an accurate, highly comprehensive database.

The committee further considered the responses to questionnaires sent to all 60 programs. Members reviewed all of this material – the NRC data, the graduate school data and the surveys – to determine how each program fared against nine carefully chosen hallmarks of graduate program quality. These hallmarks included the time required for students to earn their doctorates, students' attrition rates and the number of doctoral graduates per graduate faculty member. The results ranged considerably.

Students in some programs sprinted to their degrees in a rapid three or four years, while others rowed through an abyss as long as nine years. A mere handful of students deserted some programs, while as many as 60 percent fled others. In some programs, faculty graduate pretty close to one Ph.D. per faculty member per year. In others, it's more like one graduate per faculty member every 10 years.

The committee did not rank programs against each other, nor did it rank programs against peers elsewhere in academe, as the NRC did. Members instead used their best judgment to group like departments into four "A," "B," "C," and "D" groups, with those in the "A" group performing the best on the nine criteria.

Let me pause here to put this grouping into proper context.

We do not see the committee's report as an attempt to condemn weak programs. It is not a ranking of the university's most- and least-valued programs. Nor does it foreshadow penalties or terminations of programs. Instead, it is a starting place for each program, with a suggested route for progress.

I have the highest regard for UF faculty and their professional, scientific and scholarly achievements. Many of you are among the best in your fields. Many more of you are steadily accruing the accolades to join the best. Research and doctorate education is your native country and passport to future success. Our goal is to provide clarity and direction – to guide everyone in elevating their own programs, graduate students and ultimately the university.

A couple of important points along these lines ...

We recognize more money would help programs address the deficiencies identified by the committee. However, we have faith that leaders will also reexamine their priorities and try creative solutions that do not require new resources. Programs with unusually high acceptance rates can become more selective. Programs that have high attrition rates can improve faculty mentoring. Programs that load graduate students up with so many teaching responsibilities that it impedes their research or scholarship progress can lighten those teaching loads. All will require new thinking, new approaches, perhaps a change to a program's traditions or internal culture – not necessarily new funding.

We recognize that clarity is essential in this process. That is why our provost, Joe Glover, has asked each department to draft a five-year plan to address its deficiencies. We understand that each program is unique and that some leaders may wish to suggest their own assessments. We welcome those suggestions with the five-year plans.

We have no wish for everyone to hew to a one-size-fits-all directive. We do wish for plans that honestly acknowledge programs' shortcomings and clearly spell out solutions.

University leadership shares responsibility for crafting solutions. We intend to add \$5 to \$7 million to graduate student stipends and create more graduate fellowships. In coming years, we will make those investments in the programs that demonstrate the most growth and improvement. In the meantime, I would encourage you to think about this reexamination and renewal of the university's doctoral programs in the wider context of the growing emphasis nationally on higher education accountability.

We've always had our critics. But I have never seen as much open skepticism about the value of universities as I do today. Barely a week goes by without another story in *The Chronicle for Higher Education* reporting an attack on some element of the higher education mission.

Is an undergraduate degree worth the money and time? Is the federal government wasting money on research that is not relevant to society? Why support doctoral programs over, say, job-training programs? These used to be infrequent questions. Now, they are daily. And to a small but disturbing extent, the discussion reflects the reality on the ground. For proof of that, look no further than the higher education politics in Texas and the latest candidate to enter the GOP presidential field.

I am utterly and completely convinced that universities have tremendous value. I know the University of Florida and its graduates have elevated our state, our nation and our world in countless ways. I also know all public universities will face louder and more persistent demands to prove our worth.

When we track our graduates' employment record for a decade after they graduate – as the Doctoral Education Review Committee recommends – it broadcasts to the world that UF is deeply committed to its students' success. When we show we seek to nurture programs that efficiently produce highly sought-after graduates, it proves we are sensitive to how we spend public dollars.

We want to pursue these and other measures recommended by the committee because they will make UF a better university – but they also put us out front of our critics. They provide assurance that there is no need to intercede.

That's the external consideration. There is also an internal one.

Even as shrinking state budgets over four of the past five years have damaged the university, they have forced us all to become less shackled to tradition, more nimble, and ultimately more creative.

In the past, when we faced cutbacks, we had one game plan: Plead with Tallahassee for more money. Today, we build innovation communities. We propose a fresh idea for a new semester that will allow UF to take on 2,000 more undergraduates. We invest heavily in distance learning. We still rely on Tallahassee, but we will become more and more independent as we transform from a conventional to a creative university. This renewal of our doctoral enterprise must be a part of that transformation.

I touched on the simplest and best reason to embrace this process earlier.

Research and doctoral education set this university apart and define our careers as academics. Graduate students make faculty members' reputations with their professional success. We're all busy, and we all have a lot of responsibilities, but we have to get doctoral education right. I thank you for your energy, passion and creativity in contributing to that outcome in the coming months and years.

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Now, I'll be glad to take some questions. If anyone stumps me, I may call on Provost Glover or Dr. Dunn, who are both here, to help with an answer.

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