

January 31, 2017

Ken Smith, Ph.D.  
Chairman,  
Presidential Search Advisory Committee  
Florida Gulf Coast University

Dear Chairman Smith and Presidential Search Advisory Committee Members:

For almost 170 years, generations of my family have called Southwest Florida home. We have witnessed significant change, but have always been embedded in this community, growing and evolving with time.

For me, I grew up on a narrow dirt road on a small family farm. It was Alico Road. Looking through the lens of history, I could not have imagined in those formative years what was to take hold in our area. I can hardly believe it now. Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) has been a wondrous success. It has transformed our community in ways that few ever foresaw, and it will continue to do so in the future. Somehow my life got entangled with a small group of passionate men and women, all of whom had very big dreams. These dreams manifested into this vibrant and luminous institution we call FGCU. As we celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> year since the opening day of our university, let's not stop dreaming, and continue on our aspirational journey to very high achievement.

For nearly four decades I have also walked the hallways and alleyways of Tallahassee. I know them well. Among my most memorable assignments in the Florida Legislature, was chairing the policy and budget committees encompassing K-12, vo-tech, community college, and university funding. Through these multiple leadership positions, as well the help of many others, FGCU was born and formally signed into law on May 3, 1991.

As a lifelong Southwest Floridian, I have always held a deep personal passion for higher education. It is a passion that still stirs deep within me. As we enter the next phase of the phenomenal story surrounding our uniquely situated school of higher education, I humbly but with great pleasure, submit my application to be the next President of Florida Gulf Coast University.

I have reviewed the Presidential Leadership Profile supplied by the Executive Search Firm of Witt/Kieffer, and have organized my thoughts in this cover letter about FGCU according to the Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership section of that document.

### **Execute New Strategic Plan (SP) for 2016-2021**

The Board of Trustees of FGCU has spent a great deal of time and energy looking forward and detailing a visionary roadmap for the future. The expansion of the Honors' Program into a full college is transformative and distinctive in the local educational marketplace, as is the Emergent Technologies Institute. These two pillars of the SP under the general heading of Academic Excellence and Entrepreneurship complement the

Trustees' desire for branding and growing institutional identity. Additionally, institutional focus on entrepreneurship and the health sciences are particularly exciting for Foundation and advancement efforts. They play well in our area, and could emerge as the centerpieces of community support.

Strategic plans are not merely reports. They must be implemented. With laser like focus, the next President must clearly articulate and then implement an action plan. Great attention will have to be given to the details, particularly how the Board of Governor's (BOG) performance matrices align with operationalized outcomes. Much is at stake here. However, properly executed, the short term objectives in our fourth pillar of Emerging Pre-Eminence are clearly met, and students are better prepared to enter the workforce.

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

Florida Gulf Coast University is the dominant institution of higher learning in the local marketplace. It will continue to be so. For FGCU, institutional identity or "branding" has to be conducted on a state and national scale, if not globally. Emphasizing our roots and Mission Statement are a good place to start.

From the very beginning FGCU has been immersed in the environmental sciences. We have done well. Building upon the history and the infrastructure we already have in this field is of great interest. Additionally, we are geographically situated to excel in this domain. Attracting international faculty members, increasing research grants, and expanding curriculum only builds on our foundational strength, enhances our reputation, and supports state and local objectives of increasing degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

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

For my entire career in Tallahassee, I have been fully engrossed in budgetary and finance matters affecting public and private institutions. The appropriations process is very familiar terrain for me. Likewise, the finance programs associated with SUS funding is an area of the budget I deal with annually on behalf of my higher education clients.

Specific to our current funding needs, FGCU needs to advocate for three budgetary objectives: review of the entire SUS funding formula, public education capital outlay (PECO) replacement, and seed money to help initiate our SP. With respect to the first two objectives, these formulas are antiquated, penalize FGCU, and in the case of PECO, are insufficient to support the needed SUS infrastructure in the third largest state in the nation.

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

For FGCU, we are in the infancy of our timeline. Only the introductory chapters have been written in the history books about us. Nevertheless, we are the marquee institution

that this community revolves around. We are looked to as opinion makers, community leaders, the dispensers of knowledge and culture. We are the dominant public institution in the area, and our President should be seen as a critical linchpin to all community efforts.

The next President must be immersed in the broader community we all share, and be seen as a collaborative partner in discussing and resolving the multiple challenges we face. A high profile, physical presence in our five county region is essential. The character of the next President must include qualities of openness, inclusiveness, transparency and collegiality. The President must be seen as visionary. Service to the community should be expected, in much the same way our student body is required to provide service hours. Finally, the President must work with the Board of Trustees to meet the needs of a growing population, engage community members, plan for the future, and collectively crystallize a vision of what this institution will look like in the next 20-25 years.

### **Lead Fundraising Efforts**

Second only to the need for leadership and vision, the Board of Trustees should demand that the next President be the primary person responsible for Foundation activities, institutional advancement, and all fundraising efforts. Fundraising begins and ends in the President's office.

The President must work well with the Foundation Board, the staff, and engage proactively with the community. Awareness of our needs must be raised in both public and private venues. Fundraising objectives must tightly weave into the fabric of the FGCU story. Goals should be tangible, timelines clear, and persons held accountable. In short, the next President must actively embrace the role as the chief fundraiser for FGCU.

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

The FGCU trajectory is robust and positive. The internal institutional infrastructure must be there to support a rapidly growing organization. Most importantly, this involves people, the bright men and women that comprise FGCU. As the institution grows, new talent will have to be identified and recruited. We must strive to bring the best and brightest to our institution. Our staff must reflect our student body, be diversified, and complement the needs of our region. Emphasis must be placed on an acclaimed faculty, who are noted scholars in their respective fields. We must be seen as a preeminent depository of knowledge in our state, an institution striving for greatness, and settling for nothing less.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

I believe that my background and experience in our community and state have uniquely prepared me for this once in a lifetime opportunity. I know Southwest Florida as well as anyone. I know Tallahassee as well as anyone. I have worked in higher education at the local and state level for my entire adult life. I am a product of our institutions. With

great excitement, I have recently completed my doctoral studies and continue my leadership role in a local university.

It is my hope Dr. Smith, that you and the Selection Committee share my sense of the “fit” between FGCU and me, as I am quite eager to accept the opportunity to lead this wonderful institution of higher learning.

Most Sincerely,

J. Keith Arnold