The University of Florida: Competition and Choices

The Inaugural Address
of
JOHN V. LOMBARDI

October 12, 1990
Mr. President, the reporter asked, "If you had known what would happen during your first months, would you have still wanted to come to the University of Florida?"

At one time or another, every great university suffers through profound personal tragedy and budget cuts. Even universities with major intercollegiate athletic programs encounter difficulties, and every predominantly white university in America struggles with the issue of cultural diversity. To be sure, not all institutions see these issues with equal proportions within a few months as they have here, but each testing quickly reveals the strength and character of a university.

Let me tell you, as I have said before, that the university—its community, students, faculty, staff, and friends throughout the state—has responded magnificently. Without hesitation, each-time, each unrelenting event suggested our administration, students, faculty, community, and friends saw a causal, concomitant action in every community. The pride that we share in this university, as people, and to its friends, knows no bounds, and my passion for the place, the strength of character and the future has grown stronger as I have observed this university in action.

"Yes, I said to the reporter, 'I'm not more pleased to participate in this extraordinary university's life.'"

"Oh, said the reporter, disturbed by my answer, 'Let me ask you about football.'"

**The Story**

When I came to Gainesville to talk about the University of Florida, I told the search committee that the entire university needs five elements for its success: a story, the substance, a plan, and the means. After I spent some time here meeting faculty, staff, students, and reaching out to alumni, I had a very real and very different vision of what the University of Florida is.

"Do you love the University of Florida, you said those folks that every great university has a story explaining in vision. What is the University of Florida's story?"

Few universities enter the closing years of the twentieth century with expressions of high, achievements, so great, and a vision so clear as the University of Florida. Those of you who have lived and worked this university during this generation recognize the remarkable growth in the quality, the size, and the breadth of intellectual offerings of this university community. Two of us who have arrived have recently recognized the achievements by publishing here. The University of Florida is a remarkable place, a land-grant university serving a statewide constituency with nationally competitive programs in practically every major field of academic interest.

Those of us new to this university seek in addition to the source of this growth and its accomplishments, and we find it in many places. We find it in a state legislature that operates a carefully articulated higher education system, which recognizes quality in a proper scope. We find it in the legislative imagination that promotes research, encourages private giving to public universities toward the achievements of eminent scholars, and recognizes the proviso of outstanding students. We find it in the wisdom of medical faculty and clinicians whose attention to the educational needs of an ever-expanding new, encompass the vision of comprehensive, nationally competitive universities. We find it in the leadership of the university president whose style, capableness, and values have marked and capitalized on the challenges of their time. We find it in the energy and the quality of the students whose energy and entrepreneurial responsibility have made campus life vital and competitive. We find it in our staff whose commitment transcends the requirement for contributions to maintain a substantial community for the effectiveness and quality of their is done here. We find it in the excellence of the work for whom the university's academic achievements remain crucial parts of their daily lives and whose commitment to the university translates their enthusiasm as students into their support as alumni. We find it in our friends throughout the state and nation who bring to this university and in programs that line and our congress so that we might succeed.

Even with this remarkable complement of support and commitment, every public university depends on the excellence of its faculty. All of us who have come to love this place and its academic tradition—indeed, its many achievements depend on the faculty for the achievement of the enterprise. Fine-quality universities come in many shapes and sizes, some with large campuses and beautiful buildings, some with small student bodies and national funding, but every fine-quality university
sustain a first-quality faculty. There can be no compromise on this, for without quality faculty a university will be just another place. Clearly, then, the strength of our predilections has been the genius to bring into being a first-rat faculty whose success and achievement are the surest and only the support of all of us who celebrate and contribute to the University of Florida.

For all the success of the University of Florida, shown as it is in the rank for universities, because our excellence the next decade will surely be the measure and our wisdom. University quality is but a single thing, built not only of the bricks and mortar of the buildings but also on the quality work that we do here each day. University quality is a translation thing, each achievement building on the last, accumulating the substance and sprinkling of excellence, in the end, becomes a self-sustaining and self-reproducing characteristic of the institution.

One year, five years, or a decade is not sufficient time to build the self-sustaining quality; a generation is but a beginning, and the achievement of a second generation a nationally competitive level of excellence is the critical test. We have a generation of experience or building a nationally competitive university, the distinguishing feature of great universities is the bedrock commitment to the welfare of university life: research, teaching, and service. We must dare and speak much about these three canons of our academic faith, yet less often do we confess our failures to meet these purposes then consider the cost. It is that we must recognize both our errors and their interdependence.

Research, teaching, and service: all three issues now for us to claim leadership with the fine rank of American universities. Research, because no university prides without a commitment to advancing knowledge, discovering new ways of thought, new understanding, new discipline, and new laws. Research, because the comprehensive level of understanding of knowledge defines a university. Research, then, because we are a university.

Teaching, because the transmission of knowledge and the shaping of generations of capable citizens constitutes a legacy; but, because the inspiration and discipline of explanation and question our faculty enhance their understanding of the magnitude of their research to the holistic concerns of the anti-quality, because teaching provides the common thread that connects this generation of scholars to the next generation of citizens, because this common thread represents one of the finest products of the scholar's mind.

Service, because America's great land-grant universities bring research and teaching to focus on the public good, on the achievement of fullness, for all citizens, and the direct application of specialized knowledge to the solution of practical problems. Therefore, our scholars, teachers, staff and students, must return the benefits of the community's investment back to the people. Service, because we are a public university and must serve our communities.

To give equal weight to each element of this trilogy is not to make them the same. Research, teaching, and service respond to different incentives, measure quality by different norms, and operate within a different logic.

Research, the quaternaries, university function, represents the university's commitment to a large, national and international consciousness of the meaning, extent, and substance of life. Whether in basic sciences, humanities, the professions, social sciences, or the arts, investigators work and publish for a national and international audience. Biologists' speak with their colleagues in Geneva than to their peers through the world in Warsaw, Tokyo, and, often, historians will their most recent findings in Los Angeles, Paris, and Casablanca, scions exist in New York, Paris, and London, as well as in Geneva.

Consequently, the draining of our faculty and students speaks to and is judged primarily by seen outside the university and outside the state of Florida. And it is to a very large degree, the national and international opinion that concerns and creates the University of Florida as a fine-grain, AAC, university.

Research, whether in basic science, humanities inquiry of course creativity, for example, must be competitive with the best worldwide. We identify and measure research in our chosen fields and we must organize ourselves to continue and enhance that heritage. But the competition in university level research will become so intense over the next decade that the University of Florida must be sure it has mobilized the most effective research programs possible in fields where we have both strength and competitive advantage if we are to meet that competition.

Teaching speaks to a local audience and is judged locally. Teaching, field research, non-nuclear, product, and valuable product. Teaching is a formative art, it takes place and leaves no direct world except for the telling impact on students. Teaching provides little evidence to be examined by peer. Our success as a fine-rank university depends, nonetheless, on our ability to teach our students well, to train our knowledge and capacity the critical and constructive skills in our students. We know much about quality instruction and we must learn how to evaluate and reward teaching as we do research.
We must think even more about what we teach than about how we teach. You students exist just as inputs necessary for people, students, citizens, and faculty at the undergraduate curriculum. Some would have us return to a simpler time when science, humanities, social science, and the arts could be taught in some coherent fashion within the scope of four college years. That, of course, given the tremendous proliferation and fragmentation of knowledge will not be possible, nor should a university seek to limit the range of an undergraduate experience to some simple subset of the university's capabilities.

Still, we need a better structure for the basic curriculum and a clearer rationale for the four-year college experience. We also must believe that every undergraduate can receive effective academic advising so that the right opportunities of a great university become more visible and accessible to students. We have the quality of student and the flexibility and breadth of programs here at the University of Florida to infuse a model appropriate to coherence and equity within intellectual diversity, and that challenge must be met if we are to prepare our students for the twenty-first century.

Florida, a university proud of its land-grant tradition and accomplishments, has a myth committed to service. This commitment appears most visibly in the work of 4-H, where the research and extension system has brought the benefits of university teaching and research to people throughout the state at little or no cost. Today, students are learning from every corner of the state. Many of our colleges have additional priorities of this kind in engineering, architecture, business, law, veterinary medicine, or continuing studies, for example. With a statewide mission, the University of Florida must bring the expertise and knowledge that it now generates to the people of our community and our state.

Throughout our academic lives, each of us on the faculty lives with our society, teaching, and serving in varying versions at different times. Sometimes we teach more than we research, sometimes we do all three equally. Rarely, however, do we live our lives, year in and year out, with research, teaching, and service each occupying roughly one-third of our time. As we improve our economies and rewards, so must boost our status, we must be sure we recognize the changes that accompany graduate academic growth and raise the temporary to identify ourselves permanently as research, teaching, or service faculty.

The Place, Compensations and Choices

"Yes, I declined to sign the "fair," it's easy to talk about the University of Florida's excellence."

"Sure, but you know about lots of good things, but when one reads the material proposed it's difficult to achieve those things."

"As I replied, the plan is actually a process, its center the work of the many people who care about this university. No president can know all of what is required, and without the continuous participation of the university communities, there can be no plan."

"Well, yeah, and my friends and mentor Joe Gitter, "where do you stand on the planet?"

Within the next decade the basic curriculum of American university will come under great pressure by the same kind of changes that have been remaking the world and America's place in the world. If the changes are properly addressed, we will carry the tradition and purpose of our culture and at the same time create the opportunities for our future, must respond quickly and take these opportunities. But do universities rise from the ashes? Rather, when they fail to change, they simply disappear and decline, often imperceptively, until, at the end of a decade or so, the institution finds itself unable to compete from world-class universities by virtue of having made the wrong choices.

At the University of Florida, we will make the right choices and we will meet the competition, so to do otherwise is to deny the effort and the leadership of this remarkable generation of university growth. Compensations and choices are the key issues of the 1990s for our university. Compensation, because many share our aspirations for excellence and quality and the means and salaries required are scarce. Choices, because our ability to compete depends on the choices each of us makes, choices of programs to pursue, faculty to hire, students to support, resources to accumulate. We cannot and should not attempt to do everything falling within the domain of the university, but we must choose do the right things.

If we are to meet the competition for resources and talent, we must re-invent our programs and our priorities, we must change the culture who ask questions and discern the issues, men and we must recognize our limitations. This is the work of many specific, general, and executive committees, and our open discussions within the state and the nation. The University of Florida supports and collaborates with its colleagues in the State University System, but we also compete in a national and international academic arena. We must examine ourselves, render our own judgments, and select our own choices.

A university is a continuously changing, living organization. Its work and its people never stop, but we continue studying, creating, researching, and serving, and we must make our reviews match the growth and range of our university, responding to opportunities and making problems as we encounter them. Generally speaking, we are driven from three points, we will move quickly to frame the agenda and then move as rapidly as possible to implement solutions that have been thoroughly reviewed, discussed, and refined by appropriate committees and councils of the university, the colleges and schools, the faculties, the staff, and other interested groups. Faculty, students, and alumni affected by plans and programs will participate in the review and decision for these proposals is accepted.
Some of the crucial elements in our plan can be easily identified; students will become clearer as we pursue our continuing education. Undergraduate education helps a lot of people and currently has an essential role in our society on a day-to-day basis. Education requires study; the undergraduate plan for overseeing and supporting the research and creative activity of the faculty and staff needs review; and our commitments—our single university approach to interdisciplinary programs and cross campus collaboration—are essential. This university has an obligation to reform and reduce administrative structures wherever improvements and efficiencies can be found. Florida's destiny is to lead the nation in innovation, trade, and commerce, and our citizens require the University of Florida to continue to enhance the international dimensions of every program of this institution.

Faculty and staff spirit and morale are exceptionally high, their success and their creative approaches to teaching, research, and service standing as testimony. But this extraordinary asset can only be preserved and enhanced if we can develop strong incentives and rewards, compensation patterns that recognize merit in every aspect of university life, and to that respect the norms of the external marketplace. As we plan for the development of our faculty and staff, we will insist on creating an ethically diverse and gender-balanced faculty, for no other result will achieve our goals.

"Sure," said Dom Joa, "That's fine, but can you give me an example of what we might do one or another of these issues?"

"Oh," I said. "That's easy. The university has been working on a plan to enhance the quality of student life since last summer, and since I didn't mean it, I can fudge about it."

University life, once reserved for a small segment of the privileged classes, now belongs to all the citizens of the state. Florida. We, as a public land-grant university, carry a special obligation to serve the whole state of Florida and all of its citizens. This obligation requires us to compete for the best students in Florida, wherever they live and wherever their interests or their goals. To serve in this competition, we must review all aspects of student life to guarantee that we are attracting our share of students from Florida. This university belongs to the people of the state, and our student body must represent those people. Students who come to Florida must find the academic environment here welcoming, supportive, and engaging.

We have an exceptional tradition of student leadership, initiative, and responsibility, and we must build on that tradition, extending it to women and minority students of all ethnic backgrounds. Student life is the responsibility of all of us—faculty, staff, students, and communities—and the University of Florida must be competitive enough to attract and retain students from all of Florida. We must also attract some of the best students nationally and internationally to guarantee the breadth of experience encompassed within the student body.

We have had an admirable start with the results of the Quality of Life Task Force and the impact of the university's People's Awareness Week, but success in this effort requires each of us to help. Each day, each week, each year the energy and imagination to bridge the gap that separates us from such diverse cultural traditions as African American, Hispanic American, Native American, or Asian American and identifies us in addition by race and gender. Only by constant and continuing effort may we miss the moral and cultural perspectives of a diverse set of our university and enrich our academic experience. Thus, like the truly significant goals, will take constant, effort, and even more fully achieved in our time, will enrich each of us in the measure of our commitment.

The Resources

For once impressed, Dom Joa commented, "That's pretty clear. I hope you get everyone to commit themselves to this task. Let's make use of our resources and contributions to the general goal, and insist on effective action. This will assure that all the university is for the resources. It will take money to make it happen.

"Yes," I said. "Finally, we come to the resources."

As we create our story, enhance the substance, and develop our plan, we will identify competitive advantages and significant areas of excellence. Many of our choices will depend on the resources we can generate. While we can choose to give us the best competitive advantage at the least cost, the University of Florida will need additional resources for salaries, student services, libraries, buildings, equipment, and the other elements of a great university. There must be sources of revenue and resources to support the university's future, and Florida is no exception.

The state of Florida and its students have an obligation to contribute to the baseline funding of this university. The state needs to find the education of its students at a level at least equal to the national average. We are now at about 70% of the national average as a state, and we are declining year by year. To fund education statewide at any less is a defeat on the state's commitment to becoming a national leader. Students, too, have an obligation to contribute a reasonable share in the cost of their education, even at a public university. With excessively low tuition, the state and the university find themselves providing a large scholarship to every student in the university, whether they need it or not. Just as we expect the state to increase its support to match national norms, so too should student tuition approach the norm, with the assurance that the financial aid remains adequate for all who need it.

As the state and the students do their part, and as we believe they will, this university must continue to develop its own sources of support. Our campaign to raise endowment has demonstrated that alumni and friends share the goal of creating a first-rate, self-sustaining and self-generating university at the University of Florida. This university's first major campaign has exceeded all expectations, and we must continue to develop this strong private giving to supplement the elements of our program that fall outside the state mandate. No great university can sustain...
In conclusion, without a dynamic, strong, continuing, and effective program of private support.

Faculty provide the primary resource for the university by capturing competitive grants and contracts, patents or licenses, fellowships and awards at every opportunity, bringing our scholarship, teaching, and creative energy before their peers for funding from federal, state, corporate or foundation sources. One of the distilling marks of a great university comes from a faculty that succeeds in the competition for the external resources that enhance quality and promote research. No great university can rely on a state alone for research funding, although the state's creative use of matching programs and other research incentives multiplies the success of a quality faculty. The success brings essential resources as it teases the quality of our work in the clear light of peer review.

The creative combination of public, private, and competitive funding may create the resources base needed to build the self-sustaining and self-generating university we seek. Few of these resources derive in accident. We must plan carefully, invest wisely in project development, seek new sources, develop innovative programs, and persuade our state and national legislators, donors, foundations, corporations, and competitive funding agencies to join us in making this university succeed.

"At Guadalupe, '83," said my old friend Don José Cuaron, "this has been fun, but it looks to me like the University of Florida has set its sights out. I'm going home. Hasta luego."(239,159),(706,288)

"Then, Don José," I called out as he left the room, "no one should imagine that the next decade in the life of this university will be easy or comfortable."