Speaking of talent, our AAU membership is a key differen6ator in helping us recruit more high
-
achieving students. It has
 become an immense source of pride for our students who know the
degree they will earn comes from one of America’s leading research universi6es.

Joining the AAU is not
 the only point of pride for our university. Everywhere you look, big
achievements and impaceul contribu6ons are being made that con6nue to advance our
university into a bold new era.

Students are excited to be part of a welcoming
 community and learn
 from our world
-class
faculty, as evidenced by the record number of undergraduate
 applica6ons we received this year.
For the fall and summer terms, more than 68,
500 undergraduate first 6me in college
 and
transfer students applied to USF, an increase of approximately 5% from last year and over 35%
from just 3 years ago.

Our incoming
 class of more than 6,900
 students
 joins our university with an impressive

So, what does our con6nuous pu rsuit of excellence look l ike? It starts with student success. We

are commiHed to suppor6ng our students throughout their journey at USF, ensuring they have

the tools and resources to thrive. Our commitment to their holis6c growth extends far beyond

the classroom. Allow me to tell you about some of our key priori6es this year.

USF offers a world

-class educa6on in a state that has the lowest tui6on in the country, providing

an immense return on investment for stud ents and their families.

As the na6onal conversa6on

focuses on the rising cost of college and moun6ng student debt, we are proud of our

This effort

is about modernizing and op6mizing our admissions prac6ces to ensure students can

acces s the informa6on, to ols, and resources they n eed to seamlessly progress in thei r academic

journey.

Over 6me, this will contribute to posi6ve momentum in several areas that we are

closely monitoring this year, including the reten6on of our students and our four and six

-year

gradua6on rate

.

We are also commiHed to ensuring our students are prepared to enter the workforce and

embark on successf ul careers.

To d o so, we have placed a strong emphasis on promo6ng

experien6al learning opportuni6 es, which include ac6vi6es such as internships, coop era6ve

Transla6 onal Efforts (CREATE) awards. A core part of our mission is to solve pressing challenges,

and this ini6a6ve aims to drive innova6on and enhance our university ’s impact.

One of th e sel ected projects, USF’s first precision med icine program, is led by Rays Jiang , an

associate professor in the College of Public Health who joins us here this morning. This project

brings together faculty from five USF col leges, fostering collabora6on, training , and ser vice

across our ins6tu6on, leading to new treatments and health inter ven6 ons customized to

individual needs.

As we invest in our research enterprise and the scholarly pursuits of our worl d-cl ass faculty, we

are also commiHed to promo6ng faculty success and academic excellence.

At USF, we recognize the vital role our faculty play in fostering new knowledge and maximizing

the success of ou r students. The teaching and research excellence of our faculty con6nues to

transform l ives and advance our communi6es — and just as these world-class scholars are

commiHed to maximizing the success of our stud ents, we are equally commiHed to suppor6ng

their success.

This commitment is especially evident through our academic colleges, several of which have

recently welcomed new leaders. This summer, we wel comed two accomplished leaders to ser ve

as deans in our colleges — David Blackwell in the Mu ma College of Business, and Elizabeth

Spiller in the College of Arts & Sciences. In January, we will welcome Dr. Sten Vermund as the

new College of Publi c Health dean. We are also in the process of searching for a new dean in the

College of Engineering , which we plan to have com pleted l ater this year.

As we con6nue posi6oning USF’s exis6ng colleges for success, our planning efforts con6nue for

our proposed college of AI, cybersecu rity, and compu6ng.

The vision for th e college includes o ffering undergraduate and graduate programs aligned with

our university's strategic plan and the state’s Programs of S trategic Emph asis to prepare

students for high-demand careers, empower faculty to conduct innova6ve research that leads

to new discoveri es and technological advancements, grow industry partnerships, and promote

ethical considera6ons and trust throughout th e digital transforma6on under way i n society.

USF is the first university in Florid a and amon g the first in the na6 on to announce pl ans to

create a college dedicated to these rapidly evolving disciplines. Through the exper6se of our

faculty and our strong partnerships, we are strategically posi6oned to be a glob al leader in

these fields and to help address talent and research needs faced by our partners.

Another key area of focus i n our strategic plan is expanding our rol e in the na6onal security

ecosystem. This is a powerful example of how our un iversity can work with our partners in the

business community to help our region and state thrive.

Nex t month, we will launch a new program designed to stren gthen USF’s

con nec6on to our

communi6es

.

This leadership ini6a6ve

will give community leaders a clear understanding of

what our university does in ed uca6on, opera6ons, research, and ser vice, helping to build

partnershi ps that benefit ever yone.

When I became president, we made it a priority to ensure USF is a great place to work.

And I’m

proud to say we

are earning na6onal recogni6on for our commitment.

Last month, USF was recogni zed by Forbes as one of Flori da’s top employers, and among the

state’s 12 public universi6es, our ins6tu6on ranks No. 1.

Whether it ’s preparing our students for

successful careers, discovering innova6ve solu6on s for complex problems, or forming bold

partnershi ps that i mpact our communi6es, ou r faculty and staff are why we are one of

America’s leading research universi6es.

Our people are our greatest asset, and in the coming months, we will con6nue to launch new

tools and resources that ensure USF remains among the best places to work in our state and

across th e na6on.

We recently annou nced the launch of a new human resources system powered by Oracle, which

will go live in Januar y 2025 and be made avai lable to empl oyees on all three USF campuses.

This new system, whi ch will fully replace GEMS, in cludes several features an d enh ancements

that will help modernize our university ’s HR b usiness prac6ces, such as new recrui6ng tools,

universal search, and digital 6mesheets. We look forward to sharing more with you in the

coming months about this important ini 6a6ve.

It is because of our people that we are on a bold path to an incredibly bright future, and we

con6nue to reward your dedica6o n. Last month we announced that for the third straight year

,

our team members will par6cipate in a three percent discre6onary pool of base salar y increases

for eligible out

-of

-unit administra6ve and staff employees.

For in

-unit staff employees, increases will be implemented as permiHed by applicable collec6ve

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And in recogni6on of your 6reless work and service, we are pleased to announce that USF will
extend the winter break holiday schedule to encompass December 23rd through January 3rd.
This includes an addi6onal day off that was previously announced in July.
 I hope that you will
use the addi6onal 6me off to rest, recharge, and reconnect with your loved ones during the
holiday season.

As we reflect on the na6onal landscape of higher educa6on, it’s clear that we are naviga6ng a
great deal of change. Many ins6tu6ons are wrestling with complex challenges like declining
enrollments and shrinking budgets
—
 but that is not the case at our university.

At USF, we con6nue to break records and exceed expecta6ons. Each milestone we achieve is not
a stopping point but a steppingstone to the next level of excellence.

We are doing the work now to posi6on ourselves for the future. The challenges and
opportuni6es awai6ng us underscore the importance of our mission as a public research
university. Now, more than ever, we must rise to the occasion.

As we embark on this new academic year, I encourage you to think boldly about what is