

Dr. Robert G. Frank
Former Dean

I became dean in February 1995. I succeeded one of the finest gentlemen I have ever known, Dean Richard Gutekunst. As I recall, at that point, we had around 200 or 300 students mostly in OT and PT and our doctoral program in psychology and only Nursing had worse space than the College of Health Related Professions. Most of my time as dean was foreshadowed in a story Dick told me only *after* I had started working at UF. According to Dick, there had been a serious debate about whether to start a search for his successor or merge the college with some other entity on campus. Everyone recognized we had great programs, but we were not big enough to really cause a ripple in the UF pond. It was clear that quality alone would not protect, or grow the college, we needed to bulk up or face academic extinction.

But, our faculty were not timid; after a lovely faculty retreat, we decided to grow our research, which was a natural. We agreed to the ambitious goal of doubling our research expenditures within five years. An ambitious goal, that we sailed right by!

By 1998, we had begun serious transformation, our research was growing as were our academic programs. We established the first doctorate in rehab science. The quality of our programs was very high, almost every program was nationally recognized. We were surprised when a university-wide strategic plan virtually ignored our college. And we were worried when a proposal to establish a college of public health surfaced in the plan. Again, we realized we lacked enough size to impact the bigger UF picture.

We recognized another college in the HSC would add significant funding pressures. We undertook a serious conversation among the department chairs about becoming a college of public health and health professions. We invited the president of the Association of Schools of Public Health to Gainesville to hear our ideas and see if they had merit. A veritable dinosaur type fellow who had been in his role for four lifetimes, he enjoyed the Florida sunshine and on his way out told us it was impossible for a “school of allied health” to become an accredited public health program.

This was one of many battles we would fight in our effort to transform the college into a college of public health. As you all know, that transformation was very successful and continues despite all the challenges we in higher education now face.

These stories are important because they remind me of what makes this college different from most academic programs. From its very beginning with our first dean, Darrel Mase, the college faculty and leadership have shared a common vision of something that is hard to label; seeking excellence, commitment to our students, or being the best? Or maybe it is our willingness to try new ideas like Dean Mase’s idea that health profession education was different than medical education. Or our extension of his thinking when we created the first doctorate of rehabilitation science. Or, our bold idea to



incorporate the changing health environment into our college by recognizing that population health would govern clinical practice and payment systems in a new era of cost and quality control.

So how is it that this college can be all the things academic institutions are accused of NOT being: Visionary, nimble, transformative? Of course, like all of UF, we attract spectacular students. PPHP has also attracted very smart, dedicated faculty. Last, the college has benefitted from relative continuity of leadership in our chairs and in the dean's office. Only five deans in 60 years, fairly remarkable. But, I believe it is the culture of this college that makes it so great. PPHP has created a culture in which change is the norm and boldness is expected. There is much to learn from studying the path PPHP has cleared. Or maybe it is much simpler, summarized by thousands of Gator fans who chant: It is great to be Florida Gator.