



OUR OPINION

Record Research Dollars Shows USF Making Giant Strides

The University of South Florida hit another milestone in its effort to become a major national research university, reaching a record \$310 million in research funding this year. This onetime commuter school is evolving into an internationally respected institution of discovery, an achievement that benefits the entire region.

USF President Judy Genshaft has been more than a tireless cheerleader for the institution. When she came here in 2000, USF's research funding was \$124 million. Her relentless pushing and prodding has more than doubled that number and elevated the university's national profile.

Genshaft has a vision to make USF a top 50 research university and her determination is palatable. Asked at a recent meeting her target date for reaching that goal, Genshaft answered only with a steely gaze that conveyed, "Now!"

The task is challenging. Florida isn't exactly known for its academic prowess. Its reputation for shortchanging education and its dismal showings in key rankings like SAT scores and high school graduation rates doesn't help in faculty recruitment.

Nevertheless, USF has managed to bolster its reputation within academic circles. USF is one of the top 63 research universities designated by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. USF also is ranked as one of the fast-growing universities in federal research dollars from the National Science Foundation. Compared to its sister institutions in the Big East — where USF has the dual distinctions of being the biggest and the youngest university — USF posts impressive numbers when it comes to research.

It even has managed to move back up into the third tier of the U.S. News and World Report college rankings — an unscientific survey that nonetheless has a lot of sway when promising students select a college. The university still has work to do in recruiting higher-caliber undergraduate students and improving its graduation rates, but USF leaders are addressing those concerns. And the more prestige USF gains, the more valuable a degree earned there becomes — even one earned decades ago.

So why does USF's progress in research matter to the greater Tampa Bay area community? The research attracts businesses, creates jobs and energizes the economy. More important, it touches people's lives.

Consider the work being done by Dr. Jeffrey Krischer of USF's College of Medicine, who in 2005 was awarded a \$20.1 million National Institutes of Health grant to study Type 1 diabetes. Krischer is heading up an international study that will examine 7,000 children at risk for developing juvenile diabetes, examining every aspect of their genetics and environment in a search for ways to prevent or cure this terrible disease.

The medical school naturally leads the way in winning grants, but other sizable research grants have been won by the College of Nursing, the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute and the College of Marine Sciences.

"Our outreach is global; our vision is global," Krischer said recently in summing up what USF research is all about.

USF has come very far, very fast. Genshaft and her team deserve the community's applause and gratitude.

