

# **CHARTING THE COURSE TO OUR NEW CENTURY**

**Inaugural Address by President Julio Frenk**

**University of Miami**

January 29, 2016

Good afternoon. Buenas tardes. Bon après-midi. Bonswa. Boa tarde.

Trustees, deans, alumni, faculty, staff, students, benefactors, family and friends: Thank you all for being part of this special day at this remarkable institution. I am humbled by the opportunity to build on the outstanding legacy of my five predecessors and feel especially fortunate that Donna Shalala is here today.

I want to recognize the members of the Inauguration Steering Committee, especially honorary chairs Patricia and Phillip Frost, as well as Jorge Perez, who led the fundraising efforts.

I gratefully acknowledge the presence of distinguished delegates from 99 universities and learned societies, including our

sister institutions from the great state of Florida. Several current or former university presidents joining us today have been valued colleagues and mentors to me, including our guest speaker Drew Faust.

This Inauguration is also elevated by the attendance of government, civic, and business leaders from the Miami-Dade area and the state of Florida, as well as diplomatic representatives from 28 countries.

There are many persons here who have played a crucial role in my life. Time does not allow me to mention everyone by name, but each of you knows that I will always be grateful for your support. I do want to recognize my loving and lovely family, represented by my wife (who is also a respected colleague), her brother, three of my children, and two of my sisters.

Welcome to all!

At about the time I was named this University's sixth president, we broke ground on a construction project. Our campus has been in a state of constant renewal, but this project was special, because it was borne from a desire to strengthen connection.

For decades, the eastern part of Lake Osceola on the Coral Gables campus had been impassable to the western side. The bridge that got under way last summer was meant to address that limitation. The Weese family, whose daughter Hannah is in the class of 2016, helped fund the project and dedicated it in honor of her late grandfather. He was a successful businessman who believed in shaping circumstance, rather than being shaped by it.

Three months ago, on a warm, clear October day, we officially opened what is now called the Fate Bridge, and together we crossed it for the first time, celebrating not just completion but connection.

When I think about all I have come to know about this University and where I believe we should head, I find myself focused on the opportunities that come from building bridges.

Before constructing a bridge, engineers draw up plans, and surveyors chart the terrain. I have been myself a surveyor of ideas these last six months. Shortly after I arrived, I convened a town hall meeting to kick off an intensive listening exercise. The response was inspiring. All in all, we held more than 40 meetings attended by some 5,000 faculty, students, staff, alumni, trustees, and community leaders. We also set up a virtual mailbox that received more than 1,500 suggestions—and that's without counting all the unsolicited advice about football coaching.

Through this process, I have learned that, for a young university, we are immensely proud of our roots and our humble beginnings. We are resilient—enduring and growing through times of turmoil, threat, and challenge. And we have an extraordinary capacity for renewal—reinventing ourselves and leaning in to hurricane-

strength forces that reshape our landscape, literally and figuratively.

I have also learned that we are driven by a deep commitment to reach new heights. Just 10 years from now the University will celebrate its Centennial. Where should we set our sights for the next decade? What must we do to fulfill our potential in our new century?

Today I will share what I have come to see as our greatest aspirations—four defining visions for our future. We aspire to be:

1. The **hemispheric** university
2. The **excellent** university
3. The **relevant** university
4. The **exemplary** university

## THE HEMISPHERIC UNIVERSITY

The first of these aspirations speaks to our distinct geographic endowment—our unique capacity to build bridges that connect the Americas. Many universities seek global engagement, but the University of Miami is uniquely positioned to be *the* hemispheric university.

This idea dates back to our very beginnings, when our founders spoke of a Pan American spirit that should imbue their new university. Today that early aspiration continues to unfold—even as the bridges that span cultures and continents grow in number and strength.

As I have travelled the globe, I have become convinced that Latin America and the Caribbean must emerge as more prominent voices in our global conversations. These regions hold lessons that the world needs.

Miami has long served as a bridge between North and South America, but we can take even greater advantage of our strategic location. Our bridges must extend from the Old World embedded within the New World and beyond.

We will develop a thoughtful hemispheric strategy based on broad partnerships and institutional consortia. The raw materials for these bridges come in many forms. They include research collaborations, new approaches for sharing knowledge, and exchange programs for students. We often call such programs “study *abroad*,” but we might better call them “study *within*”—the opportunity to live inside another culture in ways that both enrich and transform.

Building on our founders’ prescient vision, we are on track to become a force for integration across the Americas and, ultimately, throughout the world. As your President, I commit to making this happen.

## **THE EXCELLENT UNIVERSITY**

For me, one of this University's greatest attractions has been its palpable desire to advance to the next level. That drive for excellence permeates every domain of our work—from research to public service, from teaching to athletics, from health care to the arts.

Yet, the pursuit of excellence is being challenged by the pressure to demonstrate short-term value. Increasingly, research funders require evidence of immediate impact, forgetting that many technologies that have changed the world began with a researcher asking: “Why?” Or “what if?” Similarly, the arts and humanities are often dismissed on the grounds that they lack so-called practical value—despite their crucial role in giving context to our choices and meaning to our lives.

Another threat to excellence is fragmentation into silos that divide people, ideas, and disciplines. The result is that the whole can become less than the sum of its parts. We must combat this



tendency in academia by striving to build bridges, not empires. Much of this University's potential stems from the fact that—for all the diverse strengths of our 11 colleges and schools—we are **ONE U**. In this spirit, we will foster connections across disciplines spanning from molecules to meaning.

To enhance our drive for excellence, we will mount a major effort to attract what we are calling “100 new talents for 100 years.” Between now and our centennial, I am committed to mobilizing the resources to fund 100 new endowed faculty chairs, with a mix of senior, junior, and visiting professorships. The infusion of new recruitments to our outstanding faculty will help build a critical mass of talent in Miami. This effort will cover the different fields of research, scholarship, artistic creation, and education that our comprehensive University cultivates.

In an age when scientific and technological advances are changing society at a lightning pace, any university striving for excellence must have depth in science and engineering. Building

on our current strengths, I am delighted to announce a major new initiative to support basic and applied science and engineering, thanks to an extraordinary gift of \$100 million dollars from Phil and Patricia Frost. You will hear much more about this transformational gift in the weeks ahead. For now, let me say this: Phil and Pat: Thank you. Your generosity will carry us further and faster in our quest for excellence, and is a powerful example of the enduring commitment of our benefactors. They have made our journey possible, and they will light the path to our future. I look forward to working with our faculty to shape this new initiative for maximum impact.

Educational innovation represents another exciting frontier for universities. We owe the relentless pursuit of pedagogical excellence to our students, who are our most enduring legacy and the most energizing force on our campuses. We will therefore develop a University-wide platform to take full advantage of the current revolution in teaching and learning.

However excellence can be undermined by the impulse to measure the value of education through the narrow lens of what might be called “instant post-graduation gratification”—gauging the value of a degree by a graduate’s starting salary. At the same time, we must not ignore legitimate and growing concerns about student debt, which are leading many to question whether a degree is worth its cost.

If education is to fulfill its crucial function of expanding opportunities, we must build a bridge between excellence and access. Excellence without access leads to frustration and deepens social inequality. Access without excellence leads to waste and can reinforce inequality by segmenting opportunity according to wealth. While it may take us a while to get there, as your President I am committed to boosting financial aid to meet 100% of student need.

## THE RELEVANT UNIVERSITY

Along with excellence, we must commit to relevance—our third aspiration. This is not an “either/or” proposition. In my own career I have moved back and forth between research and its translation into policy and practice. And I have seen, again and again, that the two reinforce each other. Knowledge—the enduring product of universities—is crucial to understanding the world in a meaningful way and also to pursuing enlightened social transformation.

From its very origins, this University has been driven by the dual commitment to excellence and relevance, pursuing the highest academic standards while also serving the local and global communities to which it belongs. Today more than ever before, we must build a sturdy bridge that connects scholarship to solutions.

For instance, rising sea levels—a major threat to Miami as well as the rest of the world—was discussed repeatedly during my listening exercise. Climate change is an arena where virtually every academic discipline has something to contribute, and where

institution is already showing the way forward. In the coming months, we will announce a new University-wide effort to expand our considerable expertise in sea level rise. This is exactly the kind of transformative, global contribution that Miami can and should be making to the search for sustainable solutions.

Health care is another area where we serve our community. We are enormously proud of our academic health system, but this is a time of profound change. Only health systems that successfully navigate this uncharted territory will thrive in the future. We at the University of Miami will lead the way in the new era of value-based integrated health care.

Technological innovation offers yet another opportunity for expanded impact. The University of Miami is uniquely positioned to propel the development of a major innovation hub with hemispheric scope, one that draws on our strengths in the life sciences, nanotechnology, and computational science, among other fields.

We are already talking to potential partners and envision this hub as central to the work that lies ahead.

Our founders conceived of the University of Miami as a vitally relevant catalyst for progress, and as your President, I commit to our full engagement for the good of our community and our world.

## **THE EXEMPLARY UNIVERSITY**

Finally, we aspire to be an example to society: an exemplary university. At a time when many voices question the value universities add, I would submit that our *value* is indivisible from our *values*. Integrity, respect, diversity, tolerance, resilience—such qualities are at the heart of who we are and who we want to be.

Take our athletic programs, which draw millions of eyes to the University and give us a chance to model the importance of fair and respectful competition. Through these programs, we also send the critical message that academic and athletic success can go hand in hand, and can promote healthy development during the college

years. In addition, I have seen here a team pride that permeates daily life, reinforces a sense of character, and helps build a feeling of connection that strengthens us all.

One of the most important ways to be exemplary is by embracing diversity, whatever form it takes. As I said in a recent message to the University community, “each of us has a responsibility to confront injustice and discrimination.” It is in this spirit that we have adopted the recommendations from the Task Force on Black Students Concerns. We have also announced a plan to develop gender-inclusive housing to better meet the needs of the students who have done so much to open our eyes to gender identity issues.

I want to stress that diversity by numbers is not enough. My dear colleague, Drew Faust, has spoken about the notion of belonging—a sense of feeling at home, a sense that each and every one of us matters. Creating such an environment is no small task. It is somewhat ironic that in our interconnected world so many people

feel the alienation that comes from a lack of meaningful connection to others. We need not only virtual *connectivity* but also real *connectedness*. To this end, we will develop policies and practices that foster inclusive, respectful, and safe interactions throughout our campuses.

Diversity can only flourish in a climate of tolerance—a value that is again under threat. In our turbulent times, universities must lead the way by intentionally cultivating the free expression of diverse perspectives. The great British philosopher, Sir Isaiah Berlin has proposed the comparative study of other cultures as an antidote to the dangerous delusion by individuals, states, political parties, ideologies or religions of being the sole possessors of truth. The goal is to promote empathy, so that we may value both our differences and our common humanity.

For me this is deeply personal. My father and his family were forced to leave Germany in the 1930s. I would not be here today if they had not found a welcoming refuge in Mexico, a country that



was poor economically but rich in the ways that matter most—tolerance, kindness to strangers, solidarity with those who suffer persecution. These values are as important today as when my family was given the opportunity to start a new life. I know that many of you share similar stories.

I am proud to be this University's first Hispanic president. (Me siento orgulloso de ser el primer rector hispano de esta Universidad.) At the same time, I am keenly aware that each of us holds diverse identities. The resolve to stand against the external forces of discrimination and intolerance can be strengthened if we embrace our inner diversity. In this way we can counter an exclusionary definition of the "others." Each of us is all of us. National politics and international diplomacy would be much more effective if they were driven by this conviction. Exemplary universities must demonstrate to the larger world that such an enlightened pathway is indeed possible. I commit to serve this University as *everyone's* President.

## **CONCLUSION**

Since arriving on this campus, I have often thought how fitting it is that a force that once threatened our existence has become the symbol of our strength. We are Hurricanes—now and always.

That invincible spirit is also reflected in the symbol of the Ibis, which has been part of our identity from our earliest days. Folklore tells us that the Ibis is the last wildlife to take shelter before a hurricane strikes and the first to reappear after the storm has passed—a symbol of the resilience and renewal that define us as a University.

Resilience is the capacity to not just overcome adversity, but to be strengthened by it. To be smarter for it. From our finances to our football program, that is who we are.

Renewal is not just the act of rebuilding. It is the process of reimagining, reinventing, and reinterpreting. From music to medicine, that is who we are.

If you think about it, the Ibis is more than our mascot. It is more than a symbol. It is our identity, and our imperative.

I have no doubt that this same spirit will fuel our work as we continue to chart the course to our new century. If we all work together—students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, and benefactors—we will build new and necessary bridges to become a truly hemispheric, excellent, relevant, and exemplary university.

The University of Miami can be a beacon of resilience—demonstrating that knowledge is the best instrument for facing adversity, and that school spirit is a form of strength.

The University of Miami can be a model of renewal—redefining the global agenda and leading the way in the hemisphere, in the

laboratory, in the classroom, on the playing fields, and in service to society.

With resilience and renewal, we can weather the winds of change buffeting higher education and the world at large, and emerge smarter and stronger.

With resilience and renewal, we can be looked to as a leader, and we can shape our destiny.

With resilience and renewal, the University of Miami can, like the Ibis, take flight, and soar.