

# Letter of Interest Statement by Kendall T. Harris, Ph.D., P.E.

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Mr. Robert Luke  
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Witt/Kieffer  
2015 Spring Road, Suite 510  
Oak Brook, IL 60523

Dear Search Committee,

This letter is to express my interest in the position of President at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). I received an email from your firm informing me of this great opportunity and I would like to formally express my interest in this position. Since October 2007, I have had the privilege of serving as the Dean of the Roy G. Perry College of Engineering at Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU). As Dean, I serve as the chief academic administrator for the College, providing vision, leadership and advocacy for programs, faculty, staff, and students in the departments of Chemical, Civil, Electrical and Computer, and Mechanical Engineering, Computer Science and Engineering Technology. Prior to joining PVAMU in 2005, I was a tenured Associate Professor of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering and Associate Department Head at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). While at UTA, I established several summer outreach programs that have subsequently motivated hundreds of middle and high students to pursue careers in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. I feel it necessary to mention this because as President, one of the most important attributes is to motivate those around you at all levels. To be an effective President, one must possess the innate ability to motivate faculty, staff, administrators, and students to look beyond their self-limitations and to aspire and envision feats beyond their current cognizance recollections. More importantly one must motivate and inspire the students of FGCU to reach beyond their imagination. Another important quality of a leader, and more specifically a University President, is the ability to see beyond the horizon. An effective President can see and react to current issues, but also possesses the ability to forecast the relevant impact that present decisions can potentially have on outcomes of the institution. Over the last twenty years, FGCU has begun the impressive feat of graduating a significant number of alumni that are beginning to

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have an impact in the Southwest Region of Florida and the entire US alike. As the next President of FGCU it would be my job to continue this impressive output of outstanding alumni and position the university to grow throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With my experience, training and passion for higher education I believe I am the right individual to continue the positive growth and maturity of FGCU.

Over the last nine (9) years at PVAMU I have been instrumental in growing the Roy G. Perry College of Engineering in all three aspects of the land-grant mission – Instruction, Research and Service – the College’s enrollment has increased 51% from 2007 to present (796 students in the Fall of 2007 to over 1,600 students in the Fall of 2016); the retention rate has also shown a significant increase with overall retention increasing by 40% in that same period (2007 to present); all academic programs have undergone successful ABET accreditation cycles; funded research has increased to over \$20.5M annually in comparison to \$3.8M in 2007. In addition to increasing funded research, the College has garnered support from alumni and corporate/foundation giving in the magnitude of over \$10M over the same nine-year period. Because of increased donations from alumni, corporations and foundations, the College of Engineering has been able to increase the undergraduate scholarship pool to over \$700K annually. As the chief financial officer, I have ensured that the College maintains a four-year surplus of the last annual amount of scholarships awarded thus there is currently a multi-million dollar scholarship reserve. I am cognizant of the fact that all of these accomplishments were not solely implemented and executed independently, but instead I do believe that as the leader of an organization one must have the vision to position the organization to achieve its maximal potential. I have highlighted some of my accomplishments during my tenure at PVAMU, and I am certain I can achieve similar or even greater accomplishments as President.

It is my opinion that my academic and philanthropic ventures have successfully prepared me to be President at FGCU. As a faculty member I have successfully moved through the ranks of academia, which has allowed me to gain a keen understanding into the inner working of the academic environment. Holding all positions of the professorate (Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor) has developed me into a leader that understands the plight of all aspects of migrating through academia. Serving in various leadership capacities (Center Director, Associate Department Head, Associate Dean and Dean) I have learned that developing individuals to maximize their potential is crucial to the overall success of an organization.

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Considering the esteemed words of Mahatma Gandhi, “*You Must be the Change You Wish To See....*”, it will be my challenge as President to work with senior university administrators to ensure that FGCU stays true to its mission by being the change agent of our society through the uncompromising education of its students. The emerging importance and impact of FGCU is proving to be important to not only the State of Florida but to the country and globe as a whole, and I would be truly excited to have the opportunity to contribute to this legacy as the next President.

Students are the key to the success of any academic institution. Without a student body, the University would cease to exist, thus as President I will foster student, faculty and staff relations, encouraging open dialogue amongst all parties to ensure that the overall complete education of our students is met at the highest level. I have long been committed to the success of students in the academic arena and believe that students value rich-intellectual and cultural experiences that take place in and out of the traditional classroom. My desire is to create an environment where students are passionate about the “the Florida Gulf Coast University Complete Experience” and are willing to invest in a FGCU education. Students must be treated with dignity and respect and in turn, they will embrace and appreciate the institution where they matriculated, thus leading them to be strong alumni supporters.

As a formally trained engineer/scientist, I have spent my career using my strong analytical skills in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields to try to impact the solution of some of the significant problems that our society has been faced with. But the most significant lesson that I have learned is that the fields of STEM alone cannot solve all problems. A strong STEM background is undergirded by the existence of first class liberal arts programs. All disciplines, including the FGCU great programs in sociology, education, health professions, social work, and business, to name a few, are supported and anchored by a foundation built on the core liberal arts curriculum. As President, I will strive to ensure that FGCU continues to produce the best graduates trained in their specific disciplines, and I am committed to building these disciplines through a strong liberal arts foundation.

Having a financially sound institution is an integral part of achieving the aforementioned goals. It is the joint responsibility of FGCU’s President, as well as other senior University administrators, to work with all stakeholders: students, faculty, staff, alumni, the Board of Trustees, the community, private and public foundations, corporations, the State of

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Florida, and the Federal Government to ensure that FGCU remains financially sovereign. The President serves as the linchpin in establishing the right relationships with the above-mentioned stakeholders. Building and fostering relationships is key, for individuals will become a part of and share their resources with those entities they believe in and are most comfortable. As a public, state-supported institution it will be the responsibility of the President to foster greater relationships with key stakeholders in the State of Florida, (i.e. State Legislators, Governor's Office, etc.) and alike.

Florida Gulf Coast University has a short but impressive history that includes an excellent foundation in its faculty. To continue to enhance the quality of teaching and research, there is a need to attract and retain high caliber faculty that can interact in an environment that unleashes their potential. Having an excellent faculty is one of the keys to sustaining effective undergraduate and graduate programs, and cutting-edge research. Maintaining quality faculty will assist in providing students with an education that includes breadth and depth; an education that grounds them in both the practical and transcendent; as well as an education that provides a command of the analytical and expressive aspects. One of the secrets to success is to do the common things, uncommonly well. We should prudently channel the expertise of the faculty and staff, thereby securing and sustaining strong teaching and research support. In the fundamental commitment to learner-centeredness and fervent pursuit of academic excellence, FGCU should not only recognize that its mission is not just transmitting knowledge to students, but igniting a flame of passion for lifelong learning. This includes a genuine commitment to social change, development and entrepreneurship. With regard to curriculum development, we should not be content with what currently exists, but aspire to creatively develop a new curriculum that closely aligns with the training of students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century job market and beyond.

Recognizing and nurturing talent into well-rounded excellence should be encouraged along with creating a record of discovery and commitment to harness innovation. If given the opportunity to be President at FGCU, I fully intend to encourage the development of an aggressive research agenda that will assist the University in continuing to create a reputation of excellence in research and societal advancement. Since the frontiers of excellence, like those of knowledge, are always in motion, we should carefully and strategically chart a path for the University's journey to the next level of excellence. I am dedicated to ensuring that as our students become proficient, their experience will be unprecedented and that when they leave the

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institution they are prepared to make an impact, on a world that is continually shaped by the forces of technology and economic globalization. Our challenge is to set our sights on the next level, and muster our resources to reach it successfully. In doing this, we must have a sustained strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of our students. It is a highly critical service area that must not be neglected. One of the plans for this will be to cultivate the necessary partnerships with various sources to attract highly talented undergraduate and graduate students and research faculty.

I would like to conclude my letter of interest by charting a vision for the Office of the President at FGCU that expands on the current four key pillars of the University's current strategic plan: academic excellence, entrepreneurship, health sciences, and emerging pre-eminence. As President I will strive to ensure that FGCU will gain *National Competitiveness* by sustaining the highest academic standards through the continued development and recruitment of a world-class faculty, the recruitment of the nation's best and brightest young student scholars and maintaining state-of-the-art facilities. FGCU will remain *Financially Sovereign* through effective and strategic partnerships at all levels that will guarantee the proper revenue streams are available to perform at the highest level of financial efficiency. FGCU will focus on *Student Success* through the recruitment of the best student scholars that our nation has to offer; this will lead to a student profile consistent with other competitive private and public universities. The FGCU student will be one that is recognized as an innate scholar, life-long learner and a leader amongst our nation's higher-education graduates. *Community Advancement*, FGCU will commit to fulfilling regional and state workforce needs while becoming a primary engine of social, economic, and intellectual development for the State of Florida, the nation and the global society. This will include the engagement of our community at all levels. It has been said that, "athletics is the window to an university" and FGCU must be *Athletically Competitive* through the recruitment of the highest quality student athletes and the University must provide them with the proper resources to perform both in the classroom and in their chosen athletic venue and it is the responsibility of the President to ensure that we have academically sound "student-athletes".

Serving as the President of FGCU will provide me the opportunity to embark upon a journey that is certain to cultivate me both personally and professionally. I intend to take this journey with FGCU, with an ardent concern for our fellow human. I am committed to helping sustain an environment that encourages us to take intellectual risks, engage in creative work and

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stimulating research that will yield monumental breakthroughs. I am committed to diligently working on unsolved problems with ingenuity, intellectual honesty, and freedoms from ideological biases while simultaneously introducing innovative concepts. Understanding that the ultimate goal of our work is to benefit our number one stakeholders, our students, we should be devoted to elevating our innovated thoughts into policies and products that will yield economic well-being and a heightened quality of life for them. My drive, passion, leadership and experience make the possibilities at Florida Gulf Coast University endless, together we will make an impact!

Yours Sincerely,

*Kendall T. Harris*

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