

## State of Academic Affairs

Presentation by Provost Ronald Toll

Student Union Ballroom

18 August 2011

Good morning, welcome, and thank you for being here. A new academic year begins, and once again that will be energized by the dichotomy of opportunities and challenges. Almost exactly a year ago today, we, the staff, faculty, and administration of the Division of Academic Affairs, gathered together in this room, to listen and respond to important information regarding strategic planning related to positioning and alignment of our academic programs. While at that time I did not intend for that event to be a first of its kind, in the year since, I see in retrospect the opportunity for that event to have served as the first annual address from the Provost to all Academic Affairs personnel on the state of our Division. Therefore, I consider our time together this morning as the second installment of what I hope will become an annual tradition, a fall division-wide address by the Provost to present important information, discuss recent events, and challenge ourselves for the upcoming year in ways that will continue to move our division and our University forward, and by doing so, rededicate ourselves to our University mission of transforming the lives of our students and our region through education.

Last week, I had the pleasure of spending some time with our new first-year faculty during the start of their orientation process. Once again, to that group

and to the new members of our Division staff, I want to congratulate you and thank you for joining the unique living-learning community that is Florida Gulf Coast University. Will all new faculty and staff please stand? It is my distinct pleasure to introduce you to our returning faculty and staff. You will find no better group of dedicated and accomplished professionals to serve as role models, colleagues and mentors. Learn from them, give back to them, and along with them accept the awesome challenge of the responsibility of educating the women and men who come to FGCU to begin, or to continue on their journey of intellection expansion, personal fulfillment, and career success. (Please be seated). Our work, as educators and those who provide support for the educational enterprise, is by my own assessment, the most important, the most solemn, and the most sacred responsibility of a free society – to educate its people and in doing so, to make the world a better place.

In concert with the University's strategic plan, and central among our goals last year was the task of the positioning and alignment of our academic units. In an open, inclusive, and transparent process established through collaboration and iteration among the leadership of the Faculty Senate, the Staff Advisory Council, and the Provost's Office, a group of faculty, staff and administration, the Positioning and Alignment Task Force, spent much of the year studying our existing academic organizational structure and ways it might be modified to facilitate further student and faculty success and institutional growth. All personnel in the Division were provided multiple opportunities for input at important milestone dates along the way. The Task Force's work was presented to me in their final report in March. At the end of April, President Bradshaw and I invited you to join us in order to share with you how the work of the Task Force

had informed the final decisions regarding alteration of the existing alignment of departments, schools and colleges. One component of that plan went into effect last week with the establishment of the newly created U. A. Whitaker College of Engineering, under the leadership of its founding Dean, Dr. Susan Blanchard.

Today, I want to inform you of our continuing progress toward completing implementation of our positioning and alignment plans, as well as to identify other high priority objectives for the coming year. But, first, I would like to make some introductions, briefly recap some of our recent accomplishments and highlight some personnel changes that we have made during the past several months.

I want to welcome Dr. Mitch Cordova as the new Dean of the College of Health Professions. After a successful national search, Dean Cordova joined us in July, coming from UNC-Charlotte. He brings to us high energy, cross-disciplinary perspective, and a strong desire to expand our partnerships with the regional health care industry. I want to take this opportunity to again thank Dr. Joan Glacken for her service as Interim Dean of the CHP.

Dr. Hudson Rogers, who has served so ably and so well in his role as Associate Provost, and before that as Associate Dean of the Lutgert College of Business, has been appointed Dean of the Lutgert College. We know that Dr. Rogers will provide effective overall leadership and help guide the College through its AACSB reaffirmation of accreditation process. I also want to thank Dr. Ara Volkan for his contributions as Interim Dean of the Lutgert College.

To help fill Hudson's large shoes within the Provost's Office, several changes were made. Mr. Steve Belcher has transitioned over to the Provost's

office where he will be responsible for oversight of many of the collective bargaining and faculty personnel responsibilities formerly carried out by Dr. Rogers. Additionally, Dr. Greg Tolley will assume some of Hudson's faculty affairs duties, particularly involving liaison activities with the Faculty Senate. And Ms. Jennifer Baker, Director of Academic Budgets, has taken on some additional responsibilities related to financial planning.

As you know, Associate Provost Peg Gray-Vickrey, who was to continue to lead the Office of Curriculum and Instruction and facilitate the continued development of our office of Undergraduate Studies, left FGCU this summer to assume the position of Provost at Texas A&M-Central Texas. I am pleased that Dr. Jim Wohlpart, formerly Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, has agreed to serve as Interim Dean for Undergraduate Studies, and will be a member of the Council of Deans. I also thank Dr. Cathy Duff who will again step up to serve as Interim Associate Provost, covering many of the administrative and technical areas within the Office of Curriculum and Instruction.

After a national search, our own Ms. Jessica Rhea was appointed Director of Service Learning and Civic Engagement and we are looking forward to her continued success as she takes on this leadership role on a permanent basis. Indeed this past year, FGCU was named to the 2010 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll with Distinction, the only Florida institution of higher education to be so recognized.

Finally, following the summer retirement of Ms. Cathy Deschene, my former Executive Assistant, and a national search to fill her position, I am very pleased that Ms. Tiffany Jackson joined us in June in that capacity. Tiffany holds a

bachelor's degree in Communication as well as an MBA. Tiffany has rapidly integrated into the FGCU family and has already distinguished herself with regard to her professionalism, dedication, organizational skills, and general fearlessness. I am extremely pleased to have her as an integral member of our team in the Provost's Office and my personal assistant.

I want to publicly recognize all of these individuals and all those who were involved in these many hiring and decision making processes. We could not have carried out such significant undertakings in such a short period of time without your valued input and dedication to continuous improvement.

I look forward to working closely with all of our new academic leaders, and I have complete confidence in their experience, skill, dedication, and ability to continue to move us forward as a Division.

Last year was another good year for capital construction. We opened the home of the Bower School of Music, expanded the Student Union, began to enjoy expanded facilities in Sudgen Resort and Hospitality, opened another parking garage, and began construction of AB8, the Health Professions Building along with yet another parking garage. As you know well, we were dealt a serious blow to the completion of AB8 as a direct result of a line item gubernatorial veto of \$4.5 million of PECO support. But I am extremely pleased to inform you that late yesterday, President Bradshaw issued a notification to the entire University community that we have found a way to reorder priorities that will allow us to complete that building and open it on time for January 2012.

This past year we continued to work cooperatively and productively with the faculty union, the UFF, to adopt a new, three-year Collective Bargaining

Agreement. And the University administration restored term life insurance benefits to all employees when payment of premiums was cut by the Legislature last year. We are proud to be the only university in the State University System to do so.

To foster enhanced communication between faculty and the Provost, I held a series of informal drop-in sessions with faculty during the past year. In the next week my office will send out an invitation to three more of these sessions for the fall semester. We also established a new forum for interaction among department chairs, deans and associate deans. I am pleased to announce the Dr. Tony Barringer, Interim Dean of the College of Professional Studies, will serve as special liaison between the Provost's Office and the collective of department chairs in order to facilitate professional development and general communications.

In terms of quality and integrity of our educational programs, we submitted our 5<sup>th</sup> Year Interim Report to SACS. The review of that document was highly favorable and places us in a strong position for positive action on our continuing accreditation when the Commission on Colleges meets in December. Our sincere thanks go to Associate Provost Paul Snyder for his leadership of this difficult, complex and time consuming endeavor and to the University Assessment Council, and the leadership teams and faculty of the college units for their work in collecting, reviewing and incorporating a wide array of data. While we are in a good place, the continuous work of keeping our regional accreditation goes on.

I am very pleased to announce that our Teacher Education Program, particularly the cooperating teacher component, earned the status of a national

model program by the National Council for Teacher Quality, one of only 10 institutions selected for such recognition from a national cohort of 134 schools, and the only one so recognized from the State of Florida. Our thanks go to Dean Marci Greene and her faculty and staff. Next step for the College of Education is NCATE accreditation, with our site visit planned for Spring 2012.

We continue to add robust and high quality degree programs to our academic inventory. Our EdD begins this fall as will our BA in Journalism, and our former computer science program will reemerge as our new software engineering program.

This past year also produced the first graduates of our Doctor of Physical Therapy program. It was my enormous pleasure to join with the faculty of the Department of Physical Therapy in the hooding of our first doctoral students at our spring commencement, where we again saw record numbers of degrees awarded.

Toward the end of the last fiscal year, we were able to distribute over \$700,000 among the colleges and other units located within our Division into acquisition of new information technology and instructional equipment. And as recently announced, by working within the structure of the University Planning and Budget Council, we made the institutional decision to acquire a new software package, DegreeWorks, which will support our student advising program in new and significant ways and allow for data mining that will directly support enrollment management and course schedule planning.

So what is on our academic plate for 2011-2012? As previously described, we will move forward with the plans developed from last year's process of

Positioning and Alignment. I am very pleased to see the various units that will be changing college affiliation already working closely with their new colleagues to aid in the transitions. My office stands ready to facilitate those transitions. These changes at the College level will be part of conversations within the Colleges regarding potential changes to internal college structure, and all of these changes will be in place for the start of the fall semester 2012. I am pleased that the College of Education, using a process adapted from that of the PATF, has already accomplished the establishment of academic departments in lieu of a prior divisional structure, and the College of Arts and Sciences will continue to move forward with the completion of the work already begun in that regard. As with the changes resulting from the overall PATF process, intra-collegiate changes should remain mindful of student learning needs and reflect core mission values, the ability to accommodate growth, to contribute to the success of students and faculty, and capable of being implemented with minimal infusion of new funds.

We will soon appoint an Implementation Task Force to facilitate the many small and large items that must be accommodated by these changes in college-level academic alignments. These range from changes to our academic catalogue to the evaluation and allocation of budgets connected to units undergoing movement to a different college.

This year we will also see substantial progress with regard to program-level assessment lead by a centralized process housed within Undergraduate Studies.

Informed by the results of the PATF process, our mission and vision statements, and our dedication to the learning outcomes of our students, and our reporting responsibilities to regional and discipline specific accrediting agencies,

our Board of Trustees, the Board of Governors, the State Legislature, and the Governor's Office, it is critical that we maintain focus on a trio of guiding principles related to the management of our academic enterprise. These are: equity, efficiency, and accountability.

First, equity can refer to many issues, but in the context of my remarks this morning, I am using that term to refer to the distribution of resources across the Division in terms of operational budgets, faculty and support staff, workload distribution, and new resources. Therefore, going forward this year, and of great importance to all of us, will be Jennifer Baker's efforts along with the leadership of the colleges, to track resource allocation and utilization. This will include various aspects of staffing levels and loads, and will provide for the first time a highly accurate, granular and data-driven basis upon which to establish equity in resource allocation. This process will serve as a means of insuring that real needs are identified, can be compared directly to each another, and that decisions can be made that are transparent, mission directed, goal oriented, and outcomes-driven.

The second factor, efficiency, a term that can cause us to wince by connotation, again, in the context of my remarks today, refers to the manner in which we employ processes and procedures to maximize our efforts and resources in the most efficacious manner to achieve shared goals. As I indicated last year at this time with regard to the PATF process, positioning and alignment was not a proxy process for budget reduction exercises, but rather a process dedicated to maximizing resources, especially in times of flat or decreasing resource availability. Therefore, efficiency requires us to think deeply, in

introspective and circumspective ways, about such things as classroom utilization, shared infrastructure, and process optimization.

Third, accountability is demonstrating to our many constituencies that we are serving as responsible stewards of the resources placed before us to accomplish our mission. There is no doubt that higher education is under greater scrutiny than ever before. We must be responsive to internal needs as well as to external review.

With regard to our students and accountability, we need not be reminded that they are at the core of our enterprise. We embrace that understanding. Student success is the central mantra of the university system, past, present and future. What our students learn, and how well they learn to learn, are critical determinants of their success, and of ours. Assessment is an important tool to understanding just how well we are doing for them. There are many important metrics and we will continue to use a variety of them.

One of these metrics, that we regularly report to the State, determine with high precision, and do so on an annual basis is student retention, particularly student retention from the freshman to the sophomore year. Over the past 10 years, our freshman to sophomore retention rates have varied from a low of 63% to a high of 80%. The last three years of data have seen a lack of any consistent trend in retention rates, with the values of 74%, 78%, and 74%, for 2008, 2009, and 2010, respectively.

I want to challenge us, as an institution, to achieve the goal of improving first-year student retention to be consistently at the 80% mark, and to get there in an incremental fashion over the period of the next five years. Why do I believe

that this particular metric is so important and so valuable as to be a major dashboard indicator? There are several reasons. First, this metric represents a form of referendum by our students as to the quality and value of their total FGCU experience. Is the campus welcoming? Are the academic programs that they want to pursue available to them? Is the quality of their curricular and co-curricular experiences held in such regard that they choose to stay and go on to be degree completers? Are we doing the things that we need to do to help them succeed while maintaining rigorous academic standards? There are many other factors to what shapes student retention. But there is another aspect to the value of increasing student retention metrics. It is a fundamental, financial component.

It is less expensive to retain a student than to recruit a student to fill that seat, especially during a time of growing enrollments and decreasing budgets. In terms of overall affect, for every student that we retain, we lower the number of students that begin anew in general education courses, reducing the burden of providing more and more sections of those introductory classes. For every student that we retain, we grow our graduation rates, a dependent metric that speaks to institutional reputation, potential funding, development of our alumni base, and fulfillment of our mission. For every student that we retain, we better populate our upper level classes with a more predictable number of students. For every student that we retain, we reduce our dependence on recruiting new FTIC's and transfer students, moving us that much closer to better enrollment management with increased patterns of predictability and greater control over scheduling and resource allocation.

I believe firmly that this goal of a sustained higher level of student retention is attainable and within our ability to grasp. As I noted earlier, we have previously attained this level of retention and we can get back there. And I assert that our continued and expanded emphasis on student success as the direct objective will serve as the driver that leads to greater retention, with all of its many benefits. Not only is student success our business, it's everybody's business.

So, how do we get there? In actuality, we are already doing many of the right things. As recently reported by Faculty Senate President Doug Harrison, we will be moving forward with our efforts to review student learning outcomes. And we will begin shortly to engage the process that will lead to our next Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) as required by SACS. Our Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Initiative, energetically led by Dr. Linda Serro, will be expanding its efforts this year into a range of wonderful new projects. The First Year Residential Experience (FYRE) program, within the Division of Student Affairs, will continue to expand its good work, and we will look for additional resources to support important efforts aimed directly at student success, such as the Center for Academic Achievement.

Further, I will charge the Enrollment and Retention Management Committee of the Planning and Budget Council to seek specific mechanisms, I will work with the Council of Deans to review and analyze our processes and procedures, and I work with the leadership of Student Affairs, the Faculty Senate and the Staff Advisory Council to maximize the positive synergies of our curricular and co-curricular programming, all geared at increasing student success.

Before I end my formal remarks and open this session up for your questions, I want to say that we will continue to face many challenges in the coming year, and the year after that. We have gone from being a state funded institution to being a state assisted institution. If we go too much further in this direction we will be become merely a state-located institution. In response, we have had to continue to increase tuition. In such an environment we have been obliged to review all that we do in terms of making the most, while receiving less.

But this University has always faced challenges, from our conception and our birth, to our multiple accreditations, and our growth. Our success is based on the individual and collective dedication of all of the people in this room and across this amazing university campus. I am confident that this year we will continue to extend our broad path of success and to reach important milestones along the road toward the meritorious accomplishments that we have rightfully established for ourselves.

Again, thank you for being here this morning, thank you your dedication to each other and to our students, and thank you for your multifaceted support for this great University and its significant mission. Welcome and welcome back – and Go Eagles !!