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Florida Gulf Coast University Presidential Search Committee  
C/o Witt/Kieffer  
2015 Spring Road, Suite 510  
Oak Brook, IL 60523

Dear Search Committee Members:

I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity to be considered for the position of President at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). Throughout my nearly thirty (30) year career in public higher education within the State University System of Florida (SUS) I have served in several leadership positions, and have been credited with establishing and enhancing a wide variety of initiatives and programs that have advanced the institutions I've served. I am a successful fundraiser and possess a disarming and persuasive persona conducive to problem solving and articulating a shared organizational vision. I have served as both an academic leader and full-time faculty member at FGCU and empathize with our core values and beliefs. I am not a candidate for any other position as my only remaining professional desire is to help in making FGCU the best institution it can possibly be.

As I explore this particular leadership position in detail, I believe that my varied experiences are particularly transferable to the preferred professional qualifications and personal characteristics identified for the next President of FGCU. I began my career within the SUS at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) in 1988 primarily assisting in the development and establishment of an increasingly complex infrastructure within the office of research and sponsored programs. From there I spent approximately five (5) years at the University of Florida within the College of Medicine, and the past eighteen (18) plus years at FGCU building various programs, starting new initiatives in a variety of areas, and serving as full-time faculty member in the Department of Educational Leadership, Technology and Research. I sincerely believe that my diverse past experiences at FGCU, coupled with my experience within the SUS, serve me well in being able to lead FGCU to an even greater level of prominence.

I am well aware of the challenges the next president of FGCU will face, and have a proven track-record in being successful at facing challenges. It is essential that the next FGCU president be able to articulate a shared organizational vision, execute strategic planning initiatives, promote a distinctive institutional identity, increase revenue to support strategic goals, and foster a campus climate that is inclusionary and non-discriminating. Difficult decisions will need to be made that are influenced by both internal and external forces. Decisions made will have a significant impact on the future

of FGCU. The changing landscape of higher education in general requires anticipating change and being responsive to it in a way that will benefit FGCU as a whole. For example, the steady increase in performance funding opportunities will play a significant role in strategic planning. The manner in which institutions respond to improving on performance metrics will be of vital importance. It will require a leader who can adapt to change, articulate a shared organizational vision, and who can effectively work with a broad and diverse constituency that have competing desires, wants, and needs.

Please allow me to briefly highlight some of my career accomplishments and experiences that I believe are supportive of my candidacy for the presidency at FGCU. First, I've had the privilege of leading fundraising efforts in support of research and sponsored programs at FGCU that resulted in over \$120 million in revenue during my tenure as chief research officer. I have worked closely with federal and state legislators and staffers to garner over \$11 million in federal appropriation support for various projects at FGCU. In collaboration with the Florida Gulf Coast University Foundation, I have authored proposals, met with donors, and been part of a dedicated team that has enjoyed great success. The majority of my senior management experience at FGCU has focused primarily on the establishment, development, and fundraising efforts in support of research and sponsored programs. I served as a member of the Dean's Council, Academic Affairs Senior Leadership Team, Planning & Budgeting Council, President's Executive Team, and President's Council. My primary responsibilities included strategic planning, fundraising, budgeting, accounting, compliance, government relations, and technology transfer. I am credited with establishing a comprehensive research infrastructure that led to significant growth and distinction for a comprehensive university. During my tenure as chief research officer, research and sponsored program activity more than quadrupled, growing from less than \$3 million annually to an average of nearly \$14 million annually over the last five fiscal years I served in this capacity.

I had the privilege of establishing internal programs that supported faculty and students in their scholarly pursuits. For example, I led the establishment of a faculty travel program, internal grant program, student travel program, and an annual event known as Research Day. Research Day was established as a way to communicate to the general public and the entire university community the important role research plays in a predominantly undergraduate institution with a focus on teaching and service learning. The inaugural Research Day event in 2000 yielded 37 faculty and student poster presentations with about 50 overall participants. The event became so popular that in the last year of my tenure as chief research officer there were over 200 faculty and student posters with more than 400 participants.

I am also very proud of my contribution toward the expansion and support of undergraduate and graduate studies at FGCU. Undergraduate programs were improved through creation of opportunities for student research experiences. I am gratified to have created a student travel program that provided both national and international opportunities for students to present their scholarship under the mentorship of a faculty member. In addition, I led the creation of an undergraduate student research grant program that supported undergraduate research across all academic programs. As

graduate programs expanded, I assisted a previous provost in establishing the Office of Graduate Studies in 2005. I found innovative ways to support new graduate studies initiatives with limited resources. For example, research assistantships and graduate assistantships were created to help recruit high quality students while at the same time helping to enhance the overall research capacity at the university.

While FGCU is classified as a “comprehensive university” with primary emphasis on teaching, research does play a critical role in our growth and development. Recognizing the strong connection between research and economic development I felt that it was imperative to promote, support, and encourage the advancement of intellectual property and related technology transfer activities from our inception. While early on such opportunities were minimal, creating an atmosphere that was receptive and conducive to such activities ultimately paid off. In January 2007, FGCU filed its first U.S. patent application, and since that time (and during my tenure as chief research officer) eight more patent applications were filed. In September 2013, FGCU was assigned its first patent which was quickly followed by a second patent in 2014. Such support can lead to licensing agreements and spin-off companies being formed that would likely help in diversifying the economy of the region and create new jobs. In my view, this is precisely the type of activity that should occur within the newly formed Emergent Technologies Institute (ETI) at FGCU as it would help advance the entrepreneurship pillar of FGCU’s current strategic plan.

In short, during my tenure as chief research officer common indicators of success in terms of research and sponsored programs at peer institutions were unparalleled. Many comprehensive universities across the United States that have been in existence for decades have not achieved the level of success in research and sponsored programs that FGCU achieved in its first fourteen (14) years.

In addition to my primary responsibilities at FGCU focusing on research and sponsored programs, I have also been privileged to participate in other university-wide decision making. As member of Dean’s Council I participated in strategic planning and decision making as it pertains to academic affairs as a whole. This includes a broad range of activity from accreditation matters to establishment of new academic programs. As a member of the President’s Executive Team and President’s Council I participated in important decision making on topics such as university-wide strategic planning, legal matters, capital campaigns, athletics, student affairs, and administrative services concerns. I was asked to serve as Interim Associate Vice President for Off Campus Programs and Continuing Education at a critical time when unexpected circumstances created an immediate need for senior leadership. I quickly familiarized myself with the matter at hand and took action that led to improved effectiveness and relationships with both internal and external constituencies.

In short, my senior administrative leadership experience extends well beyond research and sponsored programs. Serving in various senior leadership capacities at FGCU over the past eighteen (18) years has provided me with knowledge, experience, and an appreciation of the overall trials and tribulations of leading an institution of higher

education. I also empathize with the critical role faculty members play in advancing FGCU. Being a full-time faculty member at FGCU has provided me with firsthand experience in teaching, service, and scholarship activities that are detailed in my attached curriculum vita. The contribution that faculty members throughout the university make in promoting student success is nothing short of remarkable. It has been my distinct privilege to work with such esteemed colleagues both as a peer and senior administrator. In summary, I believe that my vast and diverse experience in higher education, coupled with my strong desire to lead FGCU to a greater level of prominence, make me an ideal candidate to lead FGCU. Please allow me to briefly summarize how some of my other diverse past experiences complement what is being sought in the next President of FGCU.

Prior to joining FGCU, I served as Assistant Director for Research at the University of Florida - College of Medicine, and in the same capacity at the University of Florida Health Science Center - Jacksonville. These mid-level management administrative positions provided me with first-hand experience in regard to medical schools and the interaction between the university, affiliated hospitals, and faculty practice plans. In addition to negotiating clinical trial agreements and assisting with numerous National Institutes of Health proposal submissions, I had the good fortune of being asked by senior leadership to attempt to solve some serious problems that existed. I am most proud of two major accomplishments.

First, I authored a proposal for the establishment of the Center for Clinical Research at the University of Florida Health Science Center – Jacksonville. This proposal was received with great favor and led to the establishment of a centralized office that combined services and staff of the Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research (IRB), research administration services, biostatistics, and clinical coordination services. This office exists and is functioning admirably to this day.

Second, I led the creation of a guide for initiating, registering, ordering, billing, and recovering professional and technical fees for clinical research studies at the University of Florida Health Science Center – Jacksonville, University Medical Center (affiliated teaching hospital), and University of Florida Jacksonville Physicians, Inc. (faculty practice). This was a time consuming and complicated task, but through perseverance and persuasion the guide was finished and used by all concerned. In fact, the document became an extremely useful guide for all involved, easing the pressure often associated with the administrative aspect of conducting clinical studies. I am confident that these past experiences will greatly assist in advancing the health sciences pillar of FGCU's current strategic plan.

While at Florida Atlantic University, I had the opportunity to assist the Vice President for Research establish a centralized infrastructure for research and sponsored programs. With no other full-time professional staff working in the office it was often left to me to draft policy and procedures for others to consider. While at the time I initially regretted accepting the position, I eventually became thankful for the experience. Had my initial exposure to the field of research administration been within an already fully established

office, I would never had the benefit of broad exposure to a vast variety of topics that later were of great benefit to me. The office grew during my tenure, and research and sponsored programs began to thrive.

My professional career began in 1984 as a Program Coordinator for the City of Warren, Michigan Planning Department. I later became a Program Planner for Palm Beach County, Florida within the Office of Housing and Community Development. In both of these positions I conducted numerous monitoring and site visits pertaining to residential rehabilitation programs, construction projects, and major equipment purchases. I also created annual reports and provided progress reports on various projects and activities at public meetings. While working for Palm Beach County, Florida my powers of persuasion were vigorously tested when I was asked to appear before the town Council of some of the county's most affluent communities in an attempt to persuade them to become partners in community development initiatives. Much to the surprise of my supervisor, I returned to the office with an affirmative response that had never before been achieved. From an early age I have been blessed with a disarming and persuasive persona, an ability to articulate a shared vision, and an enthusiasm for achieving collective desired results. It would be my distinct pleasure to utilize these personal characteristics and skills in leading FGCU.

I sincerely believe that a successful educational leader requires skills in developing a broadly shared vision for the institution. Anticipating and managing organizational change is an important component of educational leadership, as is having knowledge and skill in the techniques and tools for implementing change. Successful leadership of a university requires building and maintaining work groups or teams of organizational members who will share in the leadership of the organization. University leaders must be skilled in matters of complexity, including the financing of higher education, the political, economic, and social contextual factors affecting public higher education.

Successful leadership of a public university requires a thorough knowledge of public education in the United States. It is essential to be skillful at bringing together diverse voices to achieve the institution's goals and objectives. These voices are found both within and external to the organization. University leadership must be accountable to the many stakeholders of the institution. Stakeholders include various boards and board members, students, faculty, staff, community leaders, higher education officials in the state, alumni, donors, and government leaders. Constant interaction with various constituency groups is extremely important in articulating a shared vision and achieving desired results.

Finally, important for all successful leaders in academe is an appreciation for diversity and inclusion. I believe diversity of opinion is critical to ensuring that the best information possible is available to guide decision-making. As one of the major goals, universities prepare graduates for a workforce that is increasingly diverse with respect to age, nationality, culture, sexual orientation, language, and race. I am committed to diversity and inclusion in every aspect, and believe it should be an essential focus for all educational leaders.

In summary, I am particularly interested in this position because I sincerely love FGCU and have no desire to go anywhere else. I am committed to help in making FGCU the best institution that it can possibly become. Never in my professional career have I felt such a strong connection to the institution that I serve. I even seek refuge from the trials and tribulations of daily service to FGCU and personal challenges that we all face, through being an enthusiastic participant in various university events. I often share this enthusiasm by bringing family and friends to such events, and they always walk away with a feeling of pride that in turn feeds my strong desire to serve FGCU. Regardless of the outcome of this extremely important presidential search for FGCU, it will remain my intention to continue to admirably serve in helping make FGCU the best it is capable of becoming.

Thank you for the opportunity to be a candidate in this most critical search for FGCU. My curriculum vita is attached to this letter of interest. I sincerely look forward to the prospect of meeting with you personally to further discuss my interest in this position. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions. Go Eagles!!!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas J. Roberts". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'T'.

Thomas J. Roberts, Ed.D.  
College of Education  
Florida Gulf Coast University