Address at the Tocqueville Tuesday, hosted by United Way of Miami Dade

Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on May 22, 2018.
Good afternoon. It is an honor to be here today!

Alexis Charles-Henri de Tocqueville – for whom the Tocqueville society is named – once wrote: “I have seen Americans make a great deal of real sacrifices to the public welfare; and have noticed a hundred instances in which they hardly ever failed to lend a faithful support to one another”

That choice to reach out a helping hand toward someone who needs it. That willingness to go beyond — to step up, help someone else and take responsibility — is a value that is deeply stitched into the fabric of this country… And that very spirit lives on today!

It’s seen in the work of our nation’s great organizations, like the United Way. Every day, the United Way works tirelessly to improve the education of our children, the financial stability of our families, and the health of our neighbors.

We have worked shoulder to shoulder with the United Way for many years — because their mission is so closely tied to our mission…. And because, like the United Way, we take our responsibility to this community seriously.

Our FIU has never existed in isolation! We know this community and we know the challenges we’re facing — the income gaps, education gaps, employment gaps.

These gaps do not make us powerless; they give us the power to act and directly impact and improve the lives of those who truly need us the most.

FIU is committed to being a force for good… Today, we’re one of this nation’s largest research institutions. In fact, we’ve achieved Carnegie R1 classification for highest research activity!
We’re also the face of things to come. Our FIU is one of the largest Hispanic-serving institutions in the country. And in our rapidly changing world, we’re staying ahead of the change. We’re graduating students that are prepared for the unique challenges of the 21st century workforce!

We didn’t rise from the grounds of an abandoned airfield for nothing! We rose, because our community needed us! And they need us now more than ever before…

Because, if not us, then who?

That brings me to today; this is what I want to talk to you about: The role of a university and the value it brings — locally and globally! So, you might ask: How do you see — or measure — the role and value a university has? Through its impact.

At FIU, impact is our obsession! We’re constantly re-thinking ways we can do more, and do better, for this community — and beyond. And our impact is all around! It speaks loud and clear!

Go to a classroom in a Miami-Dade Public School and you will likely find an FIU grad. In fact, 35 percent of all MDCPS teachers are FIU alumni!

Or go to a hospital. You will likely find an FIU grad! They are doing residencies at Miami Children’s, West Kendall Baptist, Cleveland Clinic, Mt. Sinai, Memorial Healthcare System and more!

And there will soon be even more highly trained doctors out there… Our College of Medicine’s Class of 2018 were all offered jobs! And nearly half of them are staying right here in Florida!

Or go to a courtroom and you will likely find an FIU grad! Our College of Law was recently recognized by the Daily Business Review for our having one of the highest graduate employment rate in the state! We lead in the rankings with 80.7 percent employment! This shouldn’t be a surprise… Because our College of Law graduates – once again – earned the top passage rate on the Florida bar exam!
The list goes on. You can go anywhere in South Florida — and you will likely find a proud FIU grad!

And there are a few more out there… We are wrapping up a very busy season of graduations. Just a few weeks ago, we celebrated an exciting chapter in the FIU journey for nearly 4,500 students who graduated in 11 ceremonies!

I also just recently got back from my annual trip to China. I was there for the graduation of our Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management in Tianjin, as well as to celebrate the first graduating class of our FIU – Qingdao University Spanish Dual Degree Program!

And that’s not all… At the end of this week, we celebrate our law commencement and welcome more than 150 new lawyers to the profession!

What all of our graduates have in common is their sense of responsibility. There it is again – that word responsibility. That’s the key word! It’s what we live by! Our commitment to doing good and bringing value to our community is driven by our commitment to taking responsibility 24/7, 365.

Now, let me tell you how we put this to action… Did you know that there are an estimated 6,100 homeless or foster kids, right here in our community? That’s 6,100 kids who need the hope and possibility that a good education can give them!

In 2014, we took a stand. We did not turn our back on this community. We started Fostering Panther Pride. This initiative provides academic and other support services to undergraduate students that are homeless or former foster care youth.

To date, we’ve helped more than 359 students and graduated more than 90! One of those graduates is Kevin Love. By the time he was 15, Kevin’s entire immediate family had been incarcerated.

Our FIU was a stepping stone. Kevin used his FIU education – and the network and support he found here – to build a better future. As he says: “FIU offered a kid from the foster care system a support network that continues to be there for me. Without the opportunity for a college education, who knows where I would be today?”
Well, we know where Kevin is today… He’s a project manager at Moss & Associates, a Fort Lauderdale-based construction management company — that is run by CEO Chad Moss, a proud FIU alumnus!

Our work doesn’t end there… We’re also helping ensure our FIU continues to provide access to higher education to every child in our community. We have a win-win-win partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools called the Education Effect.

It connects the community, schools, students and parents with university expertise, resources and research-based intervention programs to address educational and social needs of students.

It has had a positive impact at our nine schools, including: Miami Northwestern, Booker T. Washington, and Miami Edison Senior High Schools, as well as feeder middle and elementary schools.

And listen to this… We have helped over 6,000 students, 500 families, and more than 300 teachers. We’ve provided 5 dual enrollment courses in our Education Effect high schools, as well as 60 summer internships!

We’ve also increased postsecondary enrollment to FIU and Miami Dade College. And the graduation rate is over 80% at our target high schools.

And last year, Rose Ellen Green donated $2 million to help the Education Effect expand into Little Haiti at Jesse J. McCrary Jr. Elementary School. After the first year, Jesse J. McCrary, Jr. Elementary achieved a “B” letter grade from the state!

And here’s some more good news… This year, we have received funding to add afterschool programs at Jesse J. McCrary through a collaboration with The Children’s Trust!

We’re also taking responsibility for our community in another way… through our cutting-edge research. You see, at FIU, we see ourselves as a solutions center… We leverage the blessings of our talents to help solve some of society’s most pressing problems…
Last year, we received a $13.1 million grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities! This is the largest National Institutes of Health grant in FIU history! With it, we’re building Florida’s first Health Disparities Research Center at a Minority Institution.

We’ll also be hiring three additional senior researchers, five new fellows each year, as well as more postdoctoral talent!

We’re also stepping up and taking responsibility for the future… This is an age of acceleration… Emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, 3-D Printing and Big Data will continue to impact our future.

We’re staying ahead of the change!

In fact, we routinely make sure that our degree programs are relevant and give our students the skills and knowledge employers need…

Let me give you an example… When the Internet of Things (IoT) technology began taking off, we recognized that there weren’t currently any degree programs in the country to prepare students with the skills they needed to enter this in-demand field. Experts agree that in the next few years, billions of IoT devices will be connected worldwide.

In January, we became the first in the nation to offer a bachelor’s degree in IoT! This degree will help give our students the competencies they will need to be competitive in the workforce! We’re excited to be at the forefront of this technological shift!

We also take responsibility for our community’s veterans… As you know, next Monday is Memorial Day. Our country will come together to remember and honor the many brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice, so that we may live in freedom!

Last year, we paid tribute to our FIU veterans by unveiling our Veterans Plaza. It’s called the Felsberg Veterans Plaza and is named after FIU alumnus Michael Felsberg, who was killed in 2004 while serving in Iraq. It’s located outside of
Parkview and east of Riccardo Silva Stadium! If you haven’t already, please stop by and take a moment to pay tribute to our veterans and our fallen hero, Lt. Michael Felsberg!

We do what we do because of this community!

From life-changing programs to win-win-win partnerships and cutting-edge research initiatives our FIU does what we do for this community. And we can only do what we do because of this community… because of people who believe in us… because of the people who step up and demonstrate their support and belief in our mission.

In fact, a few weeks ago, longtime benefactors of FIU — the Wertheim family — gave an additional $1 million to the Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing & Health Sciences. The Wertheim family’s impact on FIU has been transformational. They believed in us before we believed in us!

Their generosity over the years have helped us prepare health care professionals, entrepreneurs, artists and many other specialists who have made a difference in our world!

We never fail to support to our community. As you can see, our mission, our value and our role is deeply intertwined with this community.

Those words Tocqueville wrote are ones we live by. In a world that is sometimes full of distractions and grim discourse, a university — like our FIU — is a place filled with hope and possibility.. a place committed to bright discourse… to collaboration, compromise, and innovative, forward thinking research and scholarship… and that never fails to lend a hand.

It’s our responsibility to leverage our talents in research, teaching and helping others for good – and to move our community forward.

This is the only way we can begin to build world for us all.

Thank you, again. It’s been an honor to be here!