Address at the National Alliance for the Advancement of Haitian Professionals Conference

Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on October 26, 2018.
This speech was presented to the attendees of the National Alliance for the Advancement of Haitian Professionals Conference held at FIU’s Biscayne Bay Campus on October 20, 2018.

Good afternoon!

Welcome back to North Miami – and to FIU!

A very special thank you to:

- Commissioner Jean Monestime, Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners, District 2
- The Honorable Jean Henry Ceant, prime Minister of Haiti
- His Excellency, Paul G. Altidor, Ambassador of Haiti to the U.S.
- The Honorable Marnatha Irene Ternier, Minister of Haitians Living Abroad
- Milka Milliance, Organizational & Strategist Consultant, We R Artemis Leadership Inc.
- Dr. Jean Philippe Austin, Physician, 21st Century Oncology, Former Florida Finance Chairs, Democratic National Committee, and Executive Board Member, Haitian-Americans for Progress (HAP)

It’s my pleasure to welcome you to our beautiful Biscayne Bay Campus.

We’re so glad to welcome you back to a university that is so closely intertwined with our Haitian community here in South Florida and Haiti.

FIU shares NAAHP’s mission to make a difference right here, in our community – and in Haiti. Every day, we’re educating and helping shape the next generation of Haitian Diaspora professionals, so they can make an impact across all industries and sectors - and then use their time and talents to uplift Haiti.

This is who we are at FIU… This is what we do!
That’s what I want to focus on today: How FIU’s diversity has molded who we are… made us one of the top universities… and is charting our course for the future - in this rapidly 21st century.

Our FIU was born from a spirit of hope and determination. We rose from the grounds of an abandoned airfield against all odds. We rose with a local – and global – mission.

From day one, our founders knew how important it was to form connections beyond our local and national borders. After all, ‘International’ is our middle name! Our diverse international community is at the core of who we are. One thing is certain: our diversity makes us stronger. It’s our great diversity – and our global mindset – that has taken us to great heights – and allowed us to grow into one of this nation’s top-ranked research universities.

Today, only two percent of universities in the U.S. have earned the Carnegie R1 classification for highest research activity. FIU is one of those universities! We were also ranked one of the top 100 public universities in the country by U.S. News & World Report! This follows on the heels of our FIU being ranked second in the state in performance by the Florida Board of Governors. And our recognition as a “Great College to Work For” by The Chronicle of Higher Education.

These rankings and recognitions speak volumes. They are an indication that what we’re doing is working…We’re proof that one of the most diverse institutions in the U.S., can be one of the BEST universities in the U.S.

Now, as one the top universities, we see it as our responsibility to be a solutions center for our community – and beyond. That includes our Haitian community here – and for our friends and neighbors in Haiti. We’re invested in the future of Haiti…After all, Haiti is a part of the rich, diverse tapestry that is our FIU. During the fall semester we had more than 900 students from Haiti. During the last academic year, we awarded more than 300 degrees to students from Haiti. And 117 of our faculty and staff are originally from Haiti.

Like our founders envisioned, we’re forming those connections beyond our local and national borders. No other university in the country devotes more attention and resources to study Haiti than FIU! For nearly two decades, FIU’s Haitian Studies
Program has helped promote local and international partnerships related to Haiti and its people. We work with the State University of Haiti to support faculty exchanges, visiting professorships and joint outreach programs – in Miami and Haiti. And each October, our Haitian Student Organization collaborates on Kreyòl Celebration Month, to increase student and community awareness, promote civic engagement related to Haiti and deepen ties among students, scholars and experts. The results of these collaborations are far-reaching…

Last year, Nick Andre – who is an FIU instructor in Haitian Creole — collaborated with FIU alumna Nyya Toussaint to create the first Haitian Creole course for the language-learning platform, Duolingo! In addition, we have created a Haitian Digital Archive. It helps preserve Haitian culture by highlighting the work of Haiti’s cultural leaders, scholars and artists, and providing free access to such content around the world through the Digital Library of the Caribbean. We also have another important initiative that brings together international contributors to assist Haiti with the preservation of Haiti’s libraries and valuable historical, governmental and cultural resources -following the devastating 2010 earthquake. FIU works closely with partner institutions in Port-au-Prince to provide support for libraries and archives in Haiti as they work to protect their collections.
That’s not all!

FIU is also working to help our Haitian community here in South Florida… We recently expanded our Education Effect initiative into Little Haiti. The Education Effect is the result of a partnership between FIU and Miami-Dade Public Schools. Supported by JP Morgan Chase, this initiative connects the community, schools, students and parents with university expertise, resources and research-based intervention programs to address the educational and social needs of students. To date, the Education Effect has had a positive impact at nine schools! Rose Ellen Greene, a longtime volunteer at Jesse J. McCrary Jr. Elementary School, recently gave $2 million to the Education Effect. The expansion into McCrary Elementary marks the first time the program is working with an elementary school. The Education Effect has already made an impact… After the first year, Jesse J. McCrary, Jr. Elementary achieved a “B” grade!

These are just a few of the ways we’re making an impact… And how we’re working to be a force for good. It’s this kind of work that erases the negative ideology of ‘us’ vs. ‘them.’
This brings me to my next point… To be successful in our ever-changing 21st century, a global mindset is going to be even more important. As you know, the pace of change has never been faster. This is a digital age – driven by computers, algorithms, automation, and artificial intelligence that’s getting more and more intelligent. The future is already here and it is changing our relationships, our lives, work – and how we learn! If we are to be disrupted… We want to be the disruptors – and bring the disruption!

How do we do that? Lifelong learning!

Today, as a consequence of exponential growth of knowledge and technological advances, learning has become lifelong. As influential sociologist and futurist Alvin Toffler has stated: “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn”.

A key to lifelong learning is understanding that we live in global communities. Technology, economics and mass culture, bind us closer than ever before. We cannot pretend to see the world as something that we can turn our backs on – or ignore on our mobile devices. We’re all connected!

It’s embracing our diversity that we can create a better future for our world.

Divided communities, after all, are weaker than united ones. This means that we must all be able to engage with a diversity of perspectives… In our increasingly globalized 21st century, we must all acquire new literacies and cognitive capacities. Some of the most important of those will be human literacy and cultural agility.

This is how they will communicate and connect with others! This is how we will develop deeper, more impactful learning experiences that broadens our thinking,
enriches our minds and builds a better understanding of other people from different cultures!

And this is also how we will work together to solve global problems that transcend borders, like sea level rise, global health disparities and so much more!

Remember – in this digital world, we still live and work with one another to build a better world! My final message to all of you here today is to keep learning! Being successful today depends on it… Being a leader today depends on it… Having the knowledge and skillset you need to give back – and make a difference in our communities – and beyond – depends on it!

And our FIU is here to help you be a lifelong learner. We’re here to help you get another degree, certificate and competency! We’re here to provide professional development opportunities and leadership training.

Thank you, again, for being here – and giving so many members of our FIU family the chance to participate and learn more!