

November 8, 2016

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Dear Lucy, Robert and Veena:

Thank you for informing me of my nomination for the presidency of Florida Gulf Coast University. I am pleased to accept this nomination and look forward to participating in the search process.

I have a strong, personal, connection to the Ft. Myers/Naples area. My mother-in-law resides in Ft. Myers and my family and I have visited the area many times. I have had the opportunity to visit the FGCU campus on several occasions, most recently this past summer. The energy and vitality on display is always impressive, as are the facilities. The extraordinary growth of the campus in the years since my first visit symbolizes the dynamism of the University and its commitment to the economic partnership it enjoys with the region.

The University's Strategic Plan, 2016-2021, is comprehensive, ambitious and challenging. Plans to establish new institutes and graduate programs in the health sciences and in entrepreneurship are expansive. The creation of new schools in Dentistry and Pharmacy clearly mirror market needs and will be growth areas for the next decades. Constructing the needed infrastructure as public/private partnerships is itself an exercise in entrepreneurship. I have significant experience in establishing new graduate programs in the STEM disciplines, and in raising funds for new initiatives. While president of Delaware State University I dramatically increased alumni giving, oversaw a twofold increase in federal research funding and established the first five doctoral programs in the institutions history. Four of those programs were in STEM fields and were fully funded for the first 5-years through federal government grants. I also have some experience with the hospitality industry and thus fully understand the effort to establish FGCU as a preeminent destination in Hospitality and Golf Management.

The Strategic Plan's embrace of *emerging preeminent status*, as approved by the Board of Governors, provides an exciting pathway for FGCU to garner additional resources while gaining in regional and national stature. FGCU's initial focus of student retention and graduation rate is gratifying. Putting students first is the most certain route to continued institutional success. I am committed to access, affordability and excellence. Inclusiveness, self-awareness, the embrace of others and the pursuit of truth are things that I have espoused, and in which I have been engaged, my entire professional life. As the first in my family to attend college, and as an African-American, I embrace these themes as central elements in my educational philosophy. I believe this meshes well with the core values espoused by Florida Gulf Coast University.

I am very familiar with the role of a great university in a larger system having served as executive vice president and vice president for academic affairs of the University of Massachusetts system, and as president of Queens College of the City University of New York. It is clear to me that the synergies created in a higher education system provide for opportunities to serve local communities and the State in innovative ways that would otherwise not be possible.

I firmly believe in shared governance and have demonstrated my commitment at every institution I served. It would be a pleasure to work in collaboration with the Board of Trustees, the Florida Gulf Coast University Faculty Senate, the Staff Advisory Council and the Student Government. This, I believe, is a prerequisite to leading and advancing the University to the next level. My role as a president has always been to utilize existing governance structures and processes to convene genuine conversations that allow for the collective shaping of the institutions future. I believe that supplying pat solutions to our most challenging problems is not a productive way to resolve them.

The success already enjoyed by the relatively young FGCU alumni, and the quality of the University's faculty, students and staff provide significant opportunities for marketing and development activities that can raise the institution's national and global profile. The community connections, both in the region and state wide, can be used to great effect in fundraising, as has already been demonstrated.

FGCU's commitment to student success and insistence on academic rigor are causes that I have championed throughout my decades in higher education. As a student, I personally benefited from a very rigorous academic and athletic experience. I believe that the basis for our existence as a university is to educate and nurture our students. I have demonstrated my commitment to students in all the institutions which I have served and will continue that commitment in my future endeavors.

I also worked with community organizations in Schenectady, NY, a community that continues to struggle with the economic transformation that swept through much of the northeastern part of the United States. There I learned the value of engagement in the civic enterprise, and with the community, that has defined much of my career trajectory in research, in federal government service and in higher education.

As someone who has managed two research oriented institutions, I embrace FGCU's programs to advance knowledge and it's commitment to sustainable development. I emphasized this in very tangible terms at both Delaware State University and at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). For example, at UDC I established the College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Sciences (CAUSES) to carry out that University's land-grant mission and to spur innovative research on urban issues. CAUSES launched research in water resource management, high value crops suitable for growing in the urban environment, health disparities, nutrition and other areas vital to a healthy urban economy. I insisted that the student center, for which I developed funding, be a *LEED Platinum* structure to demonstrate the University's commitment to sustainable communities. I also created the Center for Urban Education, a graduate level institution designed to provide data driven research opportunities and graduate degrees to teachers and administrators in public schools across the Washington, DC region.

High quality, cutting edge research and scholarship, the recruitment and retention of high quality faculty and staff and the development of state of the art facilities have been essential elements in my academic career. For example, at Delaware State I led the renovation of the campus, including the construction of new athletic facilities, new residence halls and a new student center.

Also, from my personal experience as an undergraduate, I believe that high quality, value added undergraduate research, discovery and creativity that is directly connected to the students educational activity is essential to the success of a research university.

All of us in higher education are aware of the changing demographics of our potential student populations. The number of students that are the first in their families to attend college is rising dramatically. These students must succeed in their educational endeavors if our economy, both locally and nationally, is to remain competitive. Enhancing already strong connections to area high schools and community colleges present an opportunity to provide support to these students and a pathway to an advanced educational experience. It is also important to connect with students and their families much earlier in their schooling, at the elementary school level, so that they are aware of what is needed to succeed in college and in life. FGCU is well positioned to have a significant impact in this area. I have significant experience in this type of effort. As president of Queens College I established a pre-K to 8<sup>th</sup> grade school on campus to serve as a model of what can be done when university faculty get involved in teaching young children. While serving as president of the University of the District of Columbia, I created the first, and only, public community college in Washington, DC. I worked to ensure a “seamless transition” to the 4-year University for those wishing to further their education beyond the associate degree. This created a “pipe line” that is providing long-term benefits for those students.

My departure from UDC was difficult. Washington is a very political city. When I arrived I was told privately that I should get as much done as quickly as possible since I would not be allowed, politically, to do “too many good things” since it would impinge on other turfs. The political system would not allow even the most positive sustained change. This was proven to be true in many ways. Even so, I was the second longest serving president in the University’s history.

My experience with intercollegiate athletics is extensive. I was twice a member of the NCAA Division II President’s Council and have been president of a D I institution. I believe strongly that athletics can play a major, positive role in the life of a university and that is especially so of athletics at the D I level. The reach of athletics, from recruitment to community building to fundraising, is enormous. It also provides branding opportunities that cannot be derived any other way. Even though most D I programs cost a university resources, I firmly believe that the positive benefits they bring significantly outweigh the expense and I champion strategic investment in athletics.

I have managed several complex organizations, including three U.S. universities and the U.S. embassy in Mexico, then the largest U.S. diplomatic mission in the world. I have lived and worked in Europe and Latin America and have also traveled extensively and worked in Asia and the Middle East. My language proficiency includes Spanish, with a working knowledge of French and German. My Washington connections are extensive and range from the departments of State, Energy, Commerce, Labor, Education and the Intelligence community to the White House. I am also very familiar with the Congress and with the non-profit

community, including those foundations that are focused in some way on education. I continue to serve on a number of governmental and non-governmental advisory boards that have brought me in contact with the CEO's of many of the nation's major corporations.

My interest in becoming president of Florida Gulf Coast University is anchored in the belief that my skills and experience match the University's desire to build on its exceptional legacy. I believe that I have the stature, ethics and values, skills and personal qualities that describe the next leader of the University. I bring an energy and depth and breadth of knowledge and connections that would enhance that value proposition and strengthen the University's reputation regionally, nationally and globally. My ability to connect with alumni, students, faculty and staff would, I believe, suffuse an already rich environment with an enthusiasm that is vital for success in today's competitive higher education marketplace.

I have attached a current curriculum vita for your use and look forward to hearing from you as the search process develops.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Allen", is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A".

Allen Lee Sessoms

Attachment: As stated