

'Better Together'

How USF's path forward is aligned with the strengths of our state

President Law Remarks for Synapse Summit

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Florida is a magnet for attracting businesses and top talent. Last fiscal year, our state saw 86% more corporations move their headquarters here, compared to the number of companies that chose to move their head office out of the state — the highest net gain of any other state.

This trend isn't a coincidence. Florida is the nation's fourth-largest economy and third-largest workforce, and we are also regarded as the top state for new business startups. The conditions in the Sunshine State are favorable for entrepreneurs and innovators for many reasons — one of the most significant being our higher education ecosystem.

Our State University System of Florida is the second-largest public university system in the nation, and we've held the #1 spot in U.S. News & World Report's list of the best states for higher education since the ranking's inception in 2017.

As the state of Florida continues to thrive, so too does the University of South Florida. We've celebrated many milestones over the past couple of years, including our recent invitation to join the Association of American Universities, a prestigious group of 71 leading public and private research universities in the United States and Canada.

AAU institutions make up just 3% of all four-year universities in the U.S. — and membership is by invitation only, signaling that **our peers** recognize USF has emerged as one of the nation's top-tier universities.

At USF, we are solving global challenges, improving lives, and creating a healthier future — and we're doing this work in close partnership with our business and industry leaders in our communities. Today, I want to tell you more about how we can work together even more closely in the future.

At USF, we graduate approximately 15,000 students each year. It is a massive number that is filling the talent pipeline and supporting our regional and state employers. But it is our forward-thinking approach to how we train them that should get you excited.

As advances in technology rapidly evolve, the skills our graduates need will continue to change. When a student enrolls at our university, they're being prepared for careers we can't even imagine yet. Jobs that don't yet exist, technologies that haven't been invented, and more importantly, problems that aren't yet problems.

We provide our students with the skills they need to think critically, conduct sound research, and adapt to rapidly evolving industries. We help them become agile and respond to emerging challenges they'll confront in the future.

One of the ways we're able to do this is through experiential learning — a practice in which students apply what they've learned in the classroom to a real-world setting. Let me give you some examples.

In the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine, our experiential learning lab prepares our medical students for real-world patient care. One of the first experiences our students complete is simulation training in basic life support, a foundational skill that ensures they are prepared to act quickly in the event of a cardiac arrest or other critical situations. Simulation training has emerged as a critical component of medical education, and throughout their medical school journey, we have adapted to incorporate simulation exercises designed to reflect actual clinical scenarios for our students.

Another example is our partnership with ReliaQuest, a global cybersecurity company that's headquartered right here in Tampa. One of the innovative elements of our partnership is ReliaQuest Labs — a six-week hands-on training program where industry experts teach USF students how to detect and neutralize cyber threats. Since 2018, the program has graduated more than 350 students, ensuring they are prepared for cybersecurity careers — and on

top of that, ReliaQuest has also hired many of our graduates over the years.

Both examples – medicine and cybersecurity – are high-demand fields that we've increased our focus on to help meet our region and state's needs.

Another way we ensure our graduates are ready to hit the ground running is by bringing the business community into our curriculum development to reaffirm it is modern and relevant for our employers. USF has formed dozens of advisory councils across our 13 colleges that are comprised of a diverse array of industry and external partners.

These councils are active in a variety of disciplines, and they play a pivotal role at our university by offering their experience and expertise to help guide our strategic planning, shape relevant curricula, enhance research initiatives, and provide professional development opportunities to our students — ensuring they are well-prepared to enter the workforce immediately upon graduation.

This model has proved successful in several programs at our university, including Supply Chain Management and Hospitality and Tourism Management.

In addition to enhancing our existing programs, we are also developing new programs that align with industry needs and help students “upskill” or “reskill” to prepare for high-demand careers.

Look to our programs in Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an example. In the past year, we've launched two credit-bearing programs, an AI graduate certificate and a Master of Science in Data Intelligence, and we also hosted a free online course in AI and ChatGPT to help people learn how to apply this emerging technology in their work. By the way, we had thousands of people sign up to take that course.

We continue to develop these types of programs because we know today's professionals need to remain nimble and stay at the forefront of emerging trends. It is that kind of mindset that leads to bold ideas and powerful discoveries.

USF is also an engine for innovation, progress, and opportunity. Our university has a total annual economic impact of more than \$6 billion. For reference, that is the equivalent of hosting approximately 10-15 Super Bowls in Tampa Bay per year.

Our university's researchers continually turn their bold ideas into innovation and impact. USF is ranked among the top 15 public universities in generating new U.S. utility patents, and many of the inventions created by our faculty are being brought to the market and making a greater impact on our society.

We have developed a culture of innovation, and that spirit fuels our faculty who are at the forefront of discovery and actively engaged in community-based research activities that improve lives. A fitting example of this can be found through the collaborative efforts of USF Health Professor Dr. William Scott Burgin and USF alumna Dr. Maha Sallam — who owns the Tampa-based company VuEssence.

Together, they've invented a device that can help drastically reduce the time it takes to detect and diagnose a stroke — from hours, or sometimes days, to well under an hour. The device is a small system that can quickly determine not only whether a person has suffered a stroke, but also when the stroke occurred, providing a timestamp that might not otherwise be available.

The team is now planning for an expanded study, which involves sending their test system to multiple centers across the country to support FDA approval.

In recent years, Florida's population has surged, and our state remains a highly attractive area for new talent, families, and businesses. Our colleges and universities play a significant role in attracting trailblazing entrepreneurs and rapidly growing science and technology firms to our area. This is especially true at USF.

One example of this can be found through our university's partnership with Rapid7, a publicly traded cybersecurity firm headquartered in Boston. Rapid7

was seeking a location for a southeastern hub, and Tampa was one of the cities they were considering.

Our faculty met with Rapid7 during their search to showcase how USF's talent and research assets can support the company's operations. They ultimately chose Tampa as their new site, and they specifically cited the talent at USF as a factor in their decision.

In addition to attracting top talent to our area, we are also instilling an entrepreneurial mindset within our students and supporting the innovative endeavors of the Tampa Bay business community.

The USF Nault Center for Entrepreneurship is preparing our students to become tomorrow's business leaders and strengthening our university's reputation as a hub for innovation on the world stage. Their team's efforts are creating a ripple effect — over the past decade, more than 1,000 of the center's alumni have opened approximately 300 businesses.

And for those who are ready to start and grow their own business, we also host USF CONNECT, which assists startups by facilitating access to targeted programming, business mentors, university talent, and top-tier research. USF CONNECT encompasses several incubator and accelerator programs for both current students and entrepreneurs alike.

As you can see, learning opportunities abound at USF, and our partnerships are bringing together founders and CEOs from some of the fastest-growing startups in the world.

One example is the FinTech|X Accelerator, a multi-year collaboration between the Muma College of Business and the Tampa Bay Wave that invites entrepreneurs from around the globe to participate in an intense 90-day program of mentoring, pitch coaching, and investor introductions. The program recently finished its second year, and it is making a significant impact in helping its participants lead successful companies.

To continue sharing our expertise in this area, the FinTech Center at the Kate Tiedemann School of Business and Finance will soon launch a new online certificate program designed to provide the foundational knowledge needed to succeed in this growing field.

The examples I've shared with you today only scratch the surface of the bustling amount of activity taking place across our three campuses, but they are united by a common thread — they were all made possible through collaborative partnerships between our university and trailblazers in our community, like you. And that's what we want to do more of at USF.

When we talk about USF's role within our region, the words we often reflect on are, "Behind every great city is a great university," and vice versa. USF is strengthening our relationships within the community in ways we never have before.

One of the ways we've done this is through the creation of a new office, the Office of University Community Partnerships. Led by Dr. Eric Eisenberg, this office is bolstering USF's community engagement activities and strengthening our partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, the military, and government organizations — providing a "one-stop-shop" for those who want to partner with our university.

Our community partnerships are a two-way street. Our students benefit from the hands-on learning opportunities available through these organizations, and our partners benefit from having access to USF's research expertise, our state-of-the-art technologies, and our talented graduates who help fill pressing workforce needs.

Collectively, all of this plays an integral role in strengthening our communities and making the state of Florida the best state to work, learn, and grow.

Before I close, I want to stress to all of you that the University of South Florida truly is your university. Come talk to us about your goals and the challenges we can help you solve. We want you to see us as a valuable resource for you

and your companies, and we look forward to connecting and engaging with you further.

If you're eager to start that conversation, come see us in the Bulls Zone over in the Ashley Lounge. This is the perfect place to relax, recharge, and connect with leading USF experts, including our team in the Office of University Community Partnerships.

We also have several of our colleges and departments and more than a dozen USF incubator companies tabling throughout the arena today. I encourage you to stop by their tables and learn more about their work before you leave.

USF is proud to be here at the Synapse Summit because we know that we are better together. And together, we will create a bolder, healthier future — for the state of Florida, and beyond. Thank you.