

Jake Linford
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Loula Fuller and Dan Myers Professor
Florida State University College of Law
Tallahassee, Florida

May 7, 2026

VIA CANDIDATE PORTAL

Dr. Jeanette Taylor
Vice President for Faculty Development and Advancement
Florida State University

Dear Dr. Taylor,

I am pleased to apply for the position of Dean of the Florida State University (FSU) College of Law. As the current Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at FSU, I have been privileged to contribute to our institution's rise as a top-tier public law school. The College of Law's faculty, staff, students, and alumni are truly special, and I am enthusiastic about the opportunity to lead the school in its continued upward trajectory.

I am prepared to lead as a principal strategist and advocate, ensuring we continue to graduate thoughtful and prepared citizen leaders who thrive in a rapidly evolving legal landscape. Throughout my academic career, I have been committed to scholarship, teaching, and service. I am a successful and committed teacher. I have crafted a substantial body of scholarship in trademark and intellectual property law. I have also shouldered significant administrative responsibility at the College of Law and served as a dedicated community builder. I am eager to leverage my deep institutional knowledge and administrative expertise to shepherd the College through its next chapter.

The College of Law has blossomed under its two most recent, clearly exceptional Deans. Both embraced the value of rigorous scholarship as a tool to enhance student education to develop capable and successful future lawyers. Great scholars and teachers empower students by challenging their assumptions and teaching them to see and critique the strongest arguments on every side of an issue. I firmly believe that students are best served when their professors are both excellent communicators and leading scholars. Those students emerge qualified to serve their communities and meaningfully engage with the legal system in local, state, national, and international arenas.

I was fortunate to begin my academic career under the tutelage of Dean and Professor Emeritus Donald J. Weidner, who deserves significant credit for transforming the College of Law from a regional school of quality to a nationally renowned center of academic excellence. He recruited and retained excellent faculty who teach and research using various approaches, methodologies and perspectives, so that students would have the broadest range of mentors and exemplars to learn from. His Summer for Undergraduates program has brought nearly 2,000 curious students from all walks of life to the College of Law campus for a taste of law school. He built lasting relationships with the bench and bar, and inspired our alumni network to unheard of giving rates for a school of our size. From my first day on campus, Don encouraged me as a scholar, inspired me as a teacher, and provided opportunities for me to provide meaningful service to the College of Law.

I have worked more closely in leadership positions with our current Dean and Donald J. Weidner Chair, Erin O'Hara O'Connor. I currently serve as the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and previously served as the Associate Dean for Research, and Chair or Acting Chair of the Enrichment, Appointments, and Admissions Committees. The College of Law outcompetes schools with larger budgets and deeper endowments because Erin has guided smart, strategic investments in innovative degree programs, faculty retention, targeted scholarships, and student success initiatives. Chief among Erin's successes is the implementation of the online Juris Master (JM) program, which provides legal education to active professionals. That program continues to be a tremendous contributor to the College of Law's success. In my role as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, I have worked closely with Dean Manuel Utset on the JM program. As a faculty member, I have created course materials for and taught in the JM program. I am also a regular contributor to programming offered through the Stoops Center for Law and Business and the Institute of Law, Technology & Innovation. As Dean, I would continue to support the strategic growth of these programs.

The values reflected by the work of these Deans motivate my vision for the future success of the College of Law. Rather than boldly deviate from current successes, I believe the College of Law requires a coalition builder who can communicate effectively with colleagues and constituents from a variety of backgrounds, motivate and support independent initiative from staff and faculty, and gather and learn from reliable data to focus on the incremental improvements that will allow us to wisely direct crucial resources to their most effective use. My prior experience provides essential skills for success in those roles.

As Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, I orchestrate the day-to-day academic operations of the College, working collaboratively with leadership to achieve our shared mission. My experience aligns directly with the Dean's comprehensive responsibility for personnel and resource management. I have recruited and nurtured excellent faculty. I have served on and chaired our Appointments committee, recruiting fantastic cohorts of new colleagues. I have overseen tenure and promotion applications, advised on performance reviews, and counseled faculty on scholarship strategies. I am committed to recruiting and retaining the high-performing scholars who recently earned us a #6 national ranking for best professors.

I have championed initiatives that modernize our curriculum, including shepherding a new public interest certificate and pioneering an open-source Contracts casebook to enhance educational affordability. I would also work to continue to expand and improve the College of Law's emphasis on practical training using the classroom, clinics, and externships. In a job market where students must be prepared to hit the ground running right out of law school, I believe such training is vital and enhances student success.

As an intellectual property scholar, I am at the forefront of debates about the uses and abuses of generative artificial intelligence, including its effect on the legal profession, legal education, and intellectual property law. There is little doubt that education institutions are facing a potential seismic shift. I would bring my understanding of cutting-edge AI research to lead the College of Law as we plan for how best to utilize the enhancements offered by generative AI while avoiding the pitfalls that have plagued incautious adoption of these tools.

I have managed budgets for faculty activities, supervised the expenditure of faculty research and travel budgets, and consulted on overall budget development. I understand the need to align resource allocation with strategic priorities while managing market-driven financial pressures. More than ever before, a dean must generate revenue outside of JD tuition. The success of our JM and executive training programs has provided and should continue to provide Florida State with a significant amount of revenue that is used to support our JD program. I would work to build that success. I believe the College of Law must be agile and entrepreneurial in expanding programs that both fit the school's mission and provide financial support.

I am deeply committed to the data-informed efforts necessary to advance our national reputation. I consult with our Director of Bar Success about how to refine support systems including first year curriculum in preparation for the NextGen Bar exam. The College of Law has great success with bar passage and employment outcomes, but we cannot be satisfied until every student is as well-prepared for the bar as we can help them become. As a repeated member and former chair of the Admissions committee, I have significant insight on how to optimize recruitment of high-achieving student cohorts. As we continue to strengthen our cohort of incoming students, our efforts will pay dividends in bar passage and employment outcomes.

The Dean must serve as a chief external ambassador, and I am ready to deepen our relationships with alumni, the Florida Bar, the judiciary, and the state legislature. In my current role, I have the unique opportunity to forge relationships with alumni and other members of the bar as I recruit them and oversee their work as adjunct instructors at the College of Law. In addition, for the past ten years, I have served as the Academic Chair for the Florida Bar's Annual Intellectual Property Symposium. In this role, I have worked with business and IP leaders on the Florida Bar to plan, coordinate, and frequently deliver continuing education programming. I am eager to work with our advancement team to lead major fundraising initiatives that secure the resources necessary for our long-term institutional growth.

FSU College of Law is an institution that embraces intelligent risk-taking and entrepreneurial thinking. As a leader who values professionalism, excellence, and collaboration, I am prepared to navigate the “known waters” of legal education while confidently exploring “new seas” to ensure FSU remains at the forefront of innovation. While there is always a learning curve for a new dean, my familiarity with both Florida State in general and the workings of the law school and central administration will allow for a smooth transition with a comparatively short time needed to get the sense of the institution and its stakeholders.

The deanship at FSU Law is an incredibly appealing opportunity. It has been my good fortune to spend the past sixteen years here as a member of this academic community, and it would be my honor to share my enthusiasm for the College of Law and Florida State University with the various constituencies who are vital to help the school continue its successful trajectory.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.