

February 24, 2025

Dr. Goodrich and Search Committee Members  
University of Florida  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences  
Gainesville, FL 32611

Dear Dr. Goodrich and Search Committee Members:

I am writing to express my enthusiastic interest in the position of Chair of the Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences (FYCS) within the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) at the University of Florida (UF). After thoughtful consideration and at the request of several FYCS faculty, staff, and students, I am excited to apply for this position. During my 27 years of experience in higher education at land-grant universities, I have held a wide range of roles, from entry-level to senior staff positions as well as faculty positions including adjunct faculty, tenure-track assistant professor, and tenured associate professor, with my packet for promotion to full professor currently under review. As a faculty member in this department, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the profound impact our work has, and I am eager to contribute my leadership experience and vision to further enhance the department's success.

My experiences demonstrate proven strategic planning and organizational skills, along with a strong track record of collaboration, effective oral and written communication, and consistent success in securing external funding. Furthermore, my background as both staff and faculty, coupled with my formal education, uniquely qualifies me for this role. I hold a doctoral degree in family studies and a master's degree in business administration. I am a Certified Family Life Educator, an Accredited Financial Counselor, and a Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) Practitioner.

I bring a comprehensive background in higher education administration and leadership, with extensive experience as Assistant Dean for Finance and Center Administration in the College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky (UK), a land-grant institution. My experience there includes progressive roles in managing both on-campus undergraduate and graduate academic programs, as well as overseeing distance learning and three off-campus graduate programs across the state of Kentucky. I was responsible for the financial administration of approximately \$20 million per fiscal year, human resource management, accreditation, faculty effort reporting, and strategic planning, as well as assisting with private fundraising. Additionally, I provided administrative oversight for two off-campus research centers and an institute. I also successfully obtained, led and managed significant amounts of external funding while at the UK (over \$3.6 million as Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator).

I have had the privilege of serving the University of Florida in the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences for 14 years. Throughout my time at UF, I have been actively engaged in teaching, research, and Extension, which have deepened my commitment to both the field and the department. I was hired at UF as a tenure-track assistant professor in 2011, received tenure and was promoted to associate professor in 2017, and in 2024, I successfully navigated the first round of the post tenure review, earning an "exceeds expectations" rating. As previously mentioned, my packet for promotion to full professor is currently under review.

As a faculty member in FYCS, I enjoy collaborating with colleagues on interdisciplinary initiatives that address contemporary challenges facing families and communities. I mentor both undergraduate and graduate students, which has reinforced my belief in the importance of a nurturing, intellectually stimulating environment for both students and faculty. I teach at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including in-person and online courses, as well as large enrollment courses. I have served as the Program Director for the online professional development personal and family financial planning program, a Certified Financial Planner Board registered program in FYCS, since 2015. Over the years, I have served on most of the departmental committees as well as the IFAS Shared Service Governance Committee (2012-2022), the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Curriculum Committee (2019-2021), and the UF General Education Committee (2019-current). From 2019-2022, I served as a UF Faculty Senator. In 2020, I received the university wide superior accomplishment award for community service for my outreach efforts in foster care as well as financial literacy. I lead interdisciplinary research teams that have helped to shape child welfare policy in Florida. I am successful in obtaining external funding, with more than \$4.7 million awarded as Principal Investigator from federal and state funders such as USDA NIFA, CDC National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the state of Florida via the Florida Institute for Child Welfare since my promotion in 2017. I have also contributed to the profession in leadership roles, including serving as the Executive Director of the Family and Economic Resource Management Association (2016-2023) and as Associate Editor of two academic journals (*Journal of Financial Therapy* 2014-2018 and *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 2019-2023).

**Administrative and Management Philosophy.** As a candidate for Chair of the Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences, my philosophy is centered on collaboration, transparency, and a commitment to fostering a supportive environment. I believe that fostering a strong sense of community within the department is essential for both individual and collective success. I am committed to having an environment where staff and faculty feel valued and supported in their work. Leading an academic department requires balancing academic excellence with faculty, staff, and student development while aligning with the broader missions of IFAS and the university and addressing the needs of Floridians through Extension. My approach is built upon the following guiding principles:

- **Collaborative Leadership & Positive Departmental Culture:** As Chair, I will empower faculty, staff, and students by fostering open communication, transparency, and shared decision-making. I view my role as a facilitator who ensures all voices are heard and valued. The success of the department depends on strong relationships within the academic community, with students at the core. I am committed to creating an environment where faculty and staff feel supported and recognized, while students are encouraged to excel academically and personally. By listening intentionally and making informed decisions, I will foster mutual respect and open dialogue, strengthening our community and enhancing our academic, research, and Extension programs. A key example of my collaborative leadership is the development of a new Extension program area in trauma-informed care. Additionally, I deeply value the insights and expertise of lived experience experts, as demonstrated in my work on the Florida Youth Experiences Study (FL YES)—a longitudinal study designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by youth aging out of foster care in Florida.
- **Commitment to Faculty and Staff Development & Mentorship:** The success of both faculty and staff are essential to the department's success. I will prioritize professional development

for faculty and staff, supporting their growth in research, teaching, Extension, and administrative roles at all career stages. I will ensure mentorship structures are in place to help them achieve their goals, overcome challenges, and grow as leaders, fostering a culture of continuous learning and support across the department. In my current role, I have actively invested in the professional development of colleagues by facilitating opportunities such as the TBRI Practitioner certification for four Extension faculty members, including providing funding and supporting their application processes. Additionally, I have chaired peer review committees, further contributing to the development and evaluation of my colleagues' work.

- **Commitment to Student Success and Engagement:** At the heart of my philosophy is a deep, unwavering commitment to the success and well-being of our students. I will work to ensure that our department provides a robust, supportive academic experience for students, both in the classroom and beyond. This includes building meaningful relationships and providing mentorship and resources to help both undergraduate and graduate students succeed academically and professionally. Years ago, I proposed the establishment of having undergraduate teaching assistants within the department, an initiative that has since flourished. I have created numerous opportunities for students to engage in research collaborations, attend and present at conferences, and gain professional recognition. I have also provided funding and supported applications for graduate students to complete the TBRI Practitioner certification and the Accredited Financial Counselor certification. Additionally, I created the Trauma and Resilience Research and Education (TRRE) Lab, where I have mentored many undergraduate and graduate students, including those involved in the UF Active Learning Program as student interns.
- **Accountability and Continuous Improvement:** I will uphold the highest standards of accountability, both in terms of my leadership and in the department's activities. I believe in continuously assessing the effectiveness of our programs, processes, and initiatives, and in being open to constructive feedback from all stakeholders. This reflective approach will allow us to identify areas for improvement and innovation, ensuring that we are constantly striving to meet the needs of our students, staff, faculty, and the broader community.

**Strategy for Building and Sustaining the Department.** I am committed to advancing both the undergraduate and graduate academic programs, integrating innovative approaches into curriculum design and delivery, and expanding research initiatives to keep the department at the forefront of scholarship. My strategy focuses on enhancing academic offerings while fostering an environment that encourages collaboration, creativity, and academic rigor.

To strengthen the department, I will prioritize collaboration both within the department and with external partners. I have a proven track record of building strong relationships with key organizations, including nonprofit groups such as the Selfless Love Foundation and The Pearl Project, government agencies like the Florida Department of Children and Families, and the Florida Institute for Child Welfare, a legislatively mandated and funded entity, as well as industry partners. These relationships have created valuable opportunities for our students, including practicum and job placements, while also enhancing research collaborations. My work with external stakeholders has expanded students' access to real-world data and collaborative research projects, enriching their educational experience.

I will also focus on strengthening student recruitment and retention for both traditional and non-traditional students including distance learners, while also preparing them for successful careers. I

will work closely with the academic advisors and faculty to develop targeted outreach initiatives and recruitment strategies. I previously recommended that the department exhibit at the Florida Department of Children and Families Summit to recruit students for our online master's program. Additionally, I have successfully recruited and retained students for the FYCS online professional development program in personal and family financial planning. By revising the undergraduate personal finance course and transitioning it to an online format, I increased enrollment from about 80 to 510 students annually, which led to a growth in generated credit hours from about 240 to 1,530.

Additionally, I will focus on securing external funding to support the department's growth. I have actively pursued various grant opportunities, successfully securing funding to support my own research while also advancing student initiatives. In my previous role, I worked closely with faculty and administrators to secure funding from private donors and foundations. These efforts enabled the college to broaden its research initiatives and provide students with increased resources, opportunities, and hands-on experiences. I also have experience in private fundraising, having previously assisted a center with fundraising efforts. In this role, I oversaw multiple successful fundraising events, which helped secure crucial private funding for the center's initiatives and programs. This experience strengthened my ability to build relationships with donors and plan effective fundraising strategies.

Lastly, I will advocate for institutional support. By building a case for investment in key areas—such as expanding the department's research capabilities, improving student services, and increasing staff and faculty development opportunities—I will work to secure the resources needed to pursue the department's long-term goals and ensure continued growth. I have experience advocating for internal funding, including writing and presenting proposals to secure financial support for various initiatives. My approach will be centered on aligning departmental needs with IFAS and university priorities and maintaining a strong presence within the larger academic and professional community. Additionally, I also have experience in negotiating budget reductions and adapting to the ever-changing landscape of higher education, ensuring departmental priorities are met within financial constraints.

The Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences is in a strong position to build on its existing successes and continue to make a significant impact in both academic and community contexts. I am confident that, with my experience and vision, I can contribute to the department's continued success and help shape its future direction. I believe my extensive understanding of the department's strengths and opportunities uniquely positions me to lead this department into its next phase of growth and excellence.

Thank you for considering my application for the Chair position. I look forward to the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications and how I can contribute to the continued success of the department.

Sincerely,

*Martie Gillen*

Martie Gillen, PhD, MBA, CFLE, AFC®

Associate Professor and State Extension Specialist