

Stephen Mulkey, PhD

6622 NW 52 Terrace, Gainesville, FL 32653
208.596.3234
smulkey@ufl.edu professional
ssmulkey@gmail.com personal
EnvironmentalCentury.net

Date: 8 November 2016

To: Selection Committee for President, Florida Gulf Coast University

Dear Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Florida Gulf Coast University is in a rarified class of institutions that is positioned for sustained academic excellence and robust financial development during an era characterized by an adverse environment for higher education. As the fastest growing university in the Florida State University System, it hosts a distinctive collection of innovative programs and many outstanding young members of the faculty. The diversity of its student body preadapts FGCU for unfolding demographic shifts in the U.S. and Florida. Perhaps more than many state-supported universities, FGCU is intimately partnered with regional and local economies and the needs of its constituents. By leveraging its strengths in Southwest Florida and building on an exciting congruence of programmatic initiatives outlined in the new strategic plan, FGCU can serve not only the needs of its region but distinguish itself as one of the best public institutions in the nation. Here, I will articulate a vision for how FGCU can consolidate its gains thus far, build institutional coherence, and achieve pre-eminence as guided by the strategic plan.

Central to this vision is the fact that FGCU is well situated to bring together three academic foci that are foundational to the well-being and development of Southwest Florida. First, FGCU is effectively at ground zero for environmental concerns of fresh water quality, marine ecology, sea level rise, hurricane resilience, the medical ecology of disease, and ecological regeneration of degraded landscapes. Secondly, as shown by the recent [report](#) by the University of Florida GeoPlan Center, the regional population and economy are projected to have major growth through mid-century. The business and engagement opportunities for FGCU are manifold. Thirdly, the diverse demography of the region offers a rich opportunity for the social and health sciences to develop innovative approaches for individual and community wellbeing. These three areas of knowledge generation and education are linked together by the human ecology of the region. The strategic plan offers the opportunity for appropriate development of this linkage through identified Centers of Excellence consisting of programming by the College of Arts and Sciences, the Lutgert College of Business, the U. A. Whitaker College of Engineering, and the College of Health Professions and Social Work. Each of these and the College of Education has a critical role to play in the development of adaptive strategies for the region as we enter a period of accelerating economic and environmental change. I see these challenges as opportunities for significant academic and financial development of FGCU through its mission of public service to environmental sustainability, human diversity, and regional development.

My odyssey as scientist and administrator has afforded me rich experiences in several sectors of higher education, including being a research scientist in tropical forests, interdisciplinary program developer at three public institutions, science advisor to policy makers, fundraiser, a public scientist, and college president. A turning point came for me while working in Brazilian regrowth forest in 2002. I became troubled by the speed of ecological disruption, and attendant human misery, and I began to question the immediate relevance of my research. At the time, I was tenured, mentoring four graduate students, and funded by a major grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation. In consultation with colleagues and my graduate students, I embarked on a search for ways to make our work more relevant to our civilization's unfolding existential crisis.

My Experiences

The most meaningful work of my career has been to provide vision and collaborative leadership in the development of integrative academic programs, and I would hope to bring this skill to the presidency at FGCU. I have provided leadership in interdisciplinary curriculum development at the University of Missouri St. Louis, the University of Florida, the University of Idaho, and Unity College in Maine. Collectively these appointments have convinced me of the crucial importance of the prosocial foundation provided by the humanities and liberal arts for development of effective STEM programming. At each of these institutions, I've also built effective, collaborative relationships with campus, community, and government stakeholders to implement major projects and create financial stability.

In 1996, I was recruited to the University of Florida from the University of Missouri St. Louis, where I had cofounded and directed the interdisciplinary graduate program in tropical ecology. My change of focus while in Brazil led to my appointment in 2005 as director of research for UF's interdisciplinary School of Natural Resources and Environment, where I advanced the development of research and external programs focused on sustainability and climate change across several colleges and the UF Extension service. In 2007, while serving as science advisor on climate and energy to the State of Florida and Governor Crist, I was recruited to develop and lead the Environmental Science Program at the University of Idaho. This position operated with the budgetary and program authority of a dean representing 86 members of the faculty spanning four colleges. Over the next few years, I acquired significant funding from NSF and NASA for interdisciplinary program development. To develop my unit's business model and expand the brand and reach of the University's environmental programming, I researched and deployed critical marketing elements. As a public figure interpreting climate change science, I successfully negotiated the legislative process in Boise to create six new interdisciplinary Professional Science Master's degree programs, including one in sustainability science.

Seeking opportunities for important program development, I was encouraged by colleagues at the Council of Environmental Deans and Directors to investigate struggling liberal arts colleges as institutions where fundamental change might be possible. Examining some of these institutions more closely, I realized that leading such an organization could be an opportunity to put into action my ideas for holistic undergraduate education.

From July 2011 through early January 2016, I served as President of Unity College, a 700-student liberal arts institution in Maine with the trademark *America's Environmental College*. The College is justifiably proud of its commitment to environmental and conservation science, and hands-on service-based and experiential learning. I championed these efforts and in early 2012 led the faculty and board of trustees to unanimously adopt sustainability science, as broadly articulated by the United States National Academy of Science, as the transdisciplinary framework for all liberal arts programming. While the faculty and I identified this structure as the science of sustainability, we affirmed through significant investments that the liberal arts and humanities would remain foundational and integrated throughout all programming. Although in serious decline when I arrived, Unity College is now thriving and is seen by many as an industry leader among undergraduate environmental liberal arts four-year institutions. My experience while collaboratively leading the community to this success was variously exhilarating and frustrating and without a doubt the most rewarding of my professional life. I learned the essential elements of collaborative leadership and full engagement with the College's internal and external constituencies.

Some of the milestones from my presidency are:

- Reversing a three-year decline, the College has the highest enrollment in its history for consecutive years, selectively drawing on a pool of highly qualified students beyond New England.
- In fall 2011, I cultivated a \$10 million gift and began to steward the College's relationship with the donor family.
- Since 2011, net revenue increased 31 percent, while the freshman discount rate remained below 40 percent (quite modest among private institutions).
- The operating budget grew from under \$12 million to over \$18 million, and the net worth of the College, exclusive of its endowment, has increased more than 90 percent.
- In December 2015 the College was finishing the installment of \$20 million in new construction, including three new energy efficient residence halls, a new dining hall, and a classroom and lab building.
- I collaboratively led the community through the extensive renovation of the grounds and all the important facilities existing when I arrived in 2011.
- I approved the hiring of 15 new members of the faculty, all with terminal degrees and excellent backgrounds. Most of these scholars were attracted to the College because of its sustainability science emphasis.
- The academic programs now include a new Honors Program, a new Undergraduate Research Program, a newly acquired field station with operating endowment (the McKay Farm and Research Station), and a new fully approved Professional Master of Science transdisciplinary program in sustainability science.
- In 2013, Unity College was reviewed by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and awarded unconditional accreditation for another ten years. I was centrally involved in developing the College's self-study.
- In 2013, I developed a relationship with the Andrew Wyeth family and negotiated ongoing funding and access to their private island estate. Faculty grants from the

estate foundation allowed the development of student-centered cultural and ecological research, using the family's unique collection of art and the natural disturbance ecology of the rocky Maine coast.

- In fall 2012, I initiated and acquired the unanimous approval of the Board of Trustees to make Unity College the first institution of higher learning in the nation to divest its endowment (\$15.5 million) from the top 200 fossil fuel companies. In recognition of this leadership, I was appointed to serve on the board of directors of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

My partner, Michele Leavitt, and I chose to ask the Board of Trustees to release me early from my five-year contract for reasons partly related to our quality of life in rural interior Maine. Most important in my thinking was my desire to work for a larger institution with a greater economy of scale and capacity for creative development. My Board was pleased with my service and its members were generous and unanimously supportive and understanding of my decision. I felt secure in leaving because the strategic plan was more than half executed and my successor, who served as my Executive Vice President, is an expert at higher education management.

Considerations Specific to Florida Gulf Coast University

Florida Gulf Coast University has a strong basis from which to leverage new resources and develop the identity of the University. It is clear that the regional community is deeply invested in the success of FGCU. Regional constituents see FGCU as "their" institution of higher learning. Equally important is the rising profile of FGCU among the many state-supported institutions in Florida. This growing prestige affords the next president ample opportunity for brand development, revenue stabilization and growth, and philanthropic fundraising.

Execute the New Strategic Plan for 2016-2021. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of this opportunity is the new strategic plan. The online draft plan identifies Centers of Excellence that can develop synergy and program coherence as a function of regional environmental and economic issues and opportunities. The designated Centers of Excellence – The Environment, STEM Education, Business and Industry for the 21st Century, Health Professions for Burgeoning Metropolitan Region – can be unified and driven by the human ecology and environmental challenges of Southwest Florida. Given my background, I could not have hoped for a better strategic template from which to build brand identification and new revenue generation for FGCU. Each of the sectors represented by the Centers of Excellence can make major contributions to urban sustainability, economic development, energy production, human health, and community well-being. The ability of the region to respond to rapidly developing climate change is utterly dependent upon the products of such an effort. Using the environment/economy nexus as an organizing focus, I believe that FGCU can serve the public trust while generating significant new sources of revenue.

Promote FGCU Brand Development and Identity. The market analysis conducted by Neustadt Creative Marketing in early 2014 correctly identifies appropriate brand development and communications architecture for three primary constituencies of FGCU: (1) students, (2) families and businesses located regionally in Southwest Florida, and (3) those beyond

Southwest Florida. Although this is a competent frame for communications, these three constituencies exist for most institutions regardless of their location and composition. It is my experience that once an institution establishes its credibility through appropriate metrics targeting a specific audience, tailored affective and cultural elements are indispensable for developing a great institutional identity.

Soon after becoming president of Unity College, I recognized that our most important source of new revenue would be through expanded enrollment. Because of an aging population, our market for students would need to extend well beyond New England. We used data-driven analysis of metropolitan areas to target specific demographic groups with inbound Internet marketing while defining our brand through strong affective messaging about the higher purpose of an environmental education. This approach proved very successful and represented an excellent return on investment. I would recommend that FGCU assesses the affective messaging associated with the development of its communications architecture and emphasize an emerging distinctive institutional culture. Nationwide, Hispanic students will constitute an increasing majority of potential matriculates, and thus represent a significant opportunity for revenue development in Florida.

Increase Revenue. The performance-based funding model used by the state can be used to focus efforts on revenue development. Although the criteria in this model are variously subject to interpretation, certain basic metrics such as the six-year graduation rate and second-year retention are valuable benchmarks for building reliable models for stabilizing and expanding tuition revenue. Although FGCU projects modest enrollment growth, it is important that growth is predictable. The first approach to this involves assessing the applicant pool for academic and financial capacity with careful attention to enhancing diversity and the service mission of the university. It is my experience that dynamic management of enrollment involves (1) often major revisions of branding and marketing, (2) data-driven near-real-time tracking of students from the first contact to matriculation, (3) frequent personal contact with desired students, and (4) alumni, students, and faculty in the recruitment process. After a student matriculates, active tracking and advising are essential to their success. It is my experience that the technique of Intrusive Advising can have a significant effect on retention and graduation rate.

State appropriations contingent on performance metrics can be enhanced through investment in job placement services. As president of Unity College, I mandated the expansion of the jobs fair and increased funding for our placement advisors and their staff. These investments resulted in a steady improvement in employment metrics. Some of the categories in the State performance model are dependent on perception and political influence. I believe that Florida Gulf Coast University is in an excellent position to make a strong case for its increasing value.

A Strong Sense of Community. FGCU is a special institution to its internal and regional communities. From my travels through the region and engagement with colleagues who know the University, I can tell that there are strong affection and sense of identification by constituencies on and off campus. This represents a trust that the President must work to enhance through all interactions members of the community. I have considerable

experience working with external stakeholders including state legislators and state agencies in Florida and Idaho. In Florida, I engaged with Governor Charlie Crist, representing my university's research and curriculum in climate change and energy alternatives. In Maine, I became comfortable speaking to community service organizations and representatives of municipalities. I have served as an advocate for energy policy with the Florida congressional contingent in Washington, DC.

It is important that the Office of the President always operate in the open. Transparency and accessibility are prerequisites for trust, but it is my experience that the information available to faculty and staff at some institutions does not reflect the spirit of this commitment. I have found that informing faculty and staff to the fullest extent possible about issues of finance and facilities helps to build collaboration in the search for solutions and compromises. Ideally, being fully informed helps the professional community to become invested in strategic outcomes that can improve their lives as scholars and committed staff at the University. Studies have shown that two factors determine effective engagement of faculty with curriculum and program development. These are (1) faculty autonomy in areas of their purview, and (2) the ability for all voices to be heard in the process of program development. I would apply this same reasoning to engagement with the larger community and business interests. I would actively work to make it possible for external stakeholders to have a voice in the strategic development of the University.

Fundraising. Collaborating with local communities and in advancement has been an important and ongoing part of my professional growth. At Missouri, I helped to engineer funding for our nascent Ph.D. program in tropical ecology through gala events featuring celebrity scientists such as Jane Goodall, Richard Leakey, and Jacques Cousteau. I was one of the principals who designed programming and solicited funding for Latin American graduate students, whom I actively recruited from Central America. While at Florida, I worked with senior fundraisers from the University of Florida Foundation to seek external support for the environmental sciences. I successfully solicited a commitment of \$2 million from the Sarasota County Commission and led an effort to create a land-use institute for the state, which unfortunately was not further developed by the state government. I served as the science advisor to the Florida governor's sustainability commission, affording me the opportunity to travel widely throughout the state and engage legislators, diverse stakeholders, and potential donors. At Unity College, I cultivated and stewarded the two largest gifts in the College's history, \$10 million and \$1.5 million, respectively.

My wife and I maintain a home in Gainesville, Florida, where I joined the faculty at UF in 1996. I am thus intimately familiar with the various demographics and ecologies of Florida. My experience as science advisor to the Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida provided me access to members of the legislature, Governor Crist, and individuals familiar with the political process in Tallahassee. As president of FGCU, I would hope to leverage this experience to generate significant opportunities for philanthropy.

Building and Leading a Strong Organization. Florida Gulf Coast University is poised for eminence statewide and nationally. To realize this potential, the Office of President should develop the capacity for data-based scenario planning. This exercise should be adjunct to strategic planning and occur at least once a year. At the table should be experts and

academic leaders from business, environmental science, health care, education, and key external constituents and industries. Such an advisory council is indispensable to meet the external challenges that exist and those that will emerge over the coming decade. A few of these are (1) a continuing adverse financial environment for higher education in the U.S., (2) shifting demographics that will require institutions to refocus marketing and the character of academic programming, (3) the potential for unsustainable growth in Southwest Florida and statewide, and (4) rapidly changing maritime and terrestrial ecologies which will have major impacts on the regional economy and human well-being. The strategic plan provides a template for a sustained adaptive response to these challenges. By building appropriate synergies among programming in the Centers of Excellence, FGCU can become a national example of how higher education can prosper and meet its ethical imperative to future generations.

About the Person

I grew up in the northern Missouri town of Moberly, graduating from public high school in 1971. My parents did not attend college. My father, who served in Europe during WWII, upholstered furniture in the family garage, while my mother made drapes on commission in the living room. When I was 14, my father acquired the Ethan Allen franchise for mid-Missouri, and their lives transformed over the coming decades. In 1980, I attended the University of Pennsylvania with a full fellowship, and my life as a scholar began. At the time, Penn was recruiting promising graduate students with a strong background in natural history. While at Penn, I began a 22-year association with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, with my research based in tropical forest in Central America. I am an avid cyclist, backpacker, and paddler, and I play stringed instruments. I am privileged that two extraordinary young adults call me Dad. My son Andrew has recently completed environmental law at the University of Oregon and will sit for the Bar in February. My daughter Sachi is in her final year of animation studies at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, a talent that she plans to apply to inspiring people to action on the pressing issues of our time. My partner, Michele Leavitt, holds two terminal degrees and is a former Boston trial attorney and nationally recognized writer of creative nonfiction and poetry.

As a consequence of many engagements with the academy, and recognizing the urgent obligations of our time, I have purposefully lost grasping for career achievement. I have seen gratuitous ambition corrupt efforts to meet our ethical imperative. For me, this work is about developing effective institutions of higher learning for the maintenance and renewal of civilization at a time when the existential threats to civilization are very real. I am grateful for the opportunity to apply for this position and I am honored by your consideration. The post of president of Florida Gulf Coast University would build on my lifetime professional commitments, and it meets all of my personal goals for relevance and meaning during this next phase of my professional life.

Sincerely,



Stephen