

President Bernie Machen
Remarks/State of the University 2013
Inventing Our Future
Thursday, August 22 (3 p.m.)
Reitz Union Grand Ballroom

Thank you, Marc. Hello, everyone, and welcome back! I trust your summers were gratifying and you're ready for the year ahead!

The beginning of the fall term always reminds me how glad I am to be at this university. When I see the excitement on students' and families' faces; when I hear the band warming up; when I feel the energy of thousands of young people streaming through Turlington Plaza ... All these things remind me that college campuses truly are sanctuaries.

The poet Robert Frost used to spend his winters in Gainesville and hold poetry readings on campus. I'd like to think his experience here inspired one of his most memorable lines: "College," Frost said, "is a refuge from hasty judgment."

Yet this particular fall, we all understand the refuge of higher education is vulnerable to judgments, both hasty and harsh. The very notion of college is under attack from the left and the right and hit by change on every front. The rise of online learning. Growing financial pressures. Open skepticism of our value.

Whether we like it or not, we need to respond. Our very existence is being challenged. And, the best way to do so is to get out front; to actively create our future by drawing on the essence of our history.

We can't just hide from these difficult times or react to them. We need to use the principles of access ... academic excellence ... a broad liberal education ... and research for the good of the world.

We must seek to invent our own future – drawing on the strengths and missions of our past.

Our future includes online education. At UF, we are creating a four-year online undergraduate program, the E-Campus. This is part of our renewed focus on the art and science of teaching undergraduates, and we believe the E-Campus will grow our historic legacy of academic excellence – both for online students **and** for students here on campus.

We are also seeking to invent, for these complicated times, a broad liberal education for students. We're building a UF core curriculum to create a unique shared experience for freshmen. We want to get students to think deeply about themselves and their world. This contrasts the vocational approach so en vogue, but we feel it gets at the **true value** of college.

Finally, we're enhancing our position among public universities, reinventing our highest tradition as a research and graduate institution that contributes science and knowledge to better our world.

We embark on the E-Campus; on the signature undergraduate experience; and on our drive to reach the next level of research universities from a solid foundation. We are **inventing the future based on the strength of the past as a public land-grant institution.**

Our campus continues to grow with the opening this month of the Clinical and Translational Research Building. UF's research computing capabilities have been newly fortified with the Eastside Data Center, its supercomputer HiPerGator, and our 100-gigabit connection. Shands and UF have merged as UF Health. Our Sid Martin Biotech Incubator was named the 2013 Incubator of the Year worldwide. We are within a few weeks of groundbreaking on the renovation of the signature Reitz Union.

We also have several new leaders to help shepherd UF through these uncertain times. As I call out your names, please stand:

- Julie Johnson, dean of the College of Pharmacy.
- James Lloyd, dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine.
- Anna McDaniel, dean of the College of Nursing.
- Thomas Pearson, executive vice president for research and education at UF Health
- Boyd Robinson, interim dean of the College of Dentistry.
- Matt Williams, director of sustainability.

Not attending today is Michael Reid, dean of the College of Health and Human Performance.

Thank you! Now, I believe our lawmakers also deserve some recognition for their contribution to this year's strong start. For the first time in five years, the Legislature did not cut our budget. We actually received new base funding from the state.

Also for the first time, Governor Rick Scott and the legislature recognized UF as the state's highest-achieving university. They put their support behind UF advancing into the ranks of the top public universities. And, they made UF the state's provider of online higher education for undergraduates.

After so many tough years, this legislation will help rejuvenate some of the departments most harmed by five years of cuts. It represents a new beginning. With that new beginning in mind, let us look closer at the E-Campus.

By recognizing online learning as a new reality, the legislature's vision is to improve access to college and reduce its cost. By law, all Florida online students will pay only 75 percent of regular tuition.

That's the state's side of things. On our end, we begin the E-Campus with some experience, having offered online degree programs for years. In fact, we already have 7,000 online students!

Most are graduate level, but we also have 10 online quote "two-plus-two" programs. These allow associate-degree holders to attend UF online as juniors and seniors to earn their bachelor's. For the E-Campus debut in January, we will expand five of these programs to four years. After that, we anticipate adding five more programs annually.

We are one of the first bricks-and-mortar universities out of the gate to go after first-time, first-year students. To be successful we must master two challenges.

One is to meet the Legislature's expectations by expanding our tradition of access. We need to attract students to the E-Campus! And the second challenge is to enhance our legacy of academic excellence for both the online and the traditional students.

Let me take these one at a time, starting with attracting students.

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When you look at students and graduates of UF's two-plus-twos, it's clear online programs appeal to those who otherwise could not be Gators.

In microbiology and cell science, consider Christy Richardson, a Port St. Lucie mother of three who couldn't leave family and home to move to Gainesville. Or Andrew Stygar from Vero Beach, who is the first in his family to attend college and didn't want to leave his job.

Or a young woman who earned her AA degree while still in high school and is now pursuing her UF degree while living at home with her parents. This is 20-year-old Tanya Gorniewicz. Tanya chose not to come to Gainesville because she wanted to stay home with her parents and because it was less expensive. But she probably would have stayed home without a financial motivation. As she put it, quote, "There are some students who want the college life, but there are also some students like me who are more introverted."

Let me introduce you to one final UF online student, Stephanie Oweka.

Stephanie had always dreamed of going to the state university in her home state of California, and she was thrilled when she was admitted to UC San-Diego. But she works full time. UC-SD is purely residential, with daytime classes that would force her to quit her 9-6 job. When Stephanie, who is 23, added the cost of not working to paying UC-SD's tuition, she found it was better to pursue her degree online.

That's how she became the first out-of-state student in the UF microbiology program.

There are many more students in Florida like Christy, Andrew and Tanya. There are also many more students nationally like Stephanie. In the best tradition of our commitment to access, if these students have achieved the high standards required to enter UF, they deserve that opportunity – even if we can't squeeze one more undergraduate onto our Gainesville campus.

We are inventing the future by drawing on the strengths of our traditions – in this case, access, which has been a UF core principle since its inception.

That brings me to how we will use the E-Campus to renew our traditional focus on teaching and the legacy of academic excellence.

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Let's start with some basics. Students admitted to the E-Campus must have the same high grades and test scores as those admitted to our regular campus. We do not foresee this as an impediment: In my estimation, half of the students who apply to current programs could be admitted – and would be successful – if we only had space for them on campus.

Just as our E-Campus students will be as excellent as our regular students, so it is with our E-Campus faculty.

All E-Campus classes will be taught by regular faculty, not a separate group of online faculty, as occurs at other universities. Many faculty have legitimate concerns about maintaining instructional quality, building personal connections with students online, and assessing online student performance.

While the research on online outcomes is generally positive, we will be highly sensitive to these issues as we build the E-Campus.

We understand that the transition to an online class requires a huge investment of time and energy from faculty – and we will make a parallel investment in financial support, logistics and guidance from the university. We have the resources in hand: The state provided UF \$10 million to pay for upfront costs for the E-Campus, with \$5 million annually in support costs.

That said, this new initiative is about much more than practicalities. Done right, online teaching completely reimagines that old standby, the 50-minute lecture. It challenges faculty to try bold new approaches – while challenging the university to bolster their experimentation and initiative.

This reevaluation benefits traditional students as well as those online. So say UF faculty who have tried online teaching.

Jennifer Clark is a UF senior lecturer in food and resource economics who has been teaching online classes for some time and taught one of our first Massive Open Online Classes, or MOOCs, this past year.

She says her transition to online required, quote, “a radical departure.” But as she's become more expert, her work has helped her become more organized, a better communicator and an enthusiast of new ways of delivering instruction.

As she herself says, she's a better teacher. And as more faculty follow in her footsteps, so UF will be a better teaching university. Again, **inventing the future based on the strengths of our traditions, in this case, academic excellence.**

This is also the idea behind the core curriculum for undergraduates.

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Many of you are aware that it's been some time since we've thought about undergraduate education in terms of creating a shared experience that is unique to students at the University of Florida.

The legislature opened a door, giving us permission to require 12 hours of UF-only core courses. We begin this expansion by asking, ‘What is the purpose of undergraduate education?’

I’m only too aware of the political pressures to make universities even more utilitarian than we are. And given the economic difficulties, I agree that we need to prepare students for careers.

But isn’t there also value in the concept of “What is the Good Life?” – that we should help students question themselves and how they want to live? And shouldn’t we also get students to think more deeply about technology’s influence on their worldview? How about the concepts of community in a globalized world, or resiliency in the face of failure, or what the word “leadership” truly means?

These are the kinds of questions, rooted in our history of a strong liberal education, that I hope the UF core curriculum will address.

UF’s deans got the ball rolling in August with a joint proposal for two new courses, “Design for Life” and “A Sustainable Life.” It’s a start, and we will devote the coming year to discussions with faculty on the quote “Florida Core.”

Whatever curriculum we develop, this effort will join the E-Campus in forcing UF to put the spotlight back undergraduate education. The ‘Florida Core’ will also sew together myriad faculty, disciplines and points of knowledge to elevate the undergraduate experience. **Once more, inventing the future by drawing on the strengths of our past.**

That gets me to our drive to advance among the top publics.

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I’m aware that UF has sought to be considered among the nation’s best universities for ... oh 100 years or so. I also know we’ve had to go it alone. Not only with fewer resources than many peers, but also without the state behind us.

This tradition ended with the legislature’s acknowledgment of UF as Florida’s leading research university – and its financial commitment toward us reaching the next level.

Only time will tell the impact of this alignment of the state and this university. But we will do our utmost to see that it is transformational – not only for us, but for all those whose lives are touched by our research and scholarship.

Tallahassee will give UF \$15 million annually for the next five years. We will match this amount with donor funds. The UF Foundation will provide support with an \$800 million capital campaign.

Right now, when we compare UF to the top 16 AAU public universities, it’s clear that our biggest gaps relate to faculty numbers and prestige.

We are dead last in student-to-faculty ratio; dead last in number of National Academy members; 13th in faculty resources; 11th in faculty awards.

We need to improve in these standings. So, we will spend the bulk of our money on new faculty hires – including more than 100 new endowed professorships to be created by the UF Foundation’s campaign.

We want new hires throughout the university, but we will invest strategically in departments or groups that have the most potential for national prominence. We will help good groups reach the tipping point to excellence, and will create new ones in areas of high demand.

As the E-Campus and the core curriculum will enhance UF’s tradition of academic excellence, so this investment elevates UF in research.

It comes at an excellent time. Despite the myriad economic challenges, contracts and grants for the just-ended fiscal year are stable – falling about half a percentage point, from \$644.3 million to \$640.6 million.

We need more faculty, and more prominent faculty, to continue our performance in research funding ... and research findings! **More than anything else, the faculty represents the strength of the past that will help us invent the future.**

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As I wrap up, let me note that when UF was admitted to the AAU twenty-eight years ago, it was a recognition we were as good as the top 62 universities.

This year’s designation as the state’s highest-performing university is different. It’s a challenge, a call to action.

It’s saying, ‘We grant that you’re our best university. We’ve heard your need for more resources. Now, prove to us that you can be a great university.’

I hope you’ll join me in answering that call.

Let’s embrace the E-Campus as a return to a focus on teaching and academic excellence – and a new opportunity for national leadership in online education.

Let’s use the core curriculum to create a rich and wonderful “Florida Core” undergraduate experience in the best tradition of liberal education at UF.

And amid stiffening competition for fewer research resources, let’s get behind expanding research faculty and capabilities to vault UF to the nation’s best.

Toward the end of his life, Robert Frost was asked whether he had hope for the future. “Yes,” he replied. “And even for the past.”

Likewise, I have great hope for our future because we are **inventing it according to the best strengths and highest missions of our past.**

Thank you, and have a wonderful year.