

Guestview: Long-term strategies pay off at UWF

Four years ago when the Florida Board of Governors introduced the performance-based funding model for all State University System institutions, the University of West Florida found itself ranked in the bottom three, at risk of losing funding. The campus community responded, coming together to focus on supporting students, improving scores and positioning the University toward achieving better outcomes on the metrics.

I'm proud to say the efforts of the UWF trustees, leadership, faculty and staff have paid off. This year, we are among the three top-performing public universities in Florida, alongside the University of Florida and the University of South Florida. In 2014, we received 21 points out of a then-50-point scale. This year, we earned 82 points out of 100 and secured more than \$20 million in new funding.

More: [Guestview: America first, but don't forget oceans](#)

When the metrics system was created, we knew we had a challenge. The system puts all universities in Florida in the same bucket and presents us with challenging metrics when we are competing with large research universities. Despite those challenges, the system offers opportunities by allowing scoring on the higher of two measurements for each metric — an excellence score or an improvement score. Through our focus on improvement, we have stepped up among the leaders in the statewide results from this metrics system. However, the design of this system works in a remarkable way that forces universities like us to continually improve in order to score well in future years.

The university's success is founded completely in the campuswide effort to invest in long-term strategies, with a focus not only on increasing its performance in the selected metrics, but also in enhancing the overall quality of the education and experience offered to our students.

UWF's leadership implemented effective programs and initiatives aimed at all 10 metrics, including academic progress rates, student retention, degree completion and others. The success of these initiatives reflects our faculty and staff's commitment to providing the highest quality education at one of the best universities.

A great deal of credit goes to President Martha Saunders and her "war room" team. Martha's leadership in her previous role as provost and executive vice president for UWF is the primary reason we scored well this year. You don't turn a battleship in a day, but with Martha at the helm, we have accomplished great things and are now steaming toward success.

More: [Commissioner: Pensacola should keep cross](#)

Since 1967, UWF has undergone countless changes and overcome obstacles. As we've done from the beginning, when the going gets tough, we roll up our sleeves and get to work. Improving our scores on the performance-based funding metrics was our most recent challenge, and like other challenges before, we found a way to make it happen.

This has been a milestone year for UWF in many ways, as we celebrate our 50th anniversary and new beginnings under President Saunders. Our top three ranking can be considered the icing on the cake for 2017, and we're only halfway through the year. If you ask me, the future looks bright at UWF.

Mort O'Sullivan is chairman of the University of West Florida Board of Trustees.