

# PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL ADDRESS

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## Introduction

When we gathered together a little more than a year ago, we could not have imagined the rapid and devastating decline in the economy that was before us. We knew that we needed to make significant cuts to permanently fix a large ongoing deficit that had existed for several years and to allow for new commitments. But as the economy and our revenues moved sharply downwards, the size of Miami's budget deficit doubled. As we are all painfully aware, we accomplished the necessary reductions by cutting operational budgets, delaying and reducing capital projects, foregoing any increase in salary, cancelling or delaying selected faculty hiring decisions, and eliminating staff positions. While every effort was made to cut positions that were vacant, we nonetheless faced the painful reality of losing more than 60 colleagues and good friends who occupied positions that were lost.

Unfortunately, the recession worsened throughout the year. As a result of further decreases in revenue, and in anticipation of other negative changes, another \$10 million in cuts were sought to reach a sustainable budget, half this year and the other half by next year. As in the previous round, the cuts were differentially and strategically allocated to minimize the direct effect on students, especially in academic affairs. Most of these cuts have now been identified and most of the individuals whose positions are being eliminated have been informed. This time we have faced the difficult and painful loss of another 25 highly valued colleagues and friends. In total our core budget has been reduced about 7% during this recession which, unfortunately, reflects a common pattern for American universities.

## Recognizing our Accomplishments

There is no way to gloss over the difficulty of making budget cuts of the size we faced. It has been a painful process that has had a significant impact on all of us. But we must also note that even as we were cutting budgets, faculty and staff were continuing their outstanding commitment to improving Miami in significant ways. Consider, for a moment just a few examples of what we accomplished this past year:

- We commemorated our Bicentennial Year, from our opening Charter Day Celebration in February to the Bicentennial Symposium on the Engaged University two weeks ago, from departmental speakers series to alumni exhibits, from the biggest student led Charter Day Ball in our history to alumni events throughout the country.
- We instituted a new review process for Miami Plan courses that calls for identifying learning outcomes and the periodic review for all courses.
- We adopted significant revisions of the Student Handbook linking academic and student affairs judicial processes to promote greater integrity among our students.

- We finalized a new course scheduling time block to yield more pedagogically useful course periods while using the physical plant more efficiently.
- We merged Career Exploration and Career Services to provide a seamless process for students' career pursuits.
- We implemented a Voice Over IP telephone system, avoiding spending several million dollars on replacement telephone technology in Robertson Hall, reducing the University's costs for telephone services, and setting the stage for new means of communication such as desktop videoconferencing.
- We opened the Voice of America Learning Center to serve the fastest growing area of Ohio.
- We opened the new animal care facility in Psychology and the new Farmer School of Business building, both providing state-of-the-art opportunities for students and faculty and dramatically expanding the total amount of academic space on the Oxford campus.
- We launched a new Humanities Center, providing an innovative focal point for promoting the humanities that was celebrated nationally.
- We introduced the Bachelor of Integrative Studies on the regional campuses with the first degree conferred in May, and 291 majors registered this fall.
- Most importantly, we graduated 293 students with associates degrees, 3,402 with baccalaureate degrees, and 546 with graduate degrees.

Each of these accomplishments has made Miami better. But that's only part of the story. Four additional accomplishments demonstrate more fully how we moved forward creatively in challenging times.

The University Honors Program has undergone a major curricular transformation, shifting from a traditional course-based model to a 3-tiered outcomes-driven model promoting scholarly, personal, and professional maturity. As they move through the tiers, students reflect on and demonstrate mastery in an electronic portfolio.

Honors encourages its students to assume leadership roles in co-curricular programs and to serve as mentors for other students. They also help to shape and direct the program's recruitment initiatives. Last year, honors students wrote and filmed their own recruitment videos, redesigned portions of the program's website and brochures, created student-oriented all-day Saturday visits, and designed and hosted high school students in five spring overnight programs. They contacted prospective students throughout the spring semester. Empowering current students sends a strong, positive message to prospective students and family members.

And it works! Not only have the current honors students gained in terms of their development, but the program's enrollment target of 400 students for this fall was met and exceeded. The

program grew by 90 students this year, while the overall academic profile continues to be one of the highest in the nation.

At the other end of the spectrum are efforts to improve student success for first-year students who struggle academically. Since 2004, Student Affairs has been developing intervention strategies for students who are at risk. Those students who find themselves on “academic warning” (below 2.0 GPA) at the end of that first semester are directed to meet with their first year advisor and undergo a learning skills screening with the Rinella Learning Center. At that time, additional interventions ranging from course re-scheduling to extensive learning skills (including EDT 110) interventions are recommended.

The results are dramatic. In 2008-2009 the spring term cumulative GPA for students who participated in the aggressive intervention strategy jumped to 2.46, while the spring term cumulative GPA for students who did not was 1.81. These results underscore the importance of evidence-based, outcomes-oriented procedures to improve student success by turning around the fortunes of capable students who seriously stumble at the beginning of their Miami Experience.

Innovation is also happening in many service areas across the University despite the tough budget challenges. Facing an 18% reduction in its budget, IT Services engaged an experienced external team of higher education CIOs who developed recommendations for a realigned central IT organization. The most striking point made by the external review team is that with the rapid pace of change inherent in technology organizations and the evolving strategic needs of the University, IT organizational structure should be reviewed frequently and changed potentially as often as every six months.

With a goal of developing a more agile organization, the review team recommended reducing layers of management to push operational responsibility and authority downward which led to \$1.15 million in savings. An Extended Leadership Team was also created and charged with more responsibility for operational management to better deliver IT services to the University. Meeting the dramatic budget cuts head on, IT Services has re-organized itself to streamline processes, encourage teamwork, and make critical decisions to better help the university move toward our strategic goals.

The newly-approved program in Ecology, Evolution, and Environmental Biology (EEEEB) is a joint effort of Botany, Geology, Geography, Microbiology, and Zoology. This program, like the newly approved joint PhD program in Cell, Molecular, and Structural Biology, reflects the constant need to re-imagine academic disciplines, and it has become a reality because it leveraged university strengths and grew from exceptional levels of collaboration.

The program takes advantage of Miami’s excellent facilities and centers, including the Ecology Research Center, the Center for Bioinformatics and Functional Genomics, the Electron Microscope Facility, and the Geographic Information Systems Lab. In addition, EEEB is strengthened by the Ohio Eminent Scholar in Ecosystem Ecology, a newly-funded Integrated Graduate Education and Research Training (IGERT) grant in aquatic science from NSF, an NSF-funded Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) site in ecology, and the emerging Center for Aquatic and Watershed Science, a proposed OBOR center of excellence.

## **Recognitions for Accomplishments**

I am enormously proud of all these accomplishments. The university community—faculty and staff—deserve a huge amount of credit for pushing ahead in hard times. I am equally pleased that the outside world recognizes what we have done.

- The *Princeton Review* recognized Miami as one of the nation's best undergraduate institutions emphasizing our exceptional level of faculty/student interaction.
- The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, for the first time in Ohio history and one of the very rare times nationally, found no needed Areas for Improvement at Miami in our Teacher Education Program, while noting several Areas of Excellence.
- A *Business Week Magazine* survey of corporate recruiters ranked the Farmer School of Business fourth nationally for producing the best graduates.
- PayScale.com, a global compensation data Web site, ranked Miami 8<sup>th</sup> out of nearly 150 Midwestern universities for best salary potential after graduation.
- Miami Housing and Dining Services won two gold awards from the National Association of College and University Food Services. Miami holds the record for most awards received by any institution in North America.
- The Rinella Learning Center was named the nation's most outstanding university learning center in 2009 by the National College Learning Center Association.
- Miami was named to the Presidential Honor Roll for community service having provided more than 400,000 hours of service.
- We were ranked seventh on the Peace Corps' Top 25 list of medium-sized schools for producing students who join the Peace Corps after college.
- And perhaps most noteworthy, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Miami eighth among the nation's top universities for best undergraduate teaching, alongside Duke and Notre Dame.

Of course, faculty, staff, and students collected many individual recognitions and awards. From NSF CAREER awards to Fulbrights and Guggenheims, from leadership positions in national and international professional organizations to national recognition for community service, in so many other ways, our faculty and staff distinguish themselves at the local, state, national, and international level. In fact, in nearly every week of this past year, like every other year at Miami, there were remarkable achievements to celebrate. We are so accustomed to these recognitions that maybe we take them for granted. We shouldn't. They are terrific!

And the same is true for our students. From Fulbright to Astronaut Foundation to Beinecke scholarships, from discovering a Lincoln fingerprint to inventing a new sippy cup for children with eating disorders, from placing among the very best mock trial teams in the nation to reaching the finals of the Frozen Four, our students are challenged to excel.

These accomplishments serve as examples of how creative and strategic thinking, and the extraordinary hard work and commitment of our faculty and staff, can move us forward under any circumstances. Before I turn to the future, I would like to take one more moment of reflection on the past year to say thank you. This has not been an easy year, but it is a year that has nonetheless been filled with accomplishment and success. This happened because everyone here today, and everyone who works at Miami, made it happen. I thank you for keeping the idea and the reality of Miami strong.

## **Building a Strong Future**

As we look forward, it is critical to note that the pressures that we have felt so keenly over the past year are neither short-term nor unexpected, although the particular combination of factors was truly extraordinary. There has been a growing consensus that the financial underpinnings for higher education are inexorably changing. At least three major factors will continue to challenge higher education, and especially residential colleges, in the years ahead: cost constraint, demographics, and competition.

For a quarter century, inflation for higher education has outpaced the general inflation index. This is partly due to the people-intensive nature of higher education, but it also reflects our broadening mission and our higher expectations. With states decreasing their support for higher education, and real wage increases stagnating, we can expect permanent pressure to control costs.

Our demographic context is also one of constraint. This past year marked the high point for high school graduation throughout the Midwest (including Ohio) and the Northeast. While not a steep decline, we will be seeing smaller future graduating classes in our region.

While demographic demand is declining, competition in higher education is increasing. There are more institutions, and more types of institutions, than ever before, ranging from residential to online, from public to for-profit, private, and everything in-between. Consequently, it will be vital for universities like ours, with our focus on quality, to be able to communicate our value proposition with absolute clarity.

The challenges we face are especially difficult right now, but they are not short-term, and our responses to them must be more than short-term. Thus, I would like to share some thoughts—questions and ideas more than answers—regarding key elements that we must address in order to move forward. During difficult budget times, it is human nature to shorten our field of vision and to think and act in a manner that tends to re-enforce, rather than challenge, the status quo. Given the major forces that are affecting higher education, it would be a grave mistake for us to react to our challenges in this manner. Rather, we need to push ourselves to imagine and create a sustainable future that builds on our strengths.

## **Allocation of Resources**

Let me begin with the most obvious and practical point, the need to allocate and use resources responsibly and carefully. It cannot be “business as usual.”

First, as emphasized in a recent statement by the Board of Trustees, it is vital that we take a long-range and fiscally responsible approach to budget building. We have had an unbalanced budget for many years, a budget built with unrealistic expectations for increases in revenues, shored up by exceptionally high returns on investments. We must build clear, realistic long-term budgets that align with our strategic goals.

Second, we must make more judicious choices about major operations and capital investments. We have not always analyzed and prioritized major expenditures fully, evaluated their true impact, examined alternatives, and identified a secure revenue stream. Even in these difficult financial times, we must continue to make major long-term investments (from scholarships to capital projects) that are critical to our future, but we must choose these investments with great care, with a full understanding of their costs and impacts.

Third, we must contain costs. Virtually all of higher education has experienced “mission creep.” We offer more options and provide more services than ever before. The possibilities are endless, and virtually all of them are good things to do. But with a future of constrained revenue, it will be necessary to stop doing some things in order to do other things at the high quality we demand. As we know from experience, it is hard to stop doing things, but in order to invest in new initiatives, or to improve the quality of our core activities, we must do so.

We must also relentlessly focus on improving efficiency and productivity. One area of cost-cutting of special interest to us all is the push for energy conservation. Success in this area has the dual effect of improving our bottom line and reducing our carbon footprint, two critical goals for us. By changing the thermostat settings we estimate annual savings of \$250,000 and an annual reduction in carbon emissions of 1,620 tons. Our individual behaviors can and must add greatly to those savings. Let me give an example and a challenge. Each year, we have an energy contest in October, and each year our residence halls rack up substantial savings – for the month! In 2006, with a very aggressive campaign, students reduced energy consumption by almost one-half million kilowatt hours, saving over \$40,000 in one month. Unfortunately, that level of reduced consumption dropped sharply after the contest, and the level of savings in subsequent years has been only a small fraction of the 2006 success. Individual behavior matters!

Earlier, I described some of the organizational changes in IT at Miami. Other IT initiatives used technology to make very substantial positive impacts on cost and productivity. The server virtualization project, which employed new technology to manage shared physical servers, allowed us to avoid huge costs associated with a new data center while greatly reducing energy consumption.

Another example of the effect of improved productivity comes from Human Resources and Payroll where the new People Admin System, greater use of electronic forms, and the reorganization of work have reduced costs by \$300,000! In order to increase further our ability to “think outside the box” and adapt new technologies and business strategies that will lower costs and improve service, we will be engaging an outside consulting firm to examine our operations and identify further options. Such an approach has proven to be very effective at a number of other universities, including the University of North Carolina.

Dealing with productivity in the academic world has proven to be much more challenging. After all, we have a long-held expectation that the smaller the class and the greater the contact with the professor, the better the educational experience. Increasing productivity would seem to require moving in the reverse direction. However, there are alternatives from organizations like the National Center for Academic Transformation, that may improve learning outcomes and improve productivity, hopefully allowing for more of the personal interactions between students and faculty that matter most. Our regional campuses are having great success with hybrid courses that are not only more convenient to the students, but that decrease costs while maintaining or improving the quality of outcomes.

Few issues are as critical to the learning experience as how we use faculty time. Several years ago, we introduced the idea of variable workloads to better accommodate the scholarship of our teacher-scholar faculty and to more fully account for all of the contributions faculty make to our immersive learning environment. Unfortunately, one of the unintended consequences that resulted from unclear guidelines was a significant drop in the proportion of student credit hours taught by tenured and tenure track faculty. We have subsequently adopted and implemented faculty workload guidelines that provide for more clarity and consistency. As a result, the proportion is improving, and is once again noteworthy by national standards.

The allocation of faculty time is central to our core identity, and we need to constantly work to find the right balance of activities. This is not about working harder, Miami faculty work incredibly hard. Rather, it is about allocating our most valuable asset—faculty time—with great awareness and intention. For example, teaching one course more or less every two years is roughly the equivalent of adding or subtracting 80 faculty positions. That's a lot, and together we need to manage this resource carefully.

It is also critical that we continually sharpen our thinking about the criteria for promotion and tenure as well as other faculty incentives. Clearly, we value teaching, scholarship, and service, but do we have them in the right balance, and do we measure them effectively? We are a distinctive university, yet our expectations appear to be quite standard. If our core goal is to make the Miami undergraduate experience among the best in the country, do we adequately reward those, regardless of faculty rank, who “move the dial” in terms of pedagogical, programmatic, or developmental innovation? As a university that values education so highly, can we do better in recognizing outstanding contributions to the advancement of teaching and learning?

The pace of production of new knowledge is accelerating and new and exciting fields of study are emerging that challenge our centuries-old departmental structures. In times of relative affluence, Miami has responded to the development of new areas of study like most universities, by adding new programs or departments and associated support staff. As new and exciting programs that draw student interest and enrollments are developed, resources must be made available to ensure their success. But, in times of financial constraint, we must operate differently than we have in the past. Much of the cost of supporting new programs will have to come from savings that result from consolidating, reorganizing, or eliminating existing programs. We must continue to innovate, but we cannot assume that support for innovation can come from new funds.

The review of graduate programs last fall was an extraordinary effort to assess all programs simultaneously, primarily in order to reallocate resources across those programs. Very few universities have even attempted, let alone completed, such a daunting, yet vital task. It was not easy, but it was necessary. As we strive for an appropriate balance between graduate and undergraduate programs, it will be necessary to continue this critical evaluation, focusing on program quality, the ability to leverage university resources, and the ability to generate revenue to support programs, either through grants or tuition.

Recognizing the changing landscape of higher education, especially the shortened time to degree being brought on by students earning AP college credit before matriculating, Professors Rich Taylor and John Bailer have recently encouraged possible paths to create more attractive options for potential students by linking our core strength to the new reality of students entering college with many credits already accrued. One path is to highlight our rich academic environment by actively encouraging double majors and dual degrees. We are already leaders in the proportion of students with double majors, so let's make that a signature part of our identity. We should emphasize that when students enter with a large number of college credits, they can accomplish even more at Miami, rather than emphasizing leaving early. At the same time, we might expand our programs that offer a streamlined bachelors-to-masters program. This would provide another academically richer outcome for students while also providing a more financially sound basis for some graduate programs since students would pay for their masters program. The Provost is appointing an ad hoc committee to explore these possibilities and the institutional accommodations that are necessary for success.

### **Recruiting new students**

As I stressed in looking at the long-term for higher education, the competition for students is certain to grow in the years ahead, and the recruitment of new students will be a high priority for all universities. We have, therefore, set into motion a re-assessment of our recruitment strategies, our financial aid policies, and our branding position.

All aspects of our admissions process are under external review this year, and appropriate changes will be made. The good news is that student interest in Miami continues to climb, both inside and outside of Ohio. The challenge is to turn that interest into positive decisions. Barbara Jones, Vice President for Student Affairs, is heading up a campus-wide committee to provide additional perspectives on recommendations for improving our recruitment processes, improving and extending the efforts of our dedicated admissions staff to the entire Miami community.

More than ever the recruitment of new students depends on the entire extended Miami community to share all that Miami has to offer with prospective students. This point was brought home a week ago by an email from a parent of a prospective student describing their campus visit.

*Our son ... is considering applying to Miami ... As parents, we feel this is an excellent opportunity! [Our son], however, has not been quite as enthusiastic ... We were hoping our visit would sway him otherwise!*

*We participated in Saturday morning's tour. Our escort ... obviously enjoys the school and her positive attitude about classes, the facilities and the staff was infectious! Surprisingly, there was an alumnus from the 50's on tour with his grandson. He is very active and involved with the Alumni Group; we learned quite a bit about Miami's plans and progress from him—he would make an excellent tour guide and recruiter for you!*

*Prior to our visit, we were hoping that someone from [our son's] area of academic interest might be available to speak with him. Knowing that a weekend visit with a staff member might be a real stretch, we fired off a hopeful email anyways! We had reviewed the Economics Department website, closely searching for a professor who might have interests in line with our son's...*

*Dr. Moul answered our email immediately, and was more than willing to take time out of his busy weekend schedule ... to meet with us for over an hour. He gave us a tour of your new Business Building (Impressive!), and spoke extensively about Miami. He shared insight into the Economics and Business Departments, educational philosophies, student activities and the general campus experience. He provided useful and relevant information about the field of Economics, giving [our son] a much clearer view of his intended area of study. It is obvious that Chuck enjoys teaching and is extremely enthusiastic about Miami...*

*We headed home ... quite impressed!*

This email vividly demonstrates the point that everyone—tour guide, faculty, alumni, and staff—can help reveal Miami's extraordinary highly-personalized character. To underscore this concept, the Provost recently announced that faculty have volunteered 300 courses as open to visiting prospective students. As we go through this year, I hope that everyone, including alumni, will seize every opportunity to reach out to prospective students and introduce them to Miami.

In our follow-up questions to admitted students who chose to go elsewhere, it was obvious that the amount of financial aid played a major role in their decision. Even though we currently allocate \$48 million to financial aid, we will certainly have to increase that amount to be competitive. To help evaluate our financial aid strategies, we have contracted a consultant with an excellent track record for improving yield through a highly customized financial aid strategy. We have made this effort one of our highest priorities in order to improve our competitive position.

In addition to increasing and better targeting financial aid, we must do better at helping prospective students understand the value of a Miami education. The new tuition policy instituted in 2004, with the commendable goal of projecting the quality and value of a Miami education, unfortunately proved to be too confusing, and the high sticker price too intimidating, to many potential students. Consequently, that plan was ended this year. Cost remains a consideration, though, and thus we need to work together to get out the message about Miami's value.

That message goes something like this: students who attend Miami are much more likely to graduate; our graduation rate is by far the highest in Ohio; and it is among the very top for public universities nationally. Because our median time to degree is so low (3.7 years), the total cost of a Miami education is in the bottom half of the Ohio universities. Furthermore, Miami graduates are exceptionally well prepared and competitive, whether entering that first job, graduate school, law school, or medical school.

But this great value proposition, and other dimensions of Miami's unique character, are not as well-known as they need to be. We must project our value in clear and compelling terms to prospective students. Thus, we have begun a process to clarify and build our "brand," to convey better to the outside world what we do so well and what makes us distinctive. We have engaged Highwire Brand Studio, the innovative and highly successful senior capstone for marketing and design students, to undertake the crafting of a brand strategy this semester. Alumni with expertise in brand development will join representatives from across the university on the evaluation team. These ideas will be vetted with the campus community before they are adopted and utilized, though we will immediately use some of the core messages to better inform and inspire prospective students this year.

### **Raising the Bar on the Miami Experience**

At the end of the day, though, nothing is as important as our relentless effort to be better at what matters most. While we do many important things as a mid-sized university, our defining goal is "To Make the Miami Undergraduate Experience Among the Very Best in the Nation."

*The defining hallmarks of an engaged Miami education are a broad foundation in the liberal arts and an intense focus on both the intellectual and personal development of highly motivated undergraduates, leading to exceptional student success.*

Clearly, there are an endless number of actions that we can take to achieve this goal, and it is imperative that we are relentless in our efforts to improve the Miami Experience. I would like to briefly touch on two broad efforts that can move us forward—improving retention and graduation rates, and promoting engaged learning—to demonstrate how our individual and collective actions contribute to our core goals.

### **Retention and Graduation**

For quite some time Miami has had a very good graduation rate of around 80% which typically places it in the top dozen or so of public universities. Significantly, our graduation rate is notably higher than predictions based on our student profile and level of resources, reflecting the great commitment of faculty and staff to our students. But we can and must do better. We have a strategic goal to raise our graduation rate to 85% within 5 years. When we achieve this goal, we will clearly improve our academic reputation and standing, and we will considerably strengthen our financial foundations. Increasing the retention of existing students is a very cost effective strategy for improving tuition revenue that aligns sharply with our core identity and priorities. All parts of the university play a role in making this happen.

The process of retention begins well before classes start. It starts with the expectations we create for prospective students, re-enforcing the importance of having clear, compelling, and accurate messages about the Miami Experience. It continues with the summer orientation of new students. This year the orientation switched from group advising to one-on-one advising with a faculty member or staff. This change proved to be enormously popular. Students felt more confident about their experience and it helped to strengthen expectations for their relationships with faculty and staff. This year the proportion of students who indicated that they intended to use faculty office hours increased from 70% to 95%. This behavior will almost certainly improve student performance while strengthening the mentoring relationship between faculty and students, one of the great hallmarks of the Miami Experience.

We have long understood the importance of advising to the success and retention of our students. Over the past two years, we have made significant improvements in the clarity of advising and the “hand-offs” between advisors. Still, there is much more to do to improve students’ choices in appropriate courses and course levels. The success of our interventions with students who are at risk after their first semester is a clear signal of the impact of targeted advising. At the same time, it is important for us to continue to shift our thinking about gateway courses, which in some disciplines have been used as a filter, discouraging poor performers from continuing on in the field. One of the unintended consequences of this approach is the quick redirection of students who are capable, but unprepared. Unfortunately, this often falls disproportionately on those who come from less rigorous backgrounds and from groups who are already under-represented in these fields. We need to continue to better advise students at this critical time in their education, and we need to provide more support for students who have the capability, but perhaps not the preparation or study skills, to succeed in these courses.

Complementing the improvements in advising and academic support is a substantially expanded residential life program. The sophomore residency program was launched this year with the explicit goals of improving the retention of students, enhancing student engagement, and advancing interpersonal and intrapersonal development through coordinated programming. Some students use *Strengths Finder* to learn more about their own talents while others are learning how to be engaged citizens through the Empower curriculum offered by the Office of Community Engagement and Service and via workshops offered by the Office of Off-Campus Affairs. Additionally, this month we will launch a series of faculty roundtables designed to create intentional out-of-class opportunities for second year students to discuss with faculty issues pertinent to their intended academic majors.

The importance of the personal touch is just as important for retention as it is for the recruitment of students. A study of last year’s first-year class found that the most predictive variables of first year retention were not students’ ACT scores, high school achievement, or choice of major, but their overall satisfaction and their sense of belonging. During the third week of last fall, students who indicated that they were fitting in were retained at nearly a 93% rate. Students who indicated that they were not fitting in were retained at a rate of less than 80%. One of the hallmarks of Miami has been our ability to help students develop personal relationships with faculty, staff, and peers through our classrooms, living-learning communities, and co-curricular activities. However, we cannot take for granted that all students immediately find their niche at

Miami. We must continue to look for ways to proactively seek out students who may be at-risk for attrition.

One such initiative occurred this spring and summer when staff from the Provost's Office and Student Affairs identified students eligible to re-enroll for this fall, but who failed to do so during their registration period. Recognizing that sometimes even small problems at the wrong time can discourage students, staff contacted each of these students. As a result, we increased retention noticeably this year. Similarly, staff from the Office of New Student Programs this summer called every incoming first-year student who failed to register for orientation by early June and assisted them in finding a session that fit their family's schedule, leading to a lower melt than expected.

## **Engaged Learning**

At the heart of the Miami Experience lies the opportunity for our students to be immersed in a highly interactive learning environment. It is an environment that is rigorous and demanding, yet highly personal and supportive. It is an environment with values deeply rooted in our past, yet rapidly evolving. Thus it was most fitting that our Bicentennial Symposium focused on "engaged learning" with an ambitious agenda, "To imagine the University for the next centennial—one that will prepare students to succeed in a turbulent world."

The Symposium drew from Miami's growing conscious focus on engaged learning as a frame for teaching and learning at the University. It is a frame that draws from the commitment and passion for learning and discovery of teacher-scholars. It is a frame that is reinforced and extended by our residential life programming that encourages reflective personal and professional growth. It is a frame that embraces co-curricular activity as opportunity for leadership and initiative. Above all it is a frame that works to instill in our students a fundamental attitude towards their Miami Experience in which they see themselves as active learners and discoverers.

This frame has been advanced by the Top 25 Initiative through its emphasis on institutional change by developing a common language, sharing pedagogical insights, experimenting and sharing the results of individual course re-design among the broader academic community. Recognizing that we must find better ways to support our faculty and staff involved in these transformations, we have expanded the role of CELTUA to assume responsibility for pushing engaged learning forward. CELTUA will work closely with the Community of Practice on Engaged Learning (COPEL) to advance our understanding of what it takes to create a highly effective immersive learning environment.

I would like to end my remarks today by sharing some reflections on what I see emerging as the distinctive elements of this exceptional immersive learning environment that we are creating. I offer these reflections with the understanding that every day we find new ways to strengthen these vital elements of the Miami Experience.

Perhaps most critical to this immersive learning environment is how we learn. We now place a huge emphasis on collaborative and peer-to-peer learning, positioning our students to see themselves embedded in a community of learners. The energy of collaborative learning is obvious on any weekday evening in King Library where the breakout rooms and tables in the hallway by King Café are crammed with groups of students working together.

We embrace the notion of engaged learning through our efforts to position our students as learners and discoverers. Over the past 15 years, higher education has come to understand that engaged learning leads to deeper learning. Because of the internet and its dramatic access to the raw material of scholarship, and with vast increases in the availability of scientific equipment, we can reach beyond learning to discovery as the frame of mind for our students—a frame of mind driven by an insatiable appetite for inquiry and discovery. It is a frame of mind that draws from the extraordinary faculty-student relationships that are at the center of the Miami Experience.

Our learning environment reflects the importance of interdisciplinary work. Much if not most of the most interesting discoveries today are found at the boundaries of our disciplines. We want our students to connect to, and benefit from, exposure to different ways of thinking about issues. This is very much the driving philosophy that underlies our deep commitment to a liberal education which is manifested in the Miami Plan.

That logic extends to our emphasis on embracing difference. We strive to create an environment that is diverse and welcoming, an environment in which we go far beyond accommodating our differences by actively seeking out those differences, whether they are social, intellectual, or political. We recognize that embracing our differences is critical to a first-class learning environment.

We were one of the first universities to create living learning communities that create an informal, but rich, 24/7 immersive learning environment. Our residential life programming is also designed to actively advance personal and professional growth.

From the very beginning, our students have understood that they have a stake in their learning—as the establishment of literary societies in our second year and the establishment of the country's oldest student newspaper two years later attest. The role of co-curricular and student-led initiatives has never been stronger with more than 350 student-led organizations, 100 of which are academic! We were recently ranked second in a national survey of seniors for leadership experiences they had had largely as a result of their co-curricular activities.

Creating this immersive learning environment is partly about how we shape our curriculum. But it is also about how our students develop intellectually and personally, and how they, in turn, see themselves.

This was brought home to me vividly this fall when Valerie and I hosted a reception for new international students. When I asked them how it was going, many said they were struggling to make the adjustment academically. They were coming from an environment in which they were

expected to sit and listen to an environment in which they were expected to participate and contribute. Here is how one student put it in an email to me.

*You are a really democratic president. Before, the president of my high school is like a Queen. And when I saw your e-mail [invitation], I was so surprised. I began to realize that Miami is a school which supports me to grow, to learn, to find myself, instead of thinking that I am at the bottom of the Miami pyramid. This is a concept that I have never experienced.*

*In these three weeks, I made lots of new friends and found lots of help from different departments. And I have my best math professor ever who not only teaches me the way to solve a problem, but also teaches me how and why he chooses this way to solve a problem. He is so cool!*

This student has already begun to grasp the key elements of the immersive learning/discovery environment that we are creating.

It is an environment in which the boundaries between classes are blurred, so that students are unsure as to whether the material they are studying belongs to one class or another.

It is an environment in which the boundaries between curricular and co-curricular, formal and informal learning are blurred, such that discussions in a living learning community draw from and contribute to classroom discussions, and outside speakers inspire our students.

It is an environment in which the boundaries between learning and discovery are blurred, so that students do not unnecessarily restrict their ambitions for inquiry. The search for answers to questions in the back of the book is replaced by a search for understanding that continues as far as the students' drive and curiosity can carry them.

It is an environment in which the boundaries between teacher and learner are blurred, so that we see ourselves increasingly working together around questions that matter. We are all learners/discoverers who can learn/discover from and with each other.

In sum, it is an environment in which every moment of a Miami student's experience provides the opportunity for growth that is critical to success, be it intellectual, personal, or professional. That is how the Miami Experience produces graduates of uncommon quality, individuals who are exceptionally well-prepared for what the world and their lives will present.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

For nearly 200 years, through good times and bad, Miamians have been committed to building a better university. It is our fate to live in extraordinary times—times that have required difficult actions to meet the immediate challenges, none more painful or profound to our community than the loss of colleagues and friends through the reduction in positions.

Some of our challenges will be shown to be short-lived. Most, though, will be shown to reflect a fundamental reordering of forces shaping society and certainly higher education. It is vital that we understand this changing world and that we act proactively to move Miami forward.

Thus, this is not a time to be complacent, nor is it a time to be immobilized by our distress. Rather it is a time to be determined, focused, responsible, and forward-looking. The accomplishments of the past year emphatically demonstrate how much progress we can make—even under difficult circumstances—and there are many additional focused efforts underway that will strengthen our foundations and move us forward.

Miami has been blessed throughout its long history to have an extraordinarily talented and committed faculty and staff who have always found a way to overcome adversity and move forward. And now it is our time and our turn. Working together like those before us, we, the faculty, staff, students, and alumni who are the Miami family, will not falter. We will build a stronger Miami.