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Lucy Leske, Robert Luke and Veena Abraham  
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Florida Gulf Coast University

Members of the Presidential Search Committee,

Given my history, background and career of service in higher education, I enthusiastically submit my application materials for consideration as the next president of Florida Gulf Coast University. Throughout my professional career, I have served as a faculty member, department chair, Vice President for Advancement and now President at institutions who commit themselves to student centered learning. The entirety of my career has been shaped by and committed to this type of personal education that I believe to be truly life changing.

As a faculty member and department chair (Monmouth College), I oversaw the personal growth of my academic program by 300%. I worked in consort with our admissions office to personally recruit students through a data driven approach, helped secure resources for my program, and worked to manage departmental resources to maximize our program's impact on the college. As the Vice President for Advancement (Monmouth and Silver Lake College), I helped bring to completion the largest capital campaign in the institution's history and achieved significant milestones in annual giving. I personally solicited donors for naming gifts of capital projects, worked with them on planned giving initiatives and strengthened support systems within the advancement office. Now, as the current President of a blended liberal arts institution (Bethel College), I have successfully led the institution through the creation and implementation of our first strategic plan and the initial implementation of our second, even more robust strategic plan, "Extending our Heritage, Expanding Our Impact" Strategic Plan (2016-2022).

The hallmark of my career, as a teacher or an administrator, has been my focus on listening, identifying, assessing and prioritizing actions and initiatives that are most urgent for the success and progress of the program, organization or institution with which I have been associated. Those skills have been very helpful in my position at Bethel College and were essential in constructing the first strategic plan (2011-2016), "The Roadmap for Bethel College," which has served as the institutional guide for the past five years of my presidency.

Within each of the plan's priorities, much has been accomplished. A few highlights:

- Much like the growth experienced by FGCU in recent years, Bethel's total enrollment increased by 15% from spring 2010 to fall 2016 and retention rates were achieved which now exceed the state average by 10%.
- As a means of expanding the market base and reinvigorating the curriculum, the College introduced academic programs in Graphic Design, Accounting & Finance, On-Line RN-BSN, Computer Science, Chinese Studies and Sport Management.
- Realizing that facility upgrades and deferred maintenance are always a priority, cash gifts were secured to fully fund facility renovations to the Will Academic Center, Schultz Student Center and Cafeteria, Fine Arts Center, and Warkentin Court Residence Hall, as well as significant improvements to campus infrastructure, landscaping and curb appeal.
- With an intentional effort to improve campus diversity, financial support was sought and received for the establishment of the Chinese Studies Initiative, which included introductory and conversational Mandarin, a travel abroad component, as well as student and faculty exchange programs. In addition, credited course work was also initiated within the area of Diversity Study, minority enrollments have been increased and our multicultural program has been re-imagined in an effort to help all of our students adapt to a rural environment, recognizing the limited opportunity for cultural engagement in rural south central Kansas.
- Knowing that alternative streams of revenue are critical for the fiscal health of an institution, community connections and partnerships were established and strengthened through direct engagement with the Cities of Newton and North Newton, The Newton Chamber of Commerce, The Wichita Non-Profit Chamber, The Harvey County Economic Development Commission, and the Newton and Salina Regional Hospitals.

The accomplishments of "The Roadmap for Bethel College" have well-positioned the organization to engage the next evolutionary phase for the institution and led to the construction of the newest strategic plan, "Extending our Heritage, Expanding our Impact". This process began with a President-initiated Board of Directors review of vision, mission and values and featured a fully inclusive process for the construction of the next guiding document. The Board completed their review of the guiding statements in October 2014 and a fully-integrated task force, with representation from faculty, staff, students and the administrative team, was formed to prioritize, set metrics and craft the document throughout the spring and summer months of 2015. On October 8, 2015, the Board voted in unanimous approval for the implementation phase of the plan to begin. The strength of this plan resides in growth through the reinvestment and development of new pipelines for enrollment and revenue, along with a commitment to broad and sustainable partnerships with a variety of entities.

Currently, there are 36 active initiatives underway with responsibility and accountability spread throughout the organization, including student government, staff, faculty, administration and the Board of Directors. However, as President, I have assumed direct responsibility for two exciting projects.

1. The construction of our new *Center for Non-Profit Leadership and Innovation* – This initiative is funded by sponsors from local industry and affordable tuition from participants. With a flexible curriculum designed through direct dialogue and collaboration with the 160-member Wichita Non-Profit Chamber, the Center functions as an example of “just in time learning,” which allows non-profit organizations an opportunity to help prepare leadership to tackle the most pressing issues faced within their industry.
2. The cultivation and development of a new formalized partnership with the Harvey County Economic Development Commission to establish a *Small Business Incubator* on the Bethel campus to serve both traditional age college students as well as members of the larger community.

As I have worked through various strategic planning exercises with both on-campus and off-campus constituencies, I have come to believe that a contemporary understanding of and future support for the liberal learning model must include a new definition and view of entrepreneurship. With its base in the Old French, *entreprendre*, one can see the direct correlation between the concept of “one who undertakes or searches” to the notion of identifying problems and pursuing solutions. With such an understanding, I firmly believe that the obligation of the academe is to cultivate an environment that fosters a balance of effectual and causal reasoning within all students, while providing the guardrails and security of exploration offered by the nurturing, University experience.

It is my belief in the absolute necessity of a more entrepreneurial approach in higher education that has led me to the decision to seek another Presidency at the close of my current contract in July 2017. While my time at Bethel College has been tremendously rewarding and has yielded significant achievements for the institution, as I look forward, it is my desire to work in a campus environment that is more prepared to embrace the mounting challenges and new paradigm of higher education with a greater entrepreneurial mindset. Given the structures in place, the diverse revenue streams developed, and commitment to positively impacting the needs of the region, I believe FGCU is uniquely positioned to quite successfully meet these challenges and I would find such work to be tremendously invigorating.

Looking to the future of higher education, I firmly believe that colleges and universities focused on a contemporary understanding of the liberal arts must establish a stronger and more visible national position on the significance of the liberal learning model. However, higher education

must also develop a much greater flexibility in order to achieve a timely response to the rapidly changing needs of our students and society in order to remain relevant and viable. Indeed, those of us who know the value of the liberal arts experience must think strategically about how we infuse a liberal learning mindset throughout, not only the undergraduate experience, but also through the graduate experience, professional programs, the work place and life-long learning.

Based upon the institutional accomplishments articulated in the presidential search profile, I believe Florida Gulf Coast University is uniquely positioned to be the kind of strong and persuasive voice that can convey the value of a career oriented liberal learning educational experience on a national stage. Through my increased responsibilities with the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities organization, I have become familiar with numerous avenues by which one might continue to develop, more broadly, the reputation and appreciation for a FGCU education. Given the recent successes achieved by the University, I believe Florida Gulf Coast is well positioned to leverage its commitment to a sustainable future in its region, civic engagement, record of academic excellence, and distinctive location in order to advance its goals of executing a new strategic plan, establishing and promoting the University's distinctive institutional identity, increasing resource acquisition, creating a strong sense of community and building a strong organization. I do believe that my experiences connect directly with the leadership opportunity agenda FGCU has outlined.

From my earliest days as a teacher, I have believed that the obligation of higher education is to nurture hope, not just in thought or theory but in our actions. Certainly, our corporate priority is to nurture the hopes and dreams of our students, but through them we bring hope to our communities and society at large. Such an approach forces us, as teachers and as an institution, to take ownership for student success. However, such an approach also lays a heavy burden of responsibility on our students – our graduates – as they serve as our hope and the barometer by which we gauge our success as teachers and as an institution. Such an approach is life-changing. Such an approach can be world-changing. Such an objective is our obligation – it is our call to service.

Given the tremendous potential at Florida Gulf Coast University, I would look forward to and glean energy from the opportunity to work very closely with the entire FGCU community to further leverage the many clearly articulated institutional assets toward a bold and perhaps, audacious case statement for the value of an innovative and contemporary Florida Gulf Coast education. It would be my privilege to represent such a statement to local, regional and national audiences.

In closing, I believe that Florida Gulf Coast University would be a marvelous opportunity for my wife, Dalene, and me to share with another institution our energy, optimism, commitment and passion for the future of higher education. Be assured that we will bring the enthusiasm, sense of humor and drive to do the work that needs to be done.

I welcome any opportunity to further discuss my qualifications and vision for Florida Gulf Coast University and encourage you to contact me if you have any questions or wish to see any further materials.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Most sincerely,

Dr. Perry D. White  
President, Bethel College