



January 15, 2017

Board of Trustees and Search Committee
President- Florida Gulf Coast University
c/o
Mr. Robert Luke
Witt/Kieffer
2015 Spring Road, Suite 510
Oak Brook, IL 60523

Dear Trustees, Search Committee Members and Prospective Colleagues:

Enclosed you will find a record of success and achievement which should be of interest to you as you seek to fill the position of President of Florida Gulf Coast University. As I review the profile description for your new President, I would like to especially note that the portfolio I am submitting precisely fits the distinctive qualifications and background you are looking for in this position. Moreover, my credentials and leadership experiences in a variety of academic settings would allow me to immediately and enthusiastically contribute to the University. More significant, what I hope distinguishes my application is the breadth, range, and scope of experiences I could offer your institution.

First and foremost, I present myself as a proven academic administrator with 12 years of higher education leadership experience, out of 18 overall years, ranging from my most recent positions as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at Savannah State University; Chair of the Department of Political Science and International Affairs at Kennesaw State University; Director and then Chair of the Public Administration Program at Clemson University housed in the Strom Thurmond Institute; and before that as Director of the Clemson University-University of South Carolina Joint MPA Program. I have risen through the academic ranks from assistant professor to associate professor and now full professor.

These experiences when combined with my cumulative 30 years of experiences across all sectors provide me with the requisite skills and knowledge and abilities needed to navigate the complexities of academic administration at a quality and distinctive unit of Florida's public university system spanning the vibrant, growing and significant region comprising the Southwest Florida Coast.

In my role at Savannah State University it is important to point out that I led a college of 132 faculty and presided over more than 2,000 students enrolled in six departments (English, Languages and Cultures; Fine Arts, Humanities and Wellness; Journalism and Mass Communications; Political Science and Public Affairs; Social and Behavioral Sciences and Social Work). This also includes three masters programs. I am ready and enthusiastic about progressing to the next tier of academic leadership and embracing the role of stewardship of a university.

In addition to my specific 18 years in academia, I would like to highlight my 12 years of experience as a senior official in the Budget Division of the Executive Department of New York State Government working under Governors' Mario Cuomo and George Pataki. Prior to my State service I was fortunate to have served on the staff of United States Senator and former United Nations Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan as his Regional Director for Upstate New York and in capacities in New York City and Washington, DC.

These experiences provide me with enhanced budgetary and financial management skills and the ability to work well with senior executives, trustees, legislators and corporate CEO's, alumni and members of the top executive team at the University and in the Florida System. Also, these experiences leave me well equipped to handle the necessary outreach and fund raising duties that are expected of a President.

With respect to my views on overall academic leadership, I must share my full enthusiasm for an approach that embraces ethics, fairness and respect of colleagues, a commitment to transparency, an obligation to diversity and opportunity, and a collaborative decision making process. At the same time, understanding the challenges facing both public and private universities in the 21st century requires decisions to ensure that programs are responsive to evolving educational needs in society and offer flexibility to deal with changing economic complexities and market opportunities. These are linchpins of a strategic planning process I would embrace and employ at Florida Gulf Coast University. Moreover my credentials reflect a keen understanding of key public policy issues, higher education dynamics and an ability to navigate the political environment in the Southwest Coastal Region, the State of Florida, and in national and international settings.

I offer solid academic credentials and background as a tenured full professor in political science and public administration. My research and publications and teaching interests are in the areas of government ethics, ethics in public life, public budgeting and finance, leadership, organization theory and public management. I stand ready to join your faculty as a Full Professor in your Masters of Public Administration Program in the Department of Political Science.

My academic and professional credentials reflect the highest standards of rigor and achievement consistent with the qualities and attributes you seek in a new President to lead your programs, faculty, administrators, staff and students well into the 21st Century. In returning to the classroom this past semester, I launched the only course in the nation entitled *The Trump Factor in American Politics* which garnered national and international attention (CNN, AP, and Fox News) to this unique course exploring the phenomena of Donald Trump's candidacy in the 2016 Presidential Election season and his impact on American Politics. In my first semester of returning to the classroom I was presented with the *Georgia Political Science Association's* Award for Teaching Excellence in 2016. This showcases the type of commitment I have to teaching and my desire to bring relevancy of academic offerings to current issues and developments in society. And my scholarship continues with a co-authored textbook *Public Budgeting in America*, 6th edition to be published in 2017.

In addition to my academic experiences, my practitioner background includes experiences in higher education financial aid administration, local government planning, nonprofit foundation leadership and private sector management. Each of these roles adds depth and flexibility to my credentials and familiarity with the distinctive and in demand educational programs you deliver at your College. To round out these experiences, I have been successful in seeking grants for a variety of academic and research projects. I have long been committed to diversity as illustrated by my role as Dean at a Historically Black College and University committed to opportunity and while at Kennesaw State University I aggressively moved to recruit minority faculty and as a result of those hires developed a new series of courses focused on African American Politics and Politics of Culture. I relish a commitment to an applied academic focus and intellectual environment that provides opportunities to all segments of our society, and to fulfill and expand and continue that commitment as President of Florida Gulf Coast University.

I offer leadership experience evidenced in capacities ranging from professional associations, to academic journals and community service roles (including campaigns for local political office). I have worked hard to develop a network of close professional ties regionally, nationally and internationally and would draw upon these contacts to enhance and strengthen the reputation and quality of the programs at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Moreover, my student-centered involvement has included working closely with student government, the state student legislature, a variety of clubs and organizations, holding "Fire Side" chats with students, accompanying students on field trips, appeals of student grades, navigating student issues with faculty and parents, and exploring and identifying future career opportunities for students.

I have led several institutional and University level initiatives at Savannah State including the Dean's Engagement Initiative entitled CLASS in the City and the Dean's Salon Community Discussions Forum, all geared at promoting linkages between the University and the Community. I also am the lead facilitator behind the collaborative project between the City of Savannah and area universities and colleges on the Black Male Achievement Initiative aimed at bridging theory and practice and bringing solutions to a long standing problem in the Savannah community. I have been tireless in pursuing partnerships to benefit the College and University and with a responsibility of a budget of over \$10 million, I have increased external funding to the College by \$2.3 million during my tenure. I have pursued beneficial collaborative efforts with many corporate and community partners such as the Gulfstream Diversity Institute, Community Indicators Coalition, St. Patrick's Day Celebration and Parade, and Confucius Institute programming. Moreover, I have pursued several initiatives for international collaborations in Cuba, Brazil, the Republic of Georgia, and China.

Within my College I have also revitalized the Marching Band and Music and Fine Arts programs, led academic reorganizations, embarked on graduate program initiatives and certificate expansion, brought national and international scholars to campus for CLASS-oriented programming, and pursued aggressive programs to promote retention, progression and graduation, as well as faculty-oriented programs to bolster the academic focus and the imperative of scholarship among the faculty (e.g. CLASS Action Task

Force). I have also served as a member of the Senior Leadership Council, SACCOCs Reaffirmation Committee, Confucius Board of Directors, Athletic Council and the 125th Year Celebration Gala Committee.

Specifically, I have led my College's initiative with the *Educational Advisory Board (EAB)* to provide current data and a comprehensive digital platform that links advising, *Banner* systems, success metrics, career choices and communication to better assist student progression. I have championed the need for better advising through our *Center for Academic Success* and tailored advising by faculty. I have promoted the use of *Grades First* and referrals to mentoring and opportunities presented through our *Writing Center* to provide students the support they require and deserve. I pursued a *Second Year Experience Program* to better focus students toward degree programs and career pathways. My College opened the first and only College-centered study hall and support center for our students across disciplines. I also aggressively encouraged our programs to develop certificate offering to fine tune student interests and credentials with a view toward encouraging completion in degree programs. I also worked to establish an *Honors Track* for students as a preliminary step to establish an honors college and learning communities for selected majors. I also led the effort to offer the first *Master's Program in Homeland Security and Emergency Management* in the State of Georgia (pending Regents approval). These are just some initiatives I would hope to explore, expand or replicate at Florida Gulf Coast University.

I am looking for a new challenge in a leadership role at a vibrant and established public university where I believe I can make an immediate contribution as the chief executive. In a career context, I am nowhere near finished moving forward to positions where I can make a difference in higher education. The position of President of Florida Gulf Coast University offers the next and most appropriate step in allowing me to impart a vision of excellence, scholarship, engagement, partnerships, outreach, service and value in a broad-based educational environment with your established academic programs but with a solid foundation in the delivery of expanded and innovative educational opportunities for the region and beyond.

I take particular note of your University's various colleges which deliver and represent educational opportunities across all sectors and key areas of knowledge (e.g., Arts and Sciences, Engineering, Business and Education). These degree programs offer opportunities for growth and responsiveness to educational markets. Your resolve to keep lifelong and service learning as core driving constructs is admirable. In addition, enhancing the academic profile of the University, increasing student retention and support, operationalizing data driven solutions, increasing overall enrollments/programs, improving faculty governance, encouraging and rewarding scholarship and innovation, increasing external funding, and creating an environment that is inclusive, transparent and responsive, are some of the strategic imperatives I would champion.

I have closely examined your strategic plan and posted leadership profile for President and the expected qualifications and expectations; and I believe I meet those parameters. Indeed the University has presented a clear picture of its requirements for a new President to expand opportunities for new

programs, pursue strategic planning with purpose, emphasize sound fiscal management, build political support, harness a collaborative and inclusive leadership style, engage stakeholders in the goals of the University and commit to engagement and community resilience that extends beyond the classroom. My goal would be to develop and expand these opportunities for growth and responsiveness to educational markets while embracing new directions for existing or innovative programs and organizational revitalization with world class stature in mind.

If there is a bottom line to this letter of introduction, it is that I am committed to promote the value and outlook embraced by the mission of Florida Gulf Coast University. As a first generation college student and a product of largely public universities, I understand and see parallels with the underlying and foundational commitment that resonates from this history and tradition at your University. The mission and traditions of the University, I will argue, is where the strength of our humanity lies and certainly our future as a community, nation and world. It all starts in the classroom with one student and one professor and one solid institution with a commitment to that end. There is no better place for me to meet that pledge than at Florida Gulf Coast University and in the vibrant communities of Fort Myers/Naples and the larger Southwest Florida region that you serve.

Above all, my commitment to the Trustees, alumni, faculty and staff and students of Florida Gulf Coast University would be the pursuit of collaborative leadership, openness, participation, sharing, collegiality, excellence, innovation and above all enthusiasm for the future of the University.

I thank you for your time and I look forward to interviewing in the near future to discuss the exciting possibility of joining Florida Gulf Coast University for its journey in the years ahead.

Respectfully yours,

DocuSigned by:
Dr. Robert W. Smith

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Robert W. Smith, Ph.D.

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