

New College Alumni Association  
The Keating Center  
5800 Bay Shore Rd  
Sarasota, FL 34243

January 14, 2021

Presidential Search Committee  
New College of Florida  
5800 Bay Shore Rd  
Sarasota, FL 34243

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Dear Chair Ruiz, Members of the Presidential Search Committee, and WittKieffer Consultants:

We write in our official capacity as the Board of Directors of the New College Alumni Association in response to your solicitation of input from alumni and other campus stakeholders.

This letter is not meant to substitute for the input of individual alumni. There are over 7,500 individual alumni of New College, and they represent a diversity of perspectives. We encourage you to consider that individual feedback, and we encourage our fellow alumni to submit individual oral or written comments to you.

It is our sense that in the selection of the next President, the following considerations are in the long-term best interests of the College:

- ❖ **Maintaining New College's Status as an Experimental College, Providing for Highly Individualized Educational Experiences.** We believe that in the long term, New College's special contribution to global higher education (as well as its competitive advantage vis-à-vis other undergraduate programs) arises from the experimental nature of its program. Fundamentally, the College is set apart because it: (1) Dispenses with many arbitrary structures and barriers that prevent talented, inquisitive students from pursuing areas of deep interest to them and fully exercising their intellectual gifts; and (2) Emphasizes individualized education, authorizing and encouraging faculty and students to collaborate to customize courses of study that make the best use of individual interests and talents.
- ❖ We cite the following as influential formulations of the College's mission, that capture the intentions behind it:

- The formulation set forth in JOHN ELMENDORF, TRANSMITTING INFORMATION ABOUT EXPERIMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: NEW COLLEGE AS A CASE STUDY (Academy for Educational Development 1975), pages 8 to 10, noting (among important others) the following characteristics:
  - (1) “Within the college, processes would be emphasized rather than content, discovery rather than direction;”
  - (2) “Some courses were to be student initiated and, at least in part, student taught;”
  - (3) “There were to be no grades – letter grades, word grades, or number grades.”
  
- The “Four Principles,” expressed as follows:
  - (1) “[E]ach student is responsible in the last analysis for his or her own education;”
  - (2) “the best education demands a joint search for learning by exciting teachers and able students;”
  - (3) “students’ progress should be based on demonstrated competence and real mastery rather than on the accumulation of credits and grades;”
  - (4) “students should have, from the outset, opportunities to explore in-depth, areas of interest to them.”

❖ **Maintaining an Emphasis on Undergraduate Research and Original Undergraduate Creative Work.**

- We feel that the opportunity for real undergraduate research, or for substantial, original undergraduate creative work (such as substantial original works of music, art, and creative writing), are core competences of New College which are rare in global higher education and deserve preservation.
  
- The opportunity for undergraduates to truly perform original academic research – advancing the boundaries of human knowledge in a field of study – or to engage in original creative achievements – is consistent with New College’s core principle of providing talented students the freedom and customized education they need to maximize their potential.
  
- At this point, the tradition of substantial original undergraduate research and creative work is so ingrained in New College’s culture that we feel it is an indelible aspect of the institution’s identity that should be preserved.
  
- Many alumni feel that having created a rigorous undergraduate *Senior Thesis or Project* has enriched their lives, their further scholarly pursuits, and their careers.

❖ **Documenting New College’s Contribution to Global Higher Education.**

- We feel that New College’s unique program, and the challenges and benefits inherent in that program, should be better documented so as to solidify its contribution to the field of higher education.

❖ **Maintaining New College’s Unique Aspects of Student Life.**

- New College students tend to be unique self-driven individuals that may not thrive in traditional academic settings. As alumni, we believe the unconventional campus environment is valuable. Where academic life has largely been autonomous and student driven, student life has a tradition of being autonomous and student driven as well. The new President should show an interest in these qualities of New College, its traditions, and other things students can accomplish at New College that they would not necessarily accomplish in a traditional academic setting. We feel this is an important part of retention and having more positive outcomes with students and recent alumni.

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We believe that communicating and advocating for these unique qualities will serve New College in the long run regardless of short-term difficulties. Of course, adaptability is important in the present environment; but we hope the College will adapt strategically, changing to suit new conditions, and perhaps giving new expression to, but not abandoning, the fundamental qualities that make it special.

We believe, simply, that the rare occasion of a search for a new President is an appropriate time for us, as alumni, to reflect on what is truly unique about the College, what has enriched our lives, and what should be preserved for years to come.

Very truly yours,

*The Board of Directors of the New  
College Alumni Association*