Why It's Great...to be...

Mark Kaplan

Florida's future is undeniably bright. With its rapid population growth, economic and cultural vibrancy and opportunity, abundant natural resources, and a top-ranked state university system (for five straight years), the Sunshine State is poised to lead the nation and world.

The University of Florida is embracing its role in building our nation's future workforce, fueling its economic growth and prosperity, and addressing some of its most pressing challenges.

From humble beginnings—with only 102 enrolled students and a handful of course offerings—to today, as one of America's top-ranked public research universities with more than 61,000 students, over 6,000 faculty members with distinguished records in teaching, research, and service, $1 billion in research expenditures, and a transformative artificial intelligence initiative, our momentum as a university is only accelerating.

Florida—its employers and innovators—along with each and every one of the state's 22.5 million residents benefit from that extraordinary progress, and we're only just getting started.

UF provides world-class facilities, programs, experiential learning and research opportunities to foster knowledge and breakthroughs that shape a better future. We attract the best and brightest students who complete their degrees on time with little debt and equipped with the skills needed to excel in their careers and take their place in today's unique, fast-paced workforce.

That $1 billion in research spending—a recent milestone that adds UF to an exclusive group of only 15 public universities—represents the extent to which UF faculty and students are putting their intellect and talent to work for the good of the community, state, and world.

UF researchers are leading breakthroughs for treatment of brain tumors, diabetes, and Parkinson's; strengthening Florida's agriculture industry by developing new crops and using artificial intelligence in precision agriculture; identifying and sharing best practices to help children learn to read and master math; understanding how to improve coastal health and stop red tide in its tracks; discovering how to grow plants in lunar soil; and detecting malicious computer hardware components that could jeopardize cybersecurity of critical infrastructure.

But just conducting great research is not enough. UF excels at moving innovations and discoveries from the lab to the marketplace. UF's Sid Martin Biotechnology incubator has been recognized as the top incubator in the world three times in the past decade, the first three-time awardee, and our newest incubator, the Hub, is also receiving global recognition. A recent analysis ranked the University of Florida second among all U.S. public and private universities (behind only Carnegie Mellon) at moving new discoveries from the lab and into the real world through research commercialization and STEM graduates.

What does this mean for Florida? It means that great ideas and innovative discoveries become thriving businesses that contribute to the health and vitality of our state's citizens and economy.

While the technology and innovation that our faculty, staff, and students create is impactful and important, the students who graduate from UF have an even bigger impact on our state. To better prepare students for the world that lies ahead, UF is the first university in the country to implement a bold initiative that will integrate artificial intelligence (AI) across all aspects of campus, including instruction, research, university operations and professional and continuing education.

UF is building the AI university of the future, producing an AI-savvy workforce and leveraging our world-class technology infrastructure to benefit our state and nation. This means students in all majors, at all degree levels, may acquire either a basic understanding, competence or expertise in this technology and its applications tailored to their disciplines and careers. We are also driving workforce and economic development in AI through partnerships with leading technology companies, including NVIDIA, SAS and IBM, as well as

partnerships with our counterparts in the State University System of Florida (SUS), the Florida College System, the institutions that belong to the Southeastern Conference (SEC) and K-12 schools in our state.

UF is fortunate to be home to one of the most powerful and smartest AI supercomputers in the world, a machine we call HiPerGator AI—a gift from UF alumnus Chris Malachowsky and the company he cofounded, NVIDIA. We have opened access to HiPerGator to researchers at SUS and SEC institutions to facilitate their research in every discipline. To date, more than 100 researchers across the SUS have made use of HiPerGator to accelerate their discoveries in environmental science, technology, medicine, and other areas.

Of course, as a public university, this doesn't happen on its own. We are grateful to our alumni and donors and to Florida's legislature and Governor for their commitment and support. Helping UF and Florida's other universities climb in the rankings and earn sustained recognition for all we are accomplishing together will continue to provide a strong return on investment.

It's easy for me to brag about my fellow Gators, but what is happening here is about more than just pride. As Florida's colleges and universities do better, our state does better. Research breakthroughs solve pressing problems and create new opportunities. Graduates who are prepared to contribute and lead drive a thriving economy. And the visibility that comes with having the top-ranked system of higher education in the nation can create opportunity beyond anything our great state has experienced before.

Whether it is growing plants in lunar soil in preparation for NASA's extended stay on the moon, or seeking world-class advancements in medicine, or bringing science to bear on early childhood learning and literacy to give the workforce of the future the best start in education possible—the faculty, staff and students of UF are focused on what's next.

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