

Attn: Lucy Leske, Robert Luke, Veena Abraham  
Witt/Kieffer  
2015 Spring Road, Suite 510  
Oak Brook, IL 60523

November 7, 2016

Dear Chair Smith and Search Committee Members:

I am submitting my letter of application for the position of President at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). In this letter I will discuss my administrative and academic career and address the leadership expectations as outlined in the FGCU *Presidential Leadership Profile*.

**Administrative Experience.** My administrative career spans fifteen years of progressive leadership as a Chair of Social Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences Dean, and most recently as Provost/Vice-President for *both* Academic and Student Life at Central Washington University (CWU). The Division of Academic and Student Life (ASL) at CWU includes 706 faculty members and 440 staff. CWU is a regional comprehensive master's university with a current enrollment of 10,278 that spans 150 major programs located at both the main campus and seven additional campus centers in central and western Washington. I oversaw a budget of \$68 million and supervised twelve direct reports. Like legislatures elsewhere in the US, Washington disinvested in higher education over the past several years. During my first year at CWU we experienced a \$58 million biennial budget reduction. In the face of these challenges I was able to put into place several entrepreneurial short and mid term strategies. As a result, Academic and Student Life actually grew in strength and avoided massive budget reductions. Among the successful measures taken were:

- Growth of specific niche academic programs such as integrated energy studies and cybersecurity
- Introduction of high quality online and hybrid programs
- Expansion of graduate studies and sponsored research
- Significant annual growth in international programs
- Growth in veteran services and recruitment
- Expanded College in the High School and Dual Admissions programs
- Increases in student success strategies that focused on expanded strategic advising and retention, service learning, civic engagement, and undergraduate research
- Conducted an academic program analysis that had widespread participation and streamlined program offerings
- Initiated course optimization strategies and multi-year course planning that resulted in cost efficiencies

**Academic Achievements.** Graduating with a masters in Vietnamese history from the University of Hawaii and a doctorate in modern Chinese history from the University of Chicago, my career as an active teacher-scholar has included having published two books, dozens of articles, and delivered numerous presentations nationally and internationally. I received early promotion and tenure for both Associate and Full Professor ranks. My research has focused on Chinese political history centered on Chinese political party formation in France during the 1920s. My articles have been published in Chinese and French, and the creation of an online Chinese Biographical Database was utilized worldwide. Most recently I was invited to France to deliver a keynote address at a symposium on Chinese Workers in Europe during WWI that resulted in refereed publications in both French and Chinese.

As part of my academic career background the areas of teaching and service are very strong. I am passionate about teaching and was recognized with three teaching awards and three student awards. Over one-third of my grants have been to support undergraduate research. In terms of professional organizations and community engagement, I served on several councils, including Faculty Senate Chair, President of H-NET (Humanities and Social Sciences Online), Co-Chair of the Northwest Women in Higher Education Roundtable, President of the History Society for Twentieth Century China, Executive Secretary of the Western Conference of Asian Studies, and two terms on the Idaho Humanities Council.

**Challenges in Higher Education and Opportunities at FGCU.** The current state of higher education is stressed in new ways as it has been impacted by a complex and unstable economy alongside extensive social, cultural, and technological changes. Two main challenges to the academy have been global disinvestment in higher education that greatly increases debt with a concomitant increase of graduation rate from four to six years with only half of the nation's students actually graduating. In a recent article in the *Seattle Times*, a couple with two children (4 months and 4 years) had a financial analyst assess how they will meet the future. The estimate for two in-state public college educational costs will reach \$397,100. Clearly, middle class families will *not* be able to access public higher education and this jeopardizes the sustainability of academia.

We must find ways to reduce costs for students and their families while increasing the capacity of timely graduation. Forty-two million Americans owing \$1.3 trillion of student debt requires *immediate* measures. In a climate of accountability and expected performance metrics, academic leaders are attempting many solutions to increase revenues and streamline costs. What is lacking is a logical analysis of the situation. One of the major things that is needed in the next step in the evolution of higher education is to greatly move beyond piecemeal solutions. What is needed are methods that maximize the flow of knowledge to and from students and between faculty that results in accurate determination of major study areas based on individual student potential, reductions in major switching, increased retention and graduation approaching the optimum, and deeper understanding and empowerment of faculty members and their individual potentials. An achievement focused on this approach would significantly satisfy the public and therefore the politicians as well as allow better institutional financial stability. As stated above, if we do not solve the problems in short order, the future for academia will be severe.

FGCU has numerous strengths that I believe will allow the institution to find truly innovative ways to address these pressing issues. Among these strengths are:

- A commitment to incentivizing the four year graduation rate with a solution that deals with the issue of debt in the *Soar in 4 Program*.
- A mission that is not afraid to promote niche areas that will provide students with careers that serve the public good, particularly regional economic and social needs.
- A commitment to the broader academic grounding in robust liberal arts and sciences and the teacher-scholar model.
- A conscious campus culture of diversity, inclusion, transparency, and engagement that are reflected in student and faculty numbers as well as pedagogy.
- *Most important* is the real potential that exists for an openness to genuinely innovative solutions to the above issues that emanates from within the university that is confident and dynamic because of the relative newness of FGCU that allows for experimental solutions.

These are the reasons why I am interested in leading FGCU to an even higher level of achievement.

**Presidential Leadership Requirements.** The six areas of capacity and vision for the new President of FGCU elucidated in the Profile are interconnected in their articulation and aspiration for successful leadership. The profile calls for a transformational leader who leads by example and inclusion, and who is absolutely committed to academic excellence, student success, diversity, and engagement, while serving the campus and society through sound strategic planning for a financially and intellectually viable future.

**Execute New Strategic Plan for 2016-2021. Increase Revenue to Support Strategic Goals.** The four pillars of the new strategic plan call for Academic Excellence, Entrepreneurship, a focus on Health Sciences, and Emerging Pre-eminence. I have a strong record in planning and implementation that is aligned with multiyear budgetary planning. One must remain true to the institutional mission and program strengths, while nourishing the whole institution in its operational and financial strengths. In all three of my administrative positions I was able to expand my units in the face of challenging budget reductions with short timelines. For example, while leading a Division of Social Sciences, we faced a 12% budget reduction and through promoting mission-

specific programs that were in our unit of Social Work and Justice Studies, we actually expanded faculty ranks by 30% and endured no operational reductions. Relevant to the FGCU strategic plan was the intentional creation of interdisciplinary synergies between the professional programs and the several social science disciplines.

**Establish and Promote FGCU's Distinctive Institutional Identity.** A key priority would be to further develop the tremendous conviction and competence at the institution –as expressed in the strategic crafting of niche areas that include a focus on health and biological sciences, strengths in the arts, sustainable recreation and tourism, and engineering and business innovations. For example, I not only am familiar with the biological and marine biology foci presented in the *Profile* but of the specific areas of zika virus, dengue fever, and ciguatera. This would be an exciting area for internationalization of academic relevance as well as a prominent position of regional service learning and civic engagement. As a President, these areas strengthen the claim to environmental consciousness which is an important part of the institutional mission. Health, Environment, and Cultural Sustainability were key elements of one of my initiatives as Provost, i.e. the International Sustainability Development Institute (ISDI). Through the leadership support of an exceptional faculty member, we piloted this program for students to engage local communities in Nicaragua, Tanzania, Laos, and Israel. We also were working with Honors programs to expand the idea as a national model of engagement. Utilizing a hybrid structure of online instruction and overseas service learning, the faculty member raised \$100,000 from a leader in third-world health delivery to fund scholarships and a social entrepreneurship program. The idea was to help impoverished communities be self-sufficient in a way that respected sustainable cultural identity.

**Foster a Strong Sense of Community.** The lure of working with the Southwest Florida community is a very exciting opportunity of this position. I have an excellent record of working with regional communities. I was a founder of La Grande Main Street, was appointed to the Ellensburg Business Development Association, and as a faculty member, one-third of my grant awards were for community and cultural work, presenting symposia and invited speakers and artists. At Eastern Oregon University (EOU) as the Dean of Arts and Sciences, during the recession which severely impacted rural Oregon, I was able to work with Accenture who was investing in the Umatilla tribe with the creation of Cayuse Technologies. Working with the tribe, Blue Mountain Community College, Workforce Training, Cayuse Technologies, and the faculty at EOU we were able to arrange four scaffolded computer science certificates with a guaranteed availability of two hundred jobs. Another joint project resulted in the submission of a ten county grant for federal funding to create a system of micro-turbines for sustainable energy and biological sensing for agriculture and wildfires.

**Lead Fundraising Efforts.** The accomplishments of the last two campaigns at FGCU indicate an incredible leadership team in senior administration, and a very strong advancement office. In my view, the record is especially dynamic and really allied with the strengths of the programs and the institutional spirit on and off campus. I would enjoy working with the communities, alumni, state legislators, the governor, and explore partnerships with foundations, businesses, and leading industries. Currently, the goal at FGCU is to become a pre-eminent university, which translates into understanding the performance-based funding system. I have the experience and vision on ways to increase retention and graduation rates to obtain a greater statewide profile and garner more support in the state system. My experience as the senior leader in *both academic and student life* provided real opportunities to develop successful strategies for student success and to encourage campus-wide collaborations. For example, when the science faculty conferred on a NSF STEM-Solver grant application to strengthen success in science for Hispanic, Native American and first generation students, I was able to facilitate them working with appropriate Student Success Division professionals. They were awarded the multiple year NSF grant of \$680,000.

**Build and Lead a Strong Organization.** My philosophy of leadership is one of transformational practice. A strong leader should facilitate the celebration and expansion of institutional strengths while problem solving to address institutional challenges. Both facets of this behavior should work to facilitate the positive potential of all faculty, staff and students. *Trust* is the most crucial element that glues this leadership vision together and

that must be based not just on constant communication and transparency, but also on *functional collaboration* that provides an opportunity for active voice to all campus constituencies. To me, as a leader, *the process is just as important as the goal*. As Provost, I was able to create an Academic and Student Life Council that provided voice and vote to faculty, staff, and students, as well as administrative leaders.

In conclusion, the accomplishments and campus culture at Florida Gulf Coast University are excellent, with great potential for the next phase of growth. I believe in the mission and strengths of the campus and have the experience and vision to lead this effort to build on the current successes. If there are any questions or need for further materials, please do not hesitate to request them.

Sincerely,

*Marilyn A. Levine*

Marilyn A. Levine, Ph.D.