

Colleagues,

I had planned to be with you in person today but need to attend a family funeral. I am sorry to miss you but excited to share four quick updates on topics that have been regularly in my conversations with faculty across campus this month.

1. An update on high school recruitment visits:

At the University of Florida, we're committed to being an engine of upward social mobility. As the state's flagship, we have an important mission to serve Floridians of every background. Last week, Vice President for Enrollment Management Mary Parker and I visited UF-admitted high school students across our state. Each of the schools we visited are in low socioeconomic neighborhoods, and many of the students we met will be the first in their families to go to college. These kids are going to be great Gators.

For most of these students, UF is absolutely the best financial option in higher education, but – to be blunt – too many of them think of UF as “the rich school.” Here's the truth: with Bright Futures and other grant programs like Pell, we are essentially free and not just for tuition but for full cost of attendance. We need to strengthen our relationships with teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors in these schools. We're going to ramp up our enrollment and marketing strategy to make sure that every student from every school understands our incredible value, our low cost, and the life-changing experience to be had here. Stand by for more upgrades in the coming academic year – we have important work to do.

2. An update on 10x10x10:

We've talked about our 10x10x10 objective – ten programs where UF will be top-ten in the next decade. We want to make some serious investments in disciplines where the University of Florida can be a no-doubt-about-it leader in higher education.

Our 10x10x10 programs will come with new and significant investments. This is critical work, and we want to solicit serious proposals that we can narrow to quarter-finalists and then semi-finalists. Last month, Provost Angle announced to all Deans that he and I are seeking their input, and formally inviting them to make opening proposals.

Now, we want to extend the opportunity to the entire faculty. We would welcome you to declare your unit or your interdisciplinary group's candidacy for programs that can be part of 10x10x10. By the first week of May, give us a preliminary proposal – why your program could become top ten, who your market competitors are, how long it will take you to get there, and what kind of programmatic needs does success take?

We're not soliciting budget specifics right now. At this stage, we want to understand your high-level plan, your assessment of the competition, and your view on the kinds of investments (both one-time and recurring) that success will take.

We have set aside funds to award an initial round of projects for additional refinement through the summer months. We're both soliciting internal submissions and targeting external talent as we align our cluster hires around some of these major undertakings. We have fantastic opportunities and incredible people.

3. An update on solving schedule problems for students:

We want to make sure that we're continually upgrading in order to better serve our students. We've heard that getting courses scheduled on time can be a persistent challenge in many majors. To solve this, Vice President Parker is leading a curricular audit designed to find bottlenecks that can prevent students from staying on track over 8 semesters.

We want to make sure that we're doing everything we can to help students meet their major requirements on time and plan their course schedules accordingly. Where do courses have waitlists and where do others have available capacity? As part of our service to them, we want to expand resources for advising and work to clear as many scheduling hurdles as possible. This audit is the first step to solving this problem for our students.

This focus on the student experience will go hand-in-hand with our ongoing expansion of our professional track instructional faculty. We are going to be looking to hire faculty in lanes that are too frequently bottlenecked. This will, of course, have resource implications to make sure that these faculty are well-funded and supported. Right now, this review will give us important information.

4. An update on faculty data:

Last month, we talked about our data initiative and the work that we've tasked members of the cabinet. We want to make sure that our long-term planning and resource allocation is grounded in good data. We also want to make sure we get data from the foundation of our university – the faculty.

We want to find ways to evaluate and improve your experience as faculty. Some of you may be hearing from an independent firm that we've partnered with to conduct this initial survey. Vice President and Chief Information Officer Elias Eldayrie has shared faculty contact information with the firm, and they're going to be reaching out. (This is completely different than a recent Board of Governors survey of all State University System campuses.) My understanding is that this will be a 5-to-6-minute questionnaire. Responses will be completely anonymous – we hired an outside firm so that no identifying information will be shared with the university.

We want this data to help us upgrade our faculty experience. Great universities depend on their faculty. We want to make sure that we're building a mission-driven culture that serves our faculty – both tenured and professional track. We want to retain talent and go steal even more talent from a wide range of disciplines across the country.

We've talked a lot about how we have direct hire authority and how we can use it to acquire talent faster. We know that faculty want to teach and research here. We know that they love it. We also know that there's always room to improve. We know that there are opportunities to up our game and that's not going to be a top-down process. We need your input.

We want the word to go out that the University of Florida is the best place for the best and brightest minds across higher education. We want folks to help build something special. And we want to make sure that we're continually striving to make this an even better place to work. To do that, we want to get an important baseline on how our faculty evaluate the status quo right now. How do you rate important things like your career trajectory, support resources, facilities, and retirement plan? The independent firm is going to collect information and give us a report. We want to get more year-over-year data so that we can make progress.

This information will be useful.

Go Gators!

On Sunday, we are kicking off our season of graduations. I'm excited to be celebrating our online MBA graduates at the business college. It's the first of many ceremonies over the next few weeks. Our graduates make the world a better place and it's a joy to be with them as they're cheered on by family and friends.

Our student athletes are competing across the country today. Our gymnasts are competing in Fort Worth and our baseball team plays tonight in Nashville.

-Ben