

1 FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
2 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE COMMUNITY SESSIONS:
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11 STUDENTS SESSION
12 Wednesday, October 12, 2022
13 Graham Center Ballrooms
14 1:02 p.m. - 2:06 p.m.
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22 Stenographically Reported By:
23 Gina Rodriguez, RPR, CRR
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1 DR. TRESSELL: Good afternoon, everyone.
2 My name is Dr. Sofia Trelles, and it is my
3 pleasure to extend a warm welcome to the members
4 of the FIU community who are joining us today
5 for an opportunity to hear and meet from our
6 presidential candidate finalist,
7 Dr. Kenneth A. Jessell.

8 R. William Funk & Associates, which are
9 based out of Dallas, Texas, has been selected to
10 assist us with a search of FIU's sixth
11 president. The firm has conducted more than 430
12 searches for colleges and university presidents
13 and chancellors. Mr. Funk and his team will be
14 joining us today through Zoom and are here to
15 answer any questions you may have regarding our
16 search process. Today and yesterday's sessions
17 are made available to anyone to attend both in
18 person through Zoom and through WebCast. We
19 want to make sure that it is as successful as
20 possible to any member of our community who may
21 want to have an opportunity to ask a question to
22 our finalist.

23 Dr. Kenneth A. Jessell is interim president
24 of Florida International University, a position
25 he has held since his appointment on

1 January 21st, of 2022. As interim president,
2 Dr. Jessell serves as a chief executive officer
3 of the university and is responsible for
4 academic and educational programs, research
5 enterprises and economic development,
6 advancement in fundraising, community
7 engagement, intercollegiate athletics,
8 diversity, equity and inclusion initiative,
9 human resources and facilities management.

10 Prior to his appointment as interim
11 president, Dr. Jessell served as our senior vice
12 president for finance and administration as well
13 as chief financial officer at FIU from 2009
14 until 2022. In his position, he was responsible
15 for the management and administrations of
16 financials, facility and business services
17 operations of the university, and Dr. Jessell is
18 also a professor of finance in the college of
19 business administration here at FIU. It is my
20 pleasure to introduce you to Dr. Jessell.

21 (APPLAUSE)

22 DR. JESSELL: Thank you, so much, Sofia,
23 for your kind production, and thank you to those
24 of you in the audience for being here this
25 afternoon. It gives me great pride to meet with

1 you, students and former students, SGA leaders
2 and former SGA leaders. So, this is an amazing
3 session for me. I'm certainly honored and
4 humbled to be addressing you today as a
5 candidate for the sixth president of FIU. As
6 most of you know, I was not intending to be a
7 candidate for the permanent position of
8 president; however, sometimes our plans change
9 and something that was never dreamed of presents
10 itself as a dream come true. And in many ways,
11 that's the story of FIU.

12 Over the past nine months as interim
13 president, I have learned to love FIU more than
14 I could have imagined, and I found both the
15 opportunities and the challenges of the position
16 more rewarding than any of my prior positions.

17 I have been rewarded professionally more
18 than I thought possible. While I have been at
19 FIU for 13 years, for some of you, this may be
20 the first time we have interacted in person or
21 virtually. Let me tell you a few things about
22 me. I was born and reared in Fort Lauderdale,
23 Florida and except for the time that I spent as
24 a student at FSU, I have lived my entire time in
25 Broward County or, since 2009, Miami-Dade

1 County. I'm a product of Broward County, K
2 through 12 public school system and a proud
3 graduate of Fort Lauderdale High School, the
4 flying elves.

5 I'm a first-generation student. I attended
6 Florida State University where I received three
7 degrees, a bachelor of political science, an MBA
8 in finance and a Ph.D. in finance. I started my
9 professional career at Florida Atlantic
10 University in 1983, and I spent 26 wonderful
11 years there. And then in 2009, I came to FIU
12 where I have spent just a little over an amazing
13 13 years as a proud Panther.

14 I am married, my wife's name is Lori, and
15 in December, we will be celebrating our
16 46th wedding anniversary. I have a son, John; a
17 daughter, Amanda; a son-in-law, Jeff; and a
18 beautiful grandson of 18 months, James. And my
19 mother is still with us, she'll be 93 in just a
20 couple of weeks.

21 I would now like to spend a little time
22 discussing the priorities I will be focusing on
23 if given the opportunity to serve FIU as its
24 sixth president.

25 First, is Student Success. And I'm so

1 happy to see students here, and I know we have
2 more students virtually. As a national urban
3 public research university, FIU will continue to
4 invest in our students and their academic and
5 career successes. Our faculty must be not only
6 excellent scholars, but also proficient in
7 evidence-based teaching practices. We embrace
8 faculty who bring path-breaking research into
9 the classroom as part of evidence-based and
10 inclusive teaching. Our culture of teaching
11 excellence facilitates learning so our students
12 are critical thinkers who can take what they
13 have learned in the classroom or in the lab and
14 apply their knowledge to solving problems.

15 We must continue to innovate our curriculum
16 so it is aligned with career needs and to adopt
17 different designs and methods for learning that
18 are more meaningful for 21st century learners,
19 including experiential learning,
20 competency-based learning, and
21 micro-credentialing.

22 Our system of shared governance and
23 collegial discussions and cooperation are more
24 important than ever before in keeping our
25 curriculum relevant. FIU continues to be a

1 leader in innovation. Our global learning for
2 global citizenship, QEP, the one that we adopted
3 in 2010 is successful because we know the value
4 proposition of our students understanding both
5 culture and cultures within a global framework.
6 Our 2021 QEP critical skills for the 21st
7 century focuses on student attainment of skills
8 related to artificial intelligence data and
9 emotional intelligence through
10 micro-credentialing courses. However, we are
11 already seeing the expansion of A.I. and E.I.
12 throughout our curriculum. I cannot think of a
13 single program that does not have significant
14 A.I. and E.I. applications and learning
15 opportunities, and these skills translate to
16 jobs, great jobs in our knowledge-based economy.

17 We will continue to be accountable to our
18 stakeholders and measure our progress and
19 performance in educating our students, including
20 retention and graduation rates, employment, and
21 strategic degrees as well as other key metrics
22 related to research and access. FIU's key focus
23 on performance has been the primary reason why
24 we have excelled in both state and national
25 rankings as well as why we have received

1 significant incremental state performance
2 funding and philanthropic funding such as the
3 \$40 million Mackenzie Scott gift received last
4 year. I am committed to our goal of achieving
5 Top 50 public university and U.S. News & World
6 Report rankings in three years.

7 We are the fastest rising university in
8 U.S. News's public rankings in the last
9 ten years, up 62 spots and now ranked Number 72.
10 I know it gets harder and harder to increase as
11 we rise in the ranking, but I know we can get
12 there with the right focus and the right
13 investments. Indeed, we have already achieved
14 many Top 50 rankings the past few years,
15 including those focusing on economic mobility,
16 return on investment, innovation and research
17 expenditure growth.

18 FIU will remain committed to maintaining
19 our focus on access by providing educational
20 opportunities to Pell-eligible students, our
21 students with the greatest financial need and
22 ensuring that they graduate as quickly as our
23 non-Pell students.

24 We all know an FIU education is not
25 restricted to students with high financial

1 resources. And our Number 4 ranking in social
2 mobility by U.S. News and Number 32 ranking in
3 Washington Monthly reflect our commitment to
4 improving the lives of our students, their
5 families and our community. We are committed to
6 improving these impressive rankings even further
7 in the years ahead.

8 Next is research excellence.

9 FIU is an R1 public research university and
10 is in the Top 3 percent in research production
11 of all universities and colleges in the country,
12 and I remain committed to the research
13 enterprise of our university and the planned
14 investment of resources to expand research
15 opportunities. Research is critical to
16 expanding knowledge, developing innovative
17 solutions to problems and gaining a better
18 understanding of the complex world we live in.

19 Our research expenditures have surpassed
20 \$245 million, and we are in the Top 10 of
21 research expenditure growth of R1 public
22 universities over the past ten years, and we are
23 poised to hit the \$400 million mark by 2025, and
24 we already exceed the research expectations
25 required for preeminent research university

1 designation by the Florida Board of Governors.

2 Quality research requires investments, and
3 I believe the greatest opportunities for
4 expanded research funding at FIU are in areas
5 where we have already achieved a competitive
6 advantage through established infrastructure and
7 nationally and internationally recognized and
8 acclaimed academic and research programs such as
9 those in environment and health. This is
10 especially true when we focus on
11 interdisciplinary research that involves most,
12 if not all, academic programs at FIU. For
13 example, environmental resilience covers
14 everything from sea level rise, extreme weather
15 events, saltwater intrusion and water quality,
16 ecosystems, building mitigation and others. We
17 are just scratching the surface on these
18 opportunities.

19 Environmental research will include the
20 sciences, architectural design, business,
21 education, sociology, health, forensic science,
22 engineering, construction, global affairs,
23 technology, and computer science, law, and
24 health, as well as many other disciplines. I
25 believe that this focus on interdisciplinary

1 research will enable us to maximize the
2 opportunities for grant awards and research that
3 will solve global problems.

4 We know, too, that industry partnerships
5 are critical to both basic and applied research.
6 We will need industry at the table to solve the
7 challenging problems we as a community, nation,
8 and world are facing.

9 Third, sustainable resources.

10 We must have sufficient and sustainable
11 human, physical and financial resources to
12 fulfill our mission of outstanding teaching,
13 research excellence and community engagement.
14 The recruitment and retention of our best
15 faculty and staff are my highest priorities. I
16 understand the difficulties of current market
17 conditions.

18 Our team proposed and the FIU Board of
19 Trustees approved last month a \$60.7 million
20 legislative budget request for Top 50
21 operational support. This request was also
22 submitted to the Florida Board of Governors.
23 Included in this request is almost \$26 million
24 to retain our outstanding faculty and staff who
25 have demonstrated sustained exceptional

1 performance and commitment to quality teaching,
2 student success and research. Also included is
3 \$15 million for scholarship support for
4 students, \$5 million for hiring of additional
5 faculty in areas of strategic importance and in
6 areas where we know we need to decrease
7 student-faculty ratios, and \$12.5 million for
8 investments in technology to improve operational
9 efficiencies and cover recurring costs. I will
10 advocate to the Board of Governors and
11 legislative leadership for these additional
12 funds to support FIU, and I have already done
13 so.

14 Additionally, I will advocate for
15 additional funding to achieve a level of funding
16 that is fair and equitable for FIU compared to
17 the funding received by our sister institutions.
18 You have my commitment that I will stay focused
19 on FIU's strategic priorities and not take on
20 any new initiatives that are not strategic and
21 that oftentimes dilute the scarce resources we
22 already have. I will be asking the question:
23 "What is the ROI on this project?" every time.
24 This question is in my DNA.

25 I will also work tirelessly on expanding

1 our sources of revenues, particularly
2 philanthropy, net auxiliary revenues and
3 external grant funding and find ways to provide
4 high-quality administrative support services and
5 achieve cost savings through shared services
6 including human resources, information
7 technology, business and financial services and
8 research administration.

9 Additionally, I have already asked the FIU
10 foundation to prioritize student scholarship
11 funding in their annual development goals and to
12 focus on gifts that meet strategic priorities
13 for FIU as part of their annual development
14 plan.

15 Fourth, university affinity and engagement.

16 Declining college enrollments nationwide
17 have required increased efforts on retaining and
18 graduating every student we admit. We
19 understand better than ever before that we must
20 do a better job of ensuring our students are
21 successful in college and that the cost of
22 losing a student is significantly more than the
23 cost of recruiting one. Students who are
24 engaged with a university through student clubs
25 and organizations, Model UN, Student

1 Ambassadors, Greek Life, Athletics, Marching
2 Band, Panther Camp, and dozens of other student
3 groups we have at FIU, typically achieve greater
4 gains in learning are more satisfied with their
5 college experiences, experience stronger mental
6 health and well-being, feel more prepared for
7 life after college, are more likely to promote
8 their institution and give back financially to
9 their alma mater at higher rates once they
10 graduate. And this engagement translates to
11 higher retention and graduation rates of our
12 students, which improve our metrics and our
13 rankings.

14 You may have observed firsthand this great
15 affinity over homecoming week particularly on
16 Saturday where it was standing room only on our
17 housing promenades and plazas. It was very well
18 attended. These benefits are multiplied when we
19 create an engaged community of faculty and
20 staff, along with students where mentoring,
21 collegial discussions and encouragement take
22 place and where ideas for research and
23 innovation emerge throughout our great halls, in
24 our offices, in our Wolfe and Graham Centers, in
25 our food courts, on our plazas and lawns and on

1 the bay.

2 This affinity also translates to stronger
3 alumni engagement. The experiences of our
4 students while they are here will define how
5 active and supportive our alumni are after they
6 graduate. Alumni give back in many ways. They
7 provide mentoring and internship opportunities
8 for our current students and help improve job
9 placement rates once our students graduate, and
10 they help with admissions by serving as
11 ambassadors and telling the remarkable story of
12 FIU.

13 It is a source of immense pride for Panther
14 employers who hire Panthers. They know the
15 quality of the education our students receive.
16 They know the value proposition of an FIU
17 degree. Engaged alumni also support FIU
18 financially. Our alums are among the top donors
19 to FIU, and we have almost 300,000 alumni, and
20 most of them are right here in South Florida, in
21 our own backyard. Imagine the impact of their
22 advocacy in achieving FIU goals and objectives.

23 And, finally, we need to stay engaged with
24 our community. Our community and FIU are better
25 off when our students, faculty and staff

1 collaborate with the larger community. We can
2 enrich the lives of our residents through health
3 and civic partnerships, service, and research.
4 And we know that community will reciprocate by
5 supporting FIU. Many of the largest gifts to
6 FIU are from members of our community who were
7 not FIU alumni, benefactors who believe in FIU
8 and its mission and believe in our FIU students.
9 Let's face it. We are a Panther family and a
10 Panther community, and we work better together.
11 We will have greater affinity for FIU as an
12 engaged community of students, faculty, and
13 staff.

14 Just like our alma mater says: "Every
15 scholar, side by side."

16 We could be proud, very proud of what FIU
17 has accomplished over the past 50 years,
18 starting on an abandoned airfield, opening to
19 the largest enrollment of any educational
20 institution at that time, 5,667 upper division
21 and master students. And, now, we are educating
22 over 56,000 students, achieving \$246 million in
23 research expenditures, being the number one
24 producer of degrees to Hispanics, the Top 10
25 producer of baccalaureate degrees to

1 African-Americans and achieving national
2 rankings typically reserved for much older
3 institutions.

4 FIU has always had lofty goals and high
5 expectations and these have always, always been
6 exceeded, and we will continue with this
7 tradition during our next 50 years. Our
8 successes speak for themselves, and they are
9 speaking in a loud voice. And, yet, the best is
10 yet to come. We will continue to focus on
11 student success and research excellence. We
12 will continue to produce great leaders,
13 teachers, researchers, scientists, healthcare
14 providers, lawyers, innovators, and
15 entrepreneurs. And, I believe, together as a
16 Panther family, we have the opportunity to be
17 the world leader in solving the biggest problems
18 facing society today, the health of its people
19 and the environment we live in.

20 So, thank you for being here and thank you
21 for the opportunity for me to address you, our
22 students. Now I think we go into the Q & A.

23 (APPLAUSE)

24 DR. TRESSELL: Thank you so much to
25 everyone who is joining us in the audience. I

1 also wanted to share a little bit about the
2 members of our community who are joining us
3 through WebCast and through Zoom. So, outside
4 of the number of students that we have here
5 today with us, we also have 80 of them who are
6 joining us through the different platforms that
7 we have. Please feel free to just approach any
8 microphone and ask your questions, and if you
9 are joining us online, please feel free to use
10 the platform to ask your questions. I also
11 wanted to share that I recently got the number
12 of all of our members of our FIU community who
13 have joined us today and yesterday through the
14 various different session that we had with our
15 presidential candidate finalist. We have had
16 almost a thousand individuals from our community
17 join us, whether that has been through Zoom,
18 through WebCast and in person. So that's a
19 pretty amazing number, and we hope that in this
20 session and in our next session, we continue to
21 get an opportunity to meet all of you.

22 We have a question from a member of our
23 audience.

24 SPEAKER: Hello. My name is Brian Levine,
25 I'm a student here, a master student. I'm

1 taking my classes primarily at both the
2 Biscayne Bay campus and now at the FIU at I-75
3 campus, and I'm relying on some notes because my
4 memory is not as sharp as it used to and because
5 I didn't want to forget my points. A few of the
6 things I did want to bring up was: So,
7 previously I also was in the student government
8 representing as the governor of the BBC and I-75
9 campuses, now I'm still interested in them as an
10 emeritus of that position. So, the first thing
11 I wanted to bring to attention, and I had asked
12 about this once -- when I got the email about
13 these sessions, and I know you are not
14 responsible for setting this up, I immediately
15 replied to the email and copied several SGA
16 leaders about could there be a session at the
17 Biscayne Bay Campus. I was saddened by that. I
18 did not get an official response from the search
19 committee email. I don't know how -- who checks
20 that, but I did hear that it was not enough time
21 to pull that off, but I think that's actually
22 something important and it kind of stems to the
23 larger issue that makes my point, that
24 oftentimes people on some of our regional
25 locations and our BBC, Biscayne Bay Campus, feel

1 kind overlooked and oversight. It's not
2 necessarily something intentional, but it often
3 gets forgotten. And it's important that it'd be
4 consciously thought about and to make sure that
5 there is representation and activities including
6 the campus. There are still things there, but I
7 just feel in a lot of cases things will get
8 skipped.

9 The last in-person university town hall at
10 BBC was February 2022 -- 2020, two and
11 two-thirds years ago. Now, part of that relates
12 to the pandemic and this was right before the
13 pandemic, but even as they were brought back,
14 sessions here, that they have not restored at
15 BBC. And I think that's something important,
16 and it should be done at least once a year, if
17 not, more often.

18 Other ways that kind of the campus gets
19 overlooked is there was -- I'm not sure what
20 external relations is now called, I know they've
21 changed their names, but they came and they
22 recruited people from BBC to do like a photo
23 shoot. The photo shoot itself is not the big
24 deal, but what happened was they -- besides
25 coming very late, they didn't actually reach out

1 to find out when the hours of the food court
2 were open. And so they apparently wanted to
3 take pictures there, never thinking to either
4 reach out to Chartwells, check the hours, ask
5 somebody, just assuming, and these were the
6 people putting together stuff to advocate for
7 the campus. And it's not specifically that
8 commercial, but it's just one of the symptoms
9 of, you know, there are differences on the
10 campuses, differences, and people should be
11 looked at. Transportation is always a very
12 important issue.

13 Even so much as this Saturday going to the
14 football game, there was a bus to bring people
15 there, but there's often confusion. There were
16 details that -- exactly where the bus would be,
17 but some of the bus operator was given the wrong
18 information. I almost didn't see the bus come.
19 It came -- it wasn't sure where it was supposed
20 to pick up or drop off exactly. And, even
21 though it was stated they would be able to stay
22 until after the game, the driver informed us
23 that they would leave by 10:30, and so we
24 actually had to leave a little before just to
25 make sure because the bus didn't come straight

1 to the football field, it came closer to here.

2 Other things that are related to
3 transportation, there's a freebie system here,
4 and I know that covered the engineering center
5 and that's something that I think should be
6 looked into for BBC, and I've advocated for
7 before. I just learned over the summer that
8 they're not only on campuses, but they serve
9 different communities, and they just came to
10 North Miami Beach. The campuses, not
11 North Miami Beach, but literally, like, the
12 borders are very weird but very close, and it
13 seems like there's opportunities to partner for
14 that, and I would love to see that get expanded.

15 As well as in terms of transportation,
16 people have also asked for things about buses to
17 occur on weekends between campuses because
18 sometimes people do need to come and right now
19 there are no buses unless it's a special case
20 that they might have for a football game or some
21 special event and people do want to be able to
22 utilize that.

23 There are no buses necessarily during
24 commencement. As I realized last spring, they
25 were doing commencement on Saturday and Sunday

1 and I know it changed. There happened to be
2 buses on Saturday because of the finals, but I
3 was, like -- I was disappointed to see that
4 there were not buses for people who may be
5 taking classes, who have taken classes here and
6 are going to be graduating. I'm not saying to
7 move the commencement, but why not provide that
8 opportunity. It would also be a great
9 opportunity to encourage some carpooling and
10 other ways for people to take advantage of it.
11 People have asked about buses potentially to
12 I-75.

13 One thing that's important is that we need
14 the university to support and encourage the
15 colleges and schools to offer a critical mass of
16 classes. One thing people keep saying is,
17 "Well, we can't do this and do that because we
18 don't have enough students." I've seen students
19 come to campus that want to take classes there
20 but can't get those classes there. I've seen
21 students that are literally studying marine
22 biology, which the program is based there, and
23 have told me that they've had to actually come
24 here to take classes. And I don't think there's
25 anything wrong with having to come to both

1 campuses, but there are things that people say
2 there's not, but there's people that want that,
3 and I think it's important for that as well as
4 the regional campuses. And just there are
5 certain things that the campus at Biscayne Bay
6 has. We can't duplicate everything, but we
7 do -- besides hospitality, we have marine
8 science. And I remember my first year here in
9 2018, my surprise that they were doing a
10 program, a community presentation on the red
11 tide and instead of doing it at BBC, which hosts
12 the marine science program is literally on the
13 bay and other programs that are affected, it was
14 done here at MMC. I'm not against doing at
15 both, but I was just surprised that finally
16 something that's real strings to there, it
17 wasn't --

18 DR. TRESSELL: Ryan, give me just one
19 second. We're going to get to all the parts of
20 it, but if you can give him an opportunity to
21 address the first question.

22 SPEAKER: Oh, yeah, sorry, no, I just --
23 they're all in kind of one big thing so let me
24 just -- could I just finish the general point
25 and then I'll -- I'm through.

1 DR. TRESSELL: Go ahead.

2 SPEAKER: The other real key thing is to
3 kind of keep leadership at BBC. And one of the
4 positions that was just vacated because somebody
5 moved, the assistant vice president
6 Dr. DeSantis, my understanding is not going to
7 be refilled, and I just -- one of the things
8 that I think strategically that I think is
9 important to look at, to include and kind of
10 reexamine some of the restructuring that was
11 done in recent years because I think it really
12 kind of goes towards that, and it goes to your
13 point at the -- one of the last points about
14 engagement is there needs to be really dedicated
15 engagement, and I just think it's important to
16 have stuff there and dedicated positions. I
17 know you have been, you yourself, I saw you last
18 week, and I think that's great. My ideal thing
19 when the search committee started was saying
20 that I'd love to have a president that coming to
21 the campus was not a big deal because it was
22 just so routine. So, I thought it was really
23 nice to see you there and so I think you
24 understand the general sentiment.

25 DR. JESSELL: I do.

1 So, let me just respond first in terms of
2 the discussion related to the logistics. We did
3 have a conversation, but the production setups
4 were just so great since we were doing it
5 virtually. It was a decision to just have
6 everything here and make it fully available to
7 do six different sessions where everyone would
8 have an opportunity, you know, to do it even if
9 it was virtually because you can see how much is
10 involved in the setup. However, I will commit
11 to doing a town hall at BBC. I love that
12 campus. It has been a high priority of mine for
13 a good number of years. People in this room
14 know how committed I am to doing more and more
15 things there. I've been there several times as
16 the interim president, and I will continue to go
17 there because it really is special.

18 I hope you'll -- you would have found that
19 what we're doing there this fall is an
20 improvement over what we had overhead last fall.
21 We have a lot more students. I think Bayview
22 housing is about 90 percent occupied, and we
23 want to do more. We have some nursing programs
24 moving there. We want to do other programs
25 there. I've been having conversations with

1 Dr. Bejar about BBC and additional conversations
2 with the president of Broward College, the
3 meeting that we had at the I-75 campus just a
4 few weeks ago with their leadership team about
5 improving the programs that we have there. But,
6 we cannot be successful for FIU at 75 if
7 Broward College at I-75 is floundering, so we
8 want to make sure that we are in synch and do
9 the right thing to get students a quality
10 education in their own backyard. And I think we
11 have a lot of potential for student enrollments
12 right there just as we do for our north campus.

13 We will think about all of the things that
14 you said with respect to the buses. I don't
15 know that we've thought about buses for, you
16 know, commencement. The issue on the bus for
17 the football game, that's something that we --
18 number one, we'll make sure they know where to
19 go and when to go there, but we can easily work
20 to extend the hour so the bus will not depart
21 until the game is over. We want you to be at
22 the game through the very, very end, so we will
23 be listening to everything you said -- and the
24 people that are here are taking notes, and I
25 agree with what you said. We have not invested

1 the right support in BBC. We're making
2 progress, but I want to do even more.

3 SPEAKER: I appreciate that. And one point
4 to bring up, you mentioned Bayview housing. I
5 know there -- having lived there for a number of
6 times, I know and I've been reading the
7 contract, there is an option for the university
8 I believe in 2024 if it wants to exercise where
9 it could -- by and assume that I know there's
10 financial implications, but I do encourage that
11 to be explored and the provisions of the
12 contract to ensure that there is quality student
13 programming and services there because a lot
14 have been lacking, but I think there's some
15 provisions actually in the agreement with the
16 ownership of Bayview to ensure for
17 accountability, and I think that could be
18 explored more.

19 DR. JESSELL: All right. Thank you.

20 SPEAKER: Thank you.

21 DR. JESSELL: And thank you for being here.

22 DR. TRESSELL: Please.

23 SPEAKER: Hello. My name is Kaylee Long
24 Chappell (phonetic). I use they/he pronouns,
25 and I'm currently as the Pride Student Union

1 president and SGA SIPA senator.

2 As a leader on this campus, I am very eager
3 to see where you're going with student success,
4 research excellence and engagement on this
5 campus, but what I think is just equally as
6 important is diversity, equity and inclusion
7 initiatives on this campus, not only in the
8 State of Florida but in the state of political
9 discourse, there's a lot of rise anti-LGBTQ
10 legislation. I'm here as a leader that
11 represents the LGBTQ campus -- community on this
12 campus, so what do you plan personally and at
13 the administrative level to support not only
14 LGBTQ students but to expand on DEI initiatives
15 on this campus?

16 DR. JESSELL: So for the DEI, I will tell
17 you, this is an initiative that's very important
18 not only to me and the administrative team but
19 also to our Board of Trustees. About two years
20 ago, we put forth the DEI program that was more
21 than just a program. It involved funding, so we
22 would have the staffing in place to measure and
23 monitor how well we are doing. We absolutely
24 must have an inclusive student population and
25 inclusive faculty and staff participation. So,

1 we are absolutely going to be addressing that.
2 Every student is valued and respected here at
3 FIU. I think you were at the pride parade at
4 Miami Beach, weren't you? And I was there. It
5 was my honor to be with all of our students that
6 support the same goals of the pride community.
7 And you could see as we were on the parade route
8 throughout the City of Miami Beach, so many of
9 its citizens were out there with families
10 saying, "You know what, this is an important
11 initiative." We need to do more to promote
12 diversity, equity, and inclusion, so that is a
13 good way of doing it. It was a great pride
14 celebration, and it was a great way to show our
15 FIU pride. So we will continue to do those
16 types of things, and we'll be louder and
17 stronger in the future.

18 SPEAKER: Thank you so much.

19 DR. TRESSELL: Alex.

20 SPEAKER: Thank you and thank you,
21 Mr. President, for being here. Let me start by
22 saying how incredibly happy I was to hear that
23 the committee decided to nominate you for this
24 post. I speak for many who served with me that
25 there is no one better to take this role on than

1 you. So, I wanted to ask you a question to give
2 you a quick chance: How would you take this
3 institution into the Top 50? What are your
4 plans for the next three years as to how this
5 institution is going to grow and continue to
6 expand under your leadership?

7 DR. JESSELL: So I hope that, you know,
8 several of these things were already identified
9 as part of my comments.

10 Number one, we must stay keenly focused on
11 student success. And while I am very, very
12 happy with the progress that we've made on our
13 four-year graduation rate over the past few
14 years, particularly from last year to this year,
15 we can't take our eyes off the prize.

16 We need to continue doing that, which means
17 as a university community, we have to do
18 anything and everything we can to make sure that
19 every student that is admitted is graduated, and
20 that's one of the key elements of the -- of the
21 rankings. Now, keep in mind, when you look at
22 U.S. News & World Report, I mean, it's a ranking
23 that many, many people, you know, look at. It
24 is very well-established and it is very
25 well-recognized, but it's only capturing,

1 really, about 40 percent of the student success
2 initiatives. The other 20 percent, the key
3 element of 20 percent relates to the reputation
4 of our institution. And I suspect that if you
5 did a regression analysis of ranking against
6 age, you would see an upper sloping line that
7 is -- that is pretty positively correlated. The
8 older you are, the greater the reputation,
9 because you've had many, many, many years to
10 identify yourself. We're only 50. So in the
11 scheme of universities, even in the U.S. that
12 started almost 300 years ago, and if you look at
13 universities in Europe that were, you know,
14 1088, in Bologna, hey, they've had plenty of
15 years to establish great, great reputations.
16 So, we are going to jump-start some of that, and
17 I think we already have. We have reorganized
18 our external relations through strategic
19 communications so we can get the word out there,
20 so that would help in that particular ranking.

21 Thirdly, we need to stay focused as well on
22 our Pell students because I believe more and
23 more students, more and more decision-makers are
24 going to be looking at social mobility as the
25 important factor in ranking and institution. I

1 mean, let's face it, it's easy to take somebody
2 like you, let's say, 4.97 GPA, you know, 26,000
3 on the SAT, right, to be successful. All right,
4 it's a little exaggeration. But, when you can
5 take our neediest students that oftentimes come
6 from humble backgrounds, right, they're the
7 neediest kids, and there's a strong correlation
8 between wealth and the schools and turn out a
9 great graduate, that's really important. So
10 that's where we really shine. So, we just need
11 to stay focused on those things that are
12 important to FIU. We know the SUS performance
13 ranking system, that's very, very important.
14 And, if we keep doing those things, and doing
15 them well, staying focused, the rankings will
16 increase. We've got a great story. We've got
17 great students, great faculty, and we're doing
18 great things. It'll happen.

19 SPEAKER: Thank you and congratulations,
20 sir.

21 DR. JESSELL: Thank you.

22 SPEAKER: Hello, again.

23 You're probably tired of my face by now.
24 Nice to see you again, Dr. Jessell, and I wanted
25 to ask you this question today, particularly as

1 this is the SGA and student leader session. And
2 I wanted to talk to you about an action that SGA
3 took a few months ago. We passed a resolution
4 entitled, "Presidential Requirements In the Eyes
5 of Students Act or PRES Act," and it named all
6 of the qualities, ten different qualities that
7 the student body wants to see in the finalist
8 from the search committee. We have our
9 finalist, and I absolutely agree with my fellow,
10 Alex, that I could not be more happy with their
11 choice of you.

12 So I wanted to ask you if you would commit
13 to exhibiting as many of these attributes as
14 possible. Very quickly. They talk about
15 advocating for international students,
16 continuing to develop athletics, continuing to
17 support our Greek life students, making an
18 effort to become conversational in Spanish,
19 pushing for sustainability initiatives, valuing
20 BBC, and this last one I'm going to read in
21 full: Be a student-focused leader that
22 interacts with students daily, crosses
23 generational barriers to relate to youth on a
24 genuine level and charismatically makes all
25 students feel welcomed and at home on campus,

1 becoming an icon of FIU in the process.

2 So my question for you is: Would you take
3 these suggestions from the student government
4 into account? How would you do so? And more
5 broadly, what kind of relationship would you
6 like to have with the student government and
7 students leaders on this campus?

8 DR. JESSELL: Okay. So, absolutely, I'm
9 going to give myself a 93 score, okay? I'll
10 make an effort on Spanish, okay? So, I'm going
11 to see what kind of credentialing courses that
12 we have. I've always wanted to do that. It's
13 very, very sad when I was in school, it was in
14 middle school, they were doing Spanish language
15 programs, but they weren't taken very seriously
16 because the thinking was nobody's going to be
17 speaking Spanish in a few years, and it wouldn't
18 be a good use of resources. Now we know a lot
19 differently, but, yes, I will try that.

20 I love students. I can go back to my first
21 day at FIU walking through the Graham Center
22 literally, you know, shoulder to shoulder, and I
23 wrote -- I actually called my colleague, my
24 associate VP, who had taken over my job as VP at
25 FAU, and I said, "Dennis this is what I always

1 envisioned for FAU." I wanted to have a
2 university center that was filled with students,
3 and I just couldn't believe the excitement. And
4 I tried every day, I haven't been as successful
5 recently, to be every day, to get over to the
6 Graham Center, walk through and talk to
7 students, talk to the individuals that are at
8 the booths doing their promotions at the lake.

9 You are the lifeblood of FIU, and you keep
10 me young, okay? I'm reliving my life through
11 you. And even this weekend, I'm walking around
12 all the tailgating areas, all the promenades.
13 And that promenade, by the way, was done at
14 Tamiami for these types of initiatives. I even
15 did 1.75 pullups with the Marines at their's,
16 okay? So, I'm really getting into it. The
17 athletics, you know, I'm a big, big supporter of
18 all of the athletic teams, but all of the
19 programs that we have on campus because I think
20 they are just so important to the affinity.
21 When I first started here -- actually, before I
22 started, I was here for the budget discussions
23 when they decided as part of budget reductions
24 to -- to eliminate the marching band, and I
25 remember -- I remember -- yeah, Barry was hired

1 my second year.

2 But I remember going home and talking it
3 over with my wife and her response was, "Are you
4 sure you want to go to a place that's trying to
5 balance the budget by eliminating the marching
6 band?" How much can that cost? And it really
7 didn't cost that much. And it wasn't so much
8 the money or it really wasn't even the band, per
9 se, it was what came out of that marching band.
10 And at FSU, when I was a student there, the
11 first year the football team had a record of
12 zero and 11, the next year it was 1 and 10. And
13 yet people were still in the stadium. Why?
14 Because of the Marching Chiefs' marching band.
15 Right? So that's an important element. So, the
16 more we can do those things is how we're going
17 to get that real affinity and that real
18 one-on-one, that cohesiveness that we need as a
19 university community.

20 So, you have my commitment to work with
21 you. I've always had a very, very good
22 relationship with SGA and the SGA leaders here.
23 I value all the work that you do. You have a
24 very noble task, a very big task in serving our
25 students, and you do a great job. I've never

1 been disappointed with the efforts of our SGA,
2 and I mean it.

3 SPEAKER: Thank you.

4 DR. TRESSELL: The floor is yours.

5 SPEAKER: Good afternoon, sir. My name is
6 Chris, if you didn't know.

7 DR. JESSELL: We've met.

8 SPEAKER: So I have a question. As you
9 could see, the room is not even half full and
10 this is an occurrent thing in many events that
11 our students are not showing up, the affinity is
12 not there and sometimes it saddens me whenever I
13 go to different events and our organizations are
14 struggling to get the numbers up, it has to be
15 something really big. We have to put an
16 incentive out to really get students out. So
17 what would you do to really build that affinity
18 so students could feel like, "Yes, I'm a part of
19 this university, so attending this event will
20 bring value to us"?

21 DR. JESSELL: Well, I will work with SGA
22 because you know the things that are important
23 to students. Now, we did know that we needed to
24 do a much better job for athletics in terms of
25 getting students there, and I think that if

1 you've been to their games, the two home games
2 that we've had more students at those two games
3 than we have had in that area for a long period
4 of time, and we did that strategically. You
5 know with the housing that we did, we moved that
6 building -- we moved the rose house so that we
7 could have a huge promenade in-between old
8 housing and new housing that is very much
9 student centric, and that was very, very
10 deliberate. So, you have to have the right
11 venue so students can get engaged. And then
12 once you have the right venue, then you need to
13 figure out what is the best program that will
14 draw students there. It could be great space,
15 but if we don't do the right things to get
16 students there, it's not going to be successful.
17 So you're going to have to tell me what's really
18 important. You know, for me it might be
19 Guy Lombardo, but you probably don't want to
20 come to a Guy Lombardo concert. You know, the
21 band, not really Guy Lombardo, he won't be
22 showing up.

23 But you know what's important to students
24 and what really gets them excited. We know the
25 athletics will do that, but there are many, many

1 other things. The Panthers had a talent program
2 two weeks ago Sunday. How many students did we
3 have there? 4,000. It was packed. I haven't
4 seen that arena so packed for a long period of
5 time. And, again, even I was acting like a
6 student because there's nothing better. So
7 let's figure out what those programs are. I
8 don't have the answers, but I will tell you, we
9 can be part of the solution. We have a great
10 team. We will work with you and we'll work with
11 students. What's important to them and what's
12 important to them is what we should be doing.
13 What's important to you is what we should be
14 doing.

15 DR. TRESSELL: I think we have a couple
16 more questions from our audience.

17 SPEAKER: Hello, Mr. President. My name is
18 Franchesca Casanova. You had talked about your
19 ideas on affinity, and I wholeheartedly agree as
20 a member of Greek life and student government.
21 So can you talk about how you plan to show our
22 community just how exceptional FIU truly is.

23 DR. JESSELL: So our student community,
24 outside community?

25 SPEAKER: A little bit of both.

1 DR. JESSELL: Okay.

2 So we can do a lot to show internally and
3 externally how great we are by just expanding
4 the things that we are doing, okay? We know for
5 Greek life as an example, there were many events
6 that we do on campus to support each other and
7 support the FIU community. But our Greek
8 organizations, and this is all of our
9 organizations that do things on campus, we can
10 do things off campus. We can do major social
11 service projects in the community that will get
12 our name out there even more. And when the
13 community sees students out there at parades, at
14 events, at social service projects, doing beach
15 cleanups, helping in the high schools, that
16 really makes a difference because it really
17 makes an impact on the community.

18 So, those are the types of things that we
19 can be doing. And when we have our marching
20 band showing up at all different types of
21 events, not just an athletic event, but even a
22 major ceremony, like convocation when they are
23 there, that just highlights the great things
24 that they do as part of the university's
25 community.

1 And just walk through the Graham Center
2 today or look on the lawn of the Graham Center
3 today and we should be doing exactly the same
4 thing at BBC. Let's get some focus on major
5 activities to get that excitement up. There is
6 something for everyone at FIU and there is
7 something at FIU for everyone in the community.
8 It's just getting it out there. And we keep
9 doing it, the word is going to get out there.

10 SPEAKER: Good afternoon, Dr. Jessell. My
11 name is Karina Hernandez, and I'm on my third
12 year of studying environmental engineering here
13 at FIU. I'm also on SGA, and I represent the
14 college of engineering and computing, and I am
15 also serving as the chair of sustainability and
16 innovation. So with that being said, I have two
17 questions for you. I'll allow you to answer the
18 first one first. I would like to hear how much
19 of a priority sustainability and resilience is
20 to you as I believe that FIU has the potential
21 to grow to the top leader of this topic
22 throughout the country.

23 DR. JESSELL: Okay. So I -- number one,
24 let me start off by saying part of my comments
25 were the more students are engaged, the more

1 successful they're going to be. So I'm happy to
2 hear all the things that you're involved with.
3 So you're going to be successful. I also talked
4 specifically about your field, the environment
5 and environmental resilience. That includes so
6 many different aspects of our teaching and
7 research, and it includes something in every
8 discipline that we have at FIU. We know sea
9 level rise is a problem for this world and we
10 are going to need innovation in addressing how
11 we adapt to the rising seas, and that's going to
12 involve construction, it's going to involve
13 design, it's even going to involve legal in
14 terms of property rights, and it's going to
15 involve business and finance in terms of how it
16 impacts our economies and the cost versus
17 benefits of doing many of these mitigation
18 strategies.

19 We can see it right now over in Southwest
20 Florida, you know, in the islands of Sanibel and
21 Captiva. The question keeps coming up: How
22 much of that will be rebuilt? What do we have
23 to do to rebuild in a safe way?

24 So when the next storm like Ian comes
25 through or a stronger storm as we're starting to

1 see they're growing in intensity, that those
2 areas can survive. Or, we might have the
3 question: We need to do the net present value
4 of this. We may find that the cost of doing a
5 restoration or a mitigation program is so
6 excessive that it just does not make sense. Why
7 would we invest \$50 billion to develop an
8 enterprise and facilities and infrastructure
9 that might have a net present value of
10 5 million? That's an extreme, but we're going
11 to have to make some of those tough decisions as
12 we look forward. So, it might be better off to
13 relocate individuals to different areas and put
14 in new infrastructure in safer areas because
15 it's going to be a more cost effective and
16 longer term solution to the challenges that we
17 have.

18 So, the work that you're doing, you know,
19 is amazing, but you're going to touch on every
20 discipline at this university, and I think, as I
21 said, I think that multidisciplinary approach on
22 something as important as environment is going
23 to give us all kinds of opportunities for both
24 research and teaching excellence.

25 SPEAKER: Right. And one of my ideas,

1 actually, being that we have this relevancy of
2 Hurricane Ian disrupting Fort Myers and those
3 areas, we are not so far off. That could be us,
4 and it could have been us. It was in that
5 direction.

6 DR. JESSELL: It could very easily have
7 been us or Tampa, absolutely.

8 THE WITNESS: Right. So with that being
9 said, I think it's really important that we
10 start doing events on a mass basis being, like
11 you said, this is a multidisciplinary issue and
12 having maybe forums or something of the like so
13 people are actually interacting with this issue
14 and educating people along with that topic.

15 Also, with that being said, my second
16 question was: As you know, the STEM careers are
17 on the rise for specific reasons like this and a
18 big issue is funding for research and materials
19 for this research. I think that this is a topic
20 that we've needed to work on, on a university
21 basis and on a nation basis. What are you
22 willing to do for that?

23 DR. JESSELL: So, you know, I had mentioned
24 that quality research requires investments. It
25 doesn't happen for free. We have been very

1 successful as a university in increasing our
2 opportunities for external research funding.
3 We're almost, you know, 250 million right now,
4 and we should be about 350 million by 2025, the
5 way that we are going. And by having those
6 interdisciplinary approaches gives us a greater
7 opportunity to get more funding so you're not
8 limited to just one or two federal agencies or
9 state agencies for funding, you might be
10 eligible for dozens or hundreds of opportunities
11 for funding. Just the business side of this
12 might get us a funding opportunity from commerce
13 that we might not have had before.

14 When you look at the social aspects, okay,
15 of health funding could really come in, in
16 addressing some of these issues. Because it's
17 not going to be an easy process. There are
18 going to be a lot of mental health challenges
19 when we go through these things. I mean, those
20 people over in Fort Myers Beach, I mean, they're
21 going to be struggling emotionally. And
22 understanding the impact of these extreme events
23 on society and people could also open up funding
24 opportunities for us. So, I think the real key
25 is to really expand the interdisciplinary

1 approaches, stay very, very focused on what we
2 can be a world leader in, and I think
3 environment and also health are the two areas
4 that give us those opportunities. Otherwise, I
5 mean, we're always putting, you know, dollars
6 into research infrastructure, research
7 enterprise every year when we do our carry
8 forward, which are remaining fund balances, we
9 make investments in startup funds for faculty,
10 we make investments in labs. We're building the
11 new engineering building. Actually, it's going
12 to be two buildings. The first when they -- I
13 think they started construction. I saw the
14 trailers out there and I saw the backhoes out
15 there already. I think they actually started
16 digging, but I haven't been on the site yet, but
17 I will get over there this week and then we'll
18 be starting the next one in two years once that
19 is done. So we are making those physical
20 investments as well into the program.

21 SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you, Dr. Jessell.

22 DR. JESSELL: You're welcome.

23 DR. TRESSELL: Thank you so much for your
24 question.

25 Valentina, you will be our last question

1 for this particular session, but I do want to
2 invite all of you to attend our next session,
3 which starts at 2:30. We just need an
4 opportunity to wrap this one up really quickly.
5 All of our transcripts as well as the videos for
6 all of our sessions are going to be made
7 available to you all through the presidential
8 search website, so please feel free to log on
9 later on and you can view it. They will be made
10 available towards the end of the week, if not
11 early next week.

12 Valentina.

13 SPEAKER: Thank you.

14 Hello, Mr. President.

15 DR. JESSELL: Hello, Valentina.

16 SPEAKER: Nice to see you.

17 My question is pretty simple. I just
18 wanted to know if you could share with us what
19 it means to you to be the next nominee for
20 president of FIU.

21 DR. JESSELL: Well, I have to tell you, I
22 am so excited. I was truthful when I said the
23 rewards over the last nine months have been
24 amazing. I mean, it's a big job. Even working
25 with the university president here and at FAU as

1 a direct report for a good number of years, you
2 got to see it. I didn't really do it. So
3 there's a big difference between seeing and
4 doing, and it has been absolutely, you know,
5 amazing. I will work -- maybe we can use this
6 like the closing comments, but I will work
7 tirelessly for our students, our faculty and our
8 staff. I truly am a Panther, okay? I just
9 bleed blue and gold. I love this place. It is
10 absolutely amazing. I love our mission. I love
11 what we do to enrich our students' lives and
12 what we do to enrich this community. So, I'm
13 going to be a hard worker. Alex will know
14 because he was president of SGA, and he was
15 often at our building late at night, and, you
16 know, there are just a couple of people on the
17 floor 8, 8:30, 9 o'clock, and I was generally
18 one of those, Michelle was one, right? So you
19 know how committed we are. You don't do this as
20 an administrator, you don't do this as a student
21 leader if you don't love this place, if you are
22 not committed to achieving the goals of FIU.

23 And, so, I want to be a partner with you.
24 That was one of the first questions: How am I
25 going to partner? I'm going partner with the

1 students because, I mean, you have a lot of the
2 answers. You know what's important, you know,
3 to students, so I will be right there with you.
4 I will work as hard as I can to move FIU
5 forward.

6 (APPLAUSE)

7 DR. TRESSELL: Thank you, Dr. Jessell.

8 And thank you all for attending our
9 session. We really appreciate that all of you
10 attended in person as well as through Zoom and
11 our WebCast.

12 (Students Session concluded at 2:06 p.m.)
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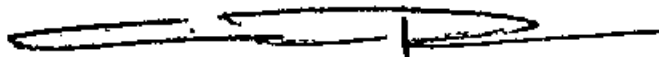
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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

STATE OF FLORIDA
COUNTY OF MIAMI-DADE

I, GINA RODRIGUEZ, Registered Professional Reporter and Certified Realtime Reporter, certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically report the foregoing proceedings and that the transcript is a true and complete record of my stenographic notes.

Dated this 14th day of October, 2022.



GINA RODRIGUEZ, RPR, CRR

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