



Florida State University

ARF News Special Feature

February 2018



State of the University by President Thrasher

On Wednesday, December 6, 2017, at a special meeting of the Faculty Senate, President Thrasher delivered this year's address on the State of the University. We think it is important enough that we have included it almost in its entirety. After a few introductory remarks, President Thrasher introduced the new head football coach, Willie Taggart. Coach Taggart spoke briefly, and then President Thrasher presented his view of the state of Florida State University. Here is what he said.



- Wow! What a year we've had! Good afternoon! Thank you, Todd, and thank you to the entire Faculty Senate for inviting me to your meeting today.
- Before I begin, I'd like to thank my wife, Jean, for her unwavering support. Jean loves Florida State as much as I do, and I think you'll all agree she is an amazing first lady!
- I'd also like to thank FSU Trustee and Student Body President Kyle Hill and the Student Government Association leaders for being here.
- Of course, I need to thank the senior leadership team for being here today and for their guidance and stewardship all year.
- You may have heard a little something these last couple days about our search for a football coach ...
- Well, it's unusual for a football coach to come to this event, but this is not your usual football coach. Academics mean something to Coach Willie Taggart, and he's here today.
- Coach, welcome to the Florida State family! Would you like to say anything to the faculty and staff today?
- Thank you, Coach.
- I'm so pleased to have this opportunity to talk about where we've been and what we've accomplished this past year — and where we are going and what we know we can achieve in the future.
- This is my third State of the University Address, which means I've just begun my fourth year as your president. It recently occurred to me that the freshmen who arrived on campus with me in the fall of 2014 are getting ready to graduate in the spring.
- I thought about how when they walk across the stage to get their diplomas, they won't be the same people who first set foot on campus four years ago. Because when you meet new people and learn new things, you look at yourself and the world a little differently. You can't help but grow and evolve and change.

- I've changed, too. That's the transformative nature of a university.
- And just as the university changes us, we change the university. On many occasions throughout the past year, we've taken the opportunity to reflect on who we are. We've stood up for our values, and we've acted to uphold them.
- Across the nation, 2017 began with confusion and uncertainty about how a travel ban affecting the entry of citizens from certain foreign countries would affect some of our own students and scholars.
- In fact, one of our doctoral students who went home to Iran to attend his father's funeral was prevented from re-entering the United States. As we lobbied on his behalf, he was able to return to FSU when an appeals court blocked the travel ban.
- Many in our campus community are also concerned about the future of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.
- Last year, I told you that I joined more than 600 higher education leaders across the nation in support of DACA, and I want to assure you that my position on DACA has not changed.
- That's because many of the beneficiaries of DACA are college students or recent graduates. As a state and nation, we have already invested in the education of these students — it only makes sense to allow them to continue to contribute to the economy and their communities as they pursue their dreams here in America.
- Then in August, the nation witnessed a clear display of racism and intimidation by white supremacists as protests over a Confederate statue in Charlottesville turned violent.
- Like the University of Virginia, Florida State has a beautiful campus with evidence of our rich heritage all around us. But our history is not without its flaws, nor were the people who contributed to the university's growth over the past 166 years.
- As we strive to become more inclusive, the time is right to have a serious and thoughtful conversation about how to recognize our past as we work together to build our future.
- That's why I established an Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions to research these issues, seek input from university constituencies and recommend criteria for naming policies and recognitions.
- No matter what the issue, it's clear that FSU is not isolated from the rest of the world just because we live and work and study in Tallahassee.

- So, when people occasionally ask me why I weigh in on issues such as DACA or immigration, I tell them the truth: These issues are not political to me — these are matters that affect real people, including members of our Florida State family.
 - I will continue to speak out against anyone or anything that attempts to divide us based on our differences — whether race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation or gender identity.
 - And first and foremost, my Number 1 priority will always be to protect the health, safety and well-being of our students, faculty and staff.
 - One of the worst days of my presidency occurred last month when I learned one of our students — a 20-year-old-fraternity pledge — had died after attending an off-campus party.
 - No university wants to be thrust into the national spotlight for a reason as heartbreaking and tragic as this. But we are taking a leadership role in changing the culture of Greek Life — and, indeed, campus life — here and around the country.
 - I want to thank the Faculty Senate for passing a resolution in support of our decision to temporarily suspend Greek Life activities and ban alcohol at all Recognized Student Organization events.
 - I think it's important we take this time to reflect upon the loss of a young life while our entire university community works together to shift the campus culture. I believe we are on our way.
 - All of the challenges of the past year have provided us with an opportunity to reaffirm our values and take positive steps toward an even stronger, healthier and more inclusive university.
 - Likewise, all of our accomplishments will provide fresh momentum as we use our new strategic plan to guide us to even higher levels of excellence in the coming years.
 - And 2017 was a year of unprecedented achievement on which to build.
- ### **RANKINGS**
- The most tangible evidence of our success came in September when U.S. News and World Report ranked FSU the 33rd best public university in the country. Just two years ago, we were ranked 43rd.
 - To move 10 spots in two years is an incredible leap. In fact, no other public university in U.S. News and World Report's Top 50 improved more than we did during this period.
 - We did it because we chose to invest in the heart and soul of this university: our students and in you — our faculty. We believed that if our priorities were in the right place, the rankings would follow — and they have.

- We hired more faculty and gave you the market equity raises you deserve. And by elevating you, we saw improvements in key areas that affect the rankings: faculty compensation, class size and student-faculty ratio.
- We also focused on student success as outlined in our strategic plan. Our 4-year graduation rate now places us in the Top 20 nationally. And our 93% freshman retention rate ranks us 18th in the country.
- Our excellent graduation and student retention rates are the driving forces behind our jump in the rankings.
- It's no wonder FSU is becoming increasingly popular among parents and prospective students. Although the application deadline is not until February, I'm excited to tell you we have already outpaced last year's record. As of November 1, we received applications from 43,000 students all vying for about 6,500 spots in next year's freshman class.
- More importantly, we are becoming the first choice for the very best students. That's why our freshman class this year was both our biggest and brightest in the university's history — they had an average high school GPA of an incredible 4.1!
- These students arrive on campus filled with promise and excitement — and often, not a clue about who they are or what they want to do. And then they meet their professors.
- You help them discover hidden passions, challenge them intellectually, and encourage them to dream even bigger.
- One of my favorite events of the year is the Spiritual Life Project's Transformation Through Teaching Awards Dinner, where students recognize faculty who have changed their lives.
- Here's what one student said about her professor: "She was the first person who took the time to directly tell me that she saw my potential and wanted to help me grow."
- That student was Marigny Nevitt, and she's here today with her professor, Annette Schwabe, from the Department of Sociology. I'd like to ask them to stand to be recognized.
- Another student said, "Because of Dr. JJ, I know that sometimes the best way to teach others is to start with questions, not answers ... She is a true inspiration to me."
- Dr. JJ is Communication Professor Felecia Jordan Jackson, and she is here with the student who nominated her, Tori Patton. Please stand.

- Altogether, 14 professors and their students were recognized at this year's dinner. But the truth is, all of you transform lives every single day.
- You share in the university's commitment to educate students in a diverse and multicultural environment and prepare them for 21st century jobs — just as we have outlined in our strategic plan.
- I truly believe that a diverse and inclusive environment enhances the educational experience for everyone and prepares our students to thrive in an increasingly multicultural and multifaceted world.
- That's why we were so pleased when Insight into Diversity magazine named us a Diversity Champion, and we received a Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award for the fourth year in a row.
- Last month, I traveled to Washington to accept the 2017 Senator Paul Simon Award for Campus Internationalization. We were one of only four institutions in the country to receive this honor.
- The award recognizes FSU's excellence in integrating international education throughout the university. The active engagement of our faculty members in international research is key to our success in this area.
- We made a big leap forward in our strategic goal to deepen our commitment to continuous innovation when the Jim Moran School of Entrepreneurship enrolled its first group of 80 juniors this fall.
- The Jim Moran School and the Jim Moran Institute for Global Entrepreneurship are now getting ready to move into their spectacular new headquarters on North Monroe Street.
- We're also making headway on our goal to amplify our excellent research programs, particularly in the areas of health and biomedical research.
- Our researchers in nursing, medicine and other health-related areas brought in record funding of 35.8 million dollars from the National Institutes of Health in Fiscal Year 2017, which is more than double the amount the university received five years ago.
- Even more remarkable, you — our faculty researchers — have brought in more than ONE BILLION DOLLARS over the past five years in federal, state and private contracts and grants.
- And last month six more faculty members were named fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in recognition of their efforts to advance science. That's impressive!
- Another one of our strategic goals involves investing strategically in our institution and reputation. You help us with that every day. Besides your groundbreaking research, you enhance the university's reputation through your original scholarship and creative activities.

- That's why Second Lady Karen Pence came to FSU to announce her new art therapy initiative. Mrs. Pence — and the national media coverage of her visit — put a well-deserved spotlight on one of our graduate programs that, truthfully, had been one of FSU's hidden gems.

- And the face of campus is changing as well. In the past year, we opened two new residence halls — Azalea and Magnolia — and a fantastic dining complex, part of an innovative new food service agreement we launched this year.

- On the other side of Jefferson Street, we're getting ready to open the doors to our new Black Student Union in January. This much-needed facility will also house our African American Studies program and offers great opportunities for collaboration.

- And this spring, we'll begin a major renovation of Oglesby Union that will greatly expand its size and its offerings to meet the needs of today's students.

- Overall, it's been a productive and transformative year. From rankings to research; diversity to internationalization; student success to faculty achievement — Florida State has emerged as a national leader in higher education.

- Now, we need to build on all of this momentum and keep moving forward.

LEGISLATURE

- Support from the Florida Legislature will help us with our aspirations to be recognized among the nation's Top 25 public universities.

- As you may know, the 2018 Session begins in January. We're making a big, bold and confident request of \$90 million to support our efforts to hire world-class faculty and scholars, advance our professional and graduate degree excellence, support our preeminence and maintain our facilities.

- We are in the process of hiring 125 new faculty members in addition to replacing those current faculty who retire or leave. This is the single largest hiring initiative in our history and is one of the most important things we can do to increase our success in every aspect of the university.

- More faculty means more research and creative activity, more support for graduate students and postdocs, more external grants and private support, and more collaboration to solve issues that impact our lives and the world.

- More faculty means an improved faculty to student ratio, meaning smaller classes and greater student success.

- More faculty means more opportunity for service to professional academic organizations worldwide, our university and our community.

- And, we're asking the Legislature for about \$75 million for new facilities on campus, including funds to complete the EOAS Building, as well as continued funding for:

- the College of Business' Legacy Hall

- the Interdisciplinary Research Commercialization Building

- a STEM Teaching Lab

- and new funding for the FAMU-FSU Joint Use Engineering Building.

- I feel cautiously optimistic about the upcoming session because our lawmakers know that Florida State is one of the most efficient universities in the country, and they understand that supporting Florida State students and faculty is a wise investment in the future.

FUNDRAISING

- Fundraising will continue to be a big part of our efforts to move forward. When it comes to the Raise the Torch campaign, you may have noticed that we've been a little quiet lately — which may seem a little strange when you're trying to raise a billion dollars — but let me assure you the campaign is going strong, and an announcement will be coming in September 2018 that will amaze you.

- I'll give you a hint: We expect to surpass our goal and we'll have a lot to celebrate. More than 600 new scholarship funds have been given or pledged and 85 professorships have been created or enhanced during the campaign.

- The success of the Raise the Torch campaign speaks volumes about the special place so many people have in their hearts for Florida State University.

- You may be interested to know that our undergraduate alumni giving rate of 19 percent ranks FSU 9th in the nation among public universities. And, about 32 percent of our faculty and staff — including many of you — have made gifts and pledges totaling about \$79 million to our Raise the Torch campaign!

- It really says something when faculty and staff who spend every day transforming the university through the work they do, still want to do even more. It shows you're willing to give back to the university because you believe in our mission and in our future.

- I'd like to close by thanking all of you for how much you care about Florida State and how much you do to lift our preeminent university even higher.

- I knew Florida State was a special place when I arrived on campus as a freshman many years ago, and I've been reminded of it again and again while I've had the honor to serve as your president.

- At Florida State, we know what it means to be part of a family. We may disagree from time to time, but

we have each other's backs. We support each other when times are difficult and we celebrate together when we have success.

- This past year, we've done both. The university has changed us, and we've changed the university — for the better. I believe that with all my heart, and I hope you do, too.
- I have no doubt that 2018 will again bring some challenges — there always are — I haven't even mentioned Hurricane Irma! — but we also will have more opportunities for even greater accomplishment.
- Our vision is clear, and we won't lose sight of our goals. Becoming a Top 25 public university is now well within our reach, and I know we will get there.
- It's been said that if everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself. So, together, let's keep moving forward. I'm excited about the future because the future is Florida State.

