To the UCF Presidential Search Committee Members:

Leading up to the commencement of my international legal career in downtown Orlando at the Akerman law firm two decades ago, my journey had involved a unique path through education, industry, technology, business, and other activities across the globe in Tokyo, Hokkaido (Japan), the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (Saipan), the Philippines, Philadelphia, and Salt Lake City. After a worldwide search, our family selected Central Florida as our destination of choice to prosper professionally, make connections, and raise our growing family. While I was summoned away by my alma mater to develop a career in academia in 2003, I have continued to remain engaged with the area since then. Now, at this juncture, it is a prime time for me to return to Orlando and apply my extensive knowledge, diverse experience, and entrepreneurial approaches for the benefit of the University of Central Florida (UCF), its students, and the community. Accordingly, I was excited by the invitation to apply for the UCF presidency and strong encouragement that I have received since then. Accordingly, I submit this statement of interest together with my curriculum vitae for consideration.

My rapid advancement within the academic ranks at three major public research universities and my varied positions around the world demonstrate my ability to inspire, innovate, adapt, and succeed. Over the past 15 years alone, I have acquired a comprehensive understanding of all facets of higher education at sizable universities in urban settings while successfully serving as: (i) university president, (ii) law school dean, (iii) tenured professor, (iv) general counsel, (v) chief academic officer of a large overseas campus in Tokyo; (vi) associate dean of academic affairs, (vii) associate dean of student affairs, (viii) distinguished international scholar, and (ix) visiting professor at several foreign universities. In all of these capacities, my efforts have resulted in considerable success, acclaim, growth, and widespread community impact. I fully expect similar success if provided with the opportunity to advance UCF to the next level in terms of academics, research, community impact, international reputation, and athletics.

Drawing on my global background in academia and industry, I am enjoying remarkable success leading the University of Akron (UA) as its President together with invaluable assistance from my wife (Noriko) and family. In addition to generating an unprecedented level of student excitement and executing transformative change, I led efforts last year to eliminate a $30 million operating deficit and add $12 million to our emergency reserves following a very difficult period in UA’s 148-year history. By way of background, after orchestrating a host of major successful initiatives as its law school dean in a challenging legal education market (e.g. new building, 40% increase in new students, etc.), UA asked me in 2016 to serve as its Interim President. Three months later, UA appointed me as president through mid-2019. Several months ago, it extended my appointment until 2023. It would be an honor to remain at UA as I thoroughly enjoy the university community and students. Also, I appreciate the chance to lead and transform a world-class comprehensive university that is again on an upward trajectory. Notwithstanding, our family has always planned on returning to our Orlando roots. I am excited about the prospect of leading UCF to even greater heights on a state, national, and international scale.

The UA family has embraced my personalized approach, energy, new ideas, and entrepreneurial nature with open arms. Among other things, donations and relationships with industry have increased significantly during my tenure (including a 57% increase in funds raised and 47% uptick in first-time donors this year alone). I have also spearheaded new approaches, creative programs, and new relationships that have generated national attention and much excitement among current and prospective students. Among other things, this includes a new esports program, a new international center, new clinical programs, major enhancements to our Division-I athletic programs (e.g. restoration of men’s baseball and addition of women’s lacrosse in an innovative manner that will generate positive revenue), innovative scholarship program, and a Five-Star Friday initiative (eliminating most Friday classes to facilitate a conflict-free zone for skills development and student retention efforts). UA has benefited from my integrity, visionary approach, interpersonal skills, and open communication style. Also, my tireless commitment to supporting excellence, quality teaching, service, and cutting-edge academic research have benefitted UA students, faculty, and the university alike. Similarly, I am confident that UCF would benefit greatly from my skills, abilities, creativity, and dynamism.
As UCF seeks its next president, I am confident that I would be an ideal fit and excellent champion of the University. My current and previous institutions have appreciated my marketing abilities, branding acumen, media engagement, and advocacy on behalf of the university and its students. UCF and its students would benefit from leadership abilities. Believing that servant leadership helps facilitate student success and creates lifelong relationships that benefit the institution, I am a disciple of fostering a culture of student engagement. In fact, I would like to direct the Committee’s attention to my leadership style and student-centric approach at UA. My efforts to engage with both current and prospective students are well-known. To enhance the student experience and create a smaller-college feeling within a large university, I not only regularly share my personal contact information with students and help students accordingly, but I also engage with them on various fronts. This includes activities ranging from leading study abroad trips to guest lectures to regularly eating in the Student Union to often attending student events, challenging students in basketball shooting contests or bowling competitions, participating in intramural sports, joining in service events, helping students move into the residence halls, calling student Bingo nights, and even performing with our steel drum band just to mention a few. You can catch a small glimpse of my engagement at http://uakron.edu/president/. With my appointment, UCF students would benefit from the same level of servant leadership and engagement.

In leading my current and previous institutions to new heights, I have relied on my transparent style, ability to listen, skill for crafting creative solutions, and global perspective. These things combined with my ability to effectively collaborate with stakeholders have enabled me to tackle complex issues and effectuate positive change. They have also facilitated substantial financial progress and strategic resource allocation. At UA, for example, I have demonstrated a keen ability to maximize university resources, streamline administration without sacrificing service, and raise funds even in the most difficult of circumstances. With respect to students, I have spearheaded imaginative approaches to access and affordability (e.g. guaranteed scholarship system with automatic upgrades, tuition guarantee, new non-resident tuition pricing structure, and new student scholarship campaign that applies funds the semester after the donation) as well as the application of online technologies to (cross-border courses). Drawing on my background, I welcome the opportunity to help UCF reach new heights in academics, research, community engagement, global impact, and athletics while tackling the challenges associated with student growth (e.g. space issues, class size, and parking), limits on public funding as well as the need for UCF to continue satisfying its unique mission, providing accessibility to higher education, developing more town-to-gown relationships, growing strategically, and acquiring additional resources (e.g. salaries, research funding, scholarships, etc.).

My extensive experience in various roles has also taught me to focus on relationships. In academia, I am dedicated to directing, supporting, and building strong relationships with faculty and staff while focusing on fostering an environment conducive to communication, personal growth, intellectual inquiry, learning, and respect. My personalized approach and style have also enabled me to quickly forge strong connections with other university stakeholders as well as build bridges with local high schools, community partners, industry, governmental officials, and other universities. Cultivating these important relationships has been invaluable. It is also very important that the university community has an inclusive, diverse, and collaborative environment that optimizes the abilities of each individual. Having spent over 15 years of my life overseas and nearly three decades in an interracial marriage, the importance of inclusion and cross-cultural understanding have been highlighted throughout my life. It is my goal to help others gain a similar respect and understanding. Along these lines, my global engagement and experience in Asia and the Pacific over the past 30 years enable me to personally impart a rich international perspective and help facilitate new cross-border educational, research, and practical opportunities at home and abroad for students and faculty. My ability to recruit international students and successfully develop cross-border relationships would further strengthen UCF’s impact too.

Through my various endeavors, I have demonstrated that I have the ability, judgment, and energy necessary to successfully serve as the next President of UCF and build upon its strong foundation. I look forward discussing this opportunity.

Best regards,

Matthew J. Wilson