

## **Mei-Mei Chan Kirk**

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TO: The FGCU Presidential Search Advisory Committee

Thanks to visionary founders and passionate supporters, FGCU has exceeded nearly all expectations in its first 20 years. Those of us vested in this community recognize and appreciate just how brightly this jewel can shine as it evolves from start-up to grown-up.

This is a pivotal moment. With an impressive foundation for such a young institution, FGCU must now establish a clear identity to distinguish itself among its peers, and raise its most critical metrics with unrelenting, laser-sharp focus. This requires courage to make tough choices, agile actions to seize opportunities, and clarity of purpose among all stakeholders.

Let me help unleash FGCU's full potential as its next President.

I have a track record as a bold strategist who adeptly leads large, complex organizations, elevates performance and accelerates change. I am a collaborative team builder who unites and galvanizes internal and external stakeholders. I am an astute problem solver able to discern and tackle root causes. My Myers-Briggs will tell you I'm an enthusiastic innovator, with extreme marks in initiative, imagination and planning. So I'm strong in blending intuition and facts, and seeing patterns where there seems to be randomness.

As head of circulation, then advertising and marketing for The Seattle Times, I oversaw some 700 employees across a wide variety of disciplines, 1,000 contractors, seven unions and \$200 million in revenue. Building strong teams intent on excellence, I took us to best-of-class on many levels, a blueprint I repeated as President of The News-Press Media Group and as Florida Regional President for Gannett, overseeing four news media companies.

Like President Bradshaw, I am the first in my family to graduate college. Feb. 25 will mark 50 years since my family emigrated from Hong Kong to Chicago. I am forever indebted to this great country, which enabled a peasant to become a president.

Thus have I been driven to give back and make a difference, as exemplified during my five years leading The News-Press.

Like nearly all organizations, the media had been struggling to find its way during unprecedented economic, technological and marketplace upheaval. No longer could we simply stay the course. Soon after my arrival in 2010, I set forth a clear mission for The News-Press: to connect, reflect, challenge and lead. We needed to recognize the power we wielded and leverage it to enhance this corner of paradise. We could be both objective reporters and critical advocates, as stewards serving Southwest Florida.

Devastated by hurricanes and the real estate market, this region was eager for fresh thinking to build a way forward in the new world. Among the most pressing issues that surfaced during numerous dialogues with the business community was the critical need for high quality education to meet the changing workforce.

I crafted a regional Education Summit in 2011, bringing together for the first time more than 500 business and educational leaders from five counties to openly discuss issues and strategies. This landmark conversation was subtitled “educational success drives economic prosperity.” Its title champions were FGCU and Edison State College (now Florida SouthWestern State College); Gov. Rick Scott, nearing one year on the job, gave the welcome address, his first public appearance in Southwest Florida.

As emcee, I quoted from The Council of 100’s “Closing the Talent Gap” 2010 report: “The leading companies and clusters that will emerge over the next 20 years will locate themselves wherever they have access to a top-quality workforce....Unfortunately, Florida isn’t leading the race. In fact, we face a crisis in human capital. The time to build Florida’s future workforce is now, and education must be its foundation.”

Over the next five years, The News-Press and I maintained the spotlight on education, workforce and economic development, holding leaders accountable to the commitments they had made to raise the bar.

As FGCU has been a catalyst for regional development, so have I. I helped champion the creation of [The Southwest Florida Economic Development Alliance](#) in 2013, the first such regional unison after many years of failed efforts. Representing a population of 1.2 million people and half a million workers, the Alliance continues to expand and strengthen.

As FGCU is committed to high-quality educational programs that address regional and statewide needs, so am I. The Education Summits led me to create Workforce Now in 2012, a unique regional research initiative to identify current and future talent requirements for Southwest Florida. A joint effort among FGCU, FSW and Hodges, Workforce Now was envisioned as a systematic, strategic multi-year focus on understanding and meeting critical workforce needs. And indeed, that it remains.

As FGCU was founded with the principle of student success at the center of all endeavors, so am I intent on that over-arching priority. I posed to both primary and secondary educational executives: are your leaders measured by student success? Is it not their responsibility to ensure each graduate has a plan? Should you not be tracking your students to improve and calibrate the educational pipeline? As a member of the Lutgert College of Business Advisory Board, my constant refrain was: What are your metrics? How are you measuring progress?

And so I was pleased with the performance-based funding model developed by the Board of Governors in support of Florida state’s priorities on excellence, productivity and strategic priorities for a knowledge economy. Whether or not it is precisely right for FGCU, it is our target and we must hit it, and quickly. If we are to lose significant funding, we should be implementing both contingency plans and improvement plans with demonstrative progress toward our objectives. We cannot afford to slip.

High quality programs that build an innovative, entrepreneurial workforce; world-class research that makes a difference; engaged communities and business that invest and thrive together: that’s the vision we want to bring to life in our own special way in Southwest Florida.

With many successes in academics, research, community and commerce, FGCU is on track with its strategic plan and its four key pillars of academic excellence, entrepreneurship, health sciences and emerging pre-eminence.

Now the tough work begins: translating vision into tactical execution--setting bold goals, identifying the most relevant mileposts, rallying widespread support and resources, and re-calibrating as needed. Trust and integrity, more than ever, must lay the foundation, to successfully navigate the challenges ahead. The president, with the full confidence of the board, will be the guiding light—but everyone needs to be all in.

With the power of FGCU's talented faculty, administrators, staff, board and supporters, I believe I am the right person at this moment in time.

What I lack in academic or political credentials, I more than make up for with my executive expertise, community engagement and big-picture knowledge of Southwest Florida's educational and economic framework. As a journalist by training, I will quickly immerse myself in learning all that I don't know as I have successfully done multiple times before. As a masterful communicator, I am well equipped to tell the FGCU story to garner support and investment locally, in Tallahassee and beyond.

What I know is that FGCU's future relies on operating as a fiscally sound, world-class business molding workforce-ready young adults with superb critical thinking skills who also are engaged citizens who want to build community. To that constituency, the most important person is the instructor, around whom their world evolves. So it is vital that we have the best faculty dedicated to student success, and enable them to be the best.

I will seek first to understand, then challenge assumptions, push our thinking, and adapt the roadmap as appropriate, with all due urgency.

I have a history of excelling in breaking the mold as a non-traditional choice, starting with picking a career in journalism when English is my second language; switching to the business side from the editorial side at The Seattle Times when tapped to run its Circulation Department, which was essentially its own company; and taking on the Presidency of The News-Press without having done the same job at a smaller organization.

I've enjoyed retirement with my family for a year and a half, and was not in search of something new.

I had hoped to read about a fantastic new leader for FGCU, whether an academician or not. When that did not happen and the search reopened, I realized I could be that person--that I *wanted* to be that person. All my talents and experience uniquely position me to make a difference in shaping FGCU's future, which will have tremendous impacts on future generations in Southwest Florida, nationwide and beyond. What an amazing opportunity.

The Presidential Search Advisory Board and the Board of Trustees strategically designed the presidential profile with an open mind about what the next FGCU president might look like.

Here I am. I look forward to talking to you in depth about my candidacy.

Yours most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mei-Mei Chan Kirk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mei-Mei Chan Kirk