

DATE: November 5, 2016

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FROM: **Dr. Darrell Parker**  
Dean of the College of Business  
Western Carolina University

SUBJECT: Florida Gulf Coast University – President

Thank you for requesting that I submit my credentials for review by the presidential search committee at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU.) FGCU has built a strong academic reputation in a short period. From the beginning the institution has focused on student success and serving the region. This ongoing commitment will not only continue to attract excellent students, but also leaders who want to help move the institution forward on its trajectory of success. This is my goal in applying for the position of President. In this cover letter let me briefly outline how my experience and expertise address the opportunities and expectations of your next president.

**Execute New Strategic Plan for 2016-2021**

My record demonstrates the breadth of management ability to lead the institution in a fiscally responsible way. Updating and implementing the strategic plan will ensure that limited resources support choices that align with the University mission. I have served in progressively increasing leadership roles at public comprehensive universities in three states. Strategic plans have included goals measured by key performance indicators. For example, retention and graduation targets are set to track student success. Then our leadership team has implemented strategies and tactics and achieved those targeted metrics.

Insight into operational priorities and institutional effectiveness comes from an in-depth review of other institutions. I recently completed six years as an elected Commissioner to the Board of Trustees for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Each Compliance and Reporting Committee reviews the accreditation and monitoring reports of seventy to eighty member schools per year. This institutional wide perspective provides a deeper understanding of the strategic needs for tomorrow's higher education environment. My record of achievement has prepared me to execute a New Strategic Plan for 2016-2021.

### **Establish and Promote FGCU's Distinctive Institutional Identity**

The leadership and vision of the next President will determine how FGCU effectively builds upon the foundation it has established to become a leader in 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education. Part of the success that FGCU already enjoys comes from its commitment to serving regional economic development. FGCU is a public institution because of its mission not just because of its funding. A public mission involves a commitment to access, engagement, and sustainable community development. That mission creates a distinctive identity that can unite our diverse university, inspire our students, and engage the state and region. The new President must assess the capacity of the institution, engage the faculty in a discussion of the future, and obtain a level of visibility and stature with the diverse constituencies to form strategic partnerships. This includes not only campus and community leaders but also elected officials at the state and national level. I have worked successfully with elected officials in three states and look forward to developing those relationships in Florida. My visionary leadership style will build trust and collaboration to move FGCU forward.

### **Increase Revenue to Support Strategic Goals**

The landscape of higher education is changing. A national reputation for academic excellence is expected for a comprehensive university. Effective leadership requires resource development to provide the margin of excellence. This includes raising private funds, maintaining the relationships with stakeholders, and seeking entrepreneurial opportunities. Entrepreneurial experience for resource development is essential to develop sustainable funding that supports the university mission and academic excellence. The UNC Board of Governors recently approved my innovative proposal to form an affiliated for profit corporation at WCU. This entity will provide opportunities for faculty and students to engage in entrepreneurial projects and open another revenue stream for the university. It is one example of how the business model for higher education can change to build sustainable resource streams from engagement and applied research. My advisory board facilitated the launch of a venture capital fund to support entrepreneurs and turn these projects into economic development for the region. An entrepreneurial approach will improve the financial position of the institution by enhancing continuing education revenues, grants, and contract funding. Creativity in developing and managing resources has played a significant role in my success as a leader.

### **Foster a Strong Sense of Community**

My experience demonstrates the skills and credentials of a dynamic and successful leader. A dozen years of progressive administrative experience provides perspective to understand university stakeholders as we listen to their needs and concerns. Leadership hinges on effective communication. This was demonstrated last year at Western Carolina University (WCU) when the College of Fine and Performing Arts required a change in leadership. My interim leadership focused on developing a more collaborative culture where faculty could embrace a vision of the next level of success. The faculty in Fine and Performing Arts are diverse and many felt they

had not been heard. My leadership style includes open communication with faculty and staff through shared governance and direct communication with university leaders. Communication is also the key to building partnerships external to the university. A record of service on chamber, economic development, and cultural center boards documents my commitment to extend the university as a partner and ally to enhance community engagement at FGCU.

### **Lead Fundraising Efforts**

Resource development begins with the creation of partnerships and reflects the commitment, collaboration, and work of many people. Success requires a shared vision supported by a marketing plan that builds the brand reputation through strategic integrated storytelling. The recruitment, retention, and success of our students provides that unifying vision. Advancement activity in the College of Business at WCU has seen a 67% increase in reported endowment funds. Scholarships for both traditional and non-traditional students provide a means to stay in school and succeed. Scholarship support and annual giving has increased at each institution under my leadership.

The College of Business at WCU has expanded partnerships with corporations such as Mission Health Systems, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and Borg Warner. A major gift allowed the accountancy program to be named for the regional leader Dixon Hughes Goodman. At the University of South Carolina Upstate the vision of building “The George” in downtown Spartanburg attracted over \$12 million in private gifts, a \$2 million naming endowment gift, and cooperative spending by the City for the parking deck and infrastructure of about \$15 million. Stewardship of key stakeholders is critical for university communication whether we are referring to major donors or community leaders. I am prepared to lead FGCU university fund raising efforts as President.

### **Build and Lead a Strong Organization**

The strength of an organization is found in its people and is visible in the culture and values that unite them. Leadership requires the passion to articulate a vision that attracts partnerships and energizes support for the University. Building the organization requires the management competence to be accountable for planning, processes, budgets, and results. You seek a President who is not just a visionary leader but also demonstrates this managerial competence for administrative, academic, and operational support issues. The issues in higher education are complex and require collaboration among functional leaders who have responsibility for university budgeting, auxiliary enterprises, facilities, student support services, athletics, and advancement activities. My experience demonstrates both the polished and inspirational communication of an effective leader and the broad management expertise necessary to lead FGCU as it builds upon its strong foundation.

Please accept this letter and the attached Vita as my application for the position of FGCU President. You seek an enthusiastic, visionary, strategic leader with demonstrated integrity and competencies in decision making, communication, and management. I genuinely believe those traits aptly describe my abilities.

It appears that the qualifications you seek align well with my portfolio of experience and expertise. If selected I would be honored to serve as the next President of Florida Gulf Coast University. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darrell Parker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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