

WHAT'S GOING ON?

"What's going on, Lombardi?" my friend asked as we stopped to talk on campus.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"You know, what's happening with the quality evaluation, what's going to happen with the DSR-Graduate School report, will the governor and the legislature solve the budget problems, can we operate in the current fiscal crisis, and, you know, other things like that."

"Oh," I responded, "just those things?"

"Well, no, actually, we all wonder whether all this change means the end of the dream of a first-rate university."

"Ah," I said, "you mean the real question."

"Yes. That's what I mean."

"OK, you want the long answer or the short answer?" I began.

"How about the short answer now and then you write me the long answer so I can share it with my colleagues, friends, and students?"

"OK," I answered. "Here's the short answer to the big question."

"The University of Florida is at the beginning of the dream, not the end. Our faculty have the academic strength and the strength of character required to achieve this dream. Our students continue to get better and work harder. Our staff achieves heroic results with the minimal existing resources."

"The current and seemingly endless series of budget revisions, cutbacks, and other difficulties represent but a reflection of the national climate. These things require attention and energy we would rather spend elsewhere, they constrain our rate of progress towards our goals, but they have not changed either our goals or our expectations."

"The University of Florida will continue to succeed, we will institutionalize the elements of superb national and international quality that we have achieved here, we will improve the quality of what we do, and we will find the money we need to do these things. This success will not come easily, it will not happen without effort, and it will demand commitment from all of us. We cannot permit the current troubles to deflect us from our goals or modify our mission. I believe we will succeed and so should you."

"Does that do it for a short answer?" I asked.

"Sure," she said, "but if I'm to believe, I need the long answer, too. Write me a letter; and soon."

"OK," I promised.



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President, John V. Lombardi

February 20, 1992

Mi estimada colega,

You asked me to talk about the University of Florida — where we are, what we're doing, and where we're going. You asked me to reflect on the current state of crisis and instability in our university, our state, and our country. You really asked me how I can continue to be so optimistic about this university's future when our present looks so uncertain. Please bear with me, for such serious questions prompt a lengthy answer. Anyway, you said you wanted the long answer.

We, who find our life's work in education and the university; who spend our time, talent, and energy on the creation, communication, and application of knowledge; and who find endless inspiration in the achievement of our students and the infinite capability of the human mind, must be optimistic. No alternative exists except cynical pessimism, surely a spirit antithetical to the university's values.

I am a believer in education in all of its many forms. I am astonished by the opportunity to spend my life permanently committed to education. We who live and breathe the university do so by choice. No one requires us to pursue the life of the mind, to seek knowledge and wisdom, and to teach that constantly renewed stream of students. We do this because we want to do it, and that opportunity makes me endlessly optimistic. Does optimism mean blindness to the difficulties that beset us? Does it imply an inability to see the challenges before us? Does it require a simple-minded denial of our problems? Not at all. Optimism lets us believe that our creativity and perseverance can overcome these difficulties.

Over the past two years I have talked to many faculty, students, staff, alumni, and citizens, taking the measure of this place. Those conversations have revealed academic strength, good will, and a commitment to success. My optimism rests not only on faith in the enterprise generally but also on the achievements of this university's people. I'm as optimistic about Florida, the university, today as I was two years ago. Better informed, wiser in the ways of this state, clearer about the institution's capabilities, and more focused on the specifics of our opportunities, but nonetheless, I'm just as optimistic.

Who are we?

The University of Florida belongs to an ancient tradition of great universities. We participate in an elaborate conversation among scholars and students that extends over space and time linking the experiences of Western Europe with the traditions and histories of all cultures, that explores the limits of the physical and biological universes, and that nurtures and prepares generations of educated people to address the problems of our societies. While Florida recognizes no limits on its intellectual boundaries, and our faculty and students remain free to explore wherever the mind and imagination lead, we live in a real world whose constraints limit what we can do. Out of the conflict between our universal intellectual aspirations and the limitations of our environment comes the definition of the university's goals.

American colleges and universities share the fundamental educational mission of teaching students. The undergraduate experience, based in the arts and sciences, remains at the core of higher education in America. The

formation of educated people, the transformation of mind through learning, and the launching of a lifetime of intellectual growth: these goals remain central to every university. This undergraduate foundation of American higher education has grown more complex as the knowledge we teach has grown more complex. Where once we had a single track through the arts and sciences leading to a degree we now have multiple tracks leading to many degrees in arts and sciences as well as in a range of professional schools. Yet even with the variety of degrees, American university undergraduate education must rest on the fundamental knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences.

In our academic world we recognize two rather imprecisely defined categories of higher education: colleges and universities. The traditional American college specializes in a carefully crafted four-year undergraduate program, generally focused almost entirely on the arts and sciences. Universities extend the range of this undergraduate education to include advanced or graduate

study leading to the Ph.D. Most American universities also include a variety of undergraduate and graduate professional programs, master's degree programs, and the like. The University of Florida shares these traditions. As an American university, we have a major commitment to undergraduate education as the foundation of our academic organization and we pursue graduate education for the Ph.D. as well as many other graduate degrees in professional fields.

We are, in addition, a major, public, comprehensive, land-grant, research university. Each of these adjectives defines one of our characteristics, and through frequent repetition, this description takes on the style of a ritual incantation: rhythmic, reverent, and infrequently examined. What, then, does each of these key words mean?

Major. Here, at the head of the list, we find one of our most important aspirations. We will be, we must be, and we are a major university. We define ourselves in comparison to the best universities we can find. We need not be the absolutely unambiguously best, but we must be among the best universities in the world. Exact ranking of the best universities is a meaningless exercise, but most of us can name 60 great universities. By whatever indicator of quality we choose, our university should fall into this group. If we define a group of universities who share our adjectives (major, public, comprehensive, land-grant, research), then we fall into a group of perhaps the best 15 in this country. This definition of major need not be very precise. What matters is not the precision of the measuring scale but the inclusion of our university in the group.

Public. We exist thanks to the commitment and investment of the people of the state of Florida. Generations of tax dollars have constructed the facilities we enjoy and have paid the major portion of our operating budget. The graduates of this institution, educated with tax dollars, have provided the majority of our private funding. Our state legislators created the conditions that permit our faculty to educate our students, pursue their research, conduct their clinical practice, and serve their statewide constituencies. We exist, then, within the public sector, responsible and responsive to the needs of the citizens of our state. The obligations we assume as a public university determine many of our characteristics.

We have many more undergraduates than graduates, we respond quickly to the needs of the state's economy, we accommodate complex linkages with other state universities and community colleges, and we operate in cooperative symbiosis with our state's media. We also experience an often too-close interaction with the political process. Private universities do not respond in the same ways to these issues and have a different profile. We, as a public university, must maintain a close, continuous, and effective communication with our many publics.

Comprehensive. This adjective recognizes the universal reach of our pursuit of knowledge. As a matter of

principle, we exclude no field from our purview. We believe that our approach to knowledge and learning, to understanding and wisdom, requires us to be ready to examine any field, cultivate any discipline, and explore any topic that offers insight or intellectual tools. Resource limits, human or financial, may constrain us from cultivating one or another academic subspecialty, but we accept, in principle, no limit on our field of view. Even when we struggle with budget problems and must reduce a program or miss an intellectual opportunity, we do so only to meet the practical constraints of our current environment. We never relinquish the commitment to the holistic pursuit of knowledge.

Land-grant. Florida belongs to the set of American universities whose mandate includes a commitment to the development and transmission of practical knowledge. As one of the land-grant universities identified by the Morrill Act of 1862, Florida has a special focus on agriculture and engineering and a mandate to deliver the practical benefits of university knowledge to every county in the state. In our university, UF/IFAS and the College of Engineering respond to this definition most obviously, but over time, the entire university has come to recognize its commitment to translating the benefits of abstract and theoretical knowledge into the marketplace, where it can sustain the economic growth that supports us all.

This commitment permeates the institutional culture and defines us as one of some 72 such institutions in America. The land-grant university is, of course, a peculiarly American invention and captures one of the powerful cultural beliefs of our country: that knowledge passes the test of utility by remaining vitally connected to industry and commerce.

Research. Research defines a certain type of university. Our faculty must dedicate themselves not only to the bedrock function of education, not only to the land-grant function of service, but equally to the essential activity of research.

By research we mean the effort to expand our understanding of the natural world, the world of the mind, and the world of the senses. We define research to include the theoretical abstractions of the mathematician, the experimental discoveries of the geneticist, the insights of the semiotician, the re-creations of the historian, or the analysis of the anthropologist. We define research to capture the business professor's analysis of economic organization, the architect's design, and the musician's interpretation or the artist's special vision. Research by agronomists improves crops, and research by engineers enhances materials. Medical and clinical research cure and prevent disease. The list of research fields continues as endlessly as the intellectual concerns of our faculty and the academic vision of our colleges.

University research, whatever the field, must be published. The musician who never performs, the scientist whose work never appears for review by colleagues, the

historian whose note cards never become a book may have accomplished much, but their accomplishments remain incomplete. When we say research, we mean research and creative activity that contributes to the international public conversation about the advancement of knowledge.

So, that's who we are. We are a major, public, comprehensive, land-grant, research university. A long name and a big responsibility.

Do we meet our self-definition? No university worth anything meets its self-definition. If it does, it must have a cramped vision to see only what is and not what can be. As we grow closer to our self-definition we revise it to seek beyond what we have done. No, we do not meet our self-definition.

Whenever I think about this university I imagine a great Spanish American colonial cathedral. A place that in its magnificence, its design, its decoration, and its functions represented the aspirations of many people of its time. A great Spanish American cathedral is never done, its construction goes on for centuries. Although never finished, this incomplete structure endures and functions for each generation, and each generation puts its mark on the structure. You enter the building and its design speaks to its purpose. You walk about and find that its complexity grows on you until, by inspection of the details, you discover the work of many people, all connected to the main purpose but each with its own special perspective: an altar to this saint, a stone monument to that ancestor, a stained glass window expressing one perspective on faith, a statue expressing another. Visitors and worshipers; poor and rich; clerics, bishops, and cardinals; politicians and military chieftains — they pass through this cathedral finding inspiration, opportunity, and solace. Some come with spiritual needs, some with cynical motives. Some of those in whose care the cathedral grows seek only the higher purposes of the place, while others use it for economic gain or base motives. Throughout it all, the cathedral changes to meet the needs and times, but it also endures and continues to serve its many publics.

Our university is like that cathedral. Our university exists as a place to achieve our goals and represents the aspirations of our many publics. It existed before we came and will endure after we leave. Its purposes remain, sometimes enhanced by good people, sometimes diminished or delayed by inadequate people or poor times. Each of us can leave a mark on this place of knowledge and learning. We can make it better.

Sometimes things go badly in the cathedral. The clerics fight or kings confiscate the cathedral's treasure, but these events take nothing away from the grand design. Only a concerted assault on the building's structure and purpose can substantially damage it.

Universities, too, endure remarkably well. They survive attacks and they weather poor leadership and mistakes. While we must always remain ready to defend this place of knowledge against a real attack, we should not confuse the turmoil of the moment with the collapse of the foundations.

Each of us serves as custodian of the university's mission. No one of us owns that mission because we own it together. No one of us transcends the importance of the university, because we work here to further the institution's mission. We must confront our own and our university's problems with some humility. No individual effort can make or break this university, but together, we can make it better. If, when our part is done, we know that the university is better for our having been here, then we can say that we met the commitment we made when we chose to come here.

The current agenda

You asked about the current agenda for the University of Florida. I live by projects. Each one representing something that needs doing, fixing, making, or changing. Universities live permanent lives, and we cannot stop and restart the institution's agenda. Instead, we plunge into the mainstream of institutional life doing, learning, reflecting, and helping all at the same time. As we live the life of the university, we find things that need fixing, directions that need changing, improvements ready to happen. Every change, problem, or opportunity represents a project. Some are permanent and continuing projects such as the improvement of race and gender balance on the campus or the continuing pursuit of academic quality. Others represent medium-term projects, works in progress: large enough to affect many people but small enough to be launched and completed in real, not historical, time. Medium-term projects usually involve change. At this university, the beneficiary of a generation of remarkable growth, change readjusts processes designed for a smaller university to meet the needs of a larger institution.

*"I like it the way it is," a colleague will complain.
"If it isn't broke, don't fix it," others will cry.
Some, perhaps more realistic than others, will say,
"This system works for me. Don't change it because
I don't want to have to change with it."*

Change for the sake of difference wastes time, energy, and resources. No changes come free in large institutions, and every change must promise benefits greater than its costs. Some change meets new circumstances, captures new challenges, or copes with unanticipated hardship. Other change reflects the disappearance of a previous problem now rendered obsolete by improvements in the university or a shift in the environment.

Most changes that improve university life take place

on the margin of the main event. When the core programs of our colleges remain strong, when the faculty have talent and energy, when the students achieve, and when the staff supports the institution, then change need only affect the institutional margin. Marginal change leaves the unnecessary behind and adds new activities at the edge of the university. In this way, the institutional center shifts forward more by losses at its trailing edge and gains at its leading edge than by major changes at the center. This kind of change may confuse some observers who mistake revision at the edges with a problem at the center.

At the University of Florida, the center of our academic enterprise remains strong. We have superior teaching quality, excellent research, and fine service. At the edges, however, we have some things we need to do.

Evaluation of quality

We, like every other university, can no longer expect our publics, our supporters, and our friends to accept the simple assertion of our worth. They should, because we tell the true story of our university. But they don't, because many institutions have failed their publics during the past decade. All of us must suffer the distrust and disillusionment of those failures. It isn't fair, but that's the way it is.

We, like every other major industry in America, find ourselves under competitive pressure. Other countries develop higher education that rivals ours; other social needs compete for scarce resources; other American institutions compete for faculty, staff, and students; and other faculty compete against ours for external dollars. Our students find intense competition for employment when they graduate, and our teaching programs must adjust to help them meet that competition. Everywhere we turn, nothing comes easily. If we want to be good, we must be competitive.

Quality — that much-mentioned but poorly defined element — makes successful competition possible. Some people think you can compete with cheap costs, quick production, or large volume. They are wrong. Only quality permits us to compete. Once we have quality, once we know how to continue to improve quality, once we can compare our quality with the best, then we can worry about costs, about production, about volume. Without quality, those things simply drive us to ruin faster, quicker, and cheaper, but they don't give us the competitive advantage of quality.

During our generation, many American industries have faced a quality challenge. Those who looked to cheap, fast volume, lost out unless they also had quality: automobiles, big steel, consumer electronics, small appliances, small pickup trucks, hand power tools, and more. We in the universities remain one of America's most internationally competitive industries. We, too, can lose that edge to better-quality institutions.

The Florida Quality Evaluation Project addresses the

quality we have and identifies ways to improve it. The draft document circulated to the university community provoked some interesting responses. Some didn't like the idea at all, and told me so. Some thought the idea good, but the program too rigid. Others thought the idea good, but the program too vague. Many thought the thing would work, but wondered whether it would be worth the effort. Several people told me that while the project might be a good idea, university quality is unmeasurable and that the project would fail.

Another, and especially significant reaction, carried an unspoken message. In a subtext, many faculty and staff implied an unspoken conversation that might go like this.

Mr. President, we know you have the best of intentions. We know you believe in what we believe in. We know that your vision for this place as a major, public, comprehensive, land-grant, research university matches our own search for quality. That's OK. We like you for trying to find a way to help us all get better.

But Mr. President, let's get real. Quality improvement takes time, commitment, and energy. Quality programs require mostly faculty and staff time, commitment, and energy. We know that the average university president lasts about 3.5 years. You are now completing year 2. We know that 1.5 years won't be enough to get the benefit from what you propose. We know that if you quit or get fired, the next president will almost certainly want to do something else. Or at least to do things differently.

Mr. President, we tell you all the things that are wrong with this proposal not just to make it better but also to tell you, quietly and gracefully, that we are not sure you are for real. Should we invest ourselves in this project if you won't last long enough to see it through? Please, don't misunderstand. Quality is a good thing. We all know what quality is. We also know it isn't easy to define, measure, or improve. Mr. President, will you be here to see this project to completion?

Talk about tough questions! That's what universities are for, of course, so I asked Don José Gómez, my mentor, for advice.

"Mi querido amigo, what do I tell them? They ask such tough questions. How can I answer?"

"¡Oye, Juancito!" Don José replied. "Tell them the truth."

The truth is that we cannot predict the future. We can

only guarantee our intent, our commitment, and our values. The world will change the course of events in unanticipated ways. Each of us should embrace our commitment to the university, seeking not the advancement of the next job, not the achievement of another victory elsewhere, but instead the completion of the project at hand, here, in this place, with these people, and under these circumstances. How long will the commitment last? My commitment to you is to work every day as if I expect to retire from university life at the University of Florida. Who among us, however, controls the future well enough to guarantee it?

If defining, evaluating, and improving quality will make the university better and more competitive, then we must do it, whoever stays or goes. Our university will continue. Because we are here, we have the obligation to make it better, now. However long any president, dean, faculty member, staff person, or student stays with the university, the university must continue to embrace quality and seek to enhance it. We can admit no alternative. Each of my predecessors pursued this goal with the tools and techniques appropriate to the time and place, and I must do the same.

With the benefit of all the advice, I will have a new version of the Quality Evaluation Project ready in a few weeks. We can then move this discussion to where it belongs: in the academic departments and staff units. This program for quality evaluation has no life unless every definition belongs to those responsible for quality. Presidents, provosts, vice presidents, deans, chairs, and directors need to coordinate, connect, and support the faculty, staff, and students in the definition and improvement of quality. This effort, like similar efforts in industry, requires emphatic administrative support, but it happens only with direct commitment and action by the faculty, staff, and students who do the work.

I have asked Dr. Betty Capaldi to coordinate this effort. Dr. Capaldi directs the SACS accreditation effort, a major project whose results provide much of the background and self-analysis needed for the Quality Evaluation Project. As the President's Special Assistant for the Florida Quality Evaluation Project, Dr. Capaldi will help develop the framework that guarantees faculty, student, and staff ownership of this program. In addition, I will create a President's Council on Quality Evaluation composed of vice presidents, deans, and directors whose support will facilitate this program.

Dr. Capaldi will convene groups of faculty, staff, and students who can carry on a continuing conversation about this process with me. Every expert who has worked with quality improvement says that if the president isn't involved directly and immediately with the most important part of the program, it won't succeed. We will succeed, and Dr. Capaldi will help me find the people I need to support and keep this program running.

Research and graduate education

Another project involves a review of Graduate School and Division of Sponsored Research functions and organization. Graduate education and sponsored research speak to key elements in our self-definition, and as a result, much discussion has followed the task force report. I've listened to much of this and read and reread the task force report.

This university no longer is the place it was when the Graduate School assumed its current form and mission or when DSR began its work of promoting sponsored research. As many colleagues remarked, the rapid improvement in graduate students and research funding testifies to the success of these two offices. At the same time, that success has made some changes necessary.

Graduate education has become not just a special and exotic part of the university but an integral mission of all our departments, schools, and colleges. Graduate faculty now represent the norm of Florida faculty, not the exception. The role of a graduate school as promoter, arbiter, and director of graduate education seems much less needed today than it may have been needed only a short time ago. If our deans, department chairs, and faculty cannot assume the primary role of directing graduate education, then we have not reached the level of maturity I think I see in our faculty. The Graduate School should reduce its profile somewhat, passing on many of its quality control functions to the colleges and departments, reserving only the authority to determine the membership of the graduate faculty, name an outside reader on all dissertations, review and recommend for approval all new Ph.D. programs, and review graduate programs where the graduate dean finds evidence of a failure of quality control. Most graduate fellowships and financial aid should be located in departments and colleges where the primary decisions about which students should be supported at what levels can be made. The Graduate School should maintain a university-wide dissertation grant fund, continue its special interest in minority admission and retention, keep graduate student records and statistics on graduate programs, and serve as ombudsman for graduate students. These changes in mission will clearly require a smaller administrative staff.

The Division of Sponsored Research has done an excellent job of supporting and encouraging the submission and acquisition of research grants generated by faculty and staff. The eloquent testimony of many people clearly indicates the success of that organization in helping with the complex and technically demanding task of getting the paper prepared correctly so the grant applications can get done on time and submitted properly. DSR has also helped individual researchers and programs find sources of funding in Washington and developed an effective system for processing patents and licenses. At the same time, the tremendous focus on funded scientific research has not been matched by an equivalent empha-

sis on developing humanistic, social scientific, artistic, or professional school research capabilities. Clearly, the current mission focused on sponsored research speaks to this emphasis. Now that the mechanisms for effective support of sponsored research exist and work well, we need to expand the reach of this office to include the promotion of all the university's research interests.

This office should become a university Research Office. Its functions should span all disciplines and programs of this research university. Currently, DSR spends much time and effort allocating returned overhead funds to various projects, researchers, and activities. Much of that reallocation might be better done by the deans of each of the colleges. Many research universities find that the key element in the promotion of faculty research is the effective use of discretionary research funds to help individual faculty develop new projects or backstop temporary lapses in funding for key programs. We should direct a major portion of the returned overhead budget to the deans and then ask the Research Office to review the success of each dean in the use of that returned money. We have two organizations that keep their returned overhead: UF/IFAS and the College of Engineering. Their returned overhead has grown more than twice as fast as DSR's since 1987-88. By assigning more authority and responsibility to the level of the dean, we will have reduced administrative involvement. By asking for a review of a college's performance, we will have enhanced accountability.

No university can advance its research agenda without encouraging interdisciplinary, collaborative research projects. We will reserve a portion of the returned overhead to support the development of such projects, and we will empower the Research Office to work with all divisions of the university, including UF/IFAS and engineering, to collaborate in such interdisciplinary projects and to support other university-wide research priorities.

Graduate student support represents a major commitment of this university and of every research department. By returning much of the research overhead funds to the deans, decisions about the appropriate level of graduate student support from such funds can be made by the faculty and chairs with the dean. In this way, the priorities of faculty, chairs, and deans for graduate student support will become clear and easy to implement. The Graduate School will review, monitor, and report on graduate student support throughout the university.

The system for distributing overhead funds to deans must take into account not only the amounts generated by each college but also the needs of non-sponsored research programs. The Research Office will be charged with the responsibility of working with the deans to determine the proper balance for distribution, a formula that will require frequent review.

In all matters involving the distribution of funds, the Research Office will work closely with the provost to

ensure that research support policies match institutional academic priorities. The Research Office will have an advisory committee appointed by the president that includes, among others, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Vice President for Health Affairs, and the Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The Research Office will continue to manage patents, licenses, and other forms of intellectual property. Because the area of patents and licensing has become an increasingly complex legal environment, we will coordinate the granting of licenses and contract activities related to patents and other forms of university intellectual property with the office of the General Counsel. The Research Office will also have, with the General Counsel's office, a major responsibility for the development and review of policies and the interpretation of rules on conflict of commitment and conflict of interest.

Because research is a university-wide priority, the Research Office will be headed by a vice president who reports to the president. Because the Graduate School is an academic unit whose primary function centers on the Ph.D. degree, the Graduate School will be headed by a dean who reports to the provost. Because the university has a severe budget crisis and is under great pressure to reduce administrative positions and costs, we will search for a single person to fulfill the dual roles of Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School. These two offices with their redefined functions will cost the university less than the current administrative structure.

I will appoint a search committee shortly that will conduct a nationwide search for this challenging position. Until that search succeeds, we will operate both DSR and the Graduate School with their incumbents. Given the great success of Dr. Price and Dr. Lockhart, as reflected in the many complimentary letters I received, I expect both of them to be candidates, nominated by their peers, for this new, dual-function position. In the interim, we will begin an analysis to determine exactly how to implement the details of this reorganization.

The legislature and politics of Florida

This state has grown up faster than its political process can easily handle. From a tourist mecca whose public service needs could be met by taxing temporary visitors through a sales tax system, Florida has grown into the fourth largest state in population and the fifth largest state economy. The people who have come here to enjoy the prosperity, the sunshine, and the beaches now need services. We need roads and highways, schools and universities, water and sewers, a clean environment, medical care and crime prevention, help for the homeless and support for the unemployed, and services for the elderly and care for our youngest citizens. When population and tourism grew faster than the need for services and when the speculative boom in real estate and commercial construction sustained our economy, we could

count on growth to provide the tax revenue that paid for our services.

Now we find ourselves at the end of that cycle of expansion and growth. The boom is over, growth and prosperity expand only at the slowest of rates, but the needs of our population continue to increase. The sales and property tax systems of our state no longer provide the money needed to pay for all the services, and the national recession has hurt our economy from banking to tourism.

Floridians, like most Americans, harbor a distrust of government. In the paradoxical way of American expectations, we at once believe that government is unresponsive, wasteful, and misguided while we expect our government to solve intractable problems of health, safety, education, and welfare. Our government leaders also subscribe to this contradictory approach by calling for efficiency and competitive performance from public agencies which they then manage as if they were the centrally planned economies of the now-discredited Soviet system.

Because neither Florida's citizens nor its government leaders suffer from stupidity, the reasons for these attitudes deserve some thought. We and our government leaders suffer from a failure of realism. We talk tough, we demand things, we speak the words of realism, but we avoid reality like a bad dream. No one wants to pay for the public services everyone wants. Because we want to avoid paying for these services, we need to find a reason why it isn't necessary to pay for what we want.

So, we invent a fantasy. The fantasy has one fundamental principle: all government services are overpriced and wasteful. Since it is always possible to find some waste in government service, as it is always possible to find waste in private enterprise, we nourish this principle with a litany of isolated examples of egregious government waste. Here's how our fantasy begins.

We say, "Government services are wasteful and expensive."

We say, "Government services cost too much."

Then we join in a chorus, "Cut costs, cut taxes, don't cut services."

Because most of us know that you can't get something for nothing, we look for the most vulnerable place to extract the missing element in this equation. We ask those who provide government services to work harder, longer, more efficiently, for less pay. We ask government agencies to assume ever-greater obligations, restrictions, and requirements without any additional money. Then, we turn to the taxpaying citizens and say:

"Aren't we wonderful? We make the bad government workers work harder for less, we ask them to do more than before, and we give them less money

to do it. If they fail to accomplish the impossible with the inadequate, we'll punish them. Look, we did all that without raising our taxes."

This is nonsense. But because of the fantasy no one wants to say:

"Hey, wake up, we can't get something for nothing. Florida can't have nationally competitive education at half the cost, it can't have high-quality environment for free, it can't keep bringing tourists without roads, it can't support medical care without doctors or hospitals."

Because if we wake up, we might have to pay for what we get.

In higher education, we have one of the most dramatic examples of the Florida fantasy. We have one of the best university systems in the country by any estimate. Floridians spend about 65 percent of the national average per student to get one of the top university educations in the country. Floridians rank 48th in the U.S. in the amount we spend per capita to support higher education. Some Floridians think that it's possible to have a better university education for even less, that Florida's universities are wasteful, that Florida's faculty and staff do not work hard enough. Our students pay tuition that is about half the national average, but some Floridians say that any increase would be outrageous. Our faculty and staff receive salaries well below the national average, but some Floridians tell each other that faculty and staff salaries are too high and should be reduced. This is fantasy.

What's a sensible person to do? One thing we can do is speak the truth. It takes money to buy the things we want for ourselves and our children. We all have to pay taxes if we want public services. If we don't want to pay taxes, we can expect the decline and disappearance of public services. The cost of doing business, whether in higher education, health care, crime prevention, public schools, or transportation, can't be avoided. Industries that fail to invest, fail to compete. That's true in the private sector and it's true in the public sector. Management of public institutions that follows centrally planned and regulated government policies will fail to be either efficient or competitive, whatever we tell ourselves. We can either pay for what we want or we can do without what we want. We can't pay nothing and get everything.

Will Florida do the right thing? Most of our political representatives and leaders understand these issues. They know all about the fantasy, and most agree with the general analysis described above. They want the same things for this state that we want; they recognize the importance of public investment for the public good. But they often worry about the short-term problem of reelection.

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Some political leaders say, "I'd do something, but the public doesn't want taxes."

We say, "Let's explain the fantasy to the public."

"Oh, no," these same leaders reply, "if we tell it like it is, we won't be leaders any more."

Most of our political leaders understand the short-sightedness of this view. They know that when the services fail, when the public schools decline, when the water quality turns bad, when the roads become potholed, and when the universities no longer prepare Florida's students for a competitive world, we will all wonder how we could have failed the state of Florida at the moment of decision. Our legislators and other political leaders know that repairing the damage of postponed investment is hideously expensive. They have seen what happened to the American auto industry and America's big steel companies. They want to ensure that Florida's future will be prosperous and filled with opportunity. But they need our support to make the necessary decisions for investment.

What can we do in the university? First, we can explain ourselves. Second, we can demonstrate the relative value that Floridians get for their higher education investment by comparing our quality with similar quality elsewhere in America. We do first-class work for much less money than almost anywhere else in this country, but we don't explain how and why that's possible. Our quality evaluation project will help with this problem of demonstration. Third, we can recognize we have to pay the taxes that support the services we all need. It does no good to complain about the failure to support higher education with tax revenues and, at the same time, resist paying taxes for the costs of health care or secondary education. Fourth, we should support those leaders strong enough to speak about the reality of Florida's future, we should support those who vote for necessary taxes, we should support those who let government agencies succeed by eliminating the costs of over-regulation.

We don't know how long this current fantasy will prevail. As we come out of the recession, the fantasy may well recede as new money comes in from existing tax structures, and we find it possible to meet the needs of the people with tax revenue. If the time it takes for the economy to recover by itself extends beyond another year

or so, the University of Florida and the other universities in our state could suffer great damage. If, after this legislative session, we find it impossible to improvise solutions out of no money, we will have to choose between quality and quantity. We may have to reduce enrollment, reduce programs, reduce employment, and spend our reduced budgets on the remaining people and programs to guarantee a nationally competitive level of quality. The University of Florida will choose quality over quantity whenever possible.

In the meantime, we will work within the political process. We can no longer maintain a detached neutrality. We must ask our alumni to help, to support those who support an investment in the future of Florida, and to oppose those who continue to live in a fantasy world. Our leaders ask for this kind of help, ask us to mobilize our people, and ask for the public support that gives them an opportunity to invest in our common dream for this state. They cannot do it alone, and we must recognize our own responsibility to invest in the future.

Florida's natural strength will overcome these temporary difficulties only if we support our legislators and political leaders in their efforts to design an investment strategy for Florida's future. If we manage well and get a modest amount of help from our leaders, we can maintain our quality, if not all of our quantity, and in many cases improve our effectiveness during these difficult times. It won't be easy, but we must find ways to keep our best people from leaving Florida and maintain the energy and spirit that sustains first-rate university work.

Well, my friend, that's enough for now. I do get carried away when talking about universities. I believe in education, I believe in the university, and I believe in the University of Florida. These are indeed interesting times. It is our time, and even though we might be able to imagine a better time, we have only this time to live and work. Our university needs all our energy and creativity, and it needs our faith in its future.

Thanks for asking the questions and reading the answers.

Sincerely yours,

