

FAMU President Application for Florida A&M University - President

Donald E. Palm



CURRENT POSITION

culture of excellence in student

Ability

Source: Portal

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Supplemental Questions

Your current title and institution

Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Office - Florida A&M University

What is your preferred email address and cell phone number?



In a few sentences, share why this opportunity is of particular interest to you.

Since its founding in 1887, FAMU has been a beacon of academic excellence, innovation, and social mobility, transforming the lives of students who graduate as leaders who shape industries, communities, and the world. As the nation's top-ranked public Historically Black College and University (HBCU), FAMU has cultivated a legacy of producing trailblazers in science, business, law, education, and the arts—they are leaders who embody resilience, intellect, and an unwavering commitment to service. With a deep appreciation for FAMU's rich history and an unrelenting focus on the future, I am ready to lead this university with purpose, passion, and an unshakable belief in its limitless potential. My academic journey and professional experiences have uniquely prepared me for this opportunity, deepening my appreciation for the transformative power of education. As a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I began my academic

pursuits at Lincoln University (PA), where I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Chemistry. Building on this foundation, I earned a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Pharmacology from Pennsylvania State University's Hershey Medical School. To further enhance my expertise in research excellence, I completed a respected postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Neurosurgery at Brown University/Rhode Island Hospital. Beyond my academic and research endeavors, I continued to enhance my leadership skills. I have trained with several prestigious programs, including the American Council on Education (ACE) Fellows Program and the Management Development Program (MDP) at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. These experiences, coupled with a distinguished 30-year career as an administrator and faculty member, have equipped me with the vision, leadership, and dedication needed to serve as the next President of FAMU.

Are you presently employed? If not, please explain briefly.

Yes

To whom do you currently report?

President of the University

If you hold an academic position, indicate your current rank

Full Professor

Are you tenured?

Yes

What are your salary expectations for this position?

Negotiable

What is your current salary?

No response.

Briefly describe the circumstances regarding your past three changes of employment?

The circumstances surrounding my previous three changes in employment have been both progressive and promotional in nature. In 1995, following the completion of my Post-Doctoral Fellowship training in the Department of Neurosurgery at Brown University/Rhode Island Hospital, I was recruited and subsequently accepted a faculty position at Florida A&M University within the College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. In 2016, after an impactful and productive tenure as a faculty member and administrator, I accepted a position at Virginia State University, serving as the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. In 2023, I returned to Florida A&M University, assuming the role of Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer.

Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?

Yes

Will you now (or in the future) require sponsorship for employment visa status, e.e., H-1B visa?

No

How did you become aware of this opportunity?

Website

Leadership, Vision, and Approach

Can you describe your vision for leading a higher education institution in the modern era, and how would you adapt your leadership style to meet the evolving needs of students, faculty, and the broader academic community?

As the next President of At Florida A&M University, my vision is that we will be driven by a relentless pursuit of excellence, innovation, and impact. As the nation's premier public HBCU, we will set the standard for 21st-century higher education—where academic brilliance, groundbreaking research, and student success converge to transform lives and communities. We will boldly lead in areas of STEM innovation, entrepreneurship, and social mobility, ensuring that every student is equipped to compete globally and lead fearlessly. By embracing cutting-edge technologies, fostering cross-disciplinary collaborations, and expanding strategic partnerships, we will elevate FAMU to new heights—a top-tier research powerhouse, an incubator of exceptional talent, and a catalyst for innovation. With an unwavering commitment to excellence, access and affordability, we will create an ecosystem where students thrive academically, graduate on time, and enter the workforce as trailblazers and change-makers. Our faculty will be empowered to push the boundaries of discovery, and our alumni network will serve as a testament to FAMU's enduring legacy of leadership and innovation. Together, we will redefine the future of higher education—one that is bold, visionary, and unapologetically FAMU.

Strategic Planning and Innovation

How would you approach strategic planning to ensure the university remains competitive and innovative in offering education that meets the future needs of the workforce and society?

At both Florida A&M University (FAMU) and Virginia State University (VSU), I have leveraged strategic planning as a catalyst for transformation and intentional success. I have led game-changing initiatives that have redefined student success, elevated national rankings, secured historic funding, and cultivated a culture of innovation and accountability. By prioritizing academic innovation, strategic faculty investment, and student-centered success initiatives, I am committed to ensuring that our university stands at the forefront of higher education—competitive, forward-thinking, and deeply aligned with the evolving needs of the workforce and society. At FAMU, I oversee the execution of our Boldly Striking 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, which has been instrumental in FAMU's success. We have achieved record-setting gains in student success metrics, with the four-year graduation rate increasing by six percentage points (from 35% to

41%) and retention rates reaching an unprecedented 90%. Through targeted interventions such as the "Finish in Four" campaign, Living Learning Communities, and enhanced first-year advising programs, we have strengthened academic persistence and positioned students for long-term success. These efforts have contributed to FAMU's rise in the U.S. News & World Report rankings, climbing 18 spots to #152 among National Universities, securing a Top 100 Public University ranking #81, and maintaining its distinction as the #1 Public Historically Black College and University for six consecutive years. As the chief architect behind VSU's five-year strategic plan "Preeminence with Purpose" Strategic Plan I led efforts to record Capital and Operational funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Sponsored programs research expenditures doubled, and the academic inventory grew with the development of eight new innovative academic degree programs, six fully online programs, and the establishment of 10 new institutes and centers.

Academic Excellence and Program Development

How would you ensure the maintenance and enhancement of academic excellence within the university, and what strategies would you implement to develop or expand academic programs in response to emerging trends and opportunities?

Throughout my tenure at Florida A&M University (FAMU) and Virginia State University (VSU), I have been committed to academic excellence, ensuring that programs remain innovative, competitive, and aligned with both accreditation standards and workforce demands. My leadership has been instrumental in the expansion of academic offerings, the successful reaccreditation of numerous programs, and the advancement of research initiatives that position both institutions as leaders in higher education. At FAMU, I have provided executive oversight in the development of new academic programs aligned with workforce demands, such as Aerospace Engineering (M.S. & Ph.D.), Engineering Data Analytics, and Cyber Security for Engineering. Similarly, at VSU, I led the launch of innovative programs, such as an MBA, M.S. in Data Analytics, and Mechanical Engineering, ensuring graduates met the needs of evolving industries. Under my leadership, online education flourished, with VSU establishing its first fully online programs. I also prioritized experiential learning by developing living-learning communities and career readiness initiatives, contributing to a notable 8% increase in the six-year graduation rate. To ensure that academic programs remain innovative, relevant, and responsive to emerging trends, I will continue to prioritize market-driven program development by aligning offerings with workforce demands through labor market analytics and industry partnerships. I will continue to champion interdisciplinary curriculum design that integrates technology and data-driven decision-making, ensuring students are prepared for evolving career landscapes. Enhancing experiential learning through internships and corporate partnerships will further bridge academia and industry, while a data-driven approach to program assessment will ensure continuous improvement and long-term sustainability.

Fundraising and Financial Acumen

Describe your experience with fundraising and obtaining funds for an institution. How have you successfully engaged alumni, donors, and external partners to secure financial support, and what strategies would you employ to enhance the university's financial health and sustainability?

Across both institutions, I have strategically leveraged fundraising and government relations to secure vital resources, foster corporate and legislative partnerships, and advance institutional missions. These efforts have directly contributed to student success, faculty development, and the long-term financial sustainability of these universities. As Interim Vice President for Advancement and Executive Director of the FAMU Foundation, I managed a \$4.7 million dollar budget and spearheaded efforts that generated \$12.6 million, with \$11.7 million in new cash contributions. I cultivated relationships with corporate and philanthropic partners, facilitating major gifts such as a \$1.2 million Lilly Rattler Scholars Program and a \$1 million health career initiative funded by the Lilly Foundation. I also engaged members of the FAMU Industry Cluster, securing investments from companies like JPMorgan Chase, Chevron, and Wells Fargo to support student career readiness, faculty research, and program development. At VSU, I managed a \$140 million dollar budget and successfully secured record-breaking state funding, including \$245 million in capital and \$48 million in operational funds through Virginia's state funding process. I also played a key role in major state-funded initiatives, such as the \$7.3 million Tech Talent Pipeline Investment and a \$5.3 million University Principal Preparation Initiative. My ability to align institutional goals with corporate and government funding priorities has been instrumental in advancing the mission of both universities. I am dedicated to enhancing FAMU's financial health and long-term sustainability by ensuring the efficient allocation of resources. Through FAMU's Resource Optimization Initiative, I am currently leading the effort to eliminate inefficiencies, maximize operational effectiveness, and reinvest savings into key university priorities such as student success, faculty support, and infrastructure enhancements.

Community and External Relationships

How have you previously worked with external community stakeholders, including local government, businesses, and nonprofit organizations, to enhance the reputation and contribution of a higher education institution within its local community and beyond?

I am committed to creating transformative initiatives that serve our community while preparing the next generation of professionals. My vision has been rooted in equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in research, influence public policy, and transform leaders to address issues that impact our community. As the Executive Vice President and Provost at Virginia State University (VSU), I spearheaded the establishment of the Virginia State University Public Health Institute (VSUPHI) to address health disparities in underserved communities. Our mission focused on serving marginalized populations, lower-income individuals, and rural communities, by tackling factors such as access to care, quality of care, availability of healthy foods, environmental quality, community safety, education, and economic insecurity. A key

component of this initiative was establishing strategic partnerships that enhanced outreach and service. Through collaborations with organizations like Central State Hospital, the Department of Health, Local Churches and the VSU Mobile Health Units, we extended our impact to local and regional communities, providing essential health services where they were needed most. These partnerships not only strengthen our program but also create real-world learning opportunities for our students. To ensure sustainability and growth, I actively pursued increased funding in public health and related fields, fostering an environment that supported research, scholarships, and program expansion. By fostering strong partnerships, securing resources, and creating opportunities for professional growth, VSU served as a catalyst for positive change in both the local and global communities.