

5115 Klahanie Dr NW  
Olympia, WA 98502  
7 November 2016

Presidential Search Committee  
Florida Gulf Coast University  
Fort Myers, FL

Dear Search Committee Members,

I was delighted to learn that I have been nominated for the presidency of Florida Gulf Coast University. Given that nomination and FGCU's outstanding reputation, I'm writing to apply for the position. I'm taking this step humbly given FGCU's success in its short history but I'm doing so because the values I've spent my academic life promoting are so very congruent with those at the heart of the university's mission. I believe that my last three administrative positions have provided me with experiences that are directly transferrable to FGCU. In brief, my tenure as vice president for academic affairs at The Evergreen State University, an institution not quite 50 years old, has positioned me well to work in a university of FGCU's age. My time as the liberal arts dean at Butler University taught me about the intricacies of working at an institution with a successful Division I sports program and my time as the liberal arts dean at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh taught me about the power and importance of a first-class regional comprehensive university. In the following paragraphs, I'll explore the lessons I learned and the overlap I see in my values and those of FGCU in an attempt to help you assess whether my experiences and knowledge are compatible with what you are seeking in a new president.

In many ways, FGCU's articulation of its mission and values is similar to that of The Evergreen State College where I'm in my sixth year as vice president for academic affairs. Most importantly, both recognize the centrality of a liberal arts core to well-rounded graduates, regardless of major. Additionally, both care deeply about social justice, the concept of student agency, and creating a community with a rich sense of shared governance and respect for diverse perspectives.

FGCU unapologetically promotes itself as a public university with programs "firmly grounded in the liberal arts and sciences." I find this heartening at a time when there's been significant misunderstanding about the value of the liberal arts and when many seem to think a college education is primarily about positioning a student to win a first job. Of course a first job is important but, as we all know, it's only a start. A broad-based, integrative liberal arts education helps a student learn critical thinking skills, improve her ability to communicate effectively, understand the importance of using data while appreciating the benefits that arise from the arts, and appreciate the value of life-long learning. These are the traits that lead to career advancement and, more importantly, civic engagement. True educational success occurs when students are able to understand

and internalize their specific goals in the context of the institution's values. Placing students at the center of their educational experience, regularly asking them to reflect on what they've accomplished and where they want to go, and providing them with mentors who understand the nature of the educational journey is the most likely way to encourage students to succeed, in college and beyond. FGCU clearly shares this perspective and I am impressed with your commitment to educating the whole student and your focus on student success, both in and out of the classroom. Indeed, your Guiding Principles very clearly notes that "Student success is at the center of all University endeavors." The FGCU campus community has articulated many of the points critical to student success, success being defined broadly to include graduation rates, employability of graduates, ability for students to go on to earn graduate and professional degrees, and, perhaps most importantly, the creation of fully engaged citizens, in your draft strategic plan. That plan and your on-going efforts also recognize the centrality of FGCU to the health of the local community. I am also impressed with the balance FGCU has struck between graduate and undergraduate education.

In my work at Evergreen I have collaborated with faculty, staff, students and alums to help move the institution in a direction designed to enhance student success. The most important facet of this work has been the adoption of Evergreen's second graduation requirement by the faculty early in my tenure. Known as the Academic Statement Initiative, this enterprise requires that students write an annual personal reflection essay that discusses their educational goals and successes. The final iteration of this academic statement becomes the cover page of each student's transcript upon graduation. The academic statement is not written in a vacuum. Faculty agreed to a greatly enhanced new student orientation program involving six hours of seminars with faculty. Additionally, faculty devote time in fall offerings to discuss the academic statement, the importance of the liberal arts, and the nature of Evergreen's pedagogical model. Taken together, the initiative involves recognizing and celebrating the high degree of student agency we invest in our students. While efforts like these are important in any context, they are even more critical in Evergreen's environment in which almost 32% of our students are the first in their families to attend college and almost 50% receive Pell Grant support. Additionally, over half of Evergreen's students transfer from community colleges and I have spent significant time working to develop relationships with those institutions.

Over the course of my career I've taken steps to partner with others to help shape the national discourse about the liberal arts and the value of a college education, regardless of major. While dean of the College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, a UW System-wide group I helped create led to Wisconsin becoming AAC&U's first LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise) state. In Washington, I created the Washington Consortium for the Liberal Arts (WaCLA), 36 public and private, two- and four-year institutions of higher education, along with seven non-

academic partners, to promote the liberal arts across the state. Under my leadership, this group has run statewide liberal arts essay contests for high school and college students, made invited presentations to the state legislature, and presented a statewide employer/educator forum to explore linkages between the academy and businesses. Last year, AAC&U accepted WaCLA's application to make Washington the 11<sup>th</sup> LEAP state. Additionally, in December 2014 Phi Beta Kappa awarded WaCLA its Key of Distinction Award for promoting the values of a liberal education.

As I've indicated, one of the most important gifts an institution can provide its students is the belief in the importance of student agency. FGCU's commitment to student success convinces me that the FGCU community feels similarly. Over my career, I have taken steps to increase the likelihood that students will have ample opportunities to go take what they've learned in classrooms, laboratories and studios to the next level. For example, at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Butler University and The Evergreen State College I initiated programs to fund students to work collaboratively with faculty members on scholarly and creative projects. Additionally, I chaired Evergreen's strategic planning committee and the five year plan we submitted included the goal of creating a significant capstone experience for every graduating student.

As FGCU looks to the future it's clear that recognizing, celebrating and enhancing diversity in all of its forms remains a high priority for the campus. Making progress on this issue is hard work, work that's never over, and work that must involve the entire community. While I've had some success in this arena, I want to immediately raise two points. First, any success that I've had is due to the collaborative efforts of many. Second, I would be exaggerating to imply that I see myself as an expert in this field. As with so many facets of my administrative career, I have had the ability to ask good questions, bring people together to search for solutions, and find ways to implement the best of those solutions.

Having said that, I'd like to describe some initiatives that have worked well. At both Oberlin and Oshkosh, I created programs for faculty to invite experts to campus with the goal of crafting opportunities for group discussions to enhance faculty understanding of the complexities surrounding diversity while encouraging course development. In Oshkosh, I partnered with Wind River Tribal College in Wyoming to enable students from both institutions to share curriculum and interact on a regular basis. Evergreen has a long-standing program for providing baccalaureate degrees on reservations in Washington and I've worked to expand those offerings, including the creation of an indigenous arts campus consisting of our Longhouse, the nation's first on a public college campus, as well as a carving studio, a fiber arts studio currently in design (both funded through contributions of the Ford Foundation) and a planned glass studio. I expect that all of this will soon come together with the creation of the nation's first MFA in

Indigenous Arts. Additionally, I recently called together the provosts of the other two institutions of higher education in Olympia in an attempt to create an on-going lecture/discussion series focused on race. Working with the executive director of our local interfaith alliance, our goal is to involve the community broadly in difficult discussions that are shaping so many facets of American civic life.

Evergreen also offers a program in Tacoma that serves students from underrepresented groups. Our presence in Tacoma has helped revitalize a depressed neighborhood while providing educational opportunities for place-bound individuals. Finding ways to ease access to higher to those who thought it was out of reach has to be a part of every college. Toward that end, I was the co-PI on an NSF grant while I was at Butler designed to attract individuals from traditionally underrepresented populations to major in the sciences. At Evergreen, I supported faculty who won such grants. Finally, in Oshkosh, I helped create the women's studies major and the African American Studies Program as well as founding and directing the UW System Women and Science Program. The program was designed to be a faculty development effort to improve pedagogy making it friendlier to students from underrepresented populations – recognizing that such efforts actually improved science instruction for all students. My efforts in that program led me to be the co-PI on an NSF grant designed to bring teams from campuses across the country to a week-long institute to discuss science pedagogy. This summer institute was successfully offered for five years.

Diversity initiatives must also internationalize the curriculum and campus. At both Oshkosh and Butler I helped faculty increase study abroad and student exchange programs. At Evergreen, we've begun teaching a program to students from Evergreen and South Korea's Daejeon University. Because faculty development efforts are critical, in Oshkosh we created a program which funded faculty to travel abroad to increase future study abroad opportunities and courses focused on international cultures. And because language study is essential to understanding cultural differences, I founded and directed the UW System Collaborative Language Program, an effort that spanned the System's 26 campuses bringing less commonly taught languages to students on campuses where such opportunities had not previously existed. At Evergreen, on a far smaller scale, I have collaborated with colleagues at our local community college to share language offerings.

The most difficult aspect of a campus's diversity initiative goes beyond curriculum and addresses the campus's ethos and the respect all community members deserve. It's critical to create an environment in which all voices are heard and respected and where opportunities and support are equitably available. This requires that actual communication takes place. The respect needed for this to occur can only develop in the presence of trust which must be earned by actions as well as words. This is particularly important because it is not enough to recruit a wide array of students to an institution; it is

essential that once they arrive they help shape the culture of the university and that they graduate in large numbers.

Campuses also need to look outward for financial support. I enjoy discussing opportunities for philanthropy with prospective donors and find it rewarding to share enthusiasm for programs and ideas with those who have an affinity for the campus. I've had success working with individuals and foundations, building partnerships and cultivating donors. At Oshkosh, my greatest success was the creation of an endowed scholarship fund for music students, the largest such fund at the university at the time. At Butler, I raised approximately \$16 million during my years as dean. At Evergreen, I raised funds to create a civic engagement institute for incoming students and participated in acquiring the College's largest single gift from a donor. I welcome moving into a presidency where such efforts will make a larger call on my time. Recognizing that the largest funder of any public institution is the state, I've been successful working collaboratively with legislators from both sides of the aisle to garner support for the institutions at which I've worked.

Campuses that are the most successful in recruiting and retaining students, hiring first rate faculty and staff, and raising funds are those that have created an internal culture of mutual respect. Campuses need to be environments where ideas matter, where intellectual and philosophical differences are argued over fiercely while participants respect one another fully. While a president alone cannot create a positive campus climate, s/he needs to model the daily interactions of the kind of environment wanted for the campus. Shared governance must be more than a slogan and all members of an academic community, regardless of role, need to know how to listen as well as how to promote their own ideas.

Before I close, I want to discuss one aspect of my professional life that has remained largely independent of the campuses at which I've worked. The reason for this aside is my belief that the work reflects many of the liberal arts values that I've articulated above and demonstrates the important link between theory and practice that we need to teach our students. Thirteen years ago I founded a group called The Clergy Letter Project and I've served as its unpaid executive director ever since. This group of over 15,000 clergy members and scientists have come together to demonstrate that religious leaders can be fully supportive of high quality science education in general and evolutionary theory in particular. One of the main goals of the project has been to help shift the national debate about the relationship between religion and science, to move past the point where people were shouting at one another and to create space for meaningful and respectful learning to take place. For the past 11 years The Clergy Letter Project has sponsored an event called Evolution Weekend, the weekend in February closest to the birthday of Charles Darwin. This weekend, with local events held in congregations all around the globe, has

reached more than three-quarters of a million people personally and many more through media outlets. One anecdotal and humorous piece of evidence pointing to the success of Evolution Weekend is the fact that both NPR and Fox News ran positive stories about the event. The Clergy Letter Project provides tangible hope that even some of our most entrenched ideas can be modified when approached respectfully, thoughtfully and with reasoned logic.

The thought of working at FGCU, one of the country's best comprehensive institutions, is truly exciting. Wisconsin, like Florida, has a strong system of higher education and I'm very comfortable within that model. Indeed, as I've described, I've worked hard to build inter-institutional partnerships statewide. Finally, I'm confident that my administrative experiences have prepared me well for the move to a presidency in general, and the values the FGCU community and I share suggest the possibility of a good fit specifically.

Thank you for reading my application. Attached please find my CV and a bibliography of my published writing. I wish you the best as you move forward with your search and as you continue to steward a superb institution.

Sincerely,

Michael Zimmerman  
Vice President for Academic Affairs  
The Evergreen State College