

February 2, 2021

University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Chancellor Search Committee

Dear Search Committee,

I am writing to offer my candidacy for the Chancellor position at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). The successes that this university has achieved throughout its history as an agent of change demonstrate its entrepreneurial character and unwavering spirit to both embrace and shape the future. The university has a robust portfolio of assets that include a diverse and successful student body, teaching excellence, strong research productivity, strategic partnerships across the system and within the state, geographical advantages, and an acute sense of responsibility for the community.

I am the Dean of the College of Business at Florida International University (FIU Business). Florida International University (FIU) is a comprehensive university with 11 colleges, over 58,000 students, and the fourth largest university in the country by enrollment. FIU is a Research 1 university and as of June 2019 also recognized by the State of Florida as an “emerging preeminence” university in the State University System of Florida. FIU is the only public Research 1 university in Miami and an Ashoka Campus with over 65% of its student body of Latino/Hispanic origin, representing over 140 countries. It has an annual operating budget of over \$1.5B, economic impact of over \$3.5B, and total research expenditure exceeding \$350M. FIU competes in eighteen Division 1 sports. FIU has numerous ranking recognitions including a *U.S. News and World Report* top 100 public national universities, No. 13 in Social Mobility, No. 40 Best Online Program, and *Times Higher Education* No. 3 Young University Ranking.

By enrollment, FIU Business is the largest business school in the state of Florida with 11,000 students and a budget of over \$82 million. Because of its size and budget model, FIU Business operates in many respects as an independent enterprise with 170+ full-time faculty and 160+ staff. FIU does not use a responsibility center management (RCM) funding model, and the business school only receives roughly \$30 million (36%) from central E&G funds. At the same time, FIU Business contributes over 40% of the university total academic auxiliary revenues. FIU Business is a doctoral degree granting college comprising the Landon Undergraduate School of Business and the Chapman Graduate School of Business with five academic departments and two schools (School of Accounting and the Hollo School of Real Estate), an executive education division, an Office of Global Initiatives, ten functional/operational units, and eight affiliated centers/institutes including one of the 15 Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERs) awarded by the Department of Education. FIU Business also hosts the South Florida Small Business Development Center.

Currently, FIU Business has over 20 programs in the top 50 by broad categories and well-known agencies. The more noticeable ones include *U.S. News and World Report* ranks FIU Business No. 2 in the country in its international business education two years in a row, and No. 8 in the country in its international MBA. Both rankings are ahead of many well-known universities such as NYU, Georgetown, Wharton, UC Berkeley, and University of Southern California. Our Online MBA program is ranked No. 9 in the world by *QS World University Rankings* and online undergraduate business program is ranked No. 11 in the nation by *U.S. News and World Report*. FIU Business also holds many significant recognitions such as the No. 1 in real estate research productivity in the world tied with the National University of Singapore and No. 1 in human resources management in both undergraduate and graduate programs by HR.com.

By sharing some brief background information of FIU and FIU Business, I hope to demonstrate why I am a good fit for this position. I am in my ninth year as a dean in a professional school. FIU Business is a rather complex organization with multiple academic programs and different kinds of tuition models. More importantly, because of its unique financial model, FIU Business runs like an autonomous entity and must remain entrepreneurial in nature to sustain its operations and competitive advantages.

When I first joined FIU Business, the college had a \$72 million budget with \$3 million in reserve, of which only \$1 million was unrestricted. After a thorough analysis of the college's financial position, I knew the small reserve put the operation at risk should enrollment drop, limiting the college's ability to support its vision let alone innovations and aspirations. To manage operations, we analyzed programs' cost structures, viability, and market demand. In the initial months, I went on a listening tour with every academic and operational unit as well as sharing the financial issues in the most transparent way. At the end of those meetings, everyone understood why collaboration was critical for the future for the school and innovations are going to help each other survive. We then took on a reorganization of our Chapman Graduate School to bring recruitment and admission in-house, resulting in an annual savings of \$3 million while enjoying a continuous increase in enrollment across almost all programs in the past three years. All of our recruiting and support staff were nervous but eager to take on significant responsibilities to partner with the academic programs. International programs with multiple years of losses were put on hiatus and executive education was required to scale and concentrate on B2B sales. FIU Business started to demonstrate a strong entrepreneurial spirit with laser-focus on creativity and innovations.

In parallel to making good choices, we began to create more connectivity across units to build empathy. We allow ourselves to make small mistakes as the price of staying innovative and to learn from them. We studied the market demand with diligence and learned good business practices from other universities. In 2018, we proposed and received approval to offer a new Doctor in Business Program which has been oversubscribed since inception. Last year, we added online modality to three popular graduate programs, bringing a total of 11 graduate programs which offered in both face-to-face and remote formats. We are now the largest producer in master's degrees in the country. As of today, FIU Business has successfully expanded its financial budget to \$82 million with \$18 million in reserves, of which \$12 million are unrestricted.

A great vision can only be formed after intentional listening and thoughtful discussions. At the beginning of fall semester 2020, I kicked off a strategic planning cycle for the college. I invited many faculty, staff, students, and advisory boards to participate in our small group discussions. Using design thinking workshops, we built empathy and identified measurable goals to support our shared vision. Many attendees after those small group meetings expressed how grateful they were to participate in this process. Honest feedback and subsequent buy-in are the outcome of shared governance. Open-mindedness allows creativity, ability to listen intently, transparency with faculty and staff, discipline to execution, and collaborative partnership with stakeholders, which are critical aspects of a solid foundation upon which to build a university. I recognize that a great university is the work of many. While the chancellor sets the vision, it is the hard work and sacrifice of faculty, staff, and students that bring the results. I am very mindful of others' contributions and am always ready to celebrate their successes. In the last Thanksgiving, we gave out a "pie of thanks" to each faculty and staff via a drive-thru during the pandemic. I enjoy these kinds of events very much because, at the end of it, we are always a family.

As a Chartered Financial Analyst, I have great interest in understanding difficult financial models and believe I have strong business acumen to manage a complex organization. During my tenure with FIU, I have worked diligently to build trust, create teams with complementary skillsets, foster creativity, and promote connectivity across many academic and operational units through reorganizations and retraining of existing staff and faculty. The results are evident in the high morale of the college, growth in enrollment in Chapman Graduate School, introduction of new programs, improvement in reputation and rankings, increase in financial reserves and endowment accounts, impactful performance in university metrics, and stronger partnerships in the community and beyond. As higher education continues to be confronted with challenges, we must continue to build trust with our internal and external stakeholders, be a good steward with our financial resources, and always commit to provide an affordable and quality college experience for our students as well as fostering an environment for research discovery. After reviewing the materials, I believe UNO has several comparative advantages to thrive in the market and I have the right skillset to lead it in this journey.

Successful universities build on a strong commitment to stakeholders. On the student side, UNO has made impressive strides in recent years in creating an impressive portfolio. With 29.5% of the student are ethnically diverse, UNO articulates diversity and inclusiveness. As a first-generation college graduate, I am excited to learn that 37.3% of your student body is first-generation college students and that your 795 international students come from 65 countries. I am equally impressed by UNO's recognition as one of the Top 10 four-year institutions for military friendliness. I believe the opportunity to train this diverse group of students in this coming decade will define the success of a university in talent development and that UNO has laid some important groundwork. On the faculty side, I am thrilled to learn that UNO's mission to foster multi-disciplinary and intercampus collaboration through your centers and institutes, and across the system. The commitment to leverage faculty's expertise and community resources is indeed encouraging. I speculate the growth of faculty in both research and collaborative partnerships in the community and beyond is indicative of a thoughtful strategic plan of UNO.

Diversity of mindsets goes beyond the inclusion of ethnicity, religions, genders, experiences, sexual orientations, backgrounds, and complexions of our skin color. It is a commitment to open-mindedness, willingness to listen to disagreements, tolerance of discomfort, acceptance of differences, and appreciation of humility. Recent events have forced higher education to rethink our existing assumptions. Like many industries, higher education needs to come up with disruptive tactics to confront this challenge and focus its efforts in creating diversity of thoughts and inclusive mindsets. Through intention and deliberation, FIU Business has been successful in diversifying our faculty and staff makeup. Our goal is to expand the potential pool of candidates and foster an environment in which everyone takes ownership of diversity and inclusiveness. For instance, I sought the Dean's Student Advisory Board to collaborate with other colleges and launch a discussion series titled "Conversations on Race and Equity." Four students are also appointed as first FIU Business Student Ambassadors for Diversity and Inclusion to collaborate with our two faculty diversity fellows. Both initiatives are very successful because we built trust among multiple stakeholders. As the former President of the Council of Chinese American Deans and Presidents (CCADP), I understand Asians represent a mere 2% in higher education leadership. In an attempt to push for more diversity, I co-authored a white paper with the current and past presidents of CCADP and shared with many universities through our members. Diversity and inclusion must not remain as a "checkbox" item. Each one of us has a responsibility to take action and lead by example. In fact, I am one of the two Asian American women graduates from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)' Millennium Leadership Initiative (MLI) in its entire history. We must come up with disruptive strategies to change the conversation. Last

year, I appointed a female faculty to an endowed professorship after she became the first Black woman to receive full professorship in the School of Accounting at the college. I also serve on multiple international advisory boards and panel discussions on these issues because I believe we must change the conversation and demonstrate with our actions. Doing nothing about diversity is simply no longer acceptable at this time in history.

During the current pandemic, higher education institutions came to suspect their business models were not working. From teaching modalities and reliance on residential revenues to brick and mortar facilities and narrowly focused enrollment strategy, many universities around the world awoke to recognize the cost of being stagnant. UNO, as a metropolitan university, has some advantage over universities that are heavily rely on residential campus. As a public university, UNO must continue to explore opportunities to manage student enrollment, reduce student loans, and promote timely graduation. How do we navigate this financial challenge? We need to capitalize on partnerships to share resources and leverage comparative advantages. With four universities in the Nebraska system, UNO should continue to leverage resources across sister schools and streamline processes. To stay truthful to its core as a public university by serving the community and beyond, UNO needs to stand out as a strong partner for parents and students to help manage their cost of attendance. Currently, tuition and fees of UNO are among the lowest in the system. Geographically, UNO is located at one of the nicest and affordable cities to live in the Midwest. At FIU Business, we understand that to survive in this financial challenge, we must quickly master our relationships to prevail in this crisis together. In fall of 2018, I established a Dean's Destination Scholarship to promote timely graduation by providing a "high tech high touch" approach. Utilizing data analytics and intentional advising, we offer small scholarships with the support of donors to incentivize students to graduate timely. As a point of reference, our 4-year graduation rate advanced from 29% in 2017 (the year I joined FIU) to close to 53% in 2020 and is projected to achieve 70% this summer. Our growth in 4-year graduation rate as a college will very likely put FIU as the first urban university achieving an overall 4-year graduation rate of more than 60%. In fact, this initiative has been so successful that prompted our president to request us to lead other colleges in this endeavor.

Working with the community is one of my top priorities and responsibilities. I currently serve on the Board of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce and am a member of its finance committee. FIU Business also works with Miami-Dade Beacon Council, our local economic development agency, and the International Trade Council. For instance, I was selected as the representative of our education sector to interview with Amazon when it came to Miami in its search for headquarter2 in 2019. We also help local communities through our in-house Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at FIU. SBDC at FIU along with our Pino Center for Entrepreneurship have helped the communities to acquire \$70M in loans and equity, of which \$43M is COVID19 related. In 2018, with the support of KPMG, we created an Innovation Hub to bring different industry professionals to help foster career paths for our students. Our Office of Business Career Management has been a pioneer in using technology to host career fairs and employer workshops. We have enjoyed successful partnerships to create internships and full-time employment locally and internationally. For instance, with our donor's support, we will be able to offer paid internships to support local small businesses as part of our first initiatives piloted through the Center of Free Enterprise, a multi-college collaboration initiated by FIU Business. In 2020, I was selected to serve as Florida Top 50 Influencers across the state. This group serves as a think tank to influence the state policies with our recent focus on rethinking tourism. I also work collaboratively with the VP of

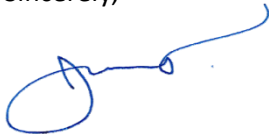
Government Relations to promote university's agenda at the state level in Tallahassee and at the federal level in D.C. FIU Business is a partner in our university's economic development agenda, such as creating a technology hub in Miami with focus on computational science and artificial intelligence, identifying solutions for environmental resilience, co-founding the preeminent program in Cybersecurity, and attracting hedge funds/venture capitalists to the region. FIU Business also has a close relationship with state officials. For instance, former mayors of the county and city, including the current mayor of Miami City, Francis Suarez, are our alumni and build working relationships with the school.

I am committed to fundraising because I am a first-generation college, non-traditional, and an international student. However, among all things I am a product of scholarships. Without donors' generosity, I would never have been able to finish college, let alone graduate studies. I consider myself a natural fundraiser because I enjoy being with people and truly comprehend the impact of philanthropy. Since joining FIU Business in 2017, I have worked alongside our advancement team to set two records in fundraising in the history of the college. Over the past three years, charitable contributions have totaled over \$12 million, representing a 70% year over year increase in private donations to support FIU Business's funding priorities. Along with our advancement team, I am excited that we are on track to set another record for the college in this academic year with quite a few corporate donations to support economic development, diversity and inclusion, and social mobility for students. I am eager to partner with UNO in its advancement efforts to support faculty research/discovery, create economic impact in community, and transform student lives.

Why seek a chancellorship now? The reason is personal. I came to the U.S. in 1988 from Hong Kong. I did not have guidance because my parents settled in Hong Kong when they were barely teenagers. Through hard work and the lack of alternatives, they became entrepreneurs despite never finishing high school. As a first-generation college student, I did not receive concerted training at home and was short of financial resources. Significant scholarships allowed me to attend college and graduate in three and a half years with summa cum laude. I went on to my Ph.D. studies as a full-ride scholar. I am tremendously grateful to every professor, staff, and mentor who had touched my life. I will be forever indebted to higher education institutions like UNO. My humble beginning graced me with a deep conviction that quality education not only provides social mobility for many but also transforms lives. I am a testament to this act of kindness. After nine years as a dean, I am ready to take on the next level of challenges and believe I have much to offer. I will be grateful if granted the privilege to lead the University of Nebraska at Omaha to its next chapter of success.

Thank you for your time and efforts in this search.

Sincerely,



Joanne Li