



August 20, 2019

Dean Search Committee Chair
Lutgert College of Business
Florida Gulf Coast University

Dear Search Committee Chair and Members,

I am writing to apply for the Dean of the College of Business (COB) at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). I am enclosing my curriculum vitae and the names and contact information for my professional references. I started the chair position in the Department of Economics in the COB at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) in Fall 2014 and was reappointed to a second term in 2017 based on my performance, accomplishments, and the support of the faculty. Under my leadership as chair over the past five years, the department has experienced tremendous growth that the faculty never thought possible. However, I recently decided that it is the right time for me to hand over the department in good condition so that I can pursue my own personal growth and focus on obtaining a challenging leadership position at the next level.

I am interested in your COB Dean position because my recent experience is well aligned with the goals and expectations outlined in your Dean search. FGCU and UTSA, both being public serving universities with a large student body of first generation college students, face similar challenges and opportunities. In particular, both universities share a growing emphasis on launching new student success initiatives to improve retention and graduation rates, creating innovative academic programs to provide students with better career advancement opportunities, advancing and fostering corporate partnerships with its surrounding business community, promoting diversity and equity with a particular consideration given to advancing underrepresented minorities, and increasing international/global recognition and engagement. In my capacity as a department chair, my work has focused on these same areas and it has led to the outcomes that I will discuss below. Comments made by two external reviewers (both from tier one universities) in their 2018 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) academic program review report are the evidence of such. Specifically, they stated *“Professor Lo and her colleagues are to be commended for turning the Graduate program in Economics around...the overall finding is that the Department’s plans for its existing degree programs, already well underway, appropriately contribute to the President’s themes of **world-engagement, multicultural discovery, fostering exceptional student experiences, and being an exemplary urban-serving university of the future.**”*

In my opinion, a successful academic Dean needs to demonstrate strong leadership skills, as well as the ability to motivate and manage a diverse workforce. As a leader, the Dean needs to create a supportive environment within which all faculty members can contribute, feel invested in the process, and have the potential to succeed. When I started my chair position, one of my goals was to unify a department that had a reputation within the COB for being disjointed and difficult, and I am confident in saying that I have created a departmental culture in which the faculty members recognize the importance of providing quality research, teaching, and service. In fact, most of my faculty members commented within the first year of my chair position that they are excited about the future of the department and are willing to participate in whatever capacity they are needed.

As to the experience with student success initiatives, I have had good success particularly through program building. Low morale had always been an issue in the Department of Economics and the situation continued to worsen until early 2014 when the new leadership in the COB announced that the Economics Master's program was under consideration for being eliminated due to low enrollment. The expectation among faculty was that the department will soon become the only department in the COB without a graduate program. This issue became one of the top priorities during my first year as the department chair, while also performing the full array of usual administrative duties associated with being a chair. I immediately worked with business leaders in the community and faculty across the economics, finance, and statistics departments to get their input regarding the restructuring of the economics curriculum. In 2015, based on input from local industry and the feedback from our own undergraduate and graduate economics majors, I added *Financial Economics* and *Business Data Analysis & Forecasting* concentrations to the existing program to enhance the value of the degree for students who wish to pursue careers in industry rather than academics. Once the new curriculum was established, I visited chairs and program directors in the economics and finance departments at potential feeder schools within the region to recruit their students. The updated curriculum has resulted in a multidisciplinary degree that is market-oriented and an increase in an enrollment from 8 to 54 within two years, as well as 100% job placement within 3 months of graduation in 2017 and 2018.

This new market-oriented approach has allowed me to create strong relationships with professional people in various industries such as banking, energy, healthcare, investment, and retailing. For example, I met with industry leaders at AllianceBernstein, BVAA Compass, Federal Reserve Bank, Frost Bank, Goldman Sachs, HEB, Marathon, Oracle, USAA, UTHSCSA, Valero, Shell, and CenterPoint Energy. To further capitalize on these relationships, I engaged employers in the business community to establish mentorship relationships with the program and provide our students with experiential learning opportunities. I communicated with the industry leaders on a regular basis regarding the possible areas for improvement in the program curriculum in order to supply a talent pipeline of students for future leadership positions in their organizations. Also, I hosted annual program networking events for students, alumni, and local industry leaders. There is no doubt that the program's close relationship with the local business community has led to student success in career advancement. In addition, these active partnerships with industry present the University Development Office with potential fundraising opportunities. I consider external relationship building to be one of my major strengths. The relationships start with opportunities for industry leaders to participate with the program in an advisory capacity and through offering internships, guest speaking, etc., and lead to opportunities for fundraising through scholarships, grants, and other gifts.

Similarly, I updated the undergraduate curriculum to adapt to changes in government and industry so that our students would have a competitive edge for employment upon graduation. I believe that the focus on applied business economics is particularly important for economics departments that are in a COB. During this same two-year period, the enrollment for Economics undergraduate programs grew from 136 students to 211 students, and the enrollment is currently 253 students as I conclude my position as chair. This increase represents an overall growth of 86% in undergraduate (Economics) enrollment during my tenure as chair (compared to an overall growth of 38% for all COB undergraduate enrollment).

One of my personal goals after becoming the department chair was to improve the overall student experience and satisfaction. A major student success initiative that I embarked on in 2015 for all economics majors was to provide departmental in-house academic student advising, rather than rely on

a central advising office that had less knowledge in the area. In fact, as of today, my department is the only department within the COB that provides its own student advising. Many economics majors have commented that this advising service has created strong connections and trust among students and faculty. Another initiative of mine was to create a two-year plan of course offerings and make it available for all students and faculty advisors in the department so that students can schedule their courses in the right sequence and graduate on time. I believe these initiatives have resulted in significant improvements in both the retention rate and graduation rate for economics majors. The supportive evidence for the improvement in retention rate came directly from the retention campaign calling list. At UTSA, department chairs are given a call list every July that includes the students in their respective departments who did not register for fall classes. In 2017, I had to make phone calls to 18 economics majors, but that number decreased significantly to 4 students in 2019. This result suggests that the one-year retention rate of economics majors is above 90%, which is 20 % higher than the overall university rate of 70%. These initiatives are critical for student success and they bring a sense of inclusion for our economic intellectual community.

In 2016, I built upon the successful regional recruitment for the graduate program by working on increasing international student enrollment. Specifically, I developed a unique collaborative program arrangement under which international undergraduate students would attend the last semester of their senior year at UTSA taking graduate courses, and then be admitted to our graduate program through a streamlined process after completing their undergraduate degrees. This provides UTSA with a competitive advantage in recruiting the top international students and gives our program a chance to evaluate these students over the course of their last undergraduate semester to further improve the decision-making process for graduate admissions. Initially, I traveled to China and Taiwan to form relationships and promote the program, resulting in signed Collaborative Program Agreements with four universities (two of which are AACSB accredited schools), and a waiting list to establish similar program agreements with ten other highly ranked universities in China and Taiwan. It is worthy to note that the two Taiwanese universities that we have signed the agreement with are ranked 1st and 5th in Taiwan. In 2018, the first group of international students were admitted through this program agreement, and in 2019 – 2020, we are scheduled to sign agreements with four additional Asian universities. Also, the model is currently being considered for adoption by other departments and colleges at UTSA.

As with most institutions, fundraising is a major responsibility for the business school Dean at FGCU. At UTSA, under the current policy, department chairs are not permitted to ask for financial support from potential donors because development officers and Deans have this responsibility and they are very protective of their turf (i.e., they want the credit). However, understanding the importance of financial support for student success, I worked with the University Development Office to establish the first departmental scholarship and fellowship funding in 2018. The University Development Office is aware of the relationships that I have cultivated with major corporations who consider our graduate program as one of their main sources for hiring talented students. As a result, the University Development Office has asked me for the names of the leaders in these corporations who they can contact to seek major financial support and form a Business Economics advisory board in order to assist in the University's upcoming 2020 Capital Campaign. In the past two years, I have also identified several potential overseas donors who have a vested interest in the collaborative agreements I established with programs in China and Taiwan. In fact, one of my prospects has verbally committed to provide a major donation to support graduate programs under my next leadership position.

In my opinion, when universities ask for donations, it is necessary to explain the benefits to the donors, especially in regard to corporations. It is important to point out the value of having a relationship with the university, such as the benefits of the students to the organizations through internships, class projects, and potential hires. I would focus my efforts on those areas with the greatest likelihood for success by targeting the people and organizations that would realize the greatest benefit from their affiliation with FGCU. My approach to pursue external relationships in the local community at FGCU will be similar to what I have done in San Antonio. I will initiate every relationship by clearly explaining the benefits to the local organizations from engaging with programs and students at FGCU. Then, in order to advance the relationships, I am committed to having an ongoing dialogue with the business community, alumni, donors, and related constituents in an effort to obtain major gifts and other valuable resources (e.g., program partnerships, data, grants, sponsored projects, etc.). In addition, I will encourage organizations to get involved with students and faculty through mentorship programs, focusing initially on regional companies, and then extending it to organizations in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan where I have extensive academic and industry connections. I believe it will be both educational and exciting for FGCU students to be afforded an industry internship opportunity in the global market where they can benefit from the exposure to diversity.

As to my experience with supporting diversity, I have statistics to support my commitment in this area. UTSA is a Hispanic-Serving Institution with more than 50% of the student population being minorities, and the university's goal is to increase the overall support for Hispanic students. As the program administrator, one of the key program missions that I set forth is to increase the student access to quality education, particularly for first-generation underrepresented minorities (e.g., Hispanics, African Americans, and women). I have encouraged our own minority undergraduates to continue with their graduate education because it provides them with a better opportunity for long-term career advancement. I have also made a concerted effort to actively recruit outstanding low-income minority students throughout Texas (e.g., Houston, Dallas, Laredo, and Rio Grande) to join our graduate program by offering them financial support in the form of a research or teaching assistantship in the department. On average, 75-80% of department assistantship positions are offered to minority students. In particular, I made sure this group of students have access to the faculty (including myself) who will prepare them to go to a tier one Ph.D. program if they choose to pursue a career in academics. On average, we prepare 2-3 underrepresented minorities each year to enter a tier one Ph.D. program (e.g., University of Houston, Ohio State University, George Mason University, etc.). Currently, the minority students account for 57% of the enrollment in our economics graduate program, which is markedly higher than 37% (45%) average for all graduate programs within COB (UTSA) combined. My goal is to make our graduate program known as one of the best programs in the country for supplying highly qualified underrepresented minorities for tier one Ph.D. programs. Finally, I also consider diversity when hiring the staff for the Department of Economics – 4 out of 5 staff are minorities.

I have also been able to establish strong relationships within the university in my five years as the department chair and I have collaborated with many chairs on various university initiatives. For example, in spring 2019 I worked with the chair of computer science and the Dean of the Honors College on designing a joint bachelor's degree that combines the Economics and Computer Science disciplines into a comprehensive course of study. This work is part of university strategic enrollment initiative and I project that it has the potential to double our economics undergraduate enrollment by 2022. In addition, I served as Vice Chair of the UTSA Department Chairs Council (DCC) for 2018 – 2019 and was elected as Chair for the DCC for the 2019 – 2020 academic year. The DCC meets once a month and its function is to discuss and facilitate many university-wide strategic plans and initiatives. In 2017, I served as co-chair on a DCC

task force that was given the charge to evaluate the Graduate School in response to the mounting complaints regarding its inefficiency in processing applications. I was particular concerned about this issue because of my dedication to providing all students with a quality educational experience.

In addition to my administrative experience, I have nineteen years of teaching experience as a tenure track faculty member, and my research productivity has been consistent with the requirements of a research institution. It should also be noted that I have taught large sections (250-300 students) for the introductory course, as well as smaller sections for honor students and graduate students. I have been instrumental in developing online teaching in our department, including going through the training program and offering a course myself. I realize the importance of alternative delivery methods in serving diverse populations utilizing new technologies. I also have experience with the AACSB accreditation process. The COB at UTSA earned reaccreditation from AACSB International in 2017 and I participated in the meetings with the AACSB Peer Review Team, including both the preliminary visit and the actual review visit. As the chair, it is my responsibility to make sure the department conforms to AACSB standards and I assist the Dean's office in collecting the departmental data necessary for the AACSB Continuous Improvement Review report. This includes an extensive assessment program for both AACSB and SACS accreditation.

Before closing, I would like to address my leadership style as an academic administrator. As a department chair, I was known for my commitment to student success and by my transparent communication in strategic planning and decision making. I am approachable and open to different opinions, and then very decisive once I have obtained the necessary input from stakeholders. I have a proven record of leading by example, and I hold myself to a high level of ethical standards and have a strong sense of fiscal accountability. For example, I have been particularly successful at leveraging limited resources to achieve impactful outcomes. In addition, I have a natural ability to engage a wide range of constituents, including administrators, alumni, faculty, students, staff, and external partners to form a collaborative community. I have an entrepreneurial spirit that allows me to identify emerging opportunities, and I am effective at earning peoples' trust and negotiating mutually beneficial outcomes for all concerned parties. My motto is "together, we can-do".

In closing, being a department chair has allowed me to impact the quality of education for students and the work environment for faculty. I have used both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards to motivate the faculty and encourage them to strive for continual improvement. As a professor, I didn't have the same opportunities to enact change that are afforded to me as a department chair, and I would have even more as a Dean. In the past two years, with all the relationships I have built, I started to feel restricted in my quest to enact changes that can advance the mission of the COB (and the university) by creating new revenue streams for the department. For example, the leadership at BVAA Compass approached me about the possibility of offering a certificate training program on business data forecasting for all of their branches in the United States. Unfortunately, my department does not have sufficient faculty resources to pursue this initiative at the present time. I strongly believe I have the personal qualities and work experience to help build the COB at FGCU into a national model of an engaged university by developing relationships within the surrounding community and increasing the global exposure through the establishment of international collaborative programs. I would also encourage faculty to pursue more community-based research and incorporate community-based projects into their classes. Finally, I would pursue a similar approach at FGCU that I did in the Department of Economics at UTSA to grow enrollments by revamping existing undergraduate, and graduate programs to meet student

and industry needs, and create new specialized, multidisciplinary, certificate programs by collaborating with other academic colleges and industry leaders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melody Lo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Melody Lo
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