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Presidential Search Committee  
Florida Gulf Coast University  
Fort Myers, FL 33965

RE.: Florida Gulf Coast University President Search

Dear Search Committee:

Please accept this letter as an expression of my interest in the position of President at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). I am enclosing my curriculum vitae with this letter for your consideration. In the following, I have provided a brief overview of both my interest in the position and how my experiences match its requirements.

I am currently a Distinguished Professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at New Jersey Institute of Technology. My most recent academic administration appointment was Dean of Newark College of Engineering at NJIT where I successfully served for two, three-year terms. Near the end of the second term, I had the opportunity to participate as a technical advisor with a group of entrepreneurs working towards taking various medical products to market. I expected this to be an outstanding experience for me to see and contribute to research and development from the viewpoint of taking product to market. My belief is that such an experience under my belt will allow me to contribute even more effectively as an academic administrator. This experience is especially applicable to FGCU given the importance it places on community/industry outreach and economic development.

A description of my accomplishments, none of which would be possible without generous contributions from my colleagues at all levels, is available in the attached curriculum vitae. These are accomplishments that can be quantified, such as, the increase in enrollments, addition of cutting-edge academic programs, growth in research expenditures, advancement of coop programs, recruitment of new faculty, etc., and are not the focus of this letter. Instead, here I would like to delve into what I have learned as an academic administrator and how that will help me serve FGCU were I to be afforded the honor to be its President.

A positive environment, I believe, is essential for the growth of academics, scholarship and learning. As an administrator, my first focus has always been on creating a positive environment for all constituents affected by my decisions and actions. As I left the position after two terms, each department had a stable and functioning leadership as did the Office of the Dean. I believe that I am blessed with a strong ability to connect with people, understand the underlying issues, and work collaboratively to foster teamwork and create a positive work environment. I will use my administrative experience and skills to help define a collective vision rooted in academic excellence for FGCU that will establish the university as a global leader.

In all my years in academia – as faculty member, department chair, and dean, I have continued to maintain my focus on the students. I made it a point to work directly with the students and student bodies and to pay close attention to their experiences, observations and input. In both of my administrative roles, it was a top priority for me to include students from various groups in Executive Boards and Board of Visitors so their input was heard and carried weight at the highest level. As President, I will help create and promote a culture in the university that is student-focused and will personally continue to interact with the students to make their experience at FGCU one that is both productive as well as memorable.

For some time now, budget cuts at state universities (and perhaps also private universities) have become a way of life. In my previous administrative positions, I have had to deal with similar budget cuts. It was particularly challenging during my tenure as dean as the university simultaneously embarked on growth of its enrollment with largest increases in enrollment occurring in engineering. I led the College through these challenging times while preserving and, in fact, enhancing the strategic directions of the College. The most important thing that I did in accomplishing this was to build an effective management team of associate deans and department chairs. Together, and through gaining support from the faculty and staff, we were able to manage the growth under constrained resources such that: (a) the prime strength of the college at undergraduate level of providing hands-on, practice oriented education was retained, (b) the status of the College as a leader in research and in offering graduate programs of relevance to the industry was enhanced, and (c) the focus on student satisfaction and success was maintained. This, I believe, speaks to my ability to manage the human, financial and information resources to yield enhanced results while sustaining the morale of the faculty. As President, I will work closely and continuously with all constituencies of the university (including government bodies) to demonstrate the value that FGCU produces for the State of Florida so that the case is made to provide adequate resources. Together, we will explore new avenues of generating funds based on the areas of strength of the university. As explained above, I have the experience and the steady hand to lead the university through challenging budget cuts while preserving the integrity of its academic programs.

I have a strong personal commitment to assuring diversity in the ranks of faculty, staff and students. I firmly believe that a diverse environment is essential to innovation and growth at an institution – a thought now widely accepted in academia. Diversity, I further believe, has to count not merely in terms of number of individuals from diverse groups represented on the campus but, more importantly, in terms of their input and influence on decision-making. In line with this belief, my leadership team at NJIT included – for the first time in the history of

its college of engineering – women and minorities serving as department chairs and associate deans. This allowed us to recruit several women and individuals from underrepresented groups of top quality into faculty ranks further strengthening the innovative infrastructure of the College. Formulating change is one thing but to have the courage in a leadership role to implement it and bring others along to follow the change is what truly counts. I bring this demonstrated ability and courage to the table in applying for this critical leadership role at FGCU. As President, I will help create an environment of inclusiveness that will promote the acceptance of diverse opinions and individuals from different backgrounds.

I have significant experience in development and fundraising activities. Alumni development, industry outreach and fundraising, in my view, go hand in hand. Channeling these resources, the college of engineering under my leadership as dean was the main contributor to the capital campaign for the university. I have led a significant effort in alumni development which has involved meeting with alumni, updating them with activities and developments at the College and connecting them back to campus. An extension of this activity has been making connections with the industry and devising ways for the industry to interact with faculty at the university. Outside connections and outreach add significantly to the prestige of an institution and its ability to make impact in local and global communities and can help for the university. I have been involved in facilitating the development of several coalitions over the course of my administrative roles. These coalitions have helped build strong cross-disciplinary activities and provided students exciting opportunities in interdisciplinary fields.

I would like to add a few words about my work and management style as these, I believe, are critical to the functioning of a President. I possess strong interpersonal and managerial skills that allow me to stimulate and motivate people to accomplish the goals set forth. My management style enables me to develop strategic plans within the framework of a shared vision and to secure cooperation to execute them. I have a firm belief that decisions in an academic setting must be made in an inclusive environment that is threatening to none. Further, I apply the same standards of ethics and integrity in making all decisions regardless of whether they are made privately or in the open. It is my sincere endeavor at all times that integrity and honesty are the hallmarks of all decisions made by me.

I have provided above a brief synopsis of the experiences, skills and commitment that I will bring to FGCU. These experiences will allow me to deliver on the areas of focus that we will collectively identify for the university. You will find in me an engaging President who works closely with and wins the confidence of all constituencies of the university. I appreciate the opportunity to have shared my sincere desire for the position as well as my qualifications and accomplishments. I look forward to further discussions on this matter. Please feel free to call me if you need any further information in this regard.

Sincerely,

Sunil Saigal