

Steve Atkins, Ph. D.
910 Francesca Court
Punta Gorda, FL 33950
(336)710-9122

November 15, 2013

Search Committee Learning Assessment Engineer:

I am an experienced leader with progressively responsible positions in higher education. My professional background, complemented by creative and collaborative leadership, and strong interpersonal and communication skills, makes me an excellent candidate for the position of Learning Assessment Engineer at Ross University. Moreover, I am very familiar with all aspects of planning, institutional effectiveness and research, outcomes assessment, program evaluation, student development, and accountability, and accreditation. I have a great desire to be part of a university that practices with integrity its core mission. Throughout my tenure in college administration, I have worked diligently to engender a culture that measures its success relative to improving student learning and enhancing the lives of students. I have a broad understanding of the challenges and opportunities that colleges and universities are facing and welcome the chance to meet with the search committee to discuss my candidacy.

I am attaching my curriculum vitae to this letter, along with artifacts that support my capabilities and competence as a college administrator with particular expertise in academic and student affairs, and the names and contact information of individuals who will serve as my references. I am also listing below certain of my accomplishments and interests that fit most closely with my perception of what Ross University is seeking in a Learning Assessment Engineer:

- I have successfully served two colleges in a variety of roles, one in North Carolina and the other in Florida. I spent twenty-one years at Surry Community College in North Carolina as full-time faculty member, Dean of Arts and Sciences, and Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs. For the past four years I have been employed by Edison State College (ESC). I was originally hired as Dean of Edison's Charlotte campus and after my first year was promoted to District Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs where I served for three years.
- At SCC, I spearheaded a nationally recognized Learning Initiative and Quality Enhancement Plan. Specific activities at SCC included initiation of a professional development model in critical thinking, implementation of an institutional portfolio model for assessing learning outcomes, an innovative process for mapping college programs for evaluation and for new program development, development of the college's faculty evaluation model to accommodate a learning-centered perspective, and implementation of a First-Year Experience Program.
- The SCC Learning Initiative resulted in national and international recognition for the college and culminated in attaining the Excellence in Critical Thinking Award at the 26th International Conference on Critical Thinking. This award was presented at the opening address and keynote session of the conference, which was attended by more than 400 international educators, government leaders, and business representatives. In addition to this honor, the college was featured by Kay McClenney in the February '06 edition of the *Community College Journal*. The article, entitled "Effective Educational Practice," explains how the college brought together faculty to discuss ways to decrease the amount of class time spent on lecture and increase the amount of time students work together to process information and generate their own solutions to problems. In addition to this publication, the college was featured in the SACS Accreditation Toolkit as an example of how colleges are using the

Community College of Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data to promote student learning throughout the accreditation review process..

- In 2003, at Dr. Terry O'Banion's request, I co-authored an article published in the League for Innovation in the Community College's *Learning Abstracts* to tell the Surry Community College story. For the several years, I have been one of only a few presenters invited by the Foundation for Critical Thinking to speak at the Foundation's International Conference on Critical Thinking in Berkeley, CA. In addition, Surry's professional development model is featured in an online article by the Foundation's president, Dr. Linda Elder.
- As a result of these efforts, I have become a sought-after consultant in the areas of accreditation, learning outcomes, critical thinking, and the learning college concept. I have been appointed to serve on the National Advisory Committee for Excellence in Critical Thinking and the Advisory Committee for Graduate Programs in Community College Education and Adult Learning at the University of North Carolina--Greensboro. In addition to these appointments, at the request of community colleges in Tennessee, Alabama, and Texas, I served as lead QEP evaluator as part of the SACS accreditation process. Also, I am currently serving on a special SACS investigative team to review accreditation issues at a large multi-campus and online university.
- In 2008, at Edison State College, I led the development of a new learning outcomes model. The model, based on the work of Dr. Ruth Stiehl, Professor Emeritus, Instructional Systems, Oregon State University, focuses on authentic outcomes and assessment practices, curriculum mapping, and development of common performance indicators for college programs. In 2009, I facilitated the development of a new model for college-wide assessment for general education. This model involves the collection and review of student projects produced in courses throughout the curriculum for each of the five general education competencies. The implementation has facilitated the integration of the competencies throughout the curriculum.
- During my tenure at Surry CC, I developed a reputation for innovation. In particular, I led the development of a novel program to support the local wine industry that resulted in Surry Community College becoming the only postsecondary institution on the east coast, with the exception of Cornell University, with a commercial teaching winery, vineyard, and enology laboratory. In fact, the program and its role in developing partnerships to support the region's economic development were featured in the *New York Times*, the *London Financial Times*, and on *National Public Radio*.
- During my tenure at ESC, the college experienced a 42% increase in FTE over a three-year period. Inherent to the growth was a significant increase in the number of students testing into developmental studies courses. The shift in student learning needs, combined with historical challenges of student success and retention, prompted a sustained and deliberate effort to develop an improvement plan focusing on the entire experience of first-year students. In fall 2008, I led more than 80 faculty, staff, students and administrators in a comprehensive self-study, under the auspices of the Foundations of Excellence® in the First College Year (FOE), with Dr. John N. Gardner serving as an adviser and consultant. The implementation of this important study is in process and will serve as one of the foundational elements for the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).
- To complement the FOE study, I wanted to ensure that its developmental studies program provided excellent teaching and related practices and support for all students. In spring 2010, I asked Dr. Barbara S. Bonham and Dr. Hunter R. Boylan of the National Center for Developmental Education to conduct a comprehensive program review of developmental education at Edison State College. Their report served as an impetus for numerous reform initiatives in the area of developmental education implemented in summer 2010.
- In 2010, I led the development of a learning-centered adjunct evaluation model that more closely resembles the in-depth analysis reflected in the expectations of teaching and learning of full-time faculty. The unique adjunct evaluation model included development of rubrics to ensure consistency of the evaluations by faculty chairs and academic administrators. The process

includes a portfolio that aligns teaching practices and goals with evaluation instruments and other methods for analyzing teaching and learning.

Perhaps my greatest strength is working closely with college faculty, staff, and administration in the implementation of assessment processes for courses, programs and degrees. My resume will depict that I have an abundance of experience mentoring, training and supporting faculty and student services staff in the creation of learning outcomes, and strategies and tools used to assess these outcomes. Moreover, I have developed professional development models and Academic Support Centers at two colleges that focus on tutoring and support for students academic and non-cognitive needs. My background in teaching statistics and creating data driven approaches has provided me skill in dissemination of data and presenting information in clear and understandable terms to a variety of audiences. Moreover, I presented workshops on assessing student learning outcomes during the "Florida Association of Community Colleges", Spring Conference, Orlando, FL; April, 2010. In addition, I was invited to conduct a workshop at Indian River State College on assessment during the college's spring convocation; January 2011.

There are several reasons I would very much like to serve Ross University in a supporting role in outcomes assessment. The most salient reason that I am interested is the opportunity to work closely with the College's leadership team in an environment that is consistent with my own philosophy of higher education practices. For years, I have been charged with transforming a college to focus on quality - quality teaching and learning, programs, and service to the community. In doing this, I have focused on best practices from the research literature and experiences of high performance colleges around the nation. I have learned much and I'm looking for a new challenge. I love new ideas and developing and implementing thoughtful innovations to address problems that universities encounter. I ask that you consider my proven track record of accomplishment as a thoughtful and caring leader, and a strategic thinker. I am not interested in working at an institution satisfied with the status quo, but seek instead to work with faculty, staff, students, and administrators who are committed to creating a college experience that is the best that it can be.

Enclosed is my resume for your review. I would like to be considered for the position and look forward to beginning discussions soon.

Sincerely,

Steve Atkins, Ph.D.