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Dear Members of the search committee,

I am pleased to submit my credentials for consideration as the next President of Florida Gulf Coast University. In my role as Provost and chief academic officer, I am responsible for the function of nearly 400 full-time faculty, 600 part-time faculty, hundreds of academic staff, and a budget in excess of \$90,000,000. I serve as a key member of the President's leadership team, a position that has given me broad insight into all University operations. As you will see in the accompanying documents, my current position has been earned on a record of a successful 30 year career in higher education, beginning as an assistant professor at a small private university, and transitioning into successively greater leadership roles in two non-flagship state universities in Ohio. It is this latter experience that I believe provides the greatest demonstration of my success and its ability to translate into the needs of FGCU as it seeks its next President.

My experience suggests that non-flagship State universities have great similarity. Many of them seek a particular class of student from a regional community, including a high proportion of first-generation college-goers. They struggle to gain the attention of the State government leadership, and are dwarfed in their impact on statewide issues. It thus becomes critical to be seen as a good partner to more established universities and to state government officials who can benefit from collaboration. This is the path that I have chosen at Youngstown State, one that we have seen to allow us to grow in statewide prestige over the last several years.

In addition, as a regional university, we must also partner with our community. Whether this means relationships with industry, area schools (K-12 and higher education), local government, or regional economic development agencies, strong partnerships have become the hallmark of our success. Our partnerships have led to growth in infrastructure for our students and resources for our faculty. As one of the leading employers in the Youngstown area, such partnerships are critical to our mutual success.

One of the hallmarks of our YSU education is our emphasis on applied learning, either through service activities in which our students are engaged, through extensive laboratory experiences, clinical placements, student teaching assignments, co-op activities, or similar programs tailored to the discipline. Although this often results in a significant time commitment on behalf of our students, it generally leads to a better educated student who is prepared to work upon graduation. That in turn helps to drive up our placement rate and leads to the high level of success achieved by our alumni, leading to even greater demand for our graduates by prospective employers. At the same time, we support student's efforts to expand their programs through undergraduate research activities that has the students using world-class equipment that many other universities would restrict to graduate students or post-docs. This gives our students an edge in placement in top graduate schools. As an example, YSU graduated this past May our first ever Rhodes Scholar and added two more Goldwater scholars to our list of students receiving prestigious national recognition.

With the remainder of this letter, I would like to highlight some of my prior experiences and discuss how they have transformed my university and can be adapted to the needs of FGCU. I have grouped these ideas into themes that I believe speak to the attributes you seek in your next President, and will look

forward to discussing these further through the interview process, should I be fortunate enough to be offered the opportunity.

Envisioning the Future

In his 2013 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama talked about the rebirth of manufacturing in the United States, saying: “There are things we can do, right now, to accelerate this trend. Last year, we created our first manufacturing innovation institute in Youngstown, Ohio. A once-shuttered warehouse is now a state-of-the-art lab where new workers are mastering the 3D printing that has the potential to revolutionize the way we make almost everything. There’s no reason this can’t happen in other towns.” I played a critical role in bringing this national research center to Youngstown, building the opportunity from an early stage investment in a few key individuals and continuing to nurture its growth over several years. My efforts included the creation of a partnership with the Youngstown Business Incubator, support for research initiatives brought by faculty, commitment of matching funds on multiple prior research grants, and a commitment to key business partners. We collaborated with the Mahoning Valley Manufacturer’s Coalition, the regional K-12 schools, the local community college, and several well-known research universities to put together a winning proposal. Over the years, leading up to this culminating event, I positioned YSU as a key member of the TechBelt, an idea put forth in 2007 by Congressman Tim Ryan to create a technology network for economic development between Cleveland and Pittsburgh. I led the STEM College to partner with Eastern Gateway Community College, Chaney STEM High School, Choffin Career Center and other K-12 schools to ensure a uniform approach to manufacturing workforce education and a pipeline of students entering YSU. In 2015, we received a \$2,500,000 gift to create the Friedman endowed chair in Manufacturing, and in fall 2016 successfully recruited a candidate to fill that position. Also in 2015, we received a \$4,000,000 grant from the Air Force Research Laboratory, a part of a congressional directive that I promoted with our legislative delegation over the last several years. This investment continues to pay off with the addition of a new Bachelor’s degree program in manufacturing engineering, and what is now arguably the best educational opportunity for additive manufacturing in the United States. The belief and continued investment in a vision led to this transformative effort.

In my role as Provost, I have engaged in a mission to develop a robust First-Year Experience program. Two years ago, we viewed such a program as central to our fledgling student success initiative, but had no vision for what the FYE program might be. Working with our Coordinator for General Education, we created a vision for the program to include several required elements, and other key learning outcomes, including a common intellectual experience. It is my belief that such a common theme across all students is critical to creating a unifying identity for our students, which will promote their success. Now having hired a Director for our FYE course, we are beginning to flesh out the common intellectual component. As part of my commitment to shared governance, we will solicit proposals from the faculty as to the form of the common experience, and then designate that faculty as the lead for the project. I expect that the specific project will vary from year to year based on the particular interests of the faculty, providing a unique experience for each class of students and a robust opportunity to explore an educational feature from multiple perspectives. I am excited about the opportunities that this experience will provide for our YSU student, as it has the potential to be transformational to our educational objectives.

Educational Leadership

I had substantial success in my position as Dean of the STEM College at YSU in developing my college into a leader for economic change through education. We rebuilt the reputation of our engineering programs, to achieve a ranking of 45th in the nation among programs that do not offer a doctoral degree.

We expanded the graduate offerings, including the development of an interdisciplinary PhD in Materials Science and Engineering, the first PhD offered at YSU, and therefore requiring approval of the Higher Learning Commission, our regional agency. I also initiated the discussion of our new Bachelor of Engineering program in Manufacturing Engineering, which was approved by the State Department of Higher Education this past spring and is now being prepared for accreditation review by ABET.

I have invested substantially in international programs, including the hiring of an Associate Provost for International and Global Initiatives. Our efforts are three-fold: 1) to increase the enrollment of international students at YSU, 2) to increase the number of YSU students who participate in study abroad, and 3) to provide a welcoming environment for incoming international students that simultaneously provides an introduction to other cultures for YSU students. Over the last two years, we have traveled to China and Taiwan to develop cooperative agreements with partner universities that can both send and receive students, and are interested in collaborative academic programs. My experience in this area derives from my time as graduate dean at the University of Toledo, during which I participated in four separate recruiting trips to China to increase the enrollment of Chinese students at UT, which eventually resulted in nearly 1000 Chinese students per year. I adapted what I learned from Toledo to the needs of Youngstown, providing one concrete example of how my past success can lead to new opportunities for FGCU.

We have added new programs in several disciplines over the last several years, including a Masters in Athletic Training, a Masters of Accountancy, and a BS in Biochemistry. We have expanded other programs, including the development of an online track in our MBA program and our Criminal Justice program. We offer a fully online RN to BSN conversion program for the many nursing professionals who need to upgrade their credentials to maintain viability in the workplace. This fall, we have developed an online Bachelor of General Studies that should provide a unique opportunity for new enrollment from the broad population of prospective students that have some college education but left school because of life's interruptions. All of these programs will provide a service to our community while also adding to YSU enrollment.

Enrollment Management

YSU reached a peak enrollment in excess of 15,000 students in 2011, and steadily declined to about 12,500 last year. Through many efforts, we have now turned that enrollment trend around and seen the first increase enrollment in five years. We have achieved this result through new enrollment practices led by our Associate Vice-President for Enrollment Management, but also through the efforts of the academic division in the development of new academic programs, the migration of selected programs into an online format, and a focus on delivery of a quality academic product.

Because retention is a key aspect of enrollment management, I worked hard to ensure that the Division of Student Success would report to the Provost. As a result, we have been able to integrate the work of our academic advisors with the work of the Center for Student Progress, which supports students through peer mentoring and supplemental instruction. We have modified the reporting structure of the advisors to provide an integrated approach that addresses the needs of undecided students, as well as students that have determined that they will not be successful in their selected major. Our efforts have resulted in an increase in our first-year retention from 67% to 72%, with a goal of bringing our retention to over 80%.

At my urging, we are beginning the process of identifying the optimal enrollment picture for YSU, and the specific mix of dual enrollment high school students, traditional undergraduate students, international students, and graduate students. We have room for growth in both the international and

graduate populations, but this growth comes with implications for student services, housing, facilities, and more. I will be leading the team to develop this plan that will become a critical component of what we now envision to be an updated strategic plan for YSU.

Finances and Fundraising

Because the largest portion of the university budget resides in academic affairs, I have had substantial responsibility in producing a financial stable operation. When I became Provost two years ago, YSU operated with a \$10,000,000 structural deficit. In FY16, we closed the books with a \$1,500,000 surplus. We achieved this turnaround through an in-depth look at our expenditures and budgeting philosophy. Rather than carrying vacant faculty positions on the books, we deleted those positions and reinvested funds in areas of need. I shared enrollment information with department chairs so that they could reduce the number of small sections and optimize the general education course offerings. We developed new programs that would attract new students who could provide a return on their investment. We invested in key staff who could aid in student recruitment, retention, and enrollment. Because of our fiscal prudence and our increased enrollment, we have roughly \$1,000,000 in new money to invest in FY17, most of which is being committed to hiring of new faculty in growth areas, to better meet the student needs and expand our efforts in faculty research and scholarship.

Among my accomplishments in fundraising is the contribution of \$440,000,000 worth of PLM software from Siemens. I also led our effort to secure two \$100,000 gifts from Roger and Gloria Jones, and participated in the award of \$150,000 for the Jack Bakos Collaborative Student Lounge, a \$1,000,000 scholarship gift from James and Patricia Hodgson, and numerous other gifts and contributions from alumni and area business leaders. The commitment of \$2,500,000 to endow the Friedman Chair in Engineering that I generated supports the third endowed chair at YSU. I am now designated as the responsible party for raising the funds to construct our new Innovation Center, and am working with our AVP Research to gain support from federal and state sources, as well as with our YSU Foundation for philanthropic gifts. We have several prospective donors to whom we have reached out and are awaiting final indication of their commitment to support our project.

Strengthening Community

When I accepted the position as Founding Dean of the STEM College, I believed that its formation created an excellent opportunity to rebuild its commitment to education, research, and community service. As Founding Dean, I led the integration of two diverse cultures to develop a climate conducive to interdisciplinary expansion. We selected the best procedures from the former Colleges of Engineering and Arts & Sciences to create a shared governance structure for our new STEM College, and I worked with the faculty to create new procedures where none existed previously. We analyzed existing strengths to create interdisciplinary research centers of excellence and made strategic hires that met the disciplinary needs while supporting the research agenda. We modified the science requirements for the general education program, reinstating a rigorous laboratory science requirement. We came together as a college to develop the PhD in Materials Science and Engineering, a truly interdisciplinary program that weaves together the best the college has to offer.

Communication and transparency were a hallmark of my Deanship, during which I involved faculty, staff, and students in my decision-making. I believe strongly that one should indicate why a decision has been made. I have worked hard to continue that effort as Provost, and interact regularly as a member of the Academic Senate and a representative on several key committees. As part of this effort, I have committed to meeting with each department once every second year, which amounts to nine department

meetings per semester. I have a personal policy that I meet personally with faculty when I deliver unpleasant news, as I believe that is essential to be able to explain why I have made a particular decision, even for such difficult transactions as notifying a faculty that they are being denied tenure (which fortunately only happens for a few faculty each year).

Diversity is a critical issue for the long-term success of YSU, especially considering its location in an urban center. Last year, the President developed a Culture of Community Collaborative that is tasked with improving the support for our diverse population. One of their initiatives is a minority student work program in which I participate. We are also working to increase the diversity of the faculty, and at my request, our professional development coordinator has developed several programs for faculty to help them understand the needs of a diverse student population.

Concluding thoughts

As an educational entrepreneur, I have had great success in promoting growth YSU and integrating it into the Youngstown community, success that should translate well to FGCU. YSU hires faculty from a nationally competitive pool; they are more highly accomplished than when I arrived at YSU ten years ago. We have expanded the geographical scope of our enrollment base, going from a population that was largely local to one that now is more regional and thus competing with other four-year universities in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Our graduates are highly successful. The accomplishments of our faculty and students demonstrate my ability to lead a collaborative team, recognize excellence, and reward success.

In addition to my service to YSU for the past ten years, I have a nationally distinguished reputation that provides the broader perspective required to be successful as President at FGCU. I have significant success in obtaining and administering external grants, have published extensively, and am frequently called upon for invited lectures in my area of expertise. I have held leadership positions in national professional societies. I have served on national review committees, including those of the National Academy of Engineering. I have been on editorial boards for major research journals and am the editor for *Environmental Progress & Sustainable Energy*. Over the years I have participated in numerous panels pertaining to sustainability, a particular passion of mine, and I would hope that I could harness that passion to be used in support of growth at FGCU.

The path to success at YSU has followed a similar pattern I have found from my prior leadership positions: build the foundation, invest in people, and respond to opportunity. I would welcome the chance to apply my extensive academic background, my strength in communicating the mission of the organization, and my leadership in innovation for teaching and scholarship as the next President at Florida Gulf Coast University. I will look forward to hearing from you regarding this position.

Sincerely,



Martin Abraham
Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs
Youngstown State University