

**WELCOME, INTRODUCTION OF PROVOST, ANTICIPATED  
OUTCOMES AND COMMON UNDERSTANDING FOR THE DAY**

*[An introduction to UF Quest and desired outcomes for the  
conference]*

**[Lindner]:** I would like to officially open this conference! For those of you who do not know me, I am Angela Lindner, the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs here at UF. Let me first welcome all of you. I know each of you has many obligations you could be (and possibly the little nagging voice inside is telling you that you should be) fulfilling right now. So, let me begin by thanking you for taking time from your busy lives to linger a few hours together in what promises to be a very important shared conversation and work surrounding the UF Quest Program.

[Slide] The purpose of this day is to convene both on-campus and off-campus partners around the topic of UF Quest, which in its final form is intended to be a shared experience for undergraduates entering as freshmen starting in the Fall of 2018.

Collectively, all of us here today reflect the diversity in skills, vocations, passions, and view points essential to develop and launch a program such as UF Quest. Just to give evidence to this fact, I ask you to raise your hand to identify yourself if the descriptor I call out matches you in any way. Specifically, present today are our five faculty who are leading our task forces, Drs. Andy Wolpert, Ata Sarajedini, David Miller, Chris Hass, and Elayne Colon. We have members of our four task forces already hard at work developing this program. We have some individuals who have barely heard of the program. We have administrators, faculty, staff, and students. We have

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attendees here not employed by UF but strongly affiliated with UF students in their work off campus. We have those whose primary role at UF is in academic affairs. We have those whose primary role at UF is in student affairs. We have engineers, humanists, clergy, artists, advisors, scientists, those who work in business.

Yet, both in spite of and because of our diversity, we all are invited today to become *one large working group* to help us enter in the next phase of development of this program that holds promise to be transformational for our students, our undergraduate experience we offer them, for our surrounding community, for everyone of us. Besides bringing us all together today, the other goals of today's conference are to expand the already open channels that have been initially etched to allow continued input into the development of UF Quest; to assist everyone here in understanding her or his roles in UF Quest's development and to broadcast this new knowledge to your respective cohorts; to introduce meaning-making and purpose exploration, the overall theme of UF Quest; and to provide practical next steps in continuing or starting—possibly as early tomorrow— in infusing meaning-making practices into our work with our students. These goals echo what the majority of you submitted in your responses to our pre-conference question that asked what are your hopes for this conference.

[Slide] We are fortunate to have with us this morning, Provost Joseph Glover, who will launch our conference today and provide a basis for the important role UF Quest will play in UF's path to preeminence.

Dr. Glover has been UF Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs since July 2008. Since arriving at UF in 1983,

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Dr. Glover has chaired the Mathematics Department and served as Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, Interim Dean, and Interim Provost. Dr. Glover earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Cornell University and master's and doctoral degrees in mathematics from the University of California, San Diego. His research work in the areas of probability theory, stochastic processes, and potential theory has led to numerous prestigious fellowships and grants, including from the National Science Foundation, Air Force Office of Scientific Research, and the National Security Agency.

Please welcome Dr. Joe Glover.”

*[Provost Glover's remarks here.]*

**[Lindner]:** Thank you, Joe, for leading us into this conference with greater awareness of the importance of UF Quest to the university, students, and all engaged in the work required for each phase of this program's life. I also wish to personally thank you for your support of the UF Core Program concept from its earliest stages, in guiding the university in the first actions after the pre-eminence legislation was released, in providing funding support to pilot and launch courses, and in generously sharing your wisdom with me as I have taken on leading this effort of radical change and the natural fear and distrust that may accompany it. *[Give Joe a note pad and pen as a gift.]*

[Slide] Many of you may recall that UF Quest was instigated by what we refer to now as the Preeminence Legislation in 2013, allowing preeminent universities in Florida to offer a shared experience for all first-time-in-college students. You see the original wording of the legislation on this slide.

[Slide] The draft model of UF Quest you see here, on which we ask you to dwell today has been a target of focus in the past 6 months by four task forces that I will describe in more detail later this morning. The overall theme woven throughout this program of coursework and experiential learning is **Meaning-Making and Purpose Exploration** and is, I believe, best introduced by a quote attributed to Mark Twain [Slide], who said, “*The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.*” If we are lucky enough to experience that second day, we have discovered our unique gifts and how to give those gifts in a way that magnifies the giving of meaning to our lives and to those around us.

As envisioned today, UF Quest combines courses in the Humanities, Natural and Social Sciences, and experiential learning with deep mentoring from our UF and surrounding community. The *intention* of this program is to reconnect students to understanding the value of general education in their individual quest for meaning *within* community, a journey that every human takes regardless of background. If we design and deliver this program carefully and well, UF Quest should draw students more deeply into the areas of general education, some pursuing majors in these areas and all understanding the non-negotiable value of liberal education in the life-long process of weaving an examined life into successfully living out their chosen career path.

**[Lindner]:** [Slide] Today, we enter into a new phase of planning for UF Quest. With the task force work underway, now is the time to start to dig in on a broader scale. If we are successful in our actions today, your participation in this conference will yield outcomes that will allow us all to have common understanding of the purpose of UF Quest, a clear

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definition of meaning-making and purpose exploration not only in UF Quest but also in your respective roles in life, confidence in your role as a UF Quest collaborator, practical ideas for introducing meaning-making in your work with undergraduate students, and inspiration to contribute to the Great Work that is ahead of us in shaping, developing, finalizing, and launching this impactful program.

How we emerge from this conversation today and what you all contribute during our activities today will set a course for the next phase of development for UF Quest. I recognize that some of you have concerns about the proposed model for UF Quest, and today's conference provides space for you to voice your concerns and also to listen. For those of you who are strong proponents of this program, I ask you too to give voice to your concerns and also to listen. [Slide] As we soon launch our first discussion activity, I wish to remind us all of the basic tenets that guide civil conversations. I ask us all to model these tenets today with the awareness that these are the very same principles that we wish to impress on our students through UF Quest through our teaching of and modeling for our students.

- ✓ Everyone has a valid voice.
- ✓ Be liberated to have passion.
- ✓ Listen closely to each other.
- ✓ Engage in civil discourse that respects "the other".
- ✓ Do not make your differences personal in either direction.
- ✓ Be open to change within yourself and externally.
- ✓ Go into this process knowing that today will not be the last opportunity to provide feedback.

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Thank you in advance for adhering to these tenets today and when you return to your work with our students and your colleagues.

[Slide] Now, I have the great pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker and my conference co-host, Dr. Michele Murray.

Dr. Murray serves Seattle University as Vice President for Student Development. She provides leadership for integrating students' intellectual, spiritual, and emotional development, ensuring a vibrant campus life, promoting students' health and well-being, and delivering excellent services and programs. Michele has served on several executive boards, including NASPA's Center for Women. As you all know, Michele co-authored *Helping College Students Find Purpose: The Campus Guide to Meaning Making*, and she is co-author of *Teaching College Students Communication Strategies for Effective Social Justice Advocacy* and numerous articles. Michele has served higher education for 20 years, and she lives in Seattle with her husband and daughter and their dog and three cats.

Along the way of this day, Michele will assist us today in defining meaning-making and purpose exploration in the context of today's college student, guiding us all in shaping our own commitments to including meaning-making in our respective roles both on and off campus, and building a strong community of meaning mentors who are inspired to see this program come to life in our students, starting in the Fall of 2018.

Please join me in a warm welcome of Dr. Michele Murray, who will first give us an overview of today's program and then transition us into our sharing our own stories as a means of getting to know each other.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE DAY**

*[A brief summary of each activity planned for the day]*

**[Murray]:**

*[Important points to make: Make sure to include an encouragement of those who know little about UF Quest to ask others questions and of those who know more about the program to offer your knowledge. Also, be welcoming to connecting with those within and outside of your group. Many of you expressed a desire for more meaningful connections with people in different areas on campus, and this is a wonderful opportunity to live out that desire.]*

## **TELLING OUR STORIES**

*[An exercise to allow group members to get to know each other and to begin engaging in the concepts of meaning-making and purpose exploration in higher education]*

**[Murray]:** We have designed this program to include both reflection and group activities throughout the day, to mirror how we envision the experiences in UF Quest will be developed for your students. As our first exercise today, we would like to you pull out the handout, entitled “Telling Our Stories.” For the next 10 minutes, we ask that you ponder on the questions provided in the “Quiet Reflection Exercise.” After we will call you to attention, we would like for you to engage in discussion with your group partners under the guidance of your group leader. You will have 25 minutes of sharing and recording your responses that capture common themes, significant differences and outcomes. In the final 10 minutes of this session, we will ask group leaders to share your groups’ summaries to the collective group.

Please begin the personal reflection exercise.

## **BREAK (10 MINUTES)**

### **KEYNOTE ADDRESS AND Q&R**

*[A definition of meaning-making and purpose exploration, description of the transformative potential of including this in the curriculum and an introduction to practical tools for student engagement in this area]*

**[Murray]:**

### **INTRO**

Good morning, once again. It is a pleasure to be with you all at the nascent stage of what promises to be a visionary approach to undergraduate education at the University of Florida. Of course, I want to thank Dr. Angela Lindner for inviting me to be here for this significant gathering. More importantly, though, I want to thank her and the entire team for venturing into this territory based on the belief that students desire and deserve more from their college education. I also want to acknowledge and thank my co-author, Dr. Robert Nash, who was unable to be with us today. Without Robert, we would not have a national conversation about meaning-making and purpose exploration on our campuses.

Finally, let me say thank you to all of you who contributed such thoughtful reflections on your personal journeys of meaning and purpose. What wisdom we have in the room!



I am so grateful to be in such good company. Each one of your responses was more inspiring than the next, and I'm delighted to share some of them with you today.

I'm here to set the stage for the work we will accomplish together today, and the work you will continue long after I'm back in Seattle. All of us come from different parts of the university and the surrounding community, but what binds us is our commitment to students--to their growth and development--to their own journeys of meaning and purpose. Regardless of our university roles, I believe—sincerely believe—that helping students make meaning, understand their gifts and talents, and find their purpose is what our work with students is about. Underneath the courses and syllabi, the programs and events, the scholarship, the conduct meetings, and all the other pursuits that keep us busy day-to-day... Underneath all of this is the privilege we have to accompany students as they discover who they are and who they are meant to be in the world.

### **ELLA STORY**

Since we do come from different parts of the university, allow me to set the context for the work I do with students. At a cocktail party when someone asks what I do I usually say that I'm in student affairs or university administration. If they look intrigued or even the tiniest bit interested, I might add that I am responsible for the out-of-class learning and development for college students. You all are in the know, so these words might mean something to you. Unfortunately most people respond with a look that says, "I have no idea how to respond."

I can't count the number of times this has happened to me. But last year someone really surprised me with crystal clear comprehension. That someone was my daughter, Ella. **SLIDE** She was three years old at the time.

I was at a welcome reception for a group of students and their families. It was a Saturday, and I brought Ella with me. When it came time for me to deliver the formal welcome, the emcee finished her introduction with, "Please welcome Dr. Michele Murray." At which point Ella said in the loudest voice possible, "Mommy, you're not a doctor!" She was looking at me sideways as if to say, "You can't fool me. I've seen Doc McStuffins, and Lady, you are no Doc McStuffins!" Without skipping a beat, Ella piped up again and explained to me—and everyone else—what I really do. "Mommy," she said, "your job is to help kids grow up."

**SLIDE** Your job is to help kids—students—grow up... Pretty astute for a three year-old. In her own way, Ella was saying that my job is to help students become themselves.

## **EDUCATE FOR THE WHY**

To help students become themselves: this is the work of all of us. Whatever our role on campus, we educate. With a nod to my co-author, Robert Nash, who loves etymology, our English word "educate" comes from the Latin *educare*, which means to lead or draw out. As educators, we have the most awesome and noble responsibility to draw out of our students who they truly

are. And for me, this is where meaning and purpose exploration come into play.

The team working on the concepts for UF Quest chose a Mark Twain quote almost as a mantra. Twain wrote: The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.

Our work as educators is to draw out of students their own why. Whether through academic challenge, internship and career exploration, or on-campus involvement, the undergraduate experience is full of opportunities for students to discover their why.

UF Quest is about creating pathways for students to discover and hone their gifts and talents, to clarify their values, to live deeply. UF Quest is about educating students for the "why."

## **EMPTINESS**

When I found my way to higher education over 20 years ago, I met student after student who seemed absolutely unacquainted with their own why. Some students simply had not encountered the questions that lead to a sense of knowing, and some were actively avoiding the questions all together. These students touched my heart, and I dedicated my work to helping them expand their horizons.

For the most part I kept this purpose to myself. It took almost 10 years for me to share my observations with anyone. The person I talked to was Robert Nash. Robert and I could not be

more different: I, an African American woman in the early stages of her career. Robert, a white man at the... other side of his career. I, a Roman Catholic. He, a secular humanist. I, a student affairs professional working in a small, Jesuit, private college. He, one of two full university professors at a large, state flagship. Despite our obvious differences, we were both intrigued by the same phenomena in students. We talked for hours, and the idea for a book was born.

What was it that prompted me to break my silence about my self-appointed secret mission?: The Pew Research Center's 2007 seminal study on the millennials. Pew asked 600 young people about their life's goals:

- 10% Become more spiritual
- 22% Be a leader
- 30% Help people in need
- SLIDE**
- 51% Become famous
- 81% Get rich

In a follow-up article (in USA Today, I believe) the reporter asked college students about these findings. For students, these results rang true. One student responded like this: "When you open a celebrity magazine, it's all about the money and being rich and famous... We see reality TV shows with Jessica (Simpson) and Nick (Lachey) living the life. – Remember... this was 2007— We see Britney and Paris (Spears

and Hilton). The people we relate to outside our friends are those people."

In today's terms, I guess the role model equivalents would be Kim Kardashian and Kanye West. On the one hand, I was shocked with the candid response. On the other hand I was not surprised in the least. In the absence of their own compelling narrative, many of our students are setting their standards by what they see in popular culture—no matter how fabricated or fantastical.

### **YOU CAN DO MORE**

Truth be told, I wasn't all that different when I was in college. My own journey to meaning making and the extraordinary life began with an auspicious conversation with my mother about my post-graduation career plans. I announced: I'm moving to New York to become a VJ for MTV!

My mom, who does not remember this conversation, reacted in the most unusual way. She was not surprised or disappointed. She simply said, "Michele, you are so talented and have so much to offer. You can do so much more with your life." At the time, I didn't know what she meant by "more." The life I planned for myself sounded great to me...the fast pace, the glamour, the money. This is what I thought it meant to lead an extraordinary life. **SLIDE** My mother offered me a different possibility.

Not every student will be as lucky to have a parent lovingly challenge their notions of the extraordinary the way my

mother did for me. But all of our students have us. We can invite our students to consider a different possibility. **SLIDE**

Think back to your own college years. How many of you discovered your "why," or at least caught a glimpse of it, with the help of a teacher or mentor who saw more in you than you were able to see in yourself? How many of you are willing to give that same gift to a student today?

## **MEANING AND PURPOSE**

Through intentional meaning-making, we can help students begin to discover their own whys and develop their own compelling narrative for what it means to lead an extraordinary life.

Put simply, making meaning is about the ways we understand and interpret our relationships, our experiences, and the major events of our lives. It is about becoming aware of the ways our values influence our interpretations and becoming aware of how we are changing because of the people we meet and the experiences we have.

As we understand how we make sense of ourselves, the world, and our place in it, we can begin to see how to best use our gifts and talents. Some of you called this, "purpose." Purpose is what gets us out of bed in the morning... it's our why.

Meaning and purpose sustain us when times are difficult and encourage us to continue on when the questions of life become too big.

## MEANING CHALLENGES

Our students experience meaning challenges regularly. My question to you and to me is, how do we accompany them through their meaning challenges?

How do we sit with them when they fail? When an important relationship ends abruptly or badly or both? When that controversial classroom discussion hits too close to home? When a family member falls ill or dies? When they are wrestling with doubt and other personal demons? When they are choosing a career path? Or when they are making sense of the tremendous social concerns we face? Underneath it all, they are asking the BIG questions: **SLIDE**

- Who am I... really?
- What should I believe and why should I believe it?
- What do I do with my woundedness?
- What does it mean for me to be successful?
- Am I worthy of being loved?
- What should I do with my life?

The funny thing about these big life questions is that they keep coming around every few years **SLIDE** throughout life. If we don't learn how to face them, we will learn to fear them. Some of us will be tempted to give into the fear. **SLIDE** And the fear can become an enormous barrier.

## GEN Z AND THE DESIRE FOR MEANING

The good news is that Generation Z, the students who are beginning to arrive on campus now, desires meaning.

Born between 1995 and 2010, Gen Z grew up in a post-9/11 world where the phones they hold in their hands are as powerful as the computers that sit on their parents' desks. Their world knows no boundaries in that they are as connected to events happening half-way around the globe as they are to events happening in their home towns. As such, Gen Z has been characterized as realistic rather than idealistic like their predecessors, the millennials. They are globally-minded with a greater desire to seek positive change in the world. The way they connect on social media has changed: Facebook usage is down; Snapchat and YouTube are up.

Gen Z is creative and innovative, they want to be involved, and... they are hurting.

Earlier this year, the American College Health Association released its annual report of the National College Health Assessment. In spring 2016, over 80,000 undergraduates at 137 colleges and universities responded to the national survey. Generally speaking, the results are eye-opening to say the least, but I'd like to call your attention to a few items in particular. Of 80,000 respondents, **SLIDE**

- 51% reported feeling hopeless in the last 12 months
- In that same time period:



- 86% felt overwhelmed
- 61% felt very lonely
- 37% felt so depressed it was difficult to function
- 59% felt overwhelming anxiety
- 7% engaged in self-injurious behavior
- 11% seriously considered suicide

In my line of work, these data are alarming, but they are not surprising. Day after day I encounter students who fall into one or more of these categories. And my colleagues and I spend time with them helping them to make themselves whole again. No wonder Generation Z has named meaning as one of their great desires.

In her book, **How to Raise an Adult**, Julie Lythcott-Haims links the increase in anxiety to what she calls over-parenting and the check-listed childhood. In her 10 years as the Dean of Freshmen at Stanford University, Lythcott-Haims observed a rapid increase in the number of over-involved parents and a corresponding decline in resilience and personal agency among students.

"Bulldozer parenting" may, indeed, be at the heart of the psychological woes our students are experiencing at higher and higher rates each year. In fact, I believe parenting choices and family dynamics do play a large role.

However, I believe something more fundamental to the human condition is at play here. Viktor Frankl, renowned psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, made an insightful observation that has become the touchstone of my work with meaning and purpose. Frankl wrote: **SLIDE** meaning to live for

*The truth is that as the struggle for survival has subsided, the question has emerged--survival for what? Ever more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for.*

Frankl's quote is as relevant today as it was in 1979, perhaps even more so. Again, no wonder Generation Z has named meaning as one of their great desires. As much as colleges and universities educate students so they will have the means to live, I believe we are also responsible for educating them for meaning.

## TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

We have the opportunity to help students satisfy their desire for meaning by teaching them tools and strategies for engaging their big questions. Tools and strategies that can serve them well for a lifetime. Let me offer a few. **SLIDE**

1. **Click** Become comfortable engaging students with tough topics. By engagement, I don't mean grandstanding or politicizing. I mean opening space for honest dialogue, eliciting students' questions, and endeavoring together to understand.

Racial bias in policing, in the court systems, and, sadly, on our campuses. Trans-inclusion. Climate change and

divestment from fossil fuels. Income inequality. Political and religious extremism. These are but a few of the issues students are hungry to talk about and make sense of. How do these issues show up in course assignments or in student organizations?

We are four short days away from the most bizarre presidential election most of us have experienced. This has been an election cycle that has exposed sensitive imperfections in the fabric of our society. Students desire real dialogue not just hot-headed opinions blasted in 140 characters and clever hashtags.

We live in a world with no shortage of tough topics to tackle, most of which have no easy answers. Our role is not to provide answers but to courageously open the door for dialogue, hear our students' questions, and nudge them toward greater understanding.

2. **Click** Create opportunities for purposeful silence. Our students move and live at a frenetic pace... always connected, always dialed in. (So do we.) Silence... is uncomfortable. Our students—and we—don't know what to do with it. In a recent study, subjects entered a room with a chair, a table, and a small electric contraption on the table. They were told to sit still and think. 65% couldn't do it. Instead of allowing themselves to "be" in silence they chose to reach for the contraption, even though it delivered an electric shock each time. Can you imagine... preferring self-administered electric shock to quiet time alone with your thoughts?

We are so accustomed to stimulus that we can hardly bear to be alone with ourselves in silence. Yet silence is

where we get to know ourselves, where we let the experiences of our lives sink in and become part of us. Silence is essential to meaning making, and none of us, particularly our students, get enough of it. Two minutes of silence before starting class or a meeting. A deliberate pause before asking or answering a question. These are simple ways we can introduce the benefits of silence to our students--and ourselves.

3. **Click** Ask good questions. Good questions are at the heart of what it means to educate--to lead or draw out. Good questions can be philosophical in nature: What does it mean to live the good life? Or Just because we can, does that mean we should? Or How are we to live? These are the questions that invite students to think, to weave together threads from multiple disciplines. These are the questions that help them clarify who and how and why they are.

Good questions can also draw out students' stories. When we ask good questions and let them know that we truly see and hear them, we are communicating love. Dave Isay, founder of Story Corps, says, "Listening is an act of love." It's as true with us and our students as it is with Story Corps: listening well comes after asking good questions. When we ask, we are telling our students they are worthy of love. That they are enough as they are.

(There. I said it. Did you catch it? I used the "L" word. Love. It's not a word we use comfortably in academia. Be careful, I may use it again...)

These are but three rather simple tools and strategies to help students make meaning of the events, experiences, and

relationships of their lives. What I like about these tools is that they're accessible. They're perfect for one-on-one meetings with students in advising appointments and conduct hearings. And they also work with intact groups in the classroom and out as with student organizations or residence hall communities. Perhaps what I like best about these tools is that they are transformational—not just for our students, but also for ourselves.

## **WE NEED TO DO OUR OWN MEANING MAKING**

There is one catch. (And in the spirit of full disclosure, I have learned it the hard way. I find I have lots of opportunities to relearn.) The catch is this: To be an effective meaning mentor, we have to do our own meaning-making. Let me say that again: To be an effective meaning mentor, we have to do our own meaning-making.

The week Dr. Lindner first contacted me about UF Quest and the possibility of joining you all for this conference, my week looked like this... **SLIDE** The work on my desk did this... **SLIDE** And I felt like this... **SLIDE**

(Ahh. There it is. The laughter of recognition. I see I'm not alone in having weeks like this.)

Frankly, this cycle repeated itself several times over the summer, last week, and the week before.

At times I found myself wondering if I needed to consider another line of work. **SLIDE** or perhaps this. **SLIDE** (You think I'm kidding?)

Somehow I needed to get back to this... **SLIDE**

And so I used the same tools I use with students on myself. I made time for silence (and for me this includes prayer and yoga--for others this might look like journaling, meditation, or long runs). I sought out people who could ask me good questions, so I could literally hear myself think, feel, and connect my head to my heart. Without the intentional meaning making and reconnecting to my purpose, I might very well be investing in a food truck or a surf side rental shop today. But I would not be living what I know to be my own why.

As much as meaning and purpose are my mantras, I experience first-hand how difficult it can be to make time for silence and asking myself the tough questions.

We cannot help others find meaning if we are not doing the work ourselves. Our roles are very challenging, and we face a lot of big questions. It is okay to not know the answers sometimes. Engaging in our own meaning work requires that we allow ourselves to be vulnerable. If you're familiar with Brene Brown's work, you know that vulnerability is the secret to whole-hearted living... to having the ability to fully experience the joy and pain of life... to living with passion... to leading with purpose.

If we are mindful of our own meaning making, we will be more effective meaning mentors. We will be more effective at

accompanying our students. When we accompany our students we provide a safe place for them to sort their thoughts, to disentangle their deepest longings and desires from their shoulds and shouldn'ts, their musts and mustn'ts. When we accompany students, we let them know in a real and unmistakable way that they matter. And we create space for them to make meaning. We create space for them to define and redefine their own why.

### **DISCOVERING THE WHY LEADS TO THE EXTRAORDINARY**

"The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why."

When we discover the why of our own life, when we have the courage to live our why, we open the possibility of leading a life that is extraordinary.

What you are building in UF Quest is the opportunity for your students to discover their own why. In your role as meaning mentors, you will help them build up the courage they need. Leading the extraordinary life... Well, that's on them. But surely what they experience with UF Quest will give them a running start.

### **INSPIRE**

Let me close with a few of your reflections on discovering your whys.

One of you wrote,

Another offered,

And finally, one of you said,

**SLIDE** Thank you to all of you for sharing your inspiring stories. May we take this wisdom you've offered with us as we help to outline UF Quest. In UF Quest, this university has a distinct opportunity to differentiate itself around the thing that happens to matter a great deal to students in this generation. I am humbled to be a witness to this great unfolding. Thank you for inspiring students to discover their whys. It is an honor to share this noble purpose with you.

*[Michele opens up the audience to Questions and Responses. At the end, Lindner closes this session and sends everyone to break.]*

## **BREAK (10 MINUTES)**

### **UF QUEST: A CORE FOR THIS GENERATION**

*[Lindner presents a brief history of previous model of program and challenges. An introduction to the task force leadership and work. Opening all to questions in need of their solutions.]*

**[Lindner]:** [Slide] I mentioned previously the legislative liberty that brought forth the ability to offer a shared experience like UF Quest. Since 2013 when that legislation was passed, UF responded by coalescing a concept for the program and by engaging campus in participating in the program.

Many here today recall a call for proposals that my predecessor, Dr. Bernard Mair, released for courses that focus on a grand challenge that would be developed by at least 3



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colleges. The image on this slide provides the model OF the original vision for the UF Core Program, to which it was referred then. Every first-time-in-college student would take all three of these courses: “What Is the Good Life?”, which had already begun to be offered to all first-time-in-college students, and the other two courses selected from the wide array of proposals submitted to Dr. Mair’s call, “The Challenge of Climate Change” and “An Informed Life: People and Data.” Every student would enroll in these 9 credit hours in addition to their other course requirement, and they would complete these courses within the first two years here at UF before they move on into the heart of their chosen major’s coursework.

*Overview of current model of program and how it addresses challenges of previous model*

When I began my role as Associate Provost in September 2015, I inherited this program in this version with the addition of two new courses, “Extreme Events” and one designed by UF International Center, both approved by Dr. Mair before he left UF. During the Fall 2015 and early Spring 2016 semesters, I went on a listening tour about this model of the program. I gathered feedback through formal channels of our University Curriculum Committee, General Education Committee, Advisory Council for Undergraduate Affairs composed of all associate deans of undergraduate colleges, the Dean of Students Office, and Office of Admissions. I shared this model with student classes and with our Student Advisory Council for Undergraduate Affairs and with our UF Student Government president at the time, Joselin Padron-Rasines. I met informally with groups and individuals as well, including with deans, associate deans, faculty, staff including our advisors and students, many of you who are here today.

[Slides] Common themes emerged in these conversations, and they surrounded the concerns of the impossibility of adding 9 additional credit hours to many of our already over-taxed curricula, the lack of overall theme or purpose of engaging in this core program, leading to students more actively questioning the purpose of these required courses and their lack of choice within a core program. Also, concerns were expressed about the impracticality of moving 6,600 students through all of the courses.

Digesting these concerns, I drew up a new proposed model for this core program. I shared this model with many of you, with deans, with advisors, with students in hours of meetings and conversation, getting a sense of whether there was receptivity in at least moving forward in mutual collaboration in developing the final version of this program. [Slide] In April 2016, I released a report that provided a detailed basis for proposing the new model as our starting point. [Slide] At the heart of this report is this map, which charts the proposed program.

The first three experiences, intended to be taken in each of the students first three years as a UF student, make up the required portion of this proposed program, as you see here on this slide, with the fourth experience optional for colleges or programs. The required portion of Experience 1 consists of the “What Is the Good Life” course that is reshaped to weave into the other components of the program. First-Year Florida, an existing one-credit-hour course will be encouraged as a means of transitioning the students into their new role as student. Experience 2 is proposed to consist of one course that the student will intentionally select from a group of natural science and social science courses including the already approved courses I previously mentioned. Experience 3 involves

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students pursuing some form of experiential learning outside of the traditional classroom, an internship or co-op, study abroad, community service, undergraduate research, and the like.

Interwoven into the academic content of each of these general education courses is mentoring of students through each stage of their questioning and reflection, starting in Experience 1 with “*Who am I? What are my gifts? Why am I here?*”, continuing in Experience 2 with “*What is the need of this world? How can my gifts meet that need?*”, and culminating in Experience 3 with living these questions out in the world in an experiences that allows them to try their giving of their gifts to the world on a trial, or pilot-scale, basis. They return to campus to be further honed as they prepare to fully embrace the world in their chosen next steps after graduation.

Because some colleges and programs expressed an interest in developing a senior-year major-specific capstone course that would bring all of their general education and discipline-specific education together in a culminating experience before they graduate, I provided space for consideration of the optional UF Core Experience 4, along with a concept of a Final-Year Florida course, taught by programs or colleges, for their majors as a means of transitioning the students out into the world beyond the real and virtual walls of UF.

Threaded throughout these experiences is envisioned an e-portfolio platform. In this platform, students will post the efforts of their engagement in these experiences, showing evidence of their reflection of the content of these experiences as well as their growth through the educational experiences here at UF and, practically, providing them a platform for an

extended transcript they can share with potential employers, graduate or professional schools, etc.

[Slide] The desired outcomes of these programs, among many others, include aforementioned deeper connection to our general education courses and program here at UF. As Michele so beautifully painted for us in her presentation, this program attempts to allow students to explore their inner landscape and to weave their inner selves into their coursework, their decisions about their major, career, and how they wish to live their life beyond UF. Along the path of the stages of their growth here, they will be surrounded by meaning mentors both on and off campus. Ultimately, we strongly hope this program will magnify the good work in our Student Affairs to impart on our students greater resilience in living through the waves, shadows, and joys of life while here as a student and beyond.

[Slide] Here, you see the logo for the program and the UF Seal. I had presented to a class of our Reitz Scholars in the spring about the general shape of this proposed program. In response and truly in the spirit of the UF Quest program, a graphic design student in our College of the Arts, Maria Pitt, who was in that class and moved by the desired outcomes of this program, volunteered her skills in designing the logo as one last act of giving of herself to UF before she graduated in May. She took the ship from the UF seal to, as she described, represent each student who, despite facing waves and shadow, is directly and confidently sailing in and towards the light, which Maria took to represent each student's unique purpose.

*Where we seek input today and moving forward*

[Slide] Let me very quickly provide you a sense of where we need your advice and constructive assistance both today and in the weeks to come as we formalize the shape of this program. Please keep in mind these questions on this slide and those put in front of you in the lunch and afternoon breakout sessions for your future reference and feedback.

- First, can you assist Dr. Wolpert in streamlining IUF1000 into the whole of the UF Quest program, addressing any concerns that you might have or have heard about the course in the past, while also understanding the real evolution of this course in the past few years? What might be implemented both in or outside of this course to draw students into the Humanities as a means of allaying concerns voiced by the Humanities program that this course may feed the national trend of decreasing enrollment in this area?
- Some in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences have expressed concern about the *second* experience's potential for preventing students from finding majors in the Humanities or being able to explore other general education courses. Other programs, such as my home of Engineering, very pleased with the UF International credit accompanying this experience, have expressed concern about adding hours to the total credit hours to degree because of their already high total count. I ask all of us to be creative in thinking of ways to achieve the outcome this experience intends to open the student to the need of the world that may dampen the potential for the negative outcome that so worries our Humanities faculty and many other programs on campus.

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- What are ways and who are contacts for us to form a strong collaboration with the Gainesville community in seeing the third experience come to life in the form of community service, internships, and other experiential learning? How can we leverage resources and channels that are already in place?
- Provide any wisdom you might have in e-portfolio platforms, use, and expanded transcripts for students. How might the e-portfolio also be used for assessment of the individual components and the program?
- Finally, I ask you to ponder the theme of meaning-making and purpose exploration and provide ways in which this theme is universal for *all* UF students. There is a group of faculty who strongly believe that I am bringing religion onto campus with this theme for UF Quest. I do strongly believe that all students should have the freedom to plumb their depths in search of meaning, non-believers and believers alike, here on campus both in and outside of the classroom, thus avoiding turning their subjects of study into more objects to be studied. If we wish to honor the diversity of all of our students and teach them how to honor and celebrate that diversity, how then do we present to them meaning-making and purpose exploration without becoming divisive?

I thank you in advance for constructive feedback and an understanding that our task force chairs and I are always open to receiving direct communication about this program. I ask you, for every criticism you have, please offer a way to resolve your concern, and I thank you also for following and encouraging in others our tenets of civil discourse as you do so.

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[Slide] At about the same time Maria created the logo for this program, I recruited four faculty members to lead four task forces, one for each experience and one for e-portfolio development. Dr. Andy Wolpert, Dr. Ata Sarajedini, Dr. Chris Hass, and Dr. Elayne Colon agreed to serve in this capacity. I also requested of many of you in the room and of others on campus names of individuals to serve on the task forces, and these groups have been diligently at work since this summer laying groundwork for this next phase of development in anticipation of the Fall 2018 launch. I cannot thank each task force member enough for their hard work already in progress and for our chairs, now including Dr. David Miller who has agreed to taken on leadership of the second task force in December when Dr. Sarajedini will sadly leave UF to assume a dean's position at FIU. I thank all of these chairs for their modeling gracious and hopeful leadership to the entire campus, including me.

[Slide] This is a slide I prepared for each of them for our first meeting together as a reminder of the importance of each member communicating their good work to each other and throughout campus and to keep in mind common objectives that could be woven throughout the program. As you will hear now from each chair, this work has begun, but there is much left to do!

I now ask each chair to come forward in the order of their task force number to provide a very brief overview of the work in their respective groups.

*[Each chair presents her/his slide. Dr. Andy Wolpert, Dr. Ata Sarajedini and Dr. David Miller, Dr. Chris Hass, and Dr. Elayne Colon]*

## **WORKING LUNCH**

*[An opportunity to share with different participants leading questions for preparation for afternoon break-out session]*

**[Murray]:** Now, it's time for lunch! We will explain what we are asking of you during lunch in parts. Before we have you get up to serve yourself, the first part of explanation is to take your plate of food and drink to a different table and sit with other attendees who are not in your working group. This will give you a chance to meet new people and perhaps give birth to new ideas. Make sure you take your packet of handouts with you, or at least the handout for this Working Lunch portion of the conference.

Once everyone is seated, we'll explain the next part of the exercise. Enjoy!

**[Murray]:** Now that everyone is seated, let me briefly explain what we are asking you to do now. If you would, please take the handout, labeled "Working Lunch". The purpose of this exercise is to have you do the needed processing work in order for you to give your best feedback in the afternoon breakout session after lunch.

What we are asking you to do is to share with each other your responses to the questions provided on the Working Lunch handout. We ask one of you at each table to volunteer as recorder to take down common themes in responses to the questions either on the large paper at your table or on a regular sheet of paper.

Before our next session begins at 12:45, I'll ask each recorder to provide Angela and me the table summary so that we can



include these in the conference summary. Enjoy the conversation and the food!

### **BREAKOUT: UF QUEST INPUT AND ADVICE**

*[Groups will focus on different components of UF Quest, providing feedback on assets that can help in implementation of UF Quest, barriers that will hinder its progress, best advice on how to leverage assets and eliminate barriers, and content that should be included in the program.]*

**[Lindner]:** Welcome back from lunch! Now we enter into the heart of this day in a break-out session with your group that will give you the opportunity to analyze each component of UF Quest as it is proposed now and to provide advice on moving forward. [Slide] Please note the location of your group and the part of UF Quest that will be the focus of your discussion on this slide. We ask Groups 1 through 4 to move to Room **3320** by following your group leader. Do not forget your packet of handouts!

All other groups remain here in the Rion Ballroom. Every group, please follow the instructions and guidance of your group leader throughout the session. As noted on the program, everyone returns to this room to begin Collective Group Sharing promptly at 2:15 p.m.

Michele and I will be roaming among the groups to answer any questions that may arise. Please do not hesitate to find one of us should you wish for us to clarify any part of this process.

### **COLLECTIVE GROUP SHARING**

*[Group leaders share each group's summary on its top three ideas to the entire conference group.]*

**[Lindner]:** We welcome you back from your discussions! Now, starting with Group 1, we would like for the group leaders to share the top three ideas that have bubbled up from her or his group. We have 30 minutes and 10 groups so we ask that each leader take no more than 2 minutes, leaving time for any final comments.

## **BREAK (15 MINUTES)**

### **PERSONAL SYNTHESIS AND SHARING**

*[Each member reflects on what s/he has learned today and shares commitments with their smaller group and collectively on how to include meaning-making and purpose exploration into their own roles on and off campus.]*

**[Murray]:** We would like for everyone to spend the next 10 minutes reflecting on what you might have learned today. You may use the handout labeled “Personal Synthesis” as a guide. When I call you to attention, we will then ask that you share within your small group some of your thoughts for about 10 minutes. In the final 10 minutes, we’ll ask group leaders to share a common theme in her/his group’s reflections.

### **WRAP UP**

*[Lindner provides summary of what we learned today, take-away highlights, and the path forward in development of UF Quest.]*

**[Lindner]:** Before I begin my conclusions, I would like to take the time to thank Michele Murray. Michele not only gave her all today in providing her expertise and guidance in our conference but she also has been a partner for me in preparing for this day, a cheerleader of encouragement in continuing to move forward with this audacious program, and a wise soul in

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how to live life compassionately and with authenticity. Would you all join me in thanking Michele for her already deep influence on our campus?

I would like to now close this important and perhaps historic meeting by providing meaning to this great and invaluable work you have accomplished today. In the next few minutes, I would like to share with you what has struck me the most deeply in our bonding today over this common theme of UF Quest. I will also give you a sense of the channels for continued communication, advice, and feedback to our chairs and me about the program, while also giving you a sense of a timeline in finalizing the program's framework, moving forward with development, approvals, piloting, and launch.

I am grateful that you chose to spend your day with us in this positive, hopeful way. Thank you for your energy, enthusiasm, and openness to sharing a little of yourself and what you believe to be your purpose. I am humbled by your honesty.

Some things that I have learned from you today is....

Examples of exciting suggestions that our task forces will ponder include.....

We will compile all of the feedback from today's discussions into a report that will then be shared with our task force chairs and with the entire community by posting on our web site. We will also post the video of the presentations this morning for your reference and for your sharing with others. In the next few weeks, we will provide an opportunity for anyone with access to the site to provide their input into this proposed model for UF Quest. We will be taking feedback until the end of this semester, after which, *first* we rest over the holidays,

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and *then* the task force chairs and I will respond to feedback by possibly refining the framework of UF Quest for subsequent sharing.

We are also contemplating an all-task-force convening in early December, schedule- and body-willing. We will be making an announcement through our task force chairs if we come to a positive answer to this question of holding another meeting at this time *or* in early spring. We also desire to hold a combined in-person and virtual student town hall meeting, led by our Student Advisory Council for Undergraduate Affairs under the leadership of Clay Hurdle, sometime in the spring semester to allow our greater student population to provide feedback and their own wisdom in shaping this shared experience for those who will come behind them.

Starting in the spring semester, and possibly earlier, the courses and program will be finalized and submitted through the normal approval channels of our University Curriculum Committee and General Education Committee. Before then, however, both committees will be kept abreast of progress in developing the program by the members of the task forces who serve on these committees, by our task force chairs, as well as by me. I will continue to keep the Advisory Council for Undergraduate Affairs updated on program development, allowing opportunity for public feedback in each monthly meeting if desired. Our Student Advisory Council for Undergraduate Affairs has started to address this program, some members of whom have already reached out to their represented cohort to gain feedback and share with me. I will begin monthly meetings with Susan Webster, SG president, and our Student Senate president, Smith Myers, will also engage his group in this important work. I will be presenting the final version of this program to Faculty Senate and to its Academic

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Policy Council in the Spring 2016 or early Fall 2017 semester when details of each experience are more settled in order for me to provide a clear explanation of intent and details of the program. Also on the list of communication action items is for our chairs and me to spread out into the community to share the news of this program and to begin creating stronger bonds with our community in order to ensure that the experiential learning component is transformational for both our students and those residing in this surrounding area. Our UF Foundation has begun to engage donors in hopes of creating endowments to support this program well into the future beyond any of us, and I will likely engage in conversation about the program to potential donors.

In addition to all of these forms of communication in which I will engage, my longstanding offer to speak with any one about their concerns, ideas, willingness to get to work on this program remains.

I would like to conclude here with encouragement to us all. The past few months have been difficult for me and for our task force chairs, as tension surrounding this program has evolved at times in ways that I see as nothing short of ugly and certainly short of the ideal for the high character we expect of everyone associated with *this* university. It has become personal.

Yet, I see that even in this tension, in the contradictions, and perhaps *especially* in this tension and in the contradictions, lies our *unity* that everyone seeks on our campus, tangible even in your pre-conference survey responses. This program with its proposed theme of meaning-making and purpose exploration is already touching us deeply and is already exposing the fact that every human being, believer or non-believer,

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administrator or faculty or staff or student or community member, has a deeper side that must confront failure; suffering; deeper connection with others; at times, often when we least expect, experiencing this world and its wonders in awe; the hunger for understanding our life beyond ourselves; and, ultimately, death. Lately, in our disunion through these contradictions, we have stumbled upon our union, what we all share in common. This tells me that we are on the right track because no threshold in which we enter, like the one we peer through towards our status of pre-eminence and this program launch, can be crossed to a new way of being without wrestling with some form of contradiction within ourselves and with each other *and* the courage to walk through it.

[Slide] I ask us all to follow the advice of writer Jacob Needleman in our staying with this contradiction, hang onto it, have hope in it, and show our students how to live through it. Ultimately, we will guide each other through our questions to a third way towards *reconciliation* that will come to light and life within each of us, in whatever form UF Quest takes, and, most importantly, within the lives of our UF students.

*[Stay with the contradiction. If you stay, you will see that there is always something more than two opposing truths. The whole truth always includes a third part, which is the reconciliation.*

-Jacob Needleman, [I Am Not I](#)

I thank you again for your sacrifice of time and wisdom today. Before I open the floor to questions and give you all liberty to leave, I remind our task force chairs to convene in this room at 4:30 p.m. for a post-conference de-briefing. Thank you.

*[Close with Question and Response to Michele and Angela. Officially end the conference afterwards.]*