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Dr. Kim M. Morrisson,  
Mr. John Mestepey, and  
Ms. Nancy Helfman  
c/o Diversified Search

**RE: Application for the position of Dean, Lutgert College of Business at Florida Gulf Coast University**

Dear Dr. Morrisson, Mr. Mestepey, Ms. Helfman, and Search Committee Members:

It is with great enthusiasm that I am submitting my application for the position of Dean of the **Lutgert College of Business (LCOB) at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU)**. I have 27 years of experience and distinguished accomplishments in serving two leading public research universities—University of South Dakota (USD) for 5 years and University of New Hampshire (UNH) for 22 years—in various capacities, including Dean, Associate Dean, Department Chair, faculty, and Principal Investigator for several high-profile and high-impact research and economic development-related projects. I have immense pride in being a part of two large public research universities—USD and UNH. While being a dean of (and a tenured professor in) USD's business school, I have developed very close and successful collaborative engagements with other schools/colleges: Colleges of engineering, medicine, health sciences, law, and liberal arts, including developing successful academic programs, working on research grants/contracts, and engaging in community development projects and public service.

In my academic leadership experience in two reputed AACSB-accredited business schools, I have first-hand experience in leading, managing, and securing accreditation from AACSB International—2008/09 and 2013/14 at UNH, and 2014/15 (CIR2) and 2019 at USD. I have in-depth knowledge of and experience in the AACSB accreditation process. I serve on AACSB Peer-Review Teams as well as mentor a business school in Scotland in securing (first-time) AACSB accreditation.

During the past five years of serving as the dean of the Beacom School of Business, I have successfully led the institution to several distinctions including: national/global rankings, increased enrollment, new market-driven innovations in academic programs (including Innovation & Entrepreneurship major and minor), expanded list of world-class firms recruiting our students (Goldman Sachs, Deloitte, KPMG, TD Ameritrade, LinkedIn, and others), successful executive education program, and collaborations with other schools/colleges on campus.

After completing my Ph.D. in 1990, I joined the University of New Hampshire's (UNH) Whittemore School of Business and Economics in 1992 (its name was changed to the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics in 2012). Over the past 27 years, I have come up through the academic ranks from assistant professor to associate professor (with tenure) in 1996, to full professor in 2003. I also served in leadership administrative roles as the Chair of the Decision Sciences Department for 10 years and then as Associate Dean until 2014, when I left UNH to become the Dean of the Beacom School of Business at the flagship University of South Dakota. Spending 26+ years in public higher education in both academic and administrative roles has given me a deepened understanding of and appreciation for the importance of educational

access, affordability, and service as well as a strong commitment to the learning, discovery, and engagement that can only emerge in world-class universities such as FGCU.

In my role as Dean of the Beacom School of Business in South Dakota, I have a proven track record of championing transformative changes with a laser-sharp focus on distinguishing the school globally as well as attracting and retaining world-class faculty and students. Under my leadership, the Beacom School of Business has witnessed significant enrollment growth (from 39 states and 32 countries), high national rankings--the Online MBA program was ranked in the Top 25 by the *Princeton Review* in 2016 (#16), 2017 (#12), 2018 (#19), and 2019 (#19)--innovations in academic programs, new centers for excellence, stronger partnerships (with the community, business, and government), and a successful launch of Beacom's executive education programs which are helping businesses in South Dakota achieve success and growth as well as generating new revenue streams for the School.

I take great pride in being a strong academic leader as well as a disciplined fiscal manager while focused on entrepreneurial thinking and collaborative pursuit of excellence in achieving growth and distinction. My engineering undergraduate background and experience combined with my strong academic and administrative track record in business higher education have given me the mindset to achieve and sustain excellence with a strong fiscal discipline. I have shown that I can make tough, timely, and thoughtful decisions that have increased productivity, strengthened fiscal sustainability, and at the same time boosted morale and achieved distinctions through national and global rankings.

### **Why LCOB and FGCU?**

I believe I have the background, experience, and expertise as a leader, scholar, teacher, and collaborator to work with President Mike Martin and LCOB faculty and staff to help realize its vision: "...[to] achieve national prominence in offering exceptional value in high-quality educational programs that address regional and statewide needs."

FGCU's Strategic Plan, *FOCUS 2017-2022*, articulates five strategic areas or pillars--Student Success, Academic Excellence, Entrepreneurship, Health Sciences, and Community Engagement. I have significant interest in and proven track record of success in these strategic areas.

I have tremendous knowledge of and experience in successfully securing AACSB accreditation. I am a strategic thinker with demonstrated track record of execution excellence. I have significant experience in developing and executing strategic plans and I believe my background and experience in academic innovations, student success initiatives, fiscal management, and economic development would help me succeed in advancing LCOB to achieve national and global distinctions. FGCU has a unique reputation for its high quality and accessible undergraduate and graduate educational programs that deliver outstanding learning experiences, and impactful, relevant research as well as meaningful engagement with global reach.

My track record of establishing and successfully achieving goals includes: imparting transformational learning experience; sustaining faculty excellence through scholarship, creativity, and discovery; managing and aligning strategic investments to maximize return on investment (ROI); and strengthening commitment to develop and maintain a culture of diversity, inclusion, and equity with the business school and across campus. LCOB and FGCU must aspire to be a major driver for economic development, and I have significant experience in collaborating with internal and external entities to contribute towards economic development, both regionally and nationally (See my track record as PI for Green Launching Pad in New Hampshire with funding from U.S. Department of Energy and my on-going efforts to build a bioscience proof-of-concept program in South Dakota with funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce).

## **My Fit:**

My role as the Dean of the Beacom School of Business in South Dakota has given me several opportunities to demonstrate my leadership competence and commitment. Over the past 5 years, I have led a talented and dedicated community of faculty, staff, and students to:

- Secure AACSB reaccreditation;
- Develop an aspirational vision and a set of strategic goals through collaborative efforts;
- Achieve significant progress in student success (highest retention and graduation rates on campus and 98% career placement rate);
- Secure high national and global rankings for our academic programs;
- Attract outstanding new faculty with world-class talent and dedication for student learning;
- Successfully secure private funding to support faculty enrichment and scholarship; and
- Create plans for four centers of excellence (one just launched with POET funding).

We were able to achieve this level of success, through my leadership style which is based on:

- Deep commitment to shared governance;
- Collaborative approach to problem solving;
- Strong sense of ethics;
- Proven track record of promoting diversity and inclusive excellence;
- Entrepreneurial thinking to assess and manage risk;
- Strong fiscal management discipline; and
- Data-driven decision-making approach.

For me, leadership is all about building trusting relationships, mobilizing resources, and creating the right processes to enable my capability for developing and nurturing high-performance teams.

I wish to highlight a few areas of my strengths and competencies that I see of significant benefit to LCOB and FGCU:

### **1. University-wide Engagement in Leadership Roles**

Since 2014, I have been engaged in several leadership roles that have contributed significantly to USD's advancement:

- I continue to play a leadership role in serving on the University's Central Budget Committee that oversees budget allocation for academic units and support centers on a yearly basis and reviews budget allocation models for continuous improvement.
- In 2017, I chaired a search committee for the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences (largest unit on campus) which concluded successfully. I have tremendous experience in representing USD and collaborating with administrators, faculty, and staff in multiple colleges/schools across the university.
- I serve on several boards (e.g., SD Chamber of Commerce & Industry) and involved in several state-wide policy making groups that impact public higher education funding.
- I continue to represent USD for establishing and strengthening partnerships with other Board of Regents campuses (SD School of Mines & Technology, SD State University, and Dakota State University) in South Dakota for academic and research engagement.
- I work closely with the Governor's Office of Economic Development in securing grants from U.S. Department of Commerce (Economic Development Administration) to establish a Bio-Science Innovation Program in South Dakota.
- I work closely with other colleges/schools at USD to develop successful inter-disciplinary academic programs and research initiatives (e.g., with USD School of Health Sciences, School of Law, and Departments of Biomedical Engineering and Math and Computer Science) which have resulted in higher enrollments of outstanding students and attracted talented faculty to USD.

## **2. Experience in Institutional Strategic Planning and Execution**

In the Beacom School of Business, I have led a collective effort to develop a strategic plan with a shared vision, involving both internal (faculty, staff, students, university leadership) and external stakeholders (alumni, business and government, and community leaders). The faculty-engaged efforts led to a collectively endorsed vision and a set of strategic goals which direct our efforts and resource allocation priorities (Budget-to-Plan). This effort, based on shared governance, has given us a sharp sense of focus in what we do every day and also enables us to gauge our progress. It has helped us make significant accomplishments in each of the strategic priorities and also helped me personally to articulate a set of fund-raising priorities to the alumni and supporters and has led to success in our fund-raising efforts (e.g., we have raised over \$17 Million since 2014).

## **3. Implement Strategies to Enhance Student Success (boosting retention, graduation, and career placement rates and starting salaries)**

I am deeply committed to student success. In my role as the dean of the Beacom School of Business, I have made it a strategic priority to boost our first-year retention rate (77.7%), 6-year graduation rate (60.1%) [both highest on campus in 2017], and career placement rate (98%). We have also boosted the average starting salaries at both undergraduate and graduate levels. With our dedicated efforts towards promoting faculty-student engagement, several of our student teams have earned the highest awards at regional and national competitions.

We have accomplished tremendous success in boosting retention and graduation rates through implementing first-year experience (FYE) programs including peer-advising and student tutoring, predictive analytics to identify at-risk students, faculty-student mentoring, and other support programs which have yielded significant results. Continued investment in student success is essential through innovations in academic programs wherein experiential learning (example, internships) becomes an integral part of on-campus learning. Alumni mentoring networks have been proven to be effective for boosting student success at other institutions and we are establishing such networks where our alumni across the nation are helping to mentor students and also identify internship and/or career opportunities.

## **4. Focus on Faculty Excellence and Boost Research Productivity**

I have a proven track record of successfully hiring a diverse group of world-class faculty, who are “innovation champions,” engaged in market-driven innovations through developing new academic programs, and also engaged in boosting research productivity through high-quality research publications and securing external funding. I have made it a strategic priority to increase the number of grant applications, grant funding, and expenditures. Faculty expectations must recognize and reward success in seeking and securing external funding. Academic-industry partnerships, collaborative research with other institutions and inter-disciplinary research are encouraged, expected, and rewarded. At the Beacom School of Business we have established a “startup” culture where market-driven innovation has become a part of institutional DNA, developed a culture of celebration, and collectively moved away from a “business as usual” mindset. High-achieving faculty, staff, and students are recognized, and excellence is rewarded.

## **5. Fiscal Discipline and Budgetary Model**

I take pride in being a disciplined fiscal manager. Since 2014, I have made bold decisions to address the budget deficit in the School, cut wasteful expenses, focused on strategic investments, monitored ROI, increased faculty hires, increased investment faculty and staff development, and as a result, we have achieved national/global recognition, boosted faculty and staff morale, increase student success, and well on our way to continue our investment in our strategic growth initiatives. One area of my strength is my deep knowledge of and experience in

managing financial operations (both centralized and decentralized models) at USD and UNH. I am deeply aware of the need to develop a budgetary model that is performance-based and incentivizes innovation and promotes academic excellence.

## 6. Collaborative Leader

I have a proven track record of being a champion of collaborative research during my tenure at UNH and USD. I have successfully managed large-federally funded research projects involving both internal and external partners. For example, the Green Launching Pad project (I was the project leader) was funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. As the PI for this project (\$1.5 Million), I have worked closely with Dartmouth's Thayer School of Engineering, UNH School of Law, UNH Engineering, Business, and Liberal Arts faculty and students to establish 14 startups focused on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and energy conservation. At USD, I recently received a grant for \$996,000 from the U.S. Economic Development Administration for a bioscience innovation i6 challenge grant that involves three institutions—USD, South Dakota State University, and SD School of Mines, to foster bioscience proof-of-concept program. I am also deeply involved in the conceptualization and implementation of the USD Research Park ("Discover District") which aims to have a significant impact on economic development.

The attached *Biography* and *Curriculum Vitae* provide details of my academic background, accomplishments, and leadership experience.

I recognize that the next Dean of LCOB at FGCU must be a dynamic and empathetic leader, accomplished academic and administrator, team builder, opportunity seeker, and a strategic thinker and doer. I believe that I possess and have demonstrated these qualities. In addition, my multi-disciplinary educational background, industry, academic, and administrative leadership experience, as well as my contributions to economic development in the states of New Hampshire and South Dakota align well with the requirements of the Dean of LCOB.

I thank you for considering my candidacy to serve FGCU as its next Dean of LCOB, and I look forward to hearing from you. If you should need any additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me at [Venky@usd.edu](mailto:Venky@usd.edu) or call me any time at (603) 767-1054.

Sincerely,



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