# State University System
# Education and General
# Performance Funds from FY 2020-2021
# University of Distinction Reporting Template
# Quarter 3 Update
# (July 1, 2020-March 31, 2021)

(Page Limit: 10)

| | |
|---|---|
| **University:** | **Florida Gulf Coast University** |
| **Amount Allocated:** | **$2,820,000** |
| **Amount Held Back:** | **$180,000** |

In describing the use of the 2020-2021 FY Pillars of Excellence funds allocated to your university, this form consists of the following two parts:

I. *Using the table below, please list the specific initiative(s), the current amount spent on each initiative, and current progress on each initiative. Please be as specific as possible when reporting progress on initiatives (e.g., number of students receiving scholarships or stipends, number of courses redesigned, etc.). Where possible, provide a detailed narrative on current progress compared to goals.*

**Table 1**

| **University Initiative** | **Spending** as of March 31, 2021 | **Progress on Initiative** as of March 31, 2021 |
|---|---|---|
| The Water School: Increased research and scholarship relevant to character, challenges and opportunities in Southwest Florida | $1,093,475 | Funds were used to enhance research capacity and to support undergraduate and graduate student research. |

II. *Using the table below, please provide additional details on the institution's current efforts to hire faculty and staff. Please note the amount of the FTE funded in each section to date, the amount of FTE yet to be funded, and the institution's timeline for hiring the remaining FTE (e.g., 20 FTE funded out of expected 100 FTE, or 20% for FY 2020-21). Where possible, provide a detailed narrative on current progress compared to goals.*

**Table 2**

| **University Hires** | **Spending** as of March 31, 2021 | **Progress on Hiring Goals** as of March 31, 2021 | **Expected Hiring Target for Quarter 4** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hired 0 out of 13 Faculty FTE | $0 | Faculty searches underway for 3 additional FTE. Hired 0 out of 13 Faculty FTE (0%). | Expected to make letters of offer for 3 FTE and begin advertising for an additional FTE in Q4. Official start date: August 7, 2021 |
| Hired 1.375 out of 5 Staff FTE | $19,037 | Hired Research Lab Coordinator I and part-time Dive Safety Officer (27.5%) | No additional staff hiring until 1st Quarter of 2021–2022 |

III. *Please provide a detailed narrative of each university initiative listed in Tables 1 & 2– including the anticipated return on investment, progress on the first-year metric or other related metrics, and plans for the third quarter.*

**The Water School – Increased Research and Scholarship:** The Water School at Florida Gulf Coast University was established to address water issues in Southwest Florida by bringing together faculty from across the university, forging partnerships with local communities, working with local organizations involved in environmental education and outreach, collaborating with research institutions across the state, and building research capacity to tackle these issues. A major component of this initiative is to educate and train the next generation of leaders responsible for addressing the region's environmental issues, especially those related to water. Core academic programs include undergraduate degrees in Environmental Geology, Environmental Studies, and Marine Science, and graduate degrees in Environmental Science and Environmental Studies. In addition to the core faculty supporting these STEM programs, affiliate Water School faculty have been appointed from across the university, representing four colleges and thirteen other departments. The expenditures listed through the third quarter are representative of general operations of The Water School, in conjunction with key capital expenditures

to build research capacity, as well as support for student research. As the University moves forward, expenditures will increase as hiring of positions and growth of the operation commence. However, due to the pandemic the rate at which these expenditures occur may not be linear. It is the full intent of the university to mobilize funding in a manner that is conscious of the risks and restrictions posed by the pandemic while at the same time moving The Water School forward with the greatest possible haste.

FGCU will hire a significant number of faculty in support of its academic and research programs. Several of these positions will be interdisciplinary and will consist of joint appointments with other departments within the College of Arts and Sciences and with other colleges across campus. New faculty will broaden available course offerings for students and provide additional faculty mentors to supervise undergraduate research. Additional faculty will also loosen a major constraint to enrollment growth in the M.S. Environmental Science program—the availability of graduate advisors for students completing their thesis research. Instructors will also be hired to increase course offerings. This will enhance General Education capacity—potentially resulting in additional recruitment to STEM programs—and will make available release time for faculty who are active and productive in scholarship.

Significant resources will be allocated to enhance research capacity and productivity and to stimulate external grant funding. Research experience helps undergraduates hone their critical thinking and communication competencies, and trains them to develop specific skills needed to be successful in STEM careers or graduate school. Graduate-level research prepares students to enter the workforce at a more advanced level with concomitantly higher salaries. External funding provided through faculty research helps drive undergraduate and graduate research. By hiring research-active faculty, adding staff to support research and outreach, and increasing financial support for students, The Water School will be able to enhance research productivity in the areas of harmful algal blooms, coastal vulnerability/sea level rise, climate change/hurricanes, environmental education and communication, water quality and management, and ecological restoration.

Outreach and partnerships transform the research and scholarship conducted at The Water School and enhance its value by using it to inform K-12 education, translating the results for citizens, training decision makers, and providing actionable information for stakeholders and government agencies. The Water School is partnering with the school districts of Lee and Collier Counties and with local non-profit organizations to implement several programs focusing on environmental education and outreach. Through its Center for Environment and Society, The Water School is also identifying potential federal partners to support these programs through competitive grants. Outreach funding will also be used to support the work of the Southwest Florida Regional Resiliency Compact. This effort brings together representatives from three counties and

eleven municipalities to develop a regional plan for communities to adapt to climate change and increase coastal resilience.

a. **Progress on Initiative:** Due to the financial impacts of the pandemic and uncertainties regarding the potential for additional impacts, FGCU has been taking a judicious and very conservative approach in its stewardship of Universities of Distinction funds. Expenditures have been restricted primarily to the use of non-recurring funds during the first three quarters so as not to make long-term commitments until we see a clear way forward. We anticipate increasing spending in Quarter 4 as the full impacts of the pandemic on University funding are more clear. However, challenges surrounding the pandemic (i.e., delays in hiring, restrictions in travel, reduction in team size for laboratory and field work) remain.

Building research capacity. — As of March 31, 2021, $283,181 in capital expenditures have been used to acquire additional instrumentation and equipment in support of faculty and student research at The Water School. Primary purchases for Q1–Q3 include a boat to support research in coastal waters ($51,555); a LISST-HAB to measure/map cell size and concentration in harmful algal blooms ($53,145); a sonde for measuring water quality ($23,880); a quantitative PCR for measuring gene expression ($18,000); a solar-powered environmental data logger ($7,403); an Imaging FlowCytobot ($135,300) for identifying and quantifying phytoplankton (including harmful algal bloom species); and a high performance desktop computing system ($5,800).

Faculty/Staff hiring. — Faculty searches are ongoing for three new Water School positions: an Eminent Scholar in Marine Conservation Biology, an Assistant/Associate Professor in Land Use, and an Assistant Professor in Environmental Psychology, the latter representing a joint appointment between The Water School and the Department of Psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences. We anticipate that these new positions will total up to $353,060 in recurring funds. Although start dates for these positions will not be until August 7, 2021, some start-up costs (up to $230,000 non-recurring) will be expended during Quarter 4. As mentioned above, expenditures to date have been limited primarily to non-recurring uses due to budget uncertainties surrounding the pandemic. However, we hired one new staff position (see Table 2) during Quarter 3—a Research Laboratory Coordinator—to support harmful algal bloom research, and we hired a part-time Dive Safety Officer (see Table 2) to support underwater research and the training of students and faculty in scientific diving.

Student funding. — During the third quarter, Water School faculty were encouraged to submit proposals to create and support research opportunities for undergraduate students. Ten proposals (i.e., ten students) were selected for funding, with student stipends totaling $50,000 ($7,143 expended as of March 31, 2021). During the first three

quarters $69,423 has also been expended on graduate research assistantships (scholarships) and OPS student research assistantships (5 graduate students).

Outreach and Partnerships. — The Water School partnership with the School District of Lee County continued to grow during the third quarter. The second module of this year's Wetland Academy partnered nine teachers with FGCU researchers to learn about water quality and water sampling techniques in the field and then met for a day of lesson sharing and peer feedback at School District headquarters. Two of our faculty partnered with the School District and the Sanibel Sea School at the Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation (a local non-profit) to conduct a weeklong Spring Break Marine Science Camp. The School District provided daily transportation for the students from their schools to Sanibel Island and assisted with recruiting students from Title I schools.

The Water School and the FGCU Foundation have initiated discussions with Babcock Ranch—a sustainable community in Southwest Florida known as America's first solar powered town—on a proposed partnership for a residential environmental education and research center there. We have also partnered with Cemex Corporation, a leading vertically integrated heavy building materials company, to develop educational programming focused on a local Cemex mining operation that will soon be sunsetting and moving into the reclamation phase of the project. We continued planning and implementation of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/North American Association for Environmental Education grant-funded Watershed Education for Resilience in Southwest Florida (WATERS) project with Grace Place for Children and Families, and Boys and Girls Club of Collier County.

The Water School has been facilitating the planning and ratification of the Southwest Florida Regional Resiliency Compact—a coalition of county and municipal governments coming together "to collaboratively identify, prepare for, adapt to, and mitigate climate change impacts" (https://fl.audubon.org/faq/southwest-florida-regional-resiliency-compact). The compact has now been ratified by nearly all of the partner counties and municipalities, and we expect that by Quarter 4 The Water School will be assuming an additional leadership role in coordinating efforts to establish the initial organizational structure to implement the Compact. The Water School continues to partner with the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Commnity Foundation of Collier County, and the Southwest Florida Community Foundation to support Growing Climate Solutions, a grassroots regional climate initiative hosted by the Conservancy with the goal of bringing together local organizations, leaders and citizens to build climate awareness, protect natural assets and empower residents, businesses and civic institutions to support and engage in climate solutions.

b. **Return on Investment**: The increase in research expenditures to date for 2020–2021 reflects a 263% gain over the 2018–2019 baseline. This increase will provide additional research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students and should result in additional research productivity (e.g., peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations) in the years following. Increased research expenditures will also benefit Florida's economy through purchases made through local and state businesses and vendors.

**c. Progress on first-year metric:** Metric 4, which focuses on increasing research expenditures in support of water studies (see Table 3), has been attained. This metric was selected to document progress during year one of the initiative. Research expenditures for the third quarter represent an additional $1,143,119, for a combined total as of March 31, 2021 of $3,095,716. ***This represents a 263% increase over the baseline (see Table 3) and a 210% increase over the target ($1 mill) set for this year***.

d. **Plan for Fourth Quarter:** The three faculty searches should be completed in the fourth quarter, with letters of offer accepted. A fourth visiting scholar faculty position will be advertised in Quarter 4. All four positions will be for an official start date of August 7, 2021. Additional capital expenditures will be made to continue to build research capacity. The Water School hired an external higher education consultant who hosted focus groups for strategic planning in the third quarter. The findings from the focus groups will be shared in Quarter 4 with the Leadership Team for The Water School, and an ad-hoc committee will begin crafting the strategic plan for 2021–2026.

*IV. Please list all year-one metrics and provide any updates from the first quarter in Table 3.*

**Table 3**

| Year-One Metric | Status before July 1 | Progress on Metric as of December 31, 2020 |
|---|---|---|
| Metric 4: $1 million externally funded research expenditures | $853,504 (2018-2019 baseline) | $3,095,716 in research expenditures in support of water research for first three quarters combined |

*V. Please provide any updates or progress (if any) on any other metrics.*