



Gulf Coast
Community College

June 29, 2009

Jim Smith, Chair
Board of Trustees
Florida State University
403 East Park Avenue
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Dear Mr. Smith,

For twenty-seven years Gulf Coast Community College has valued its partnership with Florida State University-Panama City (FSU-PC). Working together, we have served the need for higher education in our area by embracing the 2+2 system, which has provided the best of both worlds for our students—open access to an affordable and excellent community college and a transfer path to a first-tier state university.

This partnership has been both effective and efficient; we have shared resources when appropriate (our library, for example) and avoided duplication by dividing responsibility for the lower and upper division programs. We have made great strides recently with our "Connect" program, which has removed unnecessary administrative barriers from the path to a four-year degree.

The Board of Trustees and administration of Gulf Coast Community College have endeavored to support FSU-PC whenever possible. We have addressed mutual concerns in a transparent and cooperative manner. We were therefore surprised to learn that the Board of Trustees of FSU resolved in its June 17th meeting to authorize freshman and sophomore classes at FSU-PC beginning with the 2010 academic year.

We fully understand that budget reductions require change. Gulf Coast has lost over \$2.2 million in state revenues since 2007, forcing a hiring freeze and requiring our faculty to teach significantly more overload classes. The FSU board's resolution fails to consider the impact that competition for first and second year students will have on our strained budget and ability to fulfill our mission.

Although the resolution is silent on this point, we are told that local students who apply to the FSU main campus and fail will not be allowed to attend FSU-PC. Only applicants from outside our service district will be eligible for admission, even though they may be less qualified. Aside from the patent unfairness to local citizens inherent in this proposition, there may be significant legal issues that arise when a state university discriminates against in-state applicants based solely on place of residence.

We understand that the objective is to achieve a three-fold increase in enrollment, while cutting the FSU-PC budget by 25%. Since there will be far too few FSU instructors to teach the hoped-

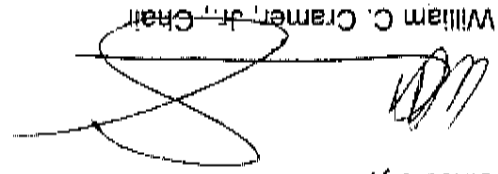
for additional students (approximately 2,000), we are told that our faculty will be called upon to fill the gap. As stated, our teachers already have full-time jobs and are working overtime.

Despite the resolution's assertion that FSU-PC is "developing a plan with Gulf Coast Community College to accept freshman and sophomore students," there has been no such discussion. Any plan must consider a host of practical, operational and budgetary concerns. It should be the result of adequate and meaningful dialogue by representatives from both institutions and the local community. In fact, President Wetherell told our President, Dr. Jim Kerley, and me that a "Blue-Ribbon" committee would be formed for this purpose and that its recommendations would be forwarded to the FSU Board of Trustees. It appears conclusion has preceded consideration.

For these reasons, the Gulf Coast District Board of Trustees is skeptical of the viability of the FSU-PC expansion as currently proposed. Frankly, we are concerned that the ultimate objective may be the elimination of the Panama City branch of FSU altogether. Therefore, our board unanimously resolved that its administration actively explore application for State College status under Florida State College System guidelines. We are categorically committed to ensuring that students in our service district have the opportunity to obtain a four-year degree here, whether it is through FSU-PC, a Gulf Coast state college, or another collaborative arrangement.

We would appreciate your immediate attention to this matter and suggest that the "Blue-Ribbon" committee be formed and allowed to do its work before the Board of Governors takes up the issue. FSU-PC and Gulf Coast share a profound responsibility to achieve a result that is in the best interests of the students and community our institutions have jointly served for almost three decades.

Sincerely,



William C. Cramer, Jr., Chair
District Board of Trustees