

February 26, 2022

Dear Search Committee,

With this letter, I respectfully submit myself for consideration as the inaugural Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at Cleveland State University (CSU). In response to your advertisement, I am providing this cover letter and a *Curriculum Vita*. I am currently Dean of the College of Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (CSTEM) at Eastern Washington University (EWU). EWU is a mid-sized regional comprehensive university located in Cheney, WA, twenty miles southwest of Spokane.

The events of the last two years have shown us that universities can no longer function as havens of learning disconnected from the society around us. From COVID-19 to the murder of George Floyd and its aftermath, universities have had to engage in challenging and uncomfortable discussions about our mission and our role in the broader society. Cleveland State has an important role as an economic and cultural engine for the region as well as a critical driver of social justice. CSU brings people from all backgrounds together to see themselves as the scientific, cultural, economic, and social leaders of the future. I am excited by the opportunity to join an institution with such an important mission.

I am particularly excited by the opportunity to be the inaugural Dean of a newly created College of Arts & Sciences. Although I am formally trained in geophysics, I am also a strong advocate for the arts and humanities. I've played French Horn for almost 40 years and have a deep passion for the performing arts. The two years I spent as a postdoc in Paris, living and breathing the historical and artistic foundations of western culture in my daily living, remain a touchstone of my intellectual life. My professional dream has been to serve in a capacity where I can work across these interests. I also believe that the Arts & Sciences play a central role in any university. Humanity is increasingly facing complex, interconnected challenges that impact all aspects of our lives and society. From social justice to globalization to climate change, a technically-sound, equity-minded, liberal arts education has never been more important.

Champion the success of Cleveland State's diverse student population

Our nation's changing demographics provide an important context for the academy's role as an agent of social change. Countless studies and reports have documented the fact that we are approaching a pivotal point in the history of the United States. As we move from a traditionally male-dominated Eurocentric culture to a more ethnically diverse, non-gendered, and inclusive society, universities are once again proving to be a cauldron of change. In this landscape, it is important for the university, particularly the College of Arts & Sciences, to not just react to changes that are thrust upon it but to be a leading entity that refocuses conflict into a meaningful dialog for positive change.

It is often said that a diverse and inclusive faculty, staff, and student body brings benefits to all students, however we must not lose sight of the fact that the support of a diverse and inclusive university is at its core a matter of social justice. Although our society has made important strides to address the historic marginalization of the BIPOC community, Black, indigenous, Latinx, and many other communities still face significant systemic barriers to equity and inclusion. Universities are not immune to this problem and have a moral and ethical obligation to be leaders in the self-reflection and self-correction needed to bring about a truly just and inclusive society.

Furthermore, as the son of a non-traditional student and the first person in my family to attend a university straight out of high school, I have always felt empathy for the challenges faced by many first-generation students. The university can be a very intimidating place with its own arcane language and bewildering rules that form an unintentional barrier for students who do not have a strong support system. Just as with historically marginalized groups, the success of these students requires developing a sense of belonging.

I also strongly believe that student success is firmly grounded in a robust ecosystem of co-curricular experiences. The pandemic-enforced experience of higher-education-by-zoom has clearly and conclusively demonstrated that college is about more than just classes. The university experience encompasses the whole student, including co-

curricular learning and extra-curricular activities in addition to student-faculty scholarship and creative activities. When I think back on my own college experience, I know that I received an outstanding education by world-class faculty. But my *memories* are of student clubs and activities that happened outside the four walls of the classroom. My *experiences* as a student leader made me the person I am. There is abundant evidence that co-curricular activities such as student clubs and discipline-based organizations have a substantial impact on student success. This is even more effective and important when these activities include the opportunity to interact with and support a diverse student population.

The combined stresses of the COVID pandemic and the growing calls for social justice over the last two years have also clearly shown that life *outside* of school have a direct impact on students' ability to succeed *in* the classroom. This is something that has long been acknowledged, however most universities create an artificial barrier between the "purely academic" pursuits of the faculty and the social-emotional-career intersection that often falls under the auspices of student affairs. A defining characteristic of my time as a dean at both Cal State Fullerton and EWU has been my desire to bridge the artificial divide between academic and student affairs. I have partnered with the student affairs divisions at both institutions to establish "satellite" offices as "dashed reports" in my colleges. These professionals are welcomed into my team as equal partners supporting functions ranging from clubs to career counseling, transfer advising to graduation specialists.

As dean at EWU, I have supported a culture of inclusion throughout the college. Some of the programs I have supported include our "100 Women+ Strong" initiative, a mentoring program for women in Engineering and Computer Science. This initiative was recognized in September 2020 as one of the year's "Inspiring Programs in STEM" by *Insight into Diversity* magazine. I also believe that true cultural change requires grass-roots support from the faculty and students of the college; as a result, I have created a faculty "Dean's Fellow for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion." The goal of this position is to coordinate student activities (such as our "Women in Science at Eastern" club and 100 Women+ Strong), support initiatives to develop culturally responsive pedagogy, and serve as a college liaison to university-level initiatives. We have also started "book clubs" on topics such as anti-racism and sponsored college seminars on diversity and inclusion in STEM featuring nationally-recognized leaders in the field.

Recruit, develop and retain distinguished and diverse faculty, administrators and staff

It's crucial to recognize that our students are not the only learners in the university. I strongly support the continued personal and professional growth of all members of the campus community and take a personal interest in helping the individuals around me to advance their own professional goals. I'm a very collaborative leader who works best in a tight-knit team. As the leader of this team, I believe in setting an overall strategy and entrusting my colleagues to fulfill the goals we set together. I believe that letting my colleagues take leadership on our shared initiatives is the best way for them to grow as leaders and to successfully advance their own careers. Just as I take pride in the success of my former students, I am proud of my former colleagues and supervisees who are now serving as Directors, Associate Deans, Associate Vice Presidents, and Deans at other institutions.

Recruiting and retaining faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds requires an intentional and strategic focus on equity and inclusion. For example, I encourage search committees to intentionally design job postings such that the research preferences and teaching opportunities would encourage a more diverse applicant pool. When possible, I also supported departments to sponsor seminars from researchers at designated Minority-Serving Institutions (HSIs, HBCUs, etc.) in the year preceding an anticipated search, as a method of increasing awareness of the program and potential job openings. It is often underappreciated that a commitment to equity and inclusion among our faculty and staff requires a similar commitment to our students. I have overseen numerous externally funded programs designed to promote success of underserved student populations, including a Department of Education Title III HSI-STEM program at Cal State Fullerton called "Strengthening Transfer Education & Matriculation in STEM (STEM)²". I also conceived and oversaw the development and submission of another Title III HSI-STEM program at CSUF titled "Project RAISE" that was awarded to Cal State Fullerton's College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics shortly after I began my current position at EWU.

At EWU I have worked closely with industry leaders and state legislators to secure additional state investment in the faculty and staff of the college. Public universities in the state of Washington appeal directly to the state legislature to fund major projects. As Dean I work closely with our campus legislative liaison and university budget

team to draft proposals for legislative funding. We have been exceptionally successful with the initiatives I've spearheaded, including a \$1.6 million baseline allocation specifically for the college of STEM to build a Computer Engineering program. This allocation added baseline state funding for six new full-time faculty and two staff. In our current legislative session, I am spearheading an additional \$2.8 million request to expand faculty and staff lines for our cybersecurity program, including a plan to elevate our NSA Center for Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense to become an NSA Center for Academic Excellence in Cyber Operations. As I write this letter, our funding proposal is in the proposed budgets of the Governor, House, and Senate; we are awaiting the conclusion of the conference process to learn the final funding level.

Advance scholarship and research

Large public research universities like CSU face unique challenges in the landscape of higher education. Although our traditional focus has been and remains undergraduate education, research and creative activities are a core part of our mission. This creates an inevitable tension as faculty find their activities measured both internally and externally against the scholarship produced by our colleagues in so-called R1 schools. However, I believe this misses the greatest strength of an institution like CSU. Unlike our peers at R1 schools who focus almost exclusively on the accomplishments of faculty and a select group of PhD-students and postdocs, the strength of a school like CSU is the focus on student-centered scholarship and creative activities.

Quality student-centered teaching remains the central mission of a university, however faculty are more than just teachers; they play a crucial role in the creation, preservation, and dissemination of the knowledge and culture that defines our society. Furthermore, excellent student outcomes are necessary but not sufficient to distinguish universities in the noisy marketplace of ideas developing around higher education.

Cutting-edge scholarship requires cutting-edge facilities. Much of my work at EWU has been focused on aggressively improving and expanding the physical infrastructure of the college. Most significantly, under my leadership the college has been awarded over \$177 million in legislative funding to expand and improve our science teaching and research facilities. This support is part of an integrated strategy to provide an entirely new science laboratory teaching facility (funded in 2016 and completed in 2020), while converting the existing 50-year-old science building from an obsolete teaching building to a modern lab and office building focused on student-faculty research (funded in 2020 with construction beginning in 2021 and to be completed in 2025). These new state of the art research facilities will transform the ability of faculty to conduct world-class research with their students.

Identify new revenue streams through private philanthropy and other sources

To achieve ambitious growth plans, a modern university must pay particular attention to private fundraising. The Dean must not only understand and manage the core academic functions of the college, they must be able to work seamlessly with University Advancement to translate initiatives across the campus into opportunities for private fundraising. At EWU, my efforts in philanthropy have primarily been focused on building a college-level infrastructure to support philanthropic activities. EWU is currently in the silent phase of the university's first-ever capital campaign. When the campaign was being developed, our then-President had articulated a vision for EWU to become the leading comprehensive university in Washington for STEM education and workforce development. As such, I have played a central role in formulating the campaign goals and in building the groundwork for the major gifts that will define success in the campaign. As part of my capacity-building work I have developed an integrated development plan (the first in the college's history). I have also spent considerable effort reforming the existing "Dean's Advisory Board." CSTEM is fortunate to have strong support among industry leaders in the Spokane region, many of whom sat on the Dean's Advisory Board when I arrived. This group has been invaluable connecting students with internships and career opportunities and have been generous in working with students both in and out of the classroom. They are eager to support or philanthropic goals and have developed into some of the most passionate advocates for the college and university.

My philanthropic successes at EWU have their foundations in the years that I was engaged in developing and supporting fundraising activities at CSUF. I served for several years as the faculty representative to the Cal State Fullerton Philanthropic Foundation Board of Governors. While still a faculty member I was asked by Fullerton's Advancement group on multiple occasions to solicit five- and six-figure gifts from our Board members (I was

successful each time). The experience and relationships with major donors that I gained as a member of CSUF's Philanthropic Foundation Board was invaluable in my position as interim dean at CSUF, giving me the knowledge and confidence to (successfully) solicit a seven-figure gift during my first year in that position. In the two years that I served as Interim Dean at CSUF, I created an integrated development plan that helped the college raise over \$7.7 million. This far exceeded the \$300,000/year that the college had historically raised philanthropically.

I have also been a key part of EWU's team for the new "Catalyst Building" project, a public-private partnership to build a new zero-energy mixed-use academic and industry research building in downtown Spokane housing the Electrical Engineering, Computer Science, Computer Engineering, and Design programs from my college (<https://www.ewu.edu/give/funds/catalyst/>). This project was made possible by a \$5 million gift that I am proud to have helped secure. Although the Catalyst Building was originally conceived as an exclusively STEM building, we have capitalized on the community's excitement and support for this initiative to include programs ranging from business to health science to creative writing in the project. It has been a singular honor and challenge to lead a project of such importance that will literally transform the face of the university and region for decades to come.

Strengthen and promote collaborations both externally and across the University

I believe that a school like CSU has enormous strength as a social, economic, creative, and intellectual resource for the region. As Dean, I would put particular emphasis on the development of strong strategic relationships with academic, cultural, and business partners. Fundraising and community engagement are my favorite "jobs" as an academic leader. I love the opportunity to learn more about the diversity of work being done across the institution while building relationships with people who channel their passion into the success of our students and faculty.

I have strongly emphasized building and maintaining external partnerships throughout my career. While I was a faculty member and interim dean at CSUF, some of these activities included service on the Board of Directors of the Southern California Earthquake Center and active participation in Red Cross Disaster Preparedness Academies in California at both the county and state level. In the Spokane region, I represent EWU in numerous regional organizations, including leadership roles in the Spokane STEM Network, Washington MESA, and the Board of Directors of MOBIUS Spokane (the regional science center). I'm also very involved in committees for Greater Spokane Inc., the primary business development organization for the Spokane region and much of eastern Washington. The workforce development team at Greater Spokane Inc routinely invites me to meet with business leaders whom the city is recruiting to relocate to the region. In recognition of my role as a community leader in higher education and the STEM fields, I was invited to be an "Honorary Commander" for the 141st Air National Guard Refueling Wing at the nearby Fairchild Air Force Base.

I am excited by the opportunity to assume the position of Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at Cleveland State University. Over the last six years, the challenges at EWU have forced me to turn much of my attention to resource management and infrastructure improvements. I am proud of the accomplishments my team has made, and value the skills that I have honed. However, my passion lies in the academic and cultural mission of the university. As we meet the challenges of the post-pandemic world, I look forward to applying my experience to build a tradition of inclusive academic excellence in the new College of Arts & Sciences. CSU is a dynamic, growing institution whose focus on student-faculty research perfectly matches my own passion. I hope that you will share my enthusiasm, and that we can work together to make the university, state, and wider society a better place.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any additional information, including the names of additional references. I look forward to working with you as the inaugural Dean of Arts & Sciences at Cleveland State University.

Sincerely,



Dean, College of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
Professor of Geology
Eastern Washington University