What Does it Mean to Be a ‘Cane? Here Is the Story of the U…

Serving others for the betterment of society is our rallying cry. It’s why we chose to come to UM, and it lives on when we graduate. Like our beloved mascot Sebastian the Ibis—the ibis bird being the first to return after a major hurricane—UM students and alumni are the first to take a stand and make the world a better place.

The University of Miami has demonstrated true excellence and character during critical times in history that have made the institution a pillar of strength and the embodiment of a compassionate spirit.

- **World War II**: UM offered special classes to pilots, navigators, and aviation personnel from the United States and Great Britain. More than 8,000 war personnel, including members of the British Royal Air Force, received training at the University.

- **Civil Rights Era**: Martin Luther King, Jr., came to campus to address students and faculty to provide hope for an unsegregated America. The visit was controversial for its time, but helped to bring the conversation of equality to the forefront.

- **Hurricane Andrew**: Relief efforts on campus transformed the library into a makeshift home for many, complete with cot beds and clothing. Exams were canceled for the fall 1992 semester as students and faculty focused on rebuilding after the devastation.

- **Earthquake in Haiti**: From in-the-trenches medical responses to grassroots initiatives, community outreach, and fundraising efforts yielding $4.4 million, the University of Miami responded to the 2010 disaster in many ways. Alumna Elizabeth Greig, M.D. ’10, created a plan to get doctors into Haiti after the disaster and served as director of the UM field hospital in Port-au-Prince. UM furnished the first medical team on the ground, providing essential support to help the survival and recovery of the Haitian people. They treated more than 250 critically injured patients within 48 hours of arriving in Haiti; nearly 300 UM doctors, nurses, and other personnel served in Haiti in a 240-bed tent hospital with operating rooms and advanced technologies.

A Bold, Remarkable History

Since its inception, the University of Miami has pursued a lofty vision of greatness. Born in the 20th century during a time of ceaseless change in a community at a geographic crossroad, UM was not constrained by precedents or traditions. It pursued a unique path distinguished by boundless innovation, savvy, and optimistic forward thinking.

The Early Years (1925-1945)

Founded in 1925 as South Florida’s first university, UM owes its origin to Coral Gables founder George Merrick, who donated 160 acres of land and more than $1 million for a planned Mediterranean Revival-style campus. Those dreams were nearly dashed when a devastating Category 4 hurricane blew through Miami on September 18, 1926. The University still opened on schedule on October 15—a sign of the optimistic, scrappy attitude of the U. On opening day, 125 prospective students showed up to enroll.

An unfinished Merrick Building was abandoned for 20 years as the struggling University leased or purchased hotels and apartments two miles north of the campus, hastily converting them into classrooms and housing, giving the school the nickname “Cardboard College.” Another legacy of the storm: adoption of the nickname “Hurricanes” for the athletic teams, first used in a Miami Herald story about the football team, which enjoyed an undefeated 8-0 inaugural season in 1926. By December, there were 646 full-time students.

Over the next two decades, the University built key leadership, faculty, and infrastructure, establishing important academic units including the School of Law, School of Business Administration, School of Education, Graduate School, and School of Engineering.

Army and Navy cadets parade in front of the Anastasia Building, which housed the University prior to construction on the Coral Gables campus.

Emergency medical personnel assisted the people of Haiti in the wake of the nation’s catastrophic earthquake.

Sebastian the Ibis leads the football team onto the field with its traditional “smoke” entrance.
Realizing Its Promise: Post-War Decades (1946-1979)

The G.I. Bill, which funded returning soldiers’ tuition and expenses, shaped the post-World War II years. When the 1946 fall semester commenced, more than 5,000 students registered. To accommodate everyone, the University opened its South Campus for 500 freshmen and 10 faculty.

In 1946 the Memorial Building was dedicated, becoming the first permanent building on the campus. Thanks to a $5 million Federal Housing Administration loan, 530 apartments were built on campus.

In 1948 the Memorial Building was finally completed and opened in 1948.

Subsequently, academic programs were on the upswing: the Marine Institute opened, and in 1948 a long-term lease was signed for property on Virginia Key. In 1952 the medical school opened at the Veterans’ Hospital (the former and future Biltmore Hotel)—Florida’s first medical school.

A great social change took place in 1961 when the Board of Trustees voted to admit qualified students without regard to race and color, ending the segregation that had been in place at the U since its opening. UM’s integration led other Florida institutions to make the same move.

In 1967 the organization United Black Students was founded, and the first black faculty member was hired in 1970.

Approaching the Millennium (1980-2000)

The 1980s began with tremendous upheaval as the Miami community experienced the Mariel Boatlift and inner-city riots. This hurt the local economy and community morale. More than 1,000 students withdrew, causing a $5 million budget shortfall. In response, the University introduced a strategic plan, “Strategy for Excellence,” with the intent of propelling UM into the circle of prestigious private research universities. There was reduced enrollment and increased student selectivity; average SAT scores of incoming freshmen increased by nearly 100 points; and a stronger emphasis on academics, research, teaching excellence, and sponsored research funding. A major change in student life was the transformation of the dormitories into residential colleges.

Hurricane athletics excelled with nine national championships—four in football, three in baseball, one in women’s golf, and one in men’s crew. The football team compiled the longest home winning streak in NCAA history—58 games at the Orange Bowl.

The 2000s have been marked by accelerated progress in all key areas—teaching and learning, the discovery of new knowledge, the delivery of cutting-edge medical care, and service to the region and beyond. The University is ranked No. 44 on U.S. News & World Report 2017 Best Colleges list, which also names UM among the top research universities that graduate students with the lowest amount of debt. In addition, a number of the University’s programs are highly ranked among U.S. News’ “Best Graduate Schools.”

UHealth — The University of Miami Health System, the only academic medical system in South Florida, opened the University of Miami Hospital, its flagship clinical facility in 2007. The Miller School’s Bascom Palmer Eye Institute has been ranked the nation’s No. 1 ophthalmology program for 15 years by U.S News.

The Launch Pad, a novel and successful entrepreneurship initiative developed at the U, has proven to be a successful model that other institutions are emulating. The program enables students and alumni to start new ventures, providing them with coaching, workshops, and access to a network of experienced entrepreneurs.

The University’s landscape has been completely transformed with major centers of excellence opening on all three campuses. On the Coral Gables campus, several new buildings have been erected including the state-of-the-art Shalala Student Center, Newman Alumni Center, Schwartz Center for Athletic Excellence, co-campus housing for upperclassmen; facilities for the architecture, music, communication, and nursing schools, and the College of Arts and Sciences; and the Watsco Center, which is home to the Hurricane men’s and women’s basketball teams. The new Lennar Foundation Medical Center on the Coral Gables campus offers a wide range of the most advanced services—from Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, the University of Miami Health System Sports Medicine Institute, and many other academic medical specialties—under one roof. The Miller School of Medicine opened the Don Soffer Clinical Research Center, Biomedical Research Building, and the University of Miami Health System Bascom Palmer Palm Beach Gardens, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute at Naples, and Sylvester at Deerfield Beach. The Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science opened the Marine Technology and Life Sciences Seawater Complex, which houses a 38,000-gallon, 75-foot-long tank capable of generating Category 5 hurricane-force winds.

In the past few decades, programs in biomedical research have experienced tremendous growth.
With a vast sponsored research portfolio of more than $320 million, the University is firmly entrenched among the nation's top research universities. The Miller School of Medicine and School of Nursing and Health Studies are the top NIH-funded medical and nursing schools in Florida. The quality of students at the University continues to be among the best in American higher education: the fall 2016 freshman class has a mean ACT score of 30 and a mean SAT score of 1300, 60 percent graduated in the top 10 percent of their high school class, and 42 percent graduated in the top 5 percent; and more than 640 undergraduates participate in the prestigious Foote Fellows Honors Program. UM students are also civically minded, with more than 12,500 of them completing over 157,000 community service hours last year.

The student body is highly diverse, reflecting the changing composition of our nation. Students come from all 50 states and Washington, D.C., three territories, and 121 other countries (16 percent international enrollment). There are more than 178,000 University of Miami alumni residing in all 50 states and 154 countries, many who have attained positions of prominence in virtually all professions and fields and many more who are making contributions in communities around the world. The Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science offers various programs for students to conduct cutting-edge scientific research and participate in innovative hands-on experiences in marine biology, including coral reef restoration projects, underwater aquatic surveys, and shark tagging.

The School of Nursing and Health Studies offers a world-class program that integrates curriculum with evidence-based practice and cutting-edge simulated learning.

Every day throughout the University of Miami, excellence and innovation are on display. University of Miami graduates depart the U not only equipped with an excellent education, but a passion to make a positive difference in the world. While most of our graduates enter the corporate world or become entrepreneurs, a growing number join organizations that are committed to serving others. As one of the nation’s top research universities, whose extraordinary momentum makes it one of the great success stories in U.S. higher education, the University of Miami is already on a trajectory toward global greatness. The advancement of the University in a little more than 90 years of existence is undeniable and demonstrates that the U is a force to be reckoned with.

The RoboCanes, a team of autonomous, soccer-playing robots from the College of Arts and Sciences, which can learn from experience, make real-time decisions, and communicate as a group, placed second in the 2014 World RoboCup Tournament in Brazil.

“The University of Miami can be a beacon of resilience—demonstrating that knowledge is the best instrument for facing adversity, and that school spirit is a form of strength. The University of Miami can be a model of renewal—redefining the global agenda and leading the way in the hemisphere, in the laboratory, in the classroom, on the playing fields, and in service to society.”

- From the inaugural address of President Julio Frenk, UM’s sixth president, January 29, 2016
A special thank you to the efforts of the University of Miami Alumni Board of Directors for their leadership in developing this publication.