

November 8, 2016

Ken Smith, Ph.D.
Chair, Presidential Search Committee
Florida Gulf Coast University
10501 FGCU Boulevard, South
Fort Meyers, FL 33965

Dear Trustee Smith:

I would like to thank you and the members of the search committee for considering my application for the position of President at Florida Gulf Coast University. It is clear that the university is at an exciting stage in its relatively young history, and I would be very interested in an opportunity to discuss leading such an institution. In recent years, I have heard much about the important role the university plays in supplying talented graduates to meet the workforce needs of southwest Florida and the state. The university's focus on improving student accessibility and diversity, enhancing student preparedness, sustainability, aligning its research activities with the needs of the surrounding cities, and the region, and expanding partnerships in the community makes this position even more attractive to an individual with my background and experience.

Florida Gulf Coast University is at a critical juncture. Like many universities, it is facing a changing funding landscape that will require its leadership to exercise more entrepreneurial thinking and action while maintaining academic excellence. Innovative education models must also be utilized to ignite new student learning pathways and enhance student readiness for the changing needs of the state's workforce. At the same time, the institution must continue to leverage its assets for the benefit of the state's economy. This should include ramping up the research enterprise to further diversify the university's funding portfolio, to capitalize on private-sector partnerships, and to address wide-ranging challenges in the state and beyond.

Your next president must not only develop and implement a vision to meet these needs but also must be a dedicated ambassador for higher education and the State of Florida. The job will require skill in consensus building, advocacy, and collaboration with a variety of constituent groups, including the congressional delegation, state legislators, industry, donors, alumni, and other external groups. Equally important, however, will be the president's ability to unite and inspire the campus faculty, staff, and students to join in enhancing the programs, infrastructure, education, and research at the university. Your next president must have the ability to focus on all of these goals simultaneously, valuing each and advancing each. This requires a dynamic and flexible leader who can strategically develop plans and implement them, but not before gaining integral support from all parties involved.

Both of my former institutions share some important characteristics with Florida Gulf Coast University. They are both also situated in an urban environment and face many of the same issues and challenges, such as helping students strike a healthy and sustainable school/life balance, creating a comprehensive experience for all members of the campus community, recruiting and retaining faculty and staff, and ensuring the university contributes to the economic, social, and cultural vitality of the region it serves. I have both led and supported efforts to address these types of issues as a member of the leadership teams at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and Boise State University, and I would look forward to sharing some of the relevant lessons I've learned with the faculty and administration of Florida Gulf Coast University.

I invite you to review my record at Boise State and UNLV to observe my contributions in these areas. I have worked closely with state and federal officials and agencies as well as private-sector partners, donors, and the public to expand the reach of my institution and to build out initiatives designed to enhance education, research, and service. My team and I have built the economic development function at Boise State through workforce preparation programs, technology transfer initiatives, and research partnerships to enhance the economic vitality of the region. I am committed to transformational thought and action as I manage people and programs, and several of initiatives outlined in my curriculum vitae demonstrate my success in leading these efforts. Above all, I take as much pride in building my relationships with colleagues, faculty, staff, and university supporters as I do in my other accomplishments.

I believe my strengths as a candidate for president are best described by the following areas related to my professional academic experience and personal management style:

An Unwavering Focus on Student Success. Although the majority of my administrative experience in academia has been in the area of research administration, I have been proud to be part of senior leadership teams that champion student success. A number of years ago, Boise State launched an ambitious plan to significantly increase our first-year retention rate, as well as our four-year, and six-year graduation rates. I played a central role in several of these initiatives, including developing our "Finish-in-Four" program, increasing our math tutoring capacity, and creating many more opportunities for our undergraduates to participate in research activities. We have made great strides on all fronts. For example, the retention rate of first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students moving from their first to second year has increased from 67% to 78% since Fall 2009. Also, based on the last academic year, 95% of all of our students who took an introductory course in our Math Learning Center were successful in their next math class. Finally, we created a fund to support undergraduate research across all disciplines, and established a campus-wide undergraduate research conference to provide a forum for our students to present their work. A university exists first and foremost to create and disseminate knowledge in many different forms to our students. I firmly believe student success can, and should, be integrated into every university strategic initiative.

Educational and Research Leadership. I have been asked quite often by my current President to lead academic initiatives. For example, I worked with the President and Provost to create a new College of Innovation and Design at Boise State, which offers academic programming focused on student success, preparedness, and experiential learning. A number of the programs that currently populate the new college were actually created in my division. Two of these, Venture College and Vertically Integrated Programs, were developed to create real-world learning environments that provide students with valuable 21st century soft skills often sought by employers.

As my current institution's leader in the area of economic development, I often focus on resolving workforce issues facing the greater Boise Metro Area. The City of Boise is home to several hundred small software engineering firms and a number of larger international firms, e.g., Micron Technologies, Simplot, and Hewlett-Packard, which have historically struggled to find a talent pool to sustain their operations. In 2012, the Idaho Department of Labor reported that there were over 1,200 software engineering jobs in Boise. Unfortunately, at that time, Boise State was only producing approximately 20 computer science graduates per year. I was tasked by the President to work with industry to begin taking the steps necessary to resolve this serious workforce shortage. Under my leadership, our Department of Computer Science has made adjustments to its curriculum and secured the necessary federal, state, and industry funding to hire additional faculty and staff to improve student retention and to relieve bottlenecks in upper divisional computer courses. As a result, the department is expecting to graduate close to 100 students in Spring 2017, and it plans to graduate more than 200 students within the next three to five years.

Finally, I have had the pleasure to work at two universities that were charged relatively late in their history to grow and diversify their research portfolios. In both cases, I was hired in a leadership role to lead and coordinate this effort. At the time of my hire, I found the research infrastructure at these institutions lacking and in need of much improvement in order to support the research and economic development activities of the university. Although this process at UNLV and Boise State was arduous, it provided me with a clear understanding of what is necessary to deliver contemporary and timely services to an institution's academic community. As a result, both of the institutions experienced unprecedented growth in sponsored project activity. In my curriculum vitae, I've outlined some recent performance measures that demonstrate achievement of strategic goals to enhance research, innovation, economic development, and graduate studies. I would be glad to elaborate on how we have achieved these outcomes at a later time.

Strategic Planning and Assessment. Using a collegial leadership style, I have led strategic planning efforts at the department, division, and university levels. I have also developed innovative assessment plans for both academic programs and research administration activities. These efforts served to implement a consensus-based vision of growth and success. I have enjoyed working with faculty, staff, and students to transform and advance the strategic goals of both UNLV and Boise State University.

Active Engagement with the Community. It is extremely important for a university to be seen as a viable and trusted partner in enhancing the quality of life in its surrounding community. I have established strong working relationships with key local business entities and members of the state legislatures at both institutions to ensure that each university is seen as an economic asset to its state. In addition, I continue to be supportive of outreach activities that educate community leaders and the general public on the importance and value of education, workforce development, research, and creative activities.

Philanthropy. With the continuing decrease in state funding levels for higher education, cultivating donors to support key university initiatives has become increasingly important. This is especially true at universities where robust strategic planning is in place and a vision for future growth and improvement has been clearly identified. I have been privileged to be actively engaged in donor relations at my two former universities, where the possibilities for great leaps were within reach, provided we could find the needed support. The opportunity to meet with potential donors, to educate them about our university and its needs, to introduce them to key faculty and students, and to share my enthusiasm and vision for our programs has been truly rewarding. I have played an active role in soliciting funds and support for a number of capital projects on campus, and expansions to our Department of Computer Science, among others. In the process, I've gained a new appreciation of the power of personal relationships to elicit support that can transform our universities. Effective philanthropy is a team endeavor, and I value working with colleagues and advancement staff on developing and implementing the most effective approach to soliciting support.

Public Relations: Informing and educating the general public and constituencies about a university's achievements and activities are key to attracting top students and building support for programs. I have been involved in these efforts on many levels, from directing the development of various media platforms to sitting for interviews with local, regional, and national press to encouraging and supporting faculty and staff in telling their stories. I have overseen the launch of two research magazines, *UNLV Innovation* and Boise State's *Explore*, and have guided the development of digital apps and social media to advance the research message at Boise State. In this age of instant information, protecting and enhancing a university's image requires clear and consistent messaging, and in response I have placed a priority on continually developing and updating such messaging for our university.

Professional Service. In order to optimize my effectiveness as a university administrator, I have continued to be active in my professional society and organizations related to university leadership. I have also served as a Program Evaluator for the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc. (ABET)/Applied Science Accreditation Commission (ASAC). This opportunity has allowed me to stay informed of evolving assessment strategies through an affiliation with a leading accrediting body.

As our economic priorities and workforce needs continue to evolve, so too must our universities if we are to meet the needs of our constituents and forge a path for future

growth. University leadership that is nimble, visionary, knowledgeable, collaborative, and inclusive is critical to institutional success in this endeavor. I believe I have the appropriate academic and administrative experience to implement these types of initiatives at Florida Gulf Coast University.

I have attached my curriculum vitae for your consideration. Thank you again for your consideration of my candidacy for the position of President at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MR', with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Mark Rudin
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
Boise State University