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Center to Set Benchmark in Scientific Journalism Under the leadership of Dr. Cheryl Koski, USF St. Petersburg’s New Science Journalism Center Slated to be Nation’s Model

ST. PETERSBURG, FLA (April 11, 2003) – Expansion is fast becoming the watchword at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg — and the Journalism Department is no exception. “Student enrollment at USF St. Petersburg has increased 62 percent in the last five years,” said Dr. Cheryl Koski, newly appointed Coordinator and Assistant Professor in Mass Communications and Science Journalism. “The campus is expected to continue expanding at a rapid pace. Such growth offers tremendous potential, especially in combination with the large number of organizations in the St. Petersburg area that have a stake in communicating effectively about science and medicine to the general public,” said Koski.

It was this need that gave rise to the concept of creating a state-of-the-art Science Journalism Center. Koski cites local organizations such as the Center for Coastal and Watershed Studies, Bayfront Medical Center, and All Children’s Hospital as examples that will benefit from the developing center.

Bringing more than 15 years of experience as an editor and science writer for the U.S. Department of Energy, Koski feels the new USF St. Petersburg Science Journalism Center is “uniquely positioned to become the best place in the southeast for students as well as working professionals — journalists, scientists, and physicians — to learn to translate the language of science and medicine into interesting stories that the general public can understand.”

“Very few universities even have a full program in science journalism,” said Dr. Michael Killenberg, director of the Journalism and Media Studies program. “Our Science Journalism Center is the only one of its kind in the southeast.”

Koski noted that during her visit to the campus it “became clear that Dr Killenberg and his colleagues have carefully built a solid program.” Of particular interest to Koski was “the opportunity to assume a significant role in achieving the objectives for the Science Journalism Center that Dr. Killenberg proposed in the Programs of Distinction Initiative.”

Under the guidance of Interim Vice President and Campus CEO Ralph Wilcox, USF St. Petersburg recently undertook an initiative designed to shape the institution’s scholarly identity by asking faculty to develop programs that would capitalize on existing academic strengths and would potentially lead to national and international recognition.

The search for academic excellence not only identified four Programs of Distinction (Journalism and Media Studies, Florida Studies, Social Responsibility, and Environmental Science, Policy and Geography) it has also entailed an extensive and far-reaching search for America’s leading scholars. Dr. Koski is one of more than 30 such scholars the university has already hired to reach its goals.

“We are no longer the ‘Bayboro branch campus,” said Gary Olson, interim vice president for Academic Affairs. “We now have fiscal autonomy and are in the process of seeking separate accreditation. This is the perfect time for USF St. Petersburg to define just ‘who we are’ and establish programs that will turn the national spotlight on our groundbreaking institution. We are excited to welcome Dr. Koski to our faculty, and I am confident that under her leadership the Science Journalism Center will become the nation’s model for research and instruction.”

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