

Natalie J. Harder

Mr. T.R. "Mac" McGehee, Jr.
FSCJ Presidential Search Committee Co-Chair
Mr. Michael M. Bell
FSCJ Presidential Search Committee Co-Chair
Florida State College at Jacksonville
501 West State Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Dear Mr. McGehee and Mr. Bell:

Please accept this letter as an expression of my sincere interest in leading Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) as its next president. Given FSCJ's commitment to student success, Jacksonville's regional economic growth, and Florida's investment in college performance, I believe that my experience and record of leadership would position FSCJ to develop even greater levels of investment and success. In response to the thoughtful FSCJ presidential profile, thank you in advance for taking the time to review my materials and my potential fit for the presidency.

In February 2012, as I began my role as Chancellor of South Louisiana Community College (SLCC), the state of Louisiana had seen its third year of disinvestment in higher education. At this same time SLCC was legislated to merge with another institution four months from my start date. The forced merger of two financial challenged institutions experiencing enrollment declines coupled with the lack of belief in administration left the new institution doubtful of its own potential and promise. However, through honest conversations and tough shared decision making we are now the leading college in our system. Indeed, through their commitment to everyday excellence and each other, college personnel never stop innovating to improve student outcomes and bring more education and training to our eight-parish region.

The commitment to increasing education and training in our region has as its cornerstone engagement and continuous communication. Most of my time is spent meeting with SLCC's many constituents. We have numerous parish presidents, superintendents, business executives, economic developers, commissioners, and community leaders who contribute to our numerous successful partnerships. I am also the key legislative contact for 23 state legislators (18% of the state legislature), many of whom hold chairs of important committees.

It is these connections coupled with faculty, staff, and administrative excellence, which have led the college to implement several "firsts" in our region and beyond. For example, we were the **first LA community college to offer an associate degree in application software development**. We created the state's **first ever university to community college economic development subcontract**. Starting in 2017, we were (and still are) the **first college in our state to be the one-stop operator** for a regional workforce board. This partnership has resulted in our **largest grant of \$12+M** over two years and in its first year we were recognized as having the highest level of service of all the workforce regions in the state.

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Just as FSCJ has demonstrated its commitment to meet differing workforce needs throughout Nassau and Duval counties, SLCC has worked to serve various industries through **new program development** such as: helicopter pilot training, registered nursing, application software, oil and gas production, and commercial diving. We have grown our 2+2 agreements with four-year institutions state wide by **ten times**. Started in 2015, our non-credit Corporate College now leads all two-year colleges in the state in terms of gross revenue and net profit and will see at least **300% growth** in a three-year period. Through Corporate College and SLCC's Adult Basic Education (ABE) office we are focusing on **participants earning industry-based certifications and college credit simultaneously**. We now **serve ten times more ABE students** than we did three years ago due to empowering employees to aggressively pursue ABE contracts because we felt we could reach more individuals than the previous ABE contractors. Our region, much like our state, lags in terms of educational attainment. As a first-generation college graduate I am keenly aware that education is the way out of poverty. Key to addressing our region's low educational attainment rate is meeting each community's needs no matter how different. We use innovation to solve community education and training problems and the **college culture encourages everyone to pilot ideas** to educate all our region's citizens.

Similar to FSCJ, recognition by our community partners as to the importance of the college and its students has yielded unprecedented investments in our programs, facilities, equipment, and faculty. SLCC started out with no endowed scholarships and now has more than a dozen. Because **we demand accountability of ourselves**, partners have invested in seven new endowed SLCC professorships in the last two years. We are very proud that our overall Foundation assets have **increased over 600%** in the last six years. We now have endowed funds that are generating dollars back to college operations. One of the highlights of the last few years was raising **\$2.1M in nine months** to ensure \$17M in bond proceeds from the state for the college's new Health and Sciences building.

My **personal engagement with the community** is one way I continue to spread the message that workforce development must be a top priority for the region. One of my most extensive engagements is as a member of the executive committee and ten-member CEO advisory council of our regional economic development organization/chamber of commerce, *One Acadiana*. I currently co-chair *One Acadiana's Workforce and Education* committee with the vice president of an international jewelry manufacturer, Stuller Inc. Due to our work, in January 2019, *One Acadiana* launched a region wide campaign to increase educational attainment throughout nine parishes, with a focus on education and training for adults. This business led organization approved me as chair-elect in November.

I am proud of the success SLCC has experienced over the past two years despite its region leading the nation in job losses for two years, 2015 and 2016. The region has yet to fully recover from these losses (based in the energy sector.) However, our efforts to retrain those who became unemployed were well recognized as JP Morgan Chase invested \$200,000 in SLCC to continue its retraining programs in conjunction with *One Acadiana*. In addition, we have partnered with international information technology company CGI, Inc. to expand its "internship to hiring" pipeline with our application software development students. This past summer was the **first time this company looked beyond interns from four-year universities** and 100% of our first cohort of interns were offered employment post-internship.

Natalie J. Harder

As the college headed into its **second merger** in 2017, I was proud we were recognized as an organization able to manage a larger institution with a leadership team equipped to manage an even more complex institution. We gained additional campuses, facilities, and personnel and added cultural aspects from communities immersed in the maritime industries. Our ability to understand and respond to this industry's dynamics resulted in our **doubling the number of individuals trained** through our new maritime division **in just one year**. Further demonstrating an ability to manage complex arrangements, I was asked if SLCC would take over a **nationwide Department of Labor grant** for apprenticeships which began in fall 2018.

I couldn't be prouder of the community's faith in SLCC as demonstrated by more than \$11M in investments in support of our students despite significant regional economic challenges. In turn, I couldn't be more excited about the new era in service to students over the last few years. From **more than tripling our student clubs and programs** to our new **faculty driven "Advising 2.0"** effort to our **pathways programming**, I believe our employees would tell you we have never been more student focused. Indeed, **SLCC's IPEDs graduation rate increased 20 percentage points in the last six years** and is now **six percentage points above the national average** for two-year public colleges. Also, we were excited to launch our **new Center for Minority Excellence** in 2016 as a result of a \$3.4M federal grant.

Despite 18 state budget cuts in nine years, SLCC continues to innovate and prove entrepreneurial in both its system and in its state. This year we will be the **first college to offer telemedicine** through a partnership with the region's largest hospital system. Telemedicine will be used for both training purposes in our health programs, but also to serve students and employees. We will be launching **new credit and non-credit programs across the college** as well as a marketing effort focused on our rural campuses, albeit tailored to each campus's community. We will begin work on our new collegiate high school program, efforts with a large housing authority, and enlarge our training program with a local sheriff, all while we continue to improve our internal processes. With ongoing process and technology improvements we fully expect our student outcomes to continue to rise in all areas of retention, persistence, graduation, and industry-based certification completion.

While managing the growth and innovation of SLCC, the system president has asked me to take on several **system-wide/state-wide responsibilities** in relation to best practices for a 12-college system serving more than 150,000 students. Most recently I was asked to chair a state task force focused on removing barriers to enrollment, the redesign of developmental education, and coordination of student services. Cross disciplinary representation from all colleges and system administration focused intently for six months on the complex approaches taken by institutions in relation to student access and success. As you can imagine, purposeful and constant communication was required during this process. Recommendations from this task force were unanimously approved by the system Board of Supervisors and implementation began at all 12 colleges last August.

Much like FSCJ has embraced *Achieve the Dream* to improve student outcomes, SLCC has embraced a **continuous improvement initiative** (through its strategic plan) entitled "*Everyday Excellence*" which has guided its **transformation to the top performing two-year college in LA**. An inclusive data driven planning, execution, and implementation process focused on people, student success, sustainability, and community, *Everyday Excellence* prioritizes professional development, employee engagement,

Natalie J. Harder

leadership development, and standards of practice to **hardwire excellence** in every action by every employee.

With such a diverse institution serving so many constituencies with variations in cultures and economies, it is not a secret why SLCC is successful. **We are committed to constant communication and results driven innovation.** We also do what we say we will do. This sounds simple, but I believe your word is your bond. Starting on my first day, I said that SLCC would be built on **excellence and integrity.** I firmly believe it is excellence and integrity that has allowed the institution to thrive in a state which leads the nation in its disinvestment in higher education and in a region which has suffered significant economic losses. The college culture now thrives on **transparency, calculated risk-taking and innovation, a commitment to colleagues,** and the recognition that as our institution is the one that will change lives, we must be relentless in encouraging our citizens to increase their education and training levels.

Despite a back drop of crippling economic change, significant operational disruption, and record disinvestment in public higher education by state government, SLCC has reached **record levels of financial and student performance.** This success is attributable to building, empowering, and celebrating the work of SLCC's amazing employees who focus on supporting each other so that student success is now in our DNA. I look forward to cultivating these same dynamics with the many constituent groups in and around FSCJ. I can both understand the many voices which need to be listened to as well as prioritize the responses to these conversations. I can discern the political as compared to the practical, and thus continue FSCJ's innovative culture while increasing outcomes for its students, campuses, and community. SLCC is successful in its many communities because I personally build and foster relationships with so many individuals. I live as the face of SLCC and I would bring that passion and drive to FSCJ and its many stakeholders. The good work of FSCJ's team is obvious and so is the innovation and excellence waiting to be further fostered. You would find no greater champion, investor, or supporter of the institution, its people, and its students than I would be as president of FSCJ.

I look forward to having additional conversations regarding SLCC's transformational story, my story, and the ways I believe I can help FSCJ reach even higher levels of success. Thank you for the consideration.

Sincerely,

Natalie J. Harder