To our distinguished guests: Governor Bush, Lt. Governor Jennings, Attorney General Crist, Congresswoman Brown, Representative Mahon, Mayor Peyton and all our elected officials, friends: all, welcome, and thank you for standing with me today.

To the Board of Governors, Chair Roberts, University Presidents, Chancellor Austin, UNF’s Board of Trustees, alumni, faculty, and students, and all of the special friends of UNF who join us this morning, I want to thank you for your incredible support, guidance, and advice over the past year. I also want especially to thank my immediate predecessors, Anne Hopkins and David Kline (Mayor Peyton, they were gracious enough to leave, me a budget with more money than the one I left you). Thanks to all who brought “welcome.” They are special friends, and I am very much the product of my friends and family.

One of the things I have enjoyed most since taking office has been meeting hundreds of University of North Florida (UNF) students and alumni, not just here on campus but all over the city and state. I can tell you that everyone relates that their educational experience here was a joy. That is a testament to the culture created by the Board of Trustees, by those who preceded me as president, by staff, students, and perhaps most importantly, by the faculty.

As I read the addresses of UNF’s past presidents, I could sense their incredible optimism for this university. Each succeeding address built on the foundation of a predecessor, each describing an innate, inherent, and earned quality. I must express my gratitude for inheriting such a wonderful institution at a time of such opportunity, and at such an early stage of development. It is also a unique time for higher education in which institutions must prove their relevance. With this said, the question before us is, of course, how do we build on the great potential we hold in our hands and find a path toward greatness?

This question leads me to the words of two contemporary philosophers: Charlie Brown, from the comic strip, and Yogi Berra, from the New York Yankees. That is as good as you get when you hire a non-traditional president not from academia. First, Charlie Brown: "There is no heavier burden than a great potential." Next, Yogi Berra, whose garbled sayings often do not make sense, but do: "If you don't know where you're going, you aren't likely to get there." For a youthful university, potential and direction are indeed both a burden and an opportunity.

In charting our course, UNF should be guided by four principles that have recently been articulated by our Board of Trustees: A commitment to excellence; a commitment to focus; a commitment to relevance; and, finally, a commitment to accountability. These four guiding principles will serve us well as the university community and the Board of Trustees collectively creates a shared vision for the University of North Florida. UNF's commitment to excellence is founded on a clear understanding of our responsibility to our students, who deserve nothing less. It is also founded on the recognition that the social, cultural, economic, and civic development of this community, the community in which we live and work, is linked to the development of our university, and is limited if this university fails to develop.
The fact that UNF seeks excellence is certainly not unique, most institutions do. In fact, I have yet to meet anyone, anywhere, who fails to describe their "home" university as either "good" or "great." But what must differentiate us from those others is the definition we give to the word "excellence." "Good is the enemy of great," so begins a recent book by former Stanford business professor, Dr. Jim Collins. "Good is the enemy of great," and he adds, "and that is why we have so little that becomes great." In his book, Dr. Collins describes how certain corporations take flight from the merely good to become the truly great. In pursuing his theory, Dr. Collins also demonstrates why a piercing focus on excellence is critical for institutions and why they cannot settle for less. To become great requires what he describes as "transcending the curse of competence." It also requires a decision to become the best among your peers at some core ability. In other words, to be great, we must first be great at something, and that something must be definable and knowable.

To be great, we must be great at something. This part of Dr. Collins' thesis leads us to a second commitment – a commitment to focus. UNF cannot find its greatness by trying to be all things to all people. Attempting to do this, as we all know, is the surest road to mediocrity. Rather, we at UNF must seek out our own unique identity.

My wife and I are blessed with four children that would make any parent proud. What Gena and I want for our children is for each to find his or her own wonderful and individual identity. We do not want Jimmy to try and become his older brother, Bill. It would not work and the world would lose the special characteristics that only Jim Delaney can bring. The same is true for Meg and her older sister Adrian. As parents, we do our best to encourage them to develop their strengths, to develop their different strengths. Of course, it would be nice if all four could learn to clean up their bedrooms.

With all due respect to my presidential colleagues on the dais, UNF should have no desire to emulate any of the other institutions in this state. We would be a failure if we tried and the State of Florida would gain nothing new. Though we have much to learn from our sister universities, should we try to mimic any one of them, the state would lose the University of North Florida and would only gain a poor imitation of something else. That is not the road we should travel.

With that said, the next question becomes: where does UNF's special focus take us? There can be no static answer to this question. It will ever be evolving and must come about as a part of shared decision-making with our faculty, our Board of Trustees, and our community. But we do know that UNF must begin with a focus on establishing a high-quality undergraduate learning experience that does more than just educate students, it is an experience that transforms their lives. Excellence in teaching is our prime directive and it is evidenced by the emphasis we place on things such as the accessibility of UNF's faculty to our undergraduate students. With this focus, we also commit to excellence in our general education curriculum, and to providing a comprehensive array of degree programs. Success in all of these is predicated on having an extraordinarily talented faculty that has the support and the resources to do their job, and is rewarded for doing so.

As UNF seeks excellence through focus, it is my contention that we will find a part of this excellence by identifying select flagship programs which are tied to our inherent strengths: programs where we are uniquely qualified to provide regional or national leadership. There are fields where we are
demonstrably great or near great now, and where we can advance further quickly. Certainly our nationally renowned Jazz program fits such a definition. There are also programs where we can attract new public or private dollars, where there is a community need or benefit, and where our faculty and Board of Trustees see promise; call them programs of academic opportunity. These may be in areas of critical job shortages, professions such as nursing or teaching, or in particular academic disciplines. In suggesting this approach, I should note that I have heard and taken seriously the wise counsel, caution, and concern expressed by some. Focus on programs of prominence must not diminish our commitment to strengthening our overall curriculum. To do so would be shortsighted, but to believe that we can be equally great in everything we do would also be naive. We must first use resources to support our entire curriculum, neglecting none. A great campus can have no orphan programs. But if we want to be great, to say, sneak up on Harvard; we must do so one program at a time. To be great, we must be great at something first.

Let me now move to our third guiding principle: A commitment to relevance. This involves tying our work here to important and vexing community issues, and demonstrating how we add value towards solutions: scholarship matched with community. The fact that the University of North Florida is focused on quality undergraduate teaching does not signal an abrogation of our responsibility to participate in research. We must always continue to expand an already active basic and applied scholarly agenda that cuts across all of the disciplines that we now offer in our curriculum, especially where faculty are so inclined. This scholarship helps to keep the curriculum up to date and it also energizes the faculty who are simultaneously teaching and writing the research. And equally important, this scholarship serves as one of the university's significant contributions to society at large.

Recognizing these opportunities, UNF scholars are already busy tackling a broad array of issues. These range from providing national leadership in research on early learning and literacy to developing remote sensor technologies that can be used to detect radioactive, biological or chemical poisons. And from studying the effectiveness of social-action programs and drug addiction programs to using wireless communication systems for collection and transmission of data to improve hurricane preparedness. The research in which we engage will have a significant impact on our understanding of ourselves and the universe in which we live. But commitments to focus and relevance suggest that we should pay particular attention to research that fit both our mission and our strengths. This would mean we must always pursue academic opportunities, but we should also especially pursue scholarly activity on community needs and in programs where we are inherently strong.

Community partnerships are key to establishing relevance. One such partnership brought together eight area hospitals to fund a program that is increasing the number of nurses UNF graduates to help meet this critical shortage. Another partnership with our public schools has been recognized by a national award for work in urban teacher professional development. Partnerships have led to the naming of the Coggin College of Business and to the unprecedented success UNF had with its recently completed capital campaign that ended early after having reached more than 150 percent of its goal.
While these successes give evidence of the strong partnerships we have already established, we know that such efforts must continue, both for the sake of the community and to ensure that we maintain our own relevance. These connections, such as the ones we are participating in with Mayor Peyton as he develops his aggressive plan to improve early literacy, will help better our community. Being guided by commitments to excellence, to focus, and to relevance, we can chart a course to the future. Taking the time and effort to draw this map is some of the most critical work in which we will be collectively engaged.

This now brings us to our fourth guiding principle, a commitment to accountability. As I raise this principle, I must admit that I do so with some hesitation. This hesitation does not come from a lack of belief in this commitment, but from the realization that much misunderstanding surrounds public concepts of accountability and the realization that many of the words used in these discussions are meant one way by those doing the measuring, and heard another by those who are to be held accountable, who frequently believe that accountability is an accusation that they are not doing their job. It is not meant that way, it simply means, let us prove we are doing a good job. The reality is that public universities in every state are being asked for new standards of accountability. This state is aggressively demanding such measures.

Some years ago, after bragging that a particular department I administered was "the best in the country," I was asked a simple question, "How do you know?" The follow-up questions were as simple, "By what measure, compared to whom, compared to where?" I realized that I was relying on hope, ego and the anecdotal rather than on hard data in making my judgment. As we describe our universities, we - administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni - also often speak from mere hope, ego and the anecdotal rather than data. This from institutions that issue grades daily and that substantially exist to research and scrutinize data.

For centuries, universities and academia throughout the world have advanced students based on a system that seeks excellence and rewards improvement, and keeps score by issuing grades. Yet, few institutions seem to routinely and rigorously evaluate their own outcomes. This, of course, does not mean that there is absence of internal and self-evaluation. The tenure and promotion process certainly provides an example of such vigorous, painstaking scrutiny, and the intensity with which we prepare for accreditation review provides another. But these are essentially pass/fail tests. How do we distinguish the pretty good from the good, and the good from the truly great? Thus, those who are largely responsible for paying the bills for our public universities: legislators, and the Governor, as well as students and donors, are asking, "What do we get for what we spend? Is it possible to measure it like we do in the business world?" Robert Reich, President Clinton's Labor Secretary, formerly at Harvard and now a professor at Brandeis, describes the situation as "the monastery meets the marketplace."

Rather than resisting such an inquiry, we should be able to answer it. Andrew Sorenson, former President at the University of Alabama and former Provost at the University of Florida, and who is now at the University of South Carolina, gave an address in 1996 advancing this position, saying, "It (has been) argued (that)... I would be inviting political Neanderthals and anti-intellectual barbarians to wreak havoc with our sacred system of higher education. During such conversation, I had the eerie feeling that I had somehow been transported back in time: I imagined that my colleagues and I
were huddled in a dark, clammy medieval monastery congratulating one another on the nobility of our cause and lauding our intellectual superiority over the Philistines outside the chapel doors."

Later, in an address to new college presidents, Sorensen also gave a "Top 10" list of advice, with number 10 on his list being: "Don't delude yourself into thinking that you can solve your campus parking problem." So you see, the guy has some decent insights. Number 9 was "Hope you like chicken."

Sorenson submits that the vast array of scholarly productivity can be evaluated quantitatively. I would submit that there are also better ways to evaluate and encourage the highest quality teaching, and that this must be valued and rewarded. And as has been mandated by most professional accrediting bodies, we must move beyond solely assessing process and must commit to continually assessing outcomes. Higher education is not a business, and its history, function and objectives do not typically respond to the typical business metrics. But it is not in isolation of accountability and public policy either. Rather than run from accountability, we should invite it. If we are good, we should be able to prove it. In fact, we should ask Tallahassee to reward quality and use the measures to get even better.

I, too, come from a profession, the law, that worships tradition. Our law's customs date back over 1,000 years, centuries before the Magna Charta was signed in 1215, which codified some of these traditions as fundamental rights. American law is a descendant of this English common law, and the entire framework is built on precedent, custom, and tradition. But it, too, has evolved and modernized to meet modern needs. In the face of one such change, a lawyer colleague once said, "I'm all for progress, I just don't want change."

We need to devise a system that can answer Tallahassee's question, "What do we get for what we spend?" If spending on higher education is an investment, and indeed it is, it is in fact the equivalent of the state's seed corn, then "what is the return on that investment?" And how do we demonstrate to them what we know is a good value? The answer: With scholarly data, not hope, not ego, not anecdote.

Florida's historic funding formula for higher education largely rewarded growth and growth only. Professor David Kirp in the recently published book Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line cites an 1828 Yale committee study on higher education's future in a similar context. In wonderful 19th century cadence, this study concludes that, "It is a hazardous experiment, to act upon the plan of gaining numbers first, and character afterwards." Today, in 2004, we must heed this same admonition. It would be easy in a growing state like Florida for our universities to do the same; that is to grow but not really improve, to add numbers but not character. Thankfully, the current direction and funding proposals by the Governor and Board of Governors seek the improvement of our academic product as well as accountability, regardless of growth. Our local Board of Trustees has a similar demand. We must stay engaged in this conversation and collectively define the metrics that will answer their question, "What is the return on our investment?"

In sketching out these four guiding principles, I have tried to provide some sense of the direction the University of North Florida should follow over the next several years in seeking a path to excellence. For this picture to become reality, it will obviously take building consensus on key issues and coming...
to agreement on the details that must follow. To help build this consensus and these agreements, I have identified nine critical elements that can frame this approach. The first four of these relate to our core mission.

1. Quality Faculty: Attract, recruit, retain, measure, compensate and promote quality faculty.
2. Quality Students: Attract, recruit, retain, measure, and reward quality students.
3. Undergraduate Learning: A focus on the undergraduate learning experience, from classroom to campus life. Each student should have what Dean Mark Workman once described as a "transformational learning experience," an element of undergraduate learning that is bigger than a single class.
4. Flagship Programs: We need a plan to collectively select, and to then develop five to ten flagship programs where the University of North Florida is the acknowledged state or national leader.

The next two relate to our supporting missions of research and service.

5. Research: We need to focus our research and scholarship activity, on community needs, on academic opportunities, and on the flagship programs; but while still enhancing the research that we currently conduct.
6. Relevance: We need to be responsive and relevant to community, regional and state needs.

Numbers seven and eight ask us to examine both our infrastructure and the resources we will need to take UNF to that proverbial "next level."

7. Facility Master Plan: Develop a master plan for facilities and grounds that support our mission, understanding that what is decided will likely be in place for generations.
8. Endowment: We should orient our endowment toward this strategic focus: targeted research, flagship programs, community needs, undergraduate learning, the physical plant's master plan, and the recruiting and rewarding of quality students and faculty. Within six years, our endowment needs to reach $100 million to fulfill these objectives. As we are a young university, that would be the quickest that any Florida university (without a medical school) has reached a $100 million endowment.

And finally, the last item asks us to examine where we are and track our course.

9. Continuous Improvement: We should adopt the 'continuous improvement' protocol. These business plan and strategic planning processes will measure and gauge our progress, and steer us toward self-evaluation, improvement and innovation.

Universities are the home of the intellectual entrepreneur. Researchers have eliminated polio and small pox. As a result of work in universities, we harvest more crops per acre than ever before. We build bridges with less steel and concrete. Our computers are now the size of a book and wireless, no longer requiring either a phone jack or an electric plug. More sophisticated financial models more accurately predict economic cycles. More complex mathematical models more accurately predict
hurricane movement. And our artists and musicians and poets and writers find more and different and deeper ways to expose truth.

In my own religious faith, we have long awaited a return of our Lord. I have often pictured God, delaying His return as He watches, bemused at the progress of man: the new innovations, new discoveries, new ideas, new inventions, thinking, "What will they come up with next?" We should take great pride in keeping alive our asking of the questions and seeking the answers, finding the innovations, the ideas, the inventions. What I have offered today is a framework toward developing a direction for the University of North Florida, a work in progress that will be collectively decided upon by all of us who love this university. It is also a framework that will allow us to provide an even clearer answer to Tallahassee and to the citizens of this State, an answer that documents that their investment in this particular institution yields remarkable returns, very possibly the greatest dividends that they will ever make on any investment, a long-term investment in hundreds of thousands of intellectual entrepreneurs who will better our world. And in response to the statement that "unless you know where you are going, you're not likely to get there," I would respond that we do know where we are going. We are taking flight on a journey to GREATNESS.

Thank you.