

November 2, 2016

Barbara J. Feldman, Ph.D.

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Dear Search Committee Members,

It is a pleasure to accept the nomination for President of Florida Gulf Coast University. I have served as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Bridgewater State University (BSU) and prior to that as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at New Jersey City University (NJCU). Florida Gulf Coast University is an institution very similar to those for which I served. It is an institution with values about which I am passionate. It is a learner-centered institution committed to offering students the finest curriculum, in an affordable manner. It is committed to diversity, access and innovation. Its vision that "graduates will be well prepared for productive lives as civically engaged and environmentally conscious citizens with successful careers, ready to pursue further education," exactly matches my vision of what a university education should be.

FGCU has successfully built an institutional culture which focuses on students. This unwavering focus grounds the institution and keeps it focused on its priorities. This focus is exemplified by the guiding principles laid out by the institution and are those that should continue to flourish.

Academic Excellence is primary for FGCU. Academic rigor, innovative curriculum and high impact practices (e.g. honors, programs, internships, co-ops, undergraduate research and study abroad) are essential components. These components keep the curriculum relevant and prepare students for their professions and their lives. My success in these areas has come from building the necessary relationships within the university that support the activities and building bridges to private businesses, government agencies, and international partners. The reconfiguration and re-introduction of the Honors' Program at NJCU was under the auspices of my office as Dean. We were successful because we built the bridges between faculty, administration and admissions and facilities. By working together from the start, we were able to create a unique and challenging curriculum, with a new lounge facility and a strong inaugural class. From there the stage was set for the future. Meaningful internships and co-ops require coordination among academic units, internship/co-op offices and work sites. The benefits of these work experience need to be mutually beneficial to students and placements. At both BSU and NJCU, when we worked to build the bridge of mutual expectation, we enjoyed the most success and have often resulted in post-graduation jobs for interns.

Curricular innovation and distinctiveness are highlighted. Florida Gulf Coast University's commitment to innovative curriculum and engaging local, state and federal government in supporting the initiatives is important. While Dean, I lead a campaign that had NJCU embrace its location in Jersey City. I felt strongly that while attending an urban campus located in the heart of Jersey City and in the shadow of New York City, students should experience the cultural and educational opportunities available in the area as well as learn about the challenges facing the city. To that end, we created and trademarked a NJCU

Feldman

signature program, "Campus Without Borders." The goal of this highly successful program is to extend the student experience beyond the classroom into the metropolitan area and to help students navigate the city, familiarize them with the incredible opportunities available to them, empower them to learn how to contribute to the urban landscape, and equip them with the skills needed to help solve the challenges of our cities. To launch this initiative, we sponsored an urban-themed semester in fall 2011 with specialized courses, lectures, and walking tours, all focusing on the urban experience. We were able to create a similar opportunity at BSU called "Bridgewater, Boston and Beyond." Many BSU students do not have the occasion to travel to Boston. By funding these trips as part of their courses, faculty were able to incorporate cities such as Boston, Providence and Provincetown into their curriculum and bring learning to life. A program like this would work well at Florida Gulf Coast University, as the surrounding area and neighboring cities can serve as an extension of their classroom experience.

A strong relationship with the surrounding community is important to Florida Gulf Coast University and has been for me for as long as I have been an administrator. Engaging the broader community has been a guiding principle of my leadership and is based on my belief that a university must be a contributing member of its community for its own sake as much as for the sake of the community. To this end, while at NJCU, I have developed relationships with institutions and venues in the area to provide students with unique opportunities emerging from our location and which in turn allow the university to outreach to the area. We established a strong relationship with National Park Service's Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island. Together we submitted a successful grant proposal and created a joint artist-in-residence program. NJCU now has courses taught at Ellis Island, and the Media Arts faculty is producing videos as requested by them. Two of the students were selected to create the official logo and poster for the Statue of Liberty 125th anniversary celebration. This is a wonderful honor, the evidence of which will be preserved throughout history.

As a student-centered institution, FGCU is concerned with student success. Student success is the business of everyone at the university. Some organizational positions' part in student success is more obvious than others, but by reaching out, bridge building, and inviting everyone to the task we create a culture of success for students as well as for faculty and staff. BSU's new president has made student success a cornerstone of his leadership. He created a new Division of Student Success and has charged the Vice President of that division and the Provost's office to work side by side in raising our already high levels of retention and steadily increasing 6-year graduation rates. The university is committed to further closing the achievement gaps along gender and race dimensions. The approach to student success is two pronged. The approach involves working at the individual level to offer micro-grants and academic supports to help students succeed, but we are also working at the programmatic level. Academic Affairs has established high impact programs to promote student success. For example, undergraduate research program, our Writing Across the Curriculum, and Quantitative Reasoning Across the Curriculum are programs which have integrated skills identified as central to student success into the curriculum.

Likewise, helping students stay on track for graduation is a big part of student success. At

Feldman

NJCU, my office expended resources to reach out to students with more than the requisite 120 credits who had not graduated and worked on individualized plans to bring to graduation. We were able to bring many students to graduation who otherwise may not have. We also tightened the course withdrawal policy, thereby reducing the number of withdrawals and increasing the graduate rate. With a similar student body of first generation college students with similar academic backgrounds, Florida Gulf Coast University should continue to find as many opportunities it can to support individual student success and raise the overall rates for the institution.

A central contributor to student success is a robust faculty development program. It is my belief that a commitment to faculty and pedagogical innovation are two of the soundest investments a university can make toward student success. At BSU, much of the faculty development funds are distributed by faculty leaders and it has been a recipe for success. The provost's office determines the budget for faculty development and then empowers the faculty to distribute most of the funds. I added to the already existing faculty development programs by establishing a competitive "Provost Scholar" program. The program establishes three awards to pre-tenured faculty which provides a faculty member a three quarter teaching release for two consecutive semesters to engage in research.

Florida Gulf Coast University, like all state universities, is facing challenging fiscal times. State appropriations continue to decline and without alternative sources of revenue, universities have no choice but to pass the burden on to students in terms of increased tuition and fees. Working from the assumption that this option is undesirable and impractical (many of our students cannot afford increased financial burdens), we must look for outside sources of revenue. Reaching out to potential donors to support scholarships is essential. I have been most successful in asking for specific scholarships such as study abroad or honors programs. Many alumni and friends of the university can readily appreciate the value of the experiences and find this form of support rewarding when students share their experiences and appreciation to the donors.

As budgets have become smaller, management of fiscal resources is of increasing importance. I have managed budgets through numerous state cuts and have always balanced my budgets. I have found ways to use available funds for strategic priorities, keep all personnel, and streamline operating fund expenditures.

Since my arrival at BSU, we created a new College of Continuing Studies and hired a founding dean. This college is a huge source of funds to the university by offering credit and non-credit bearing programs, certificate programs and professional development offerings to post- traditional students in Southeastern Massachusetts. This college has provided net revenues as much as \$5 million to the university and this year we are on track to bring in several million more than this. We have reached out to businesses in the area to learn about their needs for an educated workforce and are developing certificate programs that match their needs. As part of this college, we have developed degree completion programs to serve the nearly 300,000 residents of the area with Associate Degrees or some college.

VISION AND PHILOSOPHY

A university is a place of intellectual growth and development. Creating an environment where such growth can occur is the charge of university leadership. It requires an environment of trust and respect. Such an environment allows for the freedom to pursue ideas, ask questions, and challenge assumptions. Such an environment is promoted through building relationships. From every corner of the institution, relationships are important. Assuring that everyone feels valued for their contribution is critical. Through conversations that focus on listening and sharing of ideas, a shared vision of the institution's values and mission are honed. When everyone knows the vision and understands where he or she fits in the basis of trust is created.

This relationship building does not stop at the walls of the university. A university must build and maintain the same quality of relationship with its community and the region. It is incumbent on a university to create relationships with its community and beyond. For the same reasons that it leads to trust and mutual well-being. Universities have much to offer, but to be effective they must listen to what is needed. By listening, universities can partner with local businesses to prepare future employees. Universities have faculty expertise that can be offered as resources to the community as well.

But perhaps the most important thing is to create an environment where the relationship between professor and student is fostered. It is in this relationship that the magic of education happens. A university should be a place where professors feel safe to take risks with their pedagogy and their research, knowing that if they fail they will not be disparaged but celebrated for trying and growing. There should be spaces and facilities where faculty and student have the resources they need to pursue questions and explore ideas. As an undergraduate, I had a professor who engaged me in undergraduate research. I had no idea at the time that my experience would change my dreams and lead me to a life in the academy. I know firsthand what can happen when a professor and a student connect. This experience has been my guiding light throughout my academic career both as a professor and as an administrator.

Through a liberal arts education, either on its own or coupled with a professional degree, universities seek to prepare students for a changing future. We seek to teach them the skills and understandings that will make them nimble and adaptable to whatever may come. Universities must do the same for themselves. The future of the academy is wrought with both opportunities and challenges. To succeed, we need to stay ahead of the trends and where possible to influence the direction of momentum. The academy has faced attacks on the liberal arts, the soaring costs of tuition, and the slowed progress to graduation to name just a few. Solutions to these challenges come from connections. It comes from building connections between what higher education does and what businesses need, what the government needs, what our communities need and what elementary to high school education needs. Much of the assault on higher education may well be rooted in a lack of connection between the academy and these other institutions. The more we can connect, the more we can share our challenges and expertise, the more we can envision a future together we can better serve each other, our students and our

Feldman

society.

Fifteen years of administrative experience have taught me that an important part of succeeding in academic administration is to treat people fairly and respectfully. My years of experience have affirmed that my passions and strengths as an administrator rest with public education that stresses academic excellence and access. I welcome the opportunity to bring my experience to Florida Gulf Coast University.

It would be an honor for me to serve as the fourth President of Florida Gulf Coast University. In my experience, institutions of higher learning with a strong commitment to academic excellence, student success, and community are those best positioned to offer a world class education to its students and to transform its region. I would be honored to lead the university to achieve its vision to “achieve national prominence in offering exceptional value in high quality educational programs that address the regional and statewide needs.

Sincerely,

Barbara J. Feldman, Ph.D.

Professor of Sociology