

September 24, 2024

Brian Lamb, Chair
Florida Board of Governors
State University System of Florida
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1614
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

Dear Chair Lamb,

At its meeting on September 12, 2024, the University of West Florida Board of Trustees unanimously approved the attached "President's Employment Agreement," which extends Dr. Martha D. Saunders' contractual term for a one-year period commencing on January 1, 2025, through and including December 31, 2025, on the terms and conditions described therein, contingent upon the Florida Board of Governors approval. In support of this decision, I am very pleased to provide the following summary of accomplishments by Dr. Saunders.

Since assuming the role of president in January 2017, Dr. Saunders has organized her leadership activities around an approved University strategic plan that is aligned with the Florida Board of Governors strategic priorities. Her commitment to providing an education that is learner-centered and focused is unwavering. The University achieved its highest academic progress rate in University history, measured in the Florida Board of Governors' Performance-Based Funding Metric 5. Metric 5 measures the second-year retention rate with a GPA above 2.0. UWF's progress rate improved by 3.3 percentage points, totaling 86.8%. This is the result of Dr. Saunders' long-term, strategic and evidence-based focus on providing our students with rich and meaningful educational experiences that prepare them to be knowledgeable citizens, successful in their careers and lives.

This past year, the University had record admission applications and enrollment, and received national recognition through rankings, grants and awards. Under Dr. Saunders' leadership, UWF earned rankings from U.S. News & World Report in the following categories: Regional Universities South; Top Public School; Best Colleges for Veterans; Best Undergraduate Nursing; Best Undergraduate Psychology; and Social Mobility. The University was named a 2024-2025 Gold-level Military Friendly School Military Friendly® School in the large public category and a "Great College to Work For" for the sixth consecutive year.

The following 2023-2024 highlights are the results of Dr. Saunders' vision in action.

STUDENT CENTERED AND FOCUSED

- UWF welcomed its 16th National Merit Finalist this fall.
- UWF faculty and undergraduate students in the Department of Psychology, Department of Physics and Dr. Muhammad Harunur Rashid Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering developed Pulsed Medical LED goggles for the early detection of Alzheimer's Disease.
- A UWF team placed fifth against teams including Yale University, Dartmouth College and others at the University of South Carolina's National Big Data Health Science Student Case Competition.
- An engineering student team in the Hal Marcus College of Science and Engineering placed second in the Sumo Robot category of the National Robotics Challenge. The team was tasked to build a self-propelled, autonomous, sensing robot, designed to force another Sumo robot outside a ring.
- Students in the UWF Hal Marcus College of Science and Engineering were recognized with the Ingenuity Award at the 39th NASA Human Exploration Rover Challenge. The award, judged by NASA engineers, is given to a team that shows the most creative design and problem-solving process.

EXCEPTIONAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING AND SCHOLARSHIP ALIGNED WITH STATE NEEDS

- UWF launched the Entry into Practice Master of Science in Nursing, a graduate program that is a direct pathway to the nursing profession for those with a non-nursing bachelor's degree.
- UWF launched the Master of Science in Administration with a specialization in sport administration. The program prepares students for careers in the growing global sport market.

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- The Executive Master of Business Administration: Leadership Practice and Purpose launched in fall and is a product of the Aylstock, Witkin, Kreis & Overholtz Center for Leadership.
- The UWF Center for Cybersecurity received \$12.3 million in various grants to launch the UWF Florida Cybersecurity Training Program to provide free cybersecurity training for state and local government employees and to expand CyberSkills2Work.
- UWF was awarded a \$460,000 grant by the Florida Defense Support Task Force to support the training efforts of the Florida Air National Guard and various military units in Florida.
- UWF and Leidos, a Fortune 500® science and technology leader, launched the Leidos Cybersecurity Infrastructure Lab in UWF's Hal Marcus College of Science and Engineering. The lab provides students with hands-on cybersecurity education in realistic digital environments.
- UWF partnered with Farcast on an innovative research program to make cancer treatment more predictable for patients.
- Ascension Sacred Heart and UWF began a strategic initiative that allows 16 upper-level Bachelor of Science in Nursing students to complete the final three semesters of their clinical and classroom time on Sacred Heart Pensacola's campus.
- UWF was awarded a \$6,685,757 Triumph grant to enhance nursing program offerings.

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

- UWF launched the Office of Workforce Development, aimed at aligning education with career success and economic growth. Dr. Sherry Hartnett was named as director of the office.
- UWF's Educational Research Center for Child Development received a \$1.6 million, four-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education to assist Pell-eligible and Pell-recipient student-parents. This is the largest grant the ERCCD has received. The ERCCD also received a perfect review panel.
- The Aylstock, Witkin, Kreis & Overholtz Center for Leadership, in collaboration with the UWF Lewis Bear, Jr. College of Business MBA Program and Hal Marcus College of Science and Engineering, is providing graduate education to more than 200 student naval aviators. UWF received \$1,211,196 from the U.S. Navy to provide the first graduate education collaboration between UWF and the Navy in almost 50 years.
- UWF was selected to receive the 2024 Community Engagement Classification by the American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- For fiscal year 23-24, UWF has allocated \$6 million to hiring faculty in programs of strategic emphasis, ensuring the University develop talent to meet Florida's workforce demands; \$3 million to enhance academic and financial advising for students; \$5 million to student success initiatives such as financial literacy programs, career placement and high impact applied research initiatives; \$3 million to increase funds toward student financial aid, grants and scholarships; and \$4 million toward faculty and staff retention.

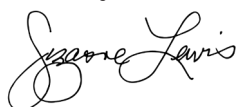
Dr. Saunders has been the recipient of multiple honors, including being named one of Florida's 500 Most Influential Leaders by Florida Trend for the fifth consecutive year and InWeekly Magazine's Power List, securing the top Power List position for 2024. She continues to be an active member of the Northwest Florida community, serving on community boards and organizations. As a visionary thought leader in higher education, she is sought out for interviews and presentations by local, state, national and international groups. Dr. Saunders is active on social media, and publishes blogs and viewpoints in multiple media outlets on a variety of topics that impact the community and the region.

Dr. Saunders possesses an authenticity of character that has garnered the respect and trust of UWF students, faculty and staff, members of the Northwest Florida community, legislators and leaders. Her genuine investment in the welfare of our students drives the commitment to excellence that persists throughout the University community and is palpable on our campus.

Florida law, namely Section 1001.706(6)(a), Florida Statutes, entrusts to the Board of Governors confirmation of the reappointment of a university president by the university's board of trustees. Accordingly, on behalf of the UWF Board of Trustees, I respectfully request that the Board of Governors confirm Dr. Saunders' reappointment for a one-year period commencing January 1, 2025, through and including December 31, 2025, on the terms and conditions described in the approved employment agreement.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me should you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Lewis
Chair, University of West Florida Board of Trustees
Cc: Dr. Martha D. Saunders