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Mr. Robert Luke, Ms. Lucy Leske, Ms. Veena Abraham,
Witt/Kieffer Consultants,
Mr. Ken Smith, Chair of the Presidential Search Advisory Committee, and Search Advisory
Committee Members
Florida Gulf Coast University
10501 FGCU Blvd S,
Fort Myers, FL 33965

Dear Mr. Luke, Ms. Leske, Ms. Abraham, Mr. Smith, and the Presidential Search Committee:

I am honored to have been nominated for the position of President of Florida Gulf Coast University. After discussing the position in more depth with Mr. Luke and considering this opportunity carefully, I offer this letter and my curriculum vitae as my formal application for the position. My entire career has been dedicated to the purposeful integration of liberal arts education, professional studies, and civic engagement with a commitment to sustainability within the context of a comprehensive institution. At Widener University, I have facilitated changes that have raised the profile of the College of Arts & Sciences, facilitating faculty development, curriculum reform, and externally funded projects in which the liberal arts provide the foundation for student experiential learning in the region and globally. Additionally, I have strengthened my college's financial sustainability by increasing admissions and retention rates and fostering the creation of innovative new academic programs to add revenue and enhance our brand. I believe that I have the vision, experience, and leadership skills required to increase Florida Gulf Coast University's strength and relevance in the emerging postsecondary landscape.

I bring more than fifteen years of higher education leadership experience at three different institutions. At the University of Scranton, I led the development of a new interdisciplinary department that housed our Latin American Studies and Women's Studies programs; such work demanded knowledge of disciplines across the university and the delicate building of consensus and support for new interdisciplinary work. At the Union Institute and University, I served as co-chief operating officer of an applied policy research center where a staff of twelve professionals implemented and managed externally-grant funded projects on university social responsibility, diversity and women's issues, and the role of non-profits in democratic societies. I also developed opportunities for faculty and students to become involved in our work. In my current role as Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at Widener University, I oversee the university's largest academic unit. We generate one-third of the university's credit hours and provide a liberal arts foundation for all undergraduates, including those enrolled in professional school programs. We also partner with the professional schools in offering graduate certificates and dual degree programs.

In today's higher education and cultural climate, it is not enough for us to defend higher education; we must find ways to demonstrate its relevance. I believe that FGCU is doing such work, and I would welcome the opportunity to partner with FGCU faculty and administrators to strengthen and further develop programs that feature high impact pedagogical practices. I enthusiastically endorse FGCU's commitments to service learning and sustainability and have a track record of accomplishments in those areas. Civic engagement supports student learning and success while distinguishing FGCU's educational offerings in a competitive and changing higher education landscape. Today's fragile global economy has revealed the dangers of education that is too specialized, given that entire professions can be quickly eliminated or placed in low demand. My conversations with alumni at Widener and with other business and community leaders bear out the recent AAC&U findings that employers seek graduates with strong communications and analytical skills as well as the ability to solve complex problems by working collaboratively across disciplinary or professional lines. FGCU's emphasis on academic excellence, emerging and growing fields in the health sciences, and entrepreneurship distinguishes its brand. FGCU can stay both with and ahead of the market by creating opportunities for students to specialize in their fields of choice while also developing the knowledge and skills that will allow them to readily adapt to a changing world.

At Widener I have been deeply involved in local and regional economic development efforts. That work was recently recognized by the Greater Philadelphia Economy League; they selected me for its leadership exchange program as one of the top leaders in Philadelphia. I have led university-community partnerships to revitalize the City of Chester that have developed new cultural, arts and educational opportunities in the community while providing transformative experiences for our students. By connecting to the community's businesses, governmental, and non-profit organizations, FGCU ensures student success by providing opportunities for real world complex problem-solving. FGCU has already emerged as a major influence in its region and is poised to become a national model for how higher education institutions can anchor economic and community development while fostering a transformative educational experience for its students. I can build on my track record at Widener to further this success.

If FGCU is going to further distinguish itself in the areas of experiential learning, civic engagement, and sustainability, it needs a president with both the academic knowledge and the experience on the ground to implement its mission and vision enthusiastically, creatively, and effectively. One of the greatest strengths I can bring to the presidency of FGCU is my extensive experience and passionate commitment to its mission as an institution that provides high impact learning opportunities and connects them to civic engagement and sustainability initiatives. FGCU has clearly made tremendous strides in developing experiential learning opportunities for its students. But there is more that can be done and new programs that can be developed that would build on FGCU's existing strengths.

Although FGCU appears to enjoy good relationships with the Ft. Myers community and greater region, there is always on-going work to do. While many campus members must be involved in the community, the president plays a crucial role as the face of the university. I currently play

that role as the face of the College of Arts & Sciences in the community of Chester, and I take that responsibility very seriously, taking the time to build relationships across the city and region. Institutionally, it is important to have curricula and other programs that connect to the community. I am experienced in developing program models that provide opportunities for mutual learning between community partners and students as they work together to build capacity and transform lives. For example, at Widener I have worked with faculty and community members to create a community writing center in which students and community members learn how to serve as writing mentors and run the center together. In another project we are piloting a revised youth courts program that involves the mentoring of liberal arts and education undergraduates by students in our graduate professional programs, thus increasing our capacity to provide youth courts in schools while at the same time intensifying the learning of students at all levels. Civic engagement initiatives should be explicitly linked to high impact practices in this way. On both the graduate and undergraduate levels, civic engagement initiatives can and should be capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive.

While many colleges and universities achieve recognition for experiential learning by making expensive capital investments, FGCU can do it by being more strategic in how it builds educational experiences and partnerships in both the local community as well as some well-chosen global sites. Thanks to the partnerships I facilitated with local artists in Chester, for example, Widener now has low-cost use of a downtown theater, saving Widener millions of dollars since we did have to build our own. Globally, I facilitated a strategic investment in Costa Rica that built on our existing partnership there, negotiating a bartered arrangement with local coffee farmers who manage the property in exchange for use of the property to host roasters and coffee buyers on weeks when Widener does not run programs. I also developed a business plan to expand a fledgling sustainable coffee research and education consortium so that its members will have access to the Costa Rica property, helping Widener pay-off the investment costs while at the same time raising its profile and expanding our students' access to cutting-edge teaching and research.

In addition to my experience in higher education, my work in the non-profit sector has had a profound effect in shaping me as a leader, providing me with greater insight into the challenges and opportunities for college-community partnerships and engagements as well as direct experience developing boards of directors and community advisory groups. I served as founding president of Mulberry Central Neighborhood Development Corporation, a non-profit that partnered with city government, local agencies, and area colleges and universities and local residents to develop and improve an urban neighborhood in Scranton. I also co-founded the Public Philosophy Network, a professional association with an international profile and more than 1,000 members that promotes engaged scholarship and teaching. Both of those projects entailed board recruitment and development, fundraising, strategic planning, and general operations oversight.

My experience as a nonprofit leader and academic administrator is matched by a track record of research and publications on higher education social responsibility. My scholarship focuses on the ethics of university-community relationships, women and development in the rural global

South, and urban theory and practice. The scholarship of diversity, civic engagement, high impact pedagogies, and sustainability is infused throughout my work. And as an ethicist, I have focused on moral development and character education necessary for leadership.

My work and research both frames my views on university social responsibility and leadership education and provides me with the credibility to speak to FGCU's mission and values. Having engaged in this work as a faculty member, higher education administrator, and a non-profit leader, I understand what is needed in terms of infrastructure, time, curricula, funds, and community relations from the perspectives of participants both internal and external to the College. I believe that I could ably and credibly communicate the mission of FGCU to students, faculty, staff, board members, legislators and other external supporters in a way that enables all stakeholders to see themselves as part of FGCU and as necessary for its success. Inspiring, facilitating and coordinating those efforts is one of the highest honors and responsibilities of the college presidency.

I understand the budget and operations challenges that public institutions face and have a track record of addressing them in tuition-dependent universities facing fiscal constraints. I have facilitated academic program review to make our majors more cost-effective and competitive while improving recruitment and retention rates. We created new messages that have increased College of Arts & Sciences enrollments by clearly articulating the unique value of a personalized Widener liberal arts education grounded in civic engagement activities. I am an entrepreneurial leader who encourages creative thinking. For example, I worked with the faculty to create new revenue streams through the introduction of new graduate certificates.

As dean, I have made difficult decisions to cut programs while at the same time generating excitement for strengthening others and creating new opportunities. Building on my record as an effective fundraiser, I established the John Vanore fund for the performing arts and have had successful meetings with individual donors, including one who raised his pledge from \$250,000 to \$750,000 after our meeting. I brought Widener more strongly into a collaborative partnership with the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, PECO, and the Pew Charitable Trust on an arts-based participatory planning process called "Chester Made". That work already has resulted in economic development in downtown Chester as well as the creation of new projects that are attracting major funders. I recently won an award for \$211,000 from the Barra Foundation and we are partners in an additional \$500,000 of funding for civic arts projects. I was the primary person responsible for fundraising for the Public Philosophy Network and was part of a very successful fundraising team at the Union Institute's Office for Social Responsibility.

I always remain attentive to the fact that no vision can be realized without a strong business plan and attention to operations. I focus on ensuring that we have the right data to make informed decisions and work collaboratively to build a shared vision as well as shared responsibility for implementation. At the Union Institute, at Widener, and in my role as trustee of Keystone College, I have served on institution-wide strategic planning committee and have worked on all facets of university administration. At Widener, I led a college-wide participatory planning

process that became the model for other unit's plan, and we are now successfully implementing this plan and have created a dashboard reporting system.

I am deeply committed to shared governance and to the creation of communication structures and outlets that encourage collaborative creative thinking and doing. I strive to continuously improve and enhance communications. At Widener, I implemented several new initiatives to give voice to faculty, staff, and student accomplishments and concerns. These included intensive listening sessions with all departments and programs as well as the creation of "open space" meetings in which participants set the agenda. Both types of meetings have helped me to listen and discern patterns of accomplishments and challenges so that we can create solutions that build on our strengths and address obstacles. These efforts are indicative of my commitment to building and sustaining relationships and motivating people to do their best work.

Lastly, I should note that I completed my doctoral degree at a public institution and am deeply committed to public education. I welcome the opportunity to lead a public institution. My engaged work has provided me with ample experience working with local and regional leaders and am confident that I could represent FGCU's interests. I believe that I share FGCU's institutional values and commitments and have a vision that might help FGCU thrive and grow. I hope that you agree that I bring the requisite combination of vision, passion, knowledge, skills, and experience to this position. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sharon M. Meagher, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Arts & Sciences
Professor of Humanities