

University of Florida President Bernie Machen
2012 State of the University Address at the Faculty Senate Meeting
The Morrill Act and the Path Ahead
Thursday, August 30, 2012

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome back to campus and a new academic year!

Someone once said that summer is, quote, “when laziness finds respectability.” Well, in that context, I think Chris and I were a little too “respectable” the past two months. We just hungout around Gainesville while Gators were breaking records all over Europe -- and not just at the London Summer Olympics.

In July, physicists at the particle accelerator near Geneva announced the detection of the last piece in the puzzle of our universe, the Higgs Boson a.k.a. “the God particle.” That historic milestone was shared by more than three dozen UF physicists, who together comprised one of the largest teams on the project.

Then, in London, athletes with Gator ties won 21 medals at the Olympics. If UF were a country, we would have outperformed Canada and Spain! The Gator Marching Band won superlatives, too, as the only U.S. college marching band that performed at the Summer Games.

We were the world leaders, and **we** also met some world leaders, as you see in these photos.

What an honor for the band and for UF! Now, **that’s** respectability.

As you are no doubt aware, I've announced this will be my last year as president of the University of Florida. But, we are not yet ready to dwell on that ending. So, I want to start my address today with new beginnings by introducing the outstanding women and men who are experiencing their first year as new leaders at UF.

Three of these leaders are not able to be present today. They are David Norton, vice president for research; Diane McFarlin, dean of the College of Journalism and Communications; and, Nick Place, dean for extension and director, Florida Cooperative Extension Service.

As I call the names of those who are here today, would you please stand:

- Dave Kratzer, vice president for student affairs
- Curtis Reynolds, vice president for business affairs
- Kelli Brown, interim dean of the College of Health and Human Performance
- John Hayes, dean for IFAS research

Please join me in welcoming all our new leaders with a round of applause. Thank you!

As you greet your students and colleagues, new and old, I hope you are experiencing the sense of excitement that accompanies this time of year. We have a great entering class, terrific new faculty members, and much to anticipate.

However, it is also understandable if you feel some concern about the future. We begin this year under the shadow of the grotesque events at Penn State, the administrative tumult at the University of Virginia and increasing concern over the cost of higher education and high student debt. Here in Florida, political support for universities is wobbly, and state funding remains anemic.

You may also feel some uncertainty about the search for a new president. But, I want to assure you that my successor will inherit one of the **best jobs in the nation**.

The University of Florida is in a strong position amid these uneasy times – a stronger position, in many respects, than our peer public universities in other states. We also have a clear map for our future – a map first drawn 150 years ago this year in an era that was far darker than our own.

When we wrestle over the present, it often helps to remember the past. So, let me ask you to journey back with me to the summer of 1862.

In that summer, the country was in the midst of a Civil War that was becoming bloodier by the day. And yet on July 2nd of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln and the Congress gathered to enact an extraordinary piece of legislation. The Congress passed, and Lincoln signed, the Morrill Act, the law that created the land-grant universities. Those universities would come to include the University of Florida.

The Morrill Act is named after its sponsor, Vermont Senator Justin Morrill. It deeded federal land to the states to sell, so that they could raise the money to found their land-grant universities. And, the act established those universities' mission and purpose.

You received a card when you came in today. On one side of the card is a quote that summarizes that mission. Quote, "...In order to promote the **liberal** and **practical** education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life..."

That idea of both a **liberal** and **practical** education is also the foundation of the University of Florida. That is clear from the quote on the other side of your card, which comes from the speech given by Nathan Bryan at the 1906 opening ceremonies for UF here in Gainesville.

Bryan later became a U.S. Senator from Florida, but at the time he was chairman of the Florida Educational Board of Control. Speaking about the purpose of public education, he said... Quote..."The country is governed by the will of the people, and in order to have good government we must have intelligent wills, trained minds, educated intellects."

The Morrill Act had three pillars. First, land-grant universities would be accessible to ordinary Americans, not just elites. Second, they would provide a broad education, adding agriculture and engineering to classics and liberal arts. Third, the universities would be controlled by their states and promote state and national progress.

As we face the considerable challenges of the present, I think it is revealing to discuss where UF stands within the context of these three pillars of our land-grant tradition – (1) access to education, (2) a broad college education, and (3) the promotion of state and national progress.

My remarks today preface a celebration of the sesquicentennial that will continue across the UF campus throughout the year, culminating with a major symposium in the spring. You will hear more about this celebration later today.

I will start with the first of three Morrill Act pillars, access to college.

We in the academic community talk a lot about all kinds of challenges facing universities. But in the public square, one concern towers over others.

That concern is rising tuition and student debt. The heat became more intense this year. President Obama decried tuition increases in the State of the Union, and headlines announced that Americans' student debt exceeded \$1 trillion.

As a large very visible state university, the University of Florida is easily swept up in the national outcry about high cost. But, with tuition of \$6,143 for this fall, we do not belong with those identified as high cost and unaffordable.

Last year, our tuition was 31 percent below the average for four-year public institutions. We have the 45th lowest tuition of state universities. While 37 million Americans are saddled with college debt, 61 percent of UF students graduate with zero debt.

You are no doubt aware that UF's affordability has serious shortcomings when it comes to operating the university. But at this moment in history... when frustration over college debt is so intense that some question the value of attending college at all... our low cost keeps us attractive to families and it mutes our critics.

Our affordability also vaults us to the top of the most prominent rankings for value, from *Kiplinger's* to the *Princeton Review* to *Money Magazine*.

We will most certainly continue to raise tuition. Indeed, while other universities have hit the ceiling, we have some headroom.

At the same time, we will remain committed to the Morrill Act pillar of access, which has enabled us to educate more than 370,000 people – most of whom are from the ordinary American families Senator Morrill and President Lincoln so wanted to serve. We should recognize that today, those people include women, minorities and other segments of society that could not attend college in 1862.

Our commitment to access includes UF providing millions in financial aid, as well as generous scholarships such as the Florida Opportunity Scholarship, to those who cannot pay for college.

Let's move on to the second pillar of the Morrill Act, which is that education should be broadly defined.

I am so proud of the quality of students at UF. This fall's 6,335 students continue the trend, with an average GPA of 4.2 and SAT of 1,891, both up from last year. More than one-third of these students graduated in the top five-percent of their high-school class.

With such high academic accomplishments, these students have many options for their college education. They choose UF because of our excellent faculty, great residential student life and also, UF's extraordinary diversity of educational possibilities spanning 97 bachelor's degree programs. From astronomy...to dance...to graphic design...to mathematics to one of our newest majors...sustainability studies.

Some of today's loudest higher-education critics accuse universities of offering too many programs. They are especially scornful of programs that do not present a clear path to a job, insisting that universities should funnel students into vocations.

We are proud that UF produces one-fifth of the state of Florida's undergraduate STEM degrees - and nearly half of its graduate STEM degrees – in fields where job opportunities are so plentiful.

We are also proud that, whatever their field, nearly 40 percent of UF seniors in the class of 2012 already had accepted a job offer before they graduated.

But we also have faith in the **inherent value** of degrees in liberal arts and the social sciences.

Steve Jobs shared this faith, as does John Hennessey, an engineer and the president of Stanford University. As President Hennessey said recently, the loss of the liberal arts would be, quote, “a loss to the country.”

I think President Lincoln and Senator Morrill would agree.

The final pillar of the Morrill Act is that land-grant universities help their states and the nation flourish. At UF, we affirm this pillar through education – and also through research.

I am happy to announce today that contracts and grants to the University of Florida for the just-ended fiscal year totaled \$644.3 million. That is up four percent from last year's \$619 million and an all-time high for this university in terms of regular funding.

We owe credit to the faculty for achieving this increase even as the economy struggles and federal agency budgets remain flat.

Looking ahead, we continue to build our research capacity through new bricks-and-mortar additions – and soon, a virtual one.

By the end of this year, UF will upgrade its research network to 100 gigabytes, accelerating the speed of data transmission by a factor of ten. We join only five other universities nationwide to complete this upgrade this year.

In the same way that land-grant universities once brought agricultural research to isolated farmers, today we spin off new technologies and new companies to the workplace. We opened our newest technology incubator, the Innovation Hub, in January. Already, the Hub is nurturing 24 infant university spinoff companies.

Here are a couple of photos that capture the evolution of our Morrill Act mission of research that promotes state and national progress. On the left, a picture of campus from around 1915, with a field of experimental plants not far from Newell Hall. On the right...taken in 2012 and just a few blocks away...a contemporary snapshot of Innovation Hub.

We are also improving the graduate education programs that sustain our research and innovation.

Last year, I discussed a university-wide initiative to revitalize graduate programs. In July, a committee issued a report identifying excellent programs and programs with significant deficiencies. It may be time to reward those graduate programs that are truly exceptional. And it may be time to eliminate some programs that have not, and are not, performing up to the standards expected for our university.

As we work to fulfill the goals of the Morrill Act, the strains on public higher education have rarely been higher. In particular, state support for universities is falling around the country, with the State of Florida reducing its allocation to UF by some \$219 million over the past six years. To remain on our current trajectory, we need to increase our efficiency. We must do more with less!

Operational reengineering is ongoing, with our College of Liberal Arts and Sciences expecting to save nearly \$800,000 annually with its pioneering shared services center. In the aggregate, UF has reduced its operating budget by \$100 million.

Further, we are adapting to take advantage of new technology in delivering online higher education. As I speak, UF is in discussions with Coursera, the California-based online education company that is a leading provider of “Massive Open Online Courses.” We are seriously considering an agreement with Coursera which already includes 16 prominent universities, including UVA, the University of Michigan and Duke University. The Coursera style of education is very new, and no one knows how it will evolve. Even as we become part of this experiment in higher education, our fee-based Internet education enterprise has expanded to more than 6,700 students.

We believe we can increase tuition revenues through high-quality Internet offerings to students around the globe – without taking away from the residential campus at the core of our undergraduate experience.

As I wrap up, I want to respond to those who believe that UF and other land-grants should scale back in response to these difficult times. They think we should cut our course offerings, reign in our research ambitions and become more insulated in our world view.

UF is grounded in the Morrill Act. Always has been. It is not our tradition or our mission to be a confined or utilitarian university. It is not who we are today. And it is not the path to a thriving future for this university, this state or this country.

Our trajectory embraces the faculty and students who made history at the particle accelerator in Switzerland... and the agricultural scientists who have made such life-altering improvements to citrus, peanuts and tomatoes...and, as Isaac crosses Louisiana, the civil engineering researchers who are designing homes to better withstand hurricane-force winds.

Amid the backdrop of the current challenges to higher education, UF's future depends on our ability to reach even further...to stand up for the rich breadth and scope of the research and teaching legacies foreseen by Justin Morrill and Abraham Lincoln...and to prove our value with excellence and purpose, as we have done for the past 150 years.

On that note, I want to conclude my remarks today with the brief video the university produced to show during commercials at this fall's football games. **Video link:** <http://vimeo.com/46632766>

Thank you.