

8 August 2019

Lutgert College of Business Dean Search Committee  
Florida Gulf Coast University

Dear Committee Members:

Please accept my application for the position of Dean of the Lutgert College of Business at Florida Gulf Coast University. As someone who moved to Southwest Florida in 1980 and was shaped by it before going on to earn a Ph.D. in Economics, I have a unique perspective of regional trends and of FGCU's impact on our region and state.

Southwest Florida's population has more than doubled since I started high school in Collier County. Once mostly known to military retirees, it now attracts whole industries, has a burgeoning entrepreneurial culture, and retains high school and college graduates beginning their careers. FGCU and the Lutgert College of Business have nurtured these developments by increasing human capital to levels justifying business investment and growth that would not have otherwise occurred.

In my case, I went to the University of Florida, St. Mary's University in San Antonio for a Master's and Auburn University for my Ph.D. (The Economics Ph.D. program was then housed in the Lowder College of Business.) I earned tenure and became a full professor at Jacksonville State University, writing and working in the area of Political Economy and Regional Economic Development. Needless to say, I felt well-suited to lead FGCU's Regional Economic Research Institute in 2015. As Director, I expanded its outreach to the region and to FGCU students, while serving the college as Professor of Economics.

As a result, I have extensive contacts in the business and economic development communities in the five counties comprising Southwest Florida and know well their strengths, challenges, and needs. I frequently appear on breakfast panels, serve as a luncheon speaker for local industry organizations and leadership groups, and advise regional development committees. Over the past two years, I have been interviewed by local media an average of once a week.

As the LCOB's Interim Dean, I have been through much of the learning curve that a new dean would face. I have nurtured relationships with the university's leadership team, deans, graduate program directors, and department heads. Furthermore, I have started the process of resetting the College's relationship with University Advancement to establish a more cooperative relationship to advance our fundraising goals. As a leader in the business school I have been involved in community outreach and recruiting, as well as curriculum design, measurement of learning outcomes, and accreditation. I am very familiar with the undergraduate and graduate programs of the school and their operation. However, I still view the College enthusiastically and with a fresh set of eyes. I have not been here so long that I see things only as an insider. My approach to the College is informed by my perspectives and insights as a professor, a colleague, and an economist.

That approach is rooted in the Five Pillars listed in the University's Strategic Plan. To that end, I would like to provide brief insights as to where I would lead the College over the next few years as Dean.

- Pillar 1: *Student Success* implies that the FGCU degree leads to success in employment or further educational opportunities. In this regard, efforts to support student scholarships for business students are critical, while expansion of internship offerings, workforce readiness activities, professional development, and critical thinking programs is a priority. Consideration should be given to certificates demanded by employers to complement our degrees. The new online MBA will go far to increase student success and may free up resources for other degree offerings to prepare students for high demand, high wage jobs.
- Pillar 2: *Academic Excellence* refers to efforts that advance teaching, scholarship, and service. The College is already improving Quality Enhancement Program activities and participates in undergraduate research programs and the Honor's College. Academic research activities need more funding so that any faculty member with a research paper aimed at a ranked journal has the opportunity to present it at a conference for feedback. These activities complement student success, since academically qualified faculty current in their discipline perform better in the classroom.
- Pillar 3: *Entrepreneurship* is a pillar of the University at the direction of its Trustees. Given the prominence Entrepreneurship played in the most recent AACSB accreditation report, it is regrettable that this program and popular major have left the College, notwithstanding the benefits created with a more interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship degree. Efforts should be made to work with the School of Entrepreneurship when possible to further student and community engagement and success.
- Pillar 4: *Health Sciences* represents an important Southwest Florida industry employing many of our graduates. The Lutgert College of Business should partner with the College of Health Sciences in areas that promote this industry. As Dean, I would meet with the new Health Sciences dean and industry stakeholders to discuss areas of possible collaboration. Given demographic trends, senior living community management and related areas represent fertile ground for such a collaboration, as could the establishment of a Master's in Health Care Management.
- Pillar 5: *Community Engagement* is a hallmark of the Lutgert College of Business. I am particularly proud of my record in this regard in my role as RERI Director. Efforts to apply LCOB faculty's knowledge to address problems that affect our region should be extended. Bringing our expertise to the Water School will be important, and discussions have already started to hire an Environmental Research Economist who would be housed within the Lutgert College of Business but based at the Water School. A Center of Agribusiness project to use industrial hemp to clean contaminated land in the Dunbar Community is also being discussed.

My actions as Interim Dean should shed light on my approach to leadership. I have spent much of my time overseeing the reorganization of the School of Resort and Hospitality Management and aiding in the establishment of the online MBA with Academic Partners. While representing FGCU at the University at the Hanseatic League of Universities in Songdo, Korea in July, I met with the business school dean from Incheon National University to discuss specific ways our colleges could fill in the details of the general memorandum of understanding signed during our visit. While maintaining the external activities of the Lutgert Dean, I have also started regular meetings with the FGCU Foundation to discuss fundraising activities and goals.

Out of my belief in transparency and the collegial exchanges of ideas, I have endeavored to increase communication between College administration and faculty and staff. I view the Dean position as one that represents the faculty and staff to the administration, ensures that the College fulfills its mandates, and that achieves its goals that are set in a changing educational environment. On a day-to-day basis, it is a Dean's job to solve problems and to listen. When I hear about a problem or conflict, I consciously try to consider the other person's perspective, with the knowledge that knowing different perspectives leads to better outcomes. The process involved in updating the School of Resort and Hospitality Management curriculum, which included numerous meetings with faculty, students, advisory board members, and industry stakeholders, is reflective of this approach.

It is also the job of the Dean to alter or end policies or programs that no longer work, detract from the College's mission or goals, or persist simply due to "tradition". The Dean must ensure that junior faculty receive support, staff know they are appreciated, and personnel, fundraising, and student scholarship objectives are met. In all that we do, we must ask ourselves how we are affecting the well-being of our students. If we can't tie our actions to student success, or if these ties no longer exist, then the Dean must help facilitate change.

This is a tall order but also an exciting challenge. It has been my honor to serve as the Interim Dean of the Lutgert College of Business and—four months later—I have decided this is one of the best jobs on campus. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with the search committee to discuss my qualifications. Thank you for your consideration of my application.

Sincerely,



Christopher Westley  
Professor of Economics and Interim Dean  
Lutgert College of Business