

# USF Aims To Join Elite Group Of Colleges

More than 300 faculty, staff and students from the University of South Florida packed the ballroom of the Marshall Center in Tampa last week as President Judy Genshaft and



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Trustee Lee Arnold unveiled the strategic plan for our four campuses.

Prepared by representatives from all walks of University life, the plan calls for USF to meet the requirements to achieve membership

in the Association of American Universities (AAU). This is a bold objective. Its achievement will bring prestige and sustained excellence to the Tampa Bay area and to the state.

Those who came to the Town Hall meeting were sincere. No doubts, no fear and no sarcasm. No one asked, "Why AAU?" No one quipped, "Is it even possible?"

Instead, faculty members wanted to talk about the strategies that will get us there; students wanted to see the kind of outcomes that ultimately could result in stronger school spirit.

How real is the goal?

Established in 1900, AAU consists of only 62 universities. Thirty-four of them are public. What do these AAU universities have in common? First and foremost, they offer some of the best undergraduate and graduate educational experiences in the nation. Second, they provide a strong



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**Graduating seniors identify University of South Florida faculty as the single most important and memorable factor about their USF experience.**

and sustained professional network for their alumni. Third, they offer a highly conducive environment for creativity and intellectual growth, thus keeping their students and communities competitive in the global economy. Finally, as engines of economic development they ensure prosperity and growth for their respective regions. Based on what we have grown into in 50 years and our trajectory, we are certain USF belongs in this stellar company.

USF already meets three of the nine measures necessary to become eligible for AAU recognition: the amount of federal research awards, the number of faculty awards and the number of post-doctoral appointees. The remaining six include measures reflecting the quality of faculty, industry support and undergraduate

educational experience. We have invested strategically in all of these areas and early results are impressive.

Our 2007 freshmen pool is the strongest and the most diverse ever. Our retention and graduation rates are higher than ever. Several world class scholars are joining USF in the coming year, including a Nobel Laureate in physics. Twenty-eight start-up companies are thriving in the Research Park, while the nonprofit research and development organization SRI and the biological products manufacturer and medical testing company Bio Vest are setting up their labs near USF in hope of harnessing our faculty's talents.

USF, like other universities, is in the business of knowledge – creating, storing, disseminating and applying

knowledge – to make life better. The foundation of any knowledge enterprise is its faculty. Graduating seniors identify USF faculty as the single most important and memorable factor about their USF experience. It is on the strength of our faculty that we feel confident building toward the success of this bold plan.

By seeking membership in AAU, USF is undertaking a journey that is full of dreams and visions. An important step is to prepare our students for leadership in the global economy. Whether they stay near home or cross oceans, they should be able to thrive in the competitive global marketplace. We propose to make "global exposure" a mandatory requirement for graduation.

The USF Strategic Plan demonstrates that we will settle for nothing but the very best as we move forward. USF students deserve the best education. Our alumni deserve the best value for their degrees. Our community deserves the best intellectual environment for social and economic development. Our goal of seeking membership in AAU is in line with fulfilling these obligations, and we know our alumni and the Tampa Bay community at large will cheer us on.

*Renu Khator is the provost and senior vice president at the University of South Florida.*