Good afternoon, I’m pleased to be with you and welcome you to the start of what we all hope will be a very successful year. FDU has much to be proud of, much to celebrate and much to anticipate, but we also have much to contend with, as does all of higher education.

*The Canaries in the Coal Mine*

Many of you are familiar with the canaries in the coal mine. The birds would be used to determine the presence of dangerous gases. If the birds stopped singing or the birds died, the workers would heed the warning signs and exit the mine immediately. Are we in higher education paying attention to the warning signs?

The concerns include rising tuition, mounting debt burdens — for universities and their students — reduced government aid and increased pressure and competition for attracting students. With the high cost of college, some have begun to raise hard questions about the worth of the investment. Many are demanding accountability from colleges and many have said they are losing faith in the value of American higher education.

Tuition costs have risen almost five times the rate of inflation since 1983, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and since 1980, the cost of college at both public and private institutions has roughly tripled in inflation-adjusted dollars. While some like FDU have kept the increases modest in recent years, tuition costs remain expensive and provide ammunition for our critics.

Overall debt levels have more than doubled from 2000 to 2011 at the more than 500 institutions rated by Moody’s Investors Service. At the same time, cuts in programs and personnel have occurred at many colleges and universities, including many of our peer competitors in the metropolitan area. Fortunately, FDU has not taken on debt in more than a decade. Through careful financial management, FDU has grown without borrowing money. But many have not been so fortunate.
Earlier this year, Moody’s offered a sobering negative outlook for higher education, especially those institutions dependent on tuition and state money, like FDU.

Last year, the total amount of student debt exceeded $1 trillion, and 40 percent of people under 30 were paying off student loans. Even relatively wealthy families are dramatically decreasing the amount they pay for a college education. More and more say they would choose a lower-priced institution, even if it were not their top choice. In other words, they are shopping carefully for bargain values.

There is a growing uncertainty in the aid available from federal and state sources. After regularly receiving more than $3 million annually from the state of New Jersey, FDU has received no state aid for the past three years. This year, the state agreed to award FDU $161,500, and we are grateful for that, but it’s a far cry from what is needed and what we received in the past. And, the aid that is available from the government may not be easy to obtain. A growing number of advocates for change, including the president of the United States, would like to tie college appropriations and aid to students to performance measures, including graduation rates.

There are, of course, many other concerns, including the incredible rising cost of health care for colleges, the problems of deferred maintenance and the increasing demands of providing premium facilities and modern technologies.

Because of these and other issues, it’s no surprise that a survey last year, sponsored by Time magazine and the Carnegie Corporation, found that 96 percent of the public and senior administrators at American colleges believe that higher education is in a crisis.

And in a survey this month, FDU’s PublicMind found that just about half of New Jersey voters think the cost of higher education is no longer worth it.

The headlines daily alert us to this growing dissatisfaction. They include: “Where Higher Education Went Wrong”, “Is College a Lousy Investment?” “Are We Paying Too Much for Higher Education” “Higher Education: Not What It Used to Be”

Yogi Berra once said, “The future ain’t what it used to be.” In the case of higher education, it seems that many think he may be right.
The question for us now is — are we paying attention to the critics? Are we paying close enough attention to our students and their needs? Are we carefully paying attention to the canaries? Or do we think it’s another case of alarmist rhetoric?

For those who think that, let me point out that FDU’s enrollment has dropped from last year, and FDU’s total revenues are down from a year ago. This, despite aggressive recruitment strategies, increased outreach efforts and increased financial aid. I’m afraid we must do more with less. And, we must reverse this trend, despite all the external challenges.

I was raised an optimist. My parents never attended college, but they believed that through education one could build a better life and make important contributions to society. So, I always knew I was going to college, and I always believed that a college education was going to help me be successful.

I do not doubt for a second the power and the importance of education. But in nearly two decades of carefully surveying the landscape of higher education, I have never been more concerned about the future of the American university. I unfortunately believe there are institutions that will not survive this crisis.

FDU, on the other hand, will not only survive, but FDU will thrive. And FDU will emerge stronger than ever.

**FDU’s Enduring Values**
What makes me so sure FDU will succeed where others will fail? As I said, I was raised an optimist but having been here for nearly two decades, I also know a few things about FDU.

From the incredibly talented faculty to our global mission, from a vast array of programs to our impressive portfolio of support services and benefits, we offer a great deal. But even more importantly, we have long displayed certain traits and committed ourselves to certain values that have endured and will continue to endure. What makes me convinced FDU will survive and prosper is not so much what we offer but what we stand for.

We stand for innovation. From the time Peter Sammartino introduced his grand educational experiment in Rutherford, Fairleigh Dickinson has been courageous enough to jump ahead of the pack and to launch bold new ventures. We’ve carried this onward with entrepreneurial initiatives like establishing a campus in Canada, a
new School of Pharmacy and a Cyber Crime Training Lab.

We stand for agility and flexibility. We respond to market trends with programs that give students a competitive edge. And, we deliver programs when and where people need them.

Take, for example, our many off-campus programs and fully online degree programs like the MS in homeland security or the master of sports administration. Or consider programs like the MBA and MS in accounting program for orthodox Jews in Lakewood and Montvale, whose schedules demand flexibility. Or consider the MAS program for diplomats. Or our degree-completion programs for National Football League players. And, there are many more examples.

We stand for accessibility and opportunity. This has been a trademark of our institution from the very beginning. Look at our nationally renowned support services for veterans. Or *Puerta al Futuro* for Spanish speaking adults and the Latino Promise for Latino students. We help these students overcome barriers.

We stand for transformation. This summer, I was at Wroxton College for the reunion of the Class of 1968. It was incredible to talk with these alumni and learn about the profound impact Wroxton has had on each of them. There, they gained a global perspective that propelled their careers and influenced them throughout their lives.

But Wroxton is not the only vehicle for transformation at FDU. Whether it’s a study-abroad program, a lecture with a Global Virtual Faculty member or dinner with a U.N. ambassador, we offer an incredible landscape of opportunities that open up new worlds to our students.

We stand for resiliency. FDU has known hard times. We have known challenges. Again, the tone was set early on in our history. Just four days after the decision was made to open the school, the U.S. was attacked at Pearl Harbor and entered World War II. Still, we persevered. Backing down is not an option at FDU.

We saw enrollments drop significantly at one point — from about 23,000 to about 8,000. But, we overcame that. We saw financial struggles mount, and we made the tough decision to close our original campus. But, we overcame that. I remember coming on board soon after Rutherford was closed, and I remember the concerns many had about just funding basic operations. But we overcame that. We righted the ship and produced 14 consecutive balanced budgets. We are truly resilient.
I not only believe in these enduring values of FDU, but I believe firmly there is an urgent need for this University. There is a need for our mission. There is a need for our students in the world.

*The Future Starts Now*

So, there are challenges, and there are enduring values we bring to the battle.

But what do we do now? In this challenging environment, we have an opportunity to set ourselves apart. But it won’t be easy.

There’s an old Latin proverb that states, “If there is no wind, row.” We do not have the winds at our back. But, we will row.

Throughout this fall, I will be meeting with faculty, students, alumni and staff to discuss your ideas for the future. I’ve also set up an online questionnaire to gather input on what we do and what we can do better. With your input and collaboration, a new strategic plan will be drafted, which will identify a clear roadmap to deal with our challenges and to elevate our institution.

Together, we will chart a course. Together, we will dream a vision for the future. And together, we will make that dream come true.

Together we will define our future.

Ah, but what about today? What about right now? The future begins with the efforts of each of us in the community — each of us in this room.

The future starts with our faculty. You are the leaders in the front lines. You are the prime forces shaping student lives and careers. You represent and define an FDU education.

How many of you remember the president of the college you attended? I sure don’t. But, I remember my faculty. They changed my life. And so I ask you to do what you always do and do it as well as ever.

I will support your great work to the very best of my ability. As you engage in the classroom, I will be sharing your work, sharing our story with all who will listen. I will focus approximately half my time on raising funds and generating new resources for the benefit of you and our students, with emphasis on raising money
for scholarships to make FDU more attractive and within the financial means of our students and their families.

Beyond that, I have several immediate goals that I would like us to focus on.

I cannot stress enough the need to make our programs more affordable. And, it goes without saying that we are striving for continuing improvement in the quality of what we offer.

We may need to consolidate, reorganize and restructure some of our operations. And, we will need to invest in programs that offer high returns on these investments.

There are some specific priorities. For example, I’ve asked our University provost, Chris Capuano, to take the leadership on integrating career planning and experiential learning into the curriculum. We also want to develop new faculty mentorship programs to support our students and improve student retention and graduation rates.

I am working with Rick Reiss, senior vice president for University advancement, to develop new opportunities for faculty to engage with alumni and keep them connected to their alma mater.

I would like the deans and the faculty to focus on the continuing integration of educational technology into the classroom and the development of more blended and online courses and programs. We were pioneers when we introduced an online learning requirement, and we want to remain in the forefront of blending online learning with face-to-face instruction.

We must continue to do all we can to provide a nurturing and supportive learning and living environment that attracts and retains great students. Improving our retention and graduation rates is paramount to our future success.

There are many priorities. And, I look forward to continuing the discussion with you to identify other needs and develop new ideas to better serve our students. We will plan together, and we will succeed together.

I can’t tell you yet exactly all that we will do. But I can share with you an example of why we do what we do.
Ivana’s Story
Ivana Viani grew up in a poor village in eastern Croatia. By the time she was a teenager, she knew the pain of hunger, the fear of terror and the horror of war.

But she had the courage to dream. She saw America as the land of opportunity. And, she knew education was the path to make her dreams come true.

So she came to the United States, with less than $100 in her pocket, and eventually she earned her associate degree. And then she found FDU.

A full-time student, with a full-time job, she sacrificed much to succeed at her studies, while continually demonstrating the compassion and humanity that makes her so special. She volunteered to help the sick, the poor, the mentally ill and victims of violence, and she became an assistant social worker at Holy Name Hospital. She later quit her job to enjoy a full college experience and took advantage of all FDU has to offer.

In 2009, Ivana graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in psychology. She then enrolled in FDU’s premedical program, while working full-time in the Office of Public Safety.

Asked about her reasons for going into the medical field, Ivana said, “Before I was born, my grandmother died from a broken leg. The nearest doctor was hours away. When she finally reached the hospital, it was hours before anyone looked at her. I grew up in the shadow of her death and the deaths of many family members who could have been saved had they been afforded adequate and appropriate care.”

This fall, I’m pleased to tell you, Ivana began studying at Harvard Medical School. I spoke to Ivana on Monday. She is doing well, and she wanted to be here today to thank the faculty, but her first exams are this week.

Ivana learned that through her education, she could influence and shape her world. Ivana is the reason we are here. We are here to nurture the hopes and fuel the dreams of our students. We are here to ensure that where the will is strong and where the ambition is determined, we will provide the opportunity.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote, “The best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.” Clearly, your work is worth doing.
Who will be the next Ivana? She — or he — may be in your classroom this semester.

Have a wonderful year!

Thank you