Internationalization and Globalization in Higher Education
Joe Glover, Provost and Senior Vice President, University of Florida
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I would like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education and all of our friends and alumni in Saudi Arabia for extending an invitation to the University of Florida to participate in this magnificent exhibition. It is a privilege and an honor to speak to you today.

The University of Florida is internationalizing its campus and globalizing its operations, just as many institutions of higher education are doing around the world. However, the University of Florida’s efforts are informed by a tradition and history of special universities in the United States. These are the public land-grant institutions of the country.

Through federal legislation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a network of public land-grant universities was created in the United States. Each state in the nation received one or two of these institutions. The universities received land and other resources from government to build institutions of higher education. In return, the universities agreed to a special obligation: to use their
expertise to improve the economic and social conditions of the citizens in the state and the nation. This is a promise that the land-grant universities have fulfilled for over 150 years. They continue to take that promise seriously, and they form a special association of universities in the United States.

When the promise was first made a century or more ago, the universities pledged to use their expertise in agriculture and the mechanical arts to better society. The discipline called mechanical arts is now known as “engineering.” From the very beginning, land-grant universities reached out from their campuses to engage with people, with businesses, and with farms in every corner of their state and throughout the nation to educate the people, to conduct research to improve the economy and social conditions, and to help businesses and ordinary citizens in practical ways. This engagement with society is called “extension,” because the universities are extending their expertise and services to the citizens of the nation.

While the mission of most universities is to perform teaching and research, the mission of land-grant universities is to perform teaching, research, and extension. They take the extension responsibility seriously. In more modern terminology, we now refer to this tripartite mission as “Learning, Discovery, and Engagement.”
Engagement has led the University of Florida to meet the needs of the citizens of the state of Florida and the United States. As the lives of our citizens, our economies, and our scientific pursuits have grown increasingly intertwined with the lives, economies, and scientific pursuits in many other nations of the world, our mission to improve our social and economic conditions has led us naturally to engage with the growing trends of internationalization and globalization. As the economy of the United States has evolved over a century from one based primarily on agriculture and mechanical production into a more modern knowledge- and information-based economy, the university’s engagement has evolved as well to support these changes.

Because of this important land-grant mission of Learning, Discovery, and Engagement, the University of Florida has developed into a university designed to do three things.

First, we educate the best and brightest students from around the world to become our next generation of leaders in science, agriculture, medicine and engineering, in politics, in the social and economic domains, and in literature, design, and the arts. To become leaders, the students must become prepared to advance our knowledge through research. The University of Florida is a research
institution, and our graduate and research programs are among the strongest in the nation. We have over 12,000 graduate students working shoulder-to-shoulder with thousands of faculty in research and education programs. But we think it is also important for undergraduates to be introduced to research and the life-long process of discovery. We ensure that undergraduates have the opportunity to work with faculty making exciting new discoveries through research.

We believe it is equally important that students understand the global context for their actions. They must acquire an appreciation of the cultural, political, and scientific environment in which they work, and they must become comfortable and adept at working in the global environment. While they learn some of this through their coursework, we as educators understand that students learn tremendously outside of the classroom through informal interaction with their peers, with graduate students, and with faculty. To acquire appreciation of other cultures and modes of thought, they can travel abroad. And students from around the world can learn from each other on the University of Florida campus, where 4,500 students from over 100 countries, including Saudi Arabia, arrive to study each year with an international faculty.
The second part of the University of Florida mission, “Discovery,” is a hallmark of the university. We emphasize graduate education and research, because we believe that we best improve the state of the world through new discoveries and their practical applications. In fact, the faculty of the University of Florida win over half a billion dollars in external research grants and contracts every year from agencies like the NIH, the National Institute of Health, NSF, the National Science Foundation, and NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Consistent with our land-grant mission, when we do research, we remember that it is intended to help the nation and the world. New discoveries are important to us, but it is equally important that we translate those discoveries into practical applications to advance medical care, to create new businesses to build a modern knowledge- and information-based economy, and to improve the lives of people around the world.

The University of Florida is well-known for its many discoveries and inventions that have changed our lives. I will give three examples. Perhaps the most famous is the invention of Gatorade. This was a drink invented by a physician in the medical school to improve the performance of athletes in sports. Not only did it
improve the performance of athletes, but this invention created the billion-dollar industry of sport beverages in the United States, which had not existed before. Not only did it enlarge the economy of the United States, but the university benefited financially from licensing the invention, since it brought many millions of dollars to the university.

Another practical invention was the first topically applied glaucoma treatment, called Trusopt. Before the invention of this drug, glaucoma treatments were administered orally by mouth. You can imagine how much medicine successfully reaches the eye from the stomach. Trusopt was the first drug to be applied topically directly to the eye, and this insured that more of the medicine reached the area that needed treatment. This invention spurred drug discovery in the United States and was also financially profitable for the university.

There are many, many other inventions and discoveries that we license through our Office of Licensing and Technology, and I will mention only one other area. Our Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is devoted to improving agriculture and ensuring that the world food supply remains safe and plentiful. We investigate plant and animal diseases, we develop new crops for difficult climates, and we study human nutrition. This institute has developed many new plants and
crops that we eat every day. Through this work, the institute has created industries worth billions of dollars.

The third portion of the University of Florida mission is “Engagement.” We understand that the citizens of the United States do not live in a closed and isolated system. They are part of the world, and we best improve the lives of our citizens by improving the lives of all the people in the world. That is why our Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences works in Africa to develop new crops that will feed the many millions of people who have no food. That is why the University of Florida sent a team of doctors and specialists in public health to Haiti two days after the recent earthquake to provide medical assistance and supplies to the citizens of Haiti. That is why our colleges of Business, Pharmacy, Engineering, and Agriculture provide education to many students and professionals around the world through distance education via the Internet. That is why the University of Florida partnered with Spain and Mexico to build the world’s largest optical telescope in the Canary Islands. That is why our faculty partner with researchers around the world to resolve the major problems facing our global society. That is why we send our students abroad and why we welcome your talented students to study in Florida. That is how we fulfill the
simple land-grant promise that we made to the people of the world over 100 years ago: to help them live better lives.

In order to accomplish these goals, the University of Florida has grown into one of the largest and most comprehensive universities in the United States. Over 50,000 students study each year at the University of Florida. What do we mean by the word “comprehensive”? A student who comes to study at the University of Florida can study virtually any academic discipline. The university has 16 different colleges with over 100 fields of study, including all disciplines of engineering and agriculture, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, public health, nursing, veterinary medicine, law, and architecture. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has over 22 departments, including Sociology, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Political Science, and foreign languages and linguistics. The College of Business offers MBA degrees and the Master’s degree in International Business, along with doctoral degrees in Finance, Marketing, Management, Real Estate, and Information Systems.

There are over 12,000 graduate and professional students on the University of Florida campus in Gainesville at any given time. Over 4,000 of them are international students from over 100 countries around the world, including Saudi
Arabia. The city of Gainesville is a small city 2 hours north of Orlando, Florida. The entire city is devoted to the University and to the university medical center that includes 3 hospitals. While we do not build new buildings at the impressive rate that Saudi Arabia is building new buildings, we regularly add important new facilities that enable us to tackle world problems as they arise. We have just completed a new Cancer Hospital that will partner with our Cancer and Genetics Institute to investigate the causes and treatments of cancer and other diseases arising from genetic abnormalities. The University of Florida has had success recently in treating a certain type of blindness caused by a genetic defect. The university has also just completed the Emerging Pathogens Institute. This institute is devoted to the study of new diseases that are arising in plants, animals, and humans. We have all heard of Ebola, SARS, and H1N1. There are many other pathogens we have not heard of that threaten our health and our food supply, and the University of Florida has established the first institute in the United States dedicated to anticipating and addressing the problem. This institute involves scholars from many disciplines needed to study new diseases and their spread, including the disciplines of medicine, sociology, geography, statistics, and epidemiology. The university will soon begin construction of a new building for its Institute on Aging, since it was recently designated a national
leader to study the medical and social problems of the elderly. One of the reasons the university was chosen for this is that the study of aging requires the contributions of many, many fields of study, including medicine, pharmacy, nursing, public health, sociology, psychology, law, the arts, and building construction. The university has a new state-of-the-art facility in nanotechnology. We are completing a new building for graduate programs in Business and will soon start construction of a new building in Chemical Biology for the study of biochemistry.

I hope this talk has provided an introduction to the University of Florida and the unique historical rationale underlying our imperative to engage with our friends around the world. The process of internationalizing and globalizing the university is consistent with the land-grant promise that we made over a century ago and that we continue to honor today. We intend to continue serving the citizens of all countries through Learning, Discovery and Engagement from our home base in Florida and our satellite bases around the world. This is so important to us, that it was made the central theme of the university’s reaccreditation process about ten years ago. We think about it every day, and we invite you to visit the University of Florida in Gainesville to think about it with us.
I thank you for your attention, and I thank the Ministry of Higher Education for extending an invitation to the University of Florida to participate in this magnificent exhibition. It has been our privilege to participate in this exciting initiative.