



8000 UTOPIA PARKWAY, QUEENS, NY 11439

March 7, 2022

Dear Search Committee,

I am delighted to be nominated to apply for the position of Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Cleveland State University. The recent restructuring of the university opens exciting possibilities to grow the strengths of individual departments and the college as a whole. I have been employed at two different institutions that are large private universities of approximately the same size as Cleveland State, and they are both urban universities with unionized faculty. Long Island University in Brooklyn and St. John's University in Queens likely have a similar student body to that of Cleveland State University. I am currently the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies for the St. John's College of Arts and Sciences at St. John's University. I believe that my skill set would be an appropriate match to the university's new direction.

Leadership and Vision: I have participated in strategic planning at two institutions—Long Island University and St. John's University. In both instances, the new strategic plan development was initiated at the behest of a new university president. I had the opportunity to observe how critical groups formed and approached their tasks. As a member of different working groups, I was able to collaborate with faculty across the university, suggest language for our plan, and edit the aspect of the plan on which I worked. I chaired the English department curriculum committee at LIU to revise our undergraduate curriculum. As department chair, I initiated and oversaw the completion of the department's first academic program review. At St. John's, I have coordinated and led a year-long revision of the assessment structure for all undergraduate programs as well as initiating a new and unified assessment of the university core curriculum. I also collaborated with and helped bring to fruition a faculty initiative to create a Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Institute on campus. To assist with funding the institute, I applied for an NEH CARES Act grant that was unfortunately not funded. I continue to work with the CRES Institute director to identify funding sources and apply for grants.

Collaboration and commitment to shared governance: I see the importance of shared governance from the viewpoint of faculty and administration. As a member of the faculty, curricular changes, student engagement work, and maintaining faculty research standards must come from the department to the administration. Having witnessed the difficulty of implementing these decisions in a top down fashion, I know that the only way to ensure success is to empower chairs and work with departments. The advantage of a unionized faculty is that some of these processes can be covered by the CBA. An example of collaboration and shared governance with which I currently engage is the introduction of new programs in the college. After an initial concept form is proposed and approved, I work extensively with department chairs and faculty seeking to propose the program. I also write up and edit the paperwork that is sent to the state for new program approval. This collaborative process allows me to understand program development in fields in which I do not have expertise. In three years, I have successfully created three new majors (biochemistry, financial math, and critical race and ethnic studies) in St. John's College and collaborated with other schools within the university to create four new majors (nursing, computer engineering, cyber security engineering, and software engineering).

Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion: I have worked with equity and inclusion initiatives for my entire career since my research, in part, focuses on the rhetoric of inequality and race. As an administrator, I have participated in two significant developments at St. John's around DEI work. The university has begun reckoning with its own history of inequality and they are actively trying to change the campus climate. To that end, the new president has emphasized the inclusion of DEI in the new strategic plan. Each college within the university has also set up antiracism, equity, and inclusion working groups to transform the college culture. I was asked by my dean to chair the curriculum working group and guide their efforts because a current member of the group was not quite grasping the extent of our charge. Several faculty had approached the dean about leaving the working group and I was asked to step in and get us back on track. The group consists of faculty from the college and staff who are interested in participating. Our college has also developed a new major and minor in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, which I helped put forward for state approval. In addition to serving on the advisory board and evaluating curricula, I will be teaching in the program.

Multidisciplinary orientation: My research is an intersection of rhetoric, literature, and social history, so I have experience working within multiple humanities disciplines. As Associate Dean, I have developed new competencies with fields across the liberal arts and sciences. I helped Physics revise their proposal to begin an engineering program and was able to extend that knowledge to another college developing engineering-like programs. I assisted the chemistry and biology departments to develop a combined biochemistry major. I also assisted with the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies program that spans English, history, sociology, anthropology, and theology and religious studies. We are hoping to expand the types of courses offered into all the disciplines in some form. One of my responsibilities is to provide teaching evaluations every fall of untenured faculty. I have had the good fortune to observe classes in every discipline in the college and the different teaching techniques used in each class.

Commitment to high-quality pedagogy: Classroom observations have definitely enhanced my understanding of teaching. Our college has a committee on High-Impact Learning Practices (HIPs), and we participated in the AAC&U HIPs Summer Institute. As a result, our committee has launched a pilot assessment in our first-year seminar course designed to disaggregate data and see if there is a differential impact of HIPs. I also work closely with department chairs and program directors to ensure appropriate staffing of courses when using contingent faculty. I review applications and any departmental evaluations as needed. Since I have responsibility for scheduling all undergraduate classes on the Queens campus, I work closely with the University Honors Program to ensure that classes are offered at optimal times and staffed by full-time, engaging faculty. St. John's University is a Vincentian, Catholic institution with a strong commitment to public service. Service-learning is embedded in our core courses and students have the opportunity to work with different community organizations in the New York City metropolitan area. My own teaching philosophy aims to foster open dialogue in safe spaces that are both diverse and inclusive. At LIU Brooklyn, I was awarded the David Newton Award for Excellence in Teaching (2009) and remain one of the youngest faculty to have received it.

Broad and inclusive view of scholarship and research: St. John's offers two forms of support for scholarship: research leaves (sabbatical) and research reductions (one course per semester). Faculty in all departments are able to submit applications and I am one of academic deans responsible for proposal review. As such, I have learned how research is conducted in many different disciplines. This broader perspective allows for a much more inclusive view of scholarship in general. Our college has begun to implement unconventional scholarship support as a result of broadening our perspective of scholarship. For example, one of our English faculty who is untenured will be awarded speaker funds to have two prominent scholars come speak to

her graduate class. As an interactive experience, the scholars will also lead the class through a workshop of two chapters in her monograph manuscript. This approach provides scholarly support to an untenured faculty member supports professionalization of graduate students at the same time. Our faculty recently asked to have clearer guidelines for tenure and promotion implemented as part of the collective bargaining agreement. I have advocated for departments to open tenure standards to innovative forms of scholarship and unacknowledged forms of service. Specifically, I have encouraged departments to look at the invisible service faculty of color perform at the university. Our faculty does not reflect the diversity of our student body, so faculty of color are often asked to perform other forms of service involving mentorship and representation. Having had that experience myself, I advocated on behalf of these faculty to ensure our tenure review process values this form of service.

Effective advocacy, interpersonal and relationship-building skills: I believe in maintaining strong relationships in the workplace and would describe my leadership style as collaborative. Before leaving LIU Brooklyn, I advocated for my faculty during a rather contentious contract negotiation and during a departmental merge. The university elected to collapse philosophy, foreign languages, and English into a large “humanities” department. As chair of English, I worked closely with the dean to make sure faculty were able to name the new department and write out any new policies. When I moved to my current position, I entered an office that was quite divided. The graduate and undergraduate sides did not communicate freely and the staff was distant. I made it a point to say hello to everyone on a daily basis, regardless of their affiliation. Much to my surprise, an assistant dean on the graduate side confessed that no one had done that in the office. Over time, we have all become more open and welcoming; the office atmosphere has undergone a significant change. During the pandemic, I made sure to schedule virtual happy hours with administrators and staff to maintain those connections. In terms of advocacy, I have come to recognize that conflict management and resolution is integral to advocacy. I chose to supplement my education by earning a Master’s degree in Legal Studies. I concentrated in Conflict Resolution, which entailed taking courses in the psychology of conflict, mediation, negotiation, and designing dispute resolution systems. I have been able to make use of all those skills in my current position.

Ability to identify existing resources and identify new resources: The pandemic created a financial crisis in institutions across the city. I was tasked to come up with resource neutral projects that would increase college visibility. I proposed expanding our digital badge initiative to the undergraduate student population. I worked with a graduate assistant to survey universities on the East Coast and realized most universities offered digital badges at the graduate level (as do we). However, undergraduate badges would be effective not just for our existing student body but our alumni as well. We had intended to pilot the first badge in Fall 2020, but we have had to postpone it. I have also explored grants as bringing in funding for specific initiatives. I applied for both NEH CARES Act grants and was given useful feedback to pursue future funding. I also worked with colleagues in the sciences to create a pre-proposal for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Inclusive Excellence 3. HHMI decided to restructure the award and St. John’s is now part of a learning community with 14 institutions that will be funded over five years. Our project is to revise introductory STEM classes through the lens of antiracism, equity, and inclusion. As the project director for the grant, I am working with faculty in biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics to create a cohort that will be trained to revise syllabi. We are aiming to remove the idea that introductory STEM courses are designed to “weed out” students, and we hope to increase and encourage a broader range of students to go into STEM fields.

Commitment to student engagement: As a faculty person, I aimed to introduce my classes to extracurricular experiences that extended classroom learning. I have taken students to many theatrical productions, smaller museums, library archives, and outdoor cultural installations throughout New York City. At LIU Brooklyn, I was actively involved in the Honors Program, so I was able to mentor students and accompany them to National Collegiate Honors Council conferences. I had the good fortune to participate in the first “Partners in the Parks” event and took three of our students to a week-long camping experience in Bryce Canyon, Utah. My most rewarding experience was that one of my students, a young man of Guatemalan descent raised in Bushwick, Brooklyn, come back from a long hike having seen a bear. It was the first bear to be sighted at Bryce in seven years. I also developed student engagement in my department by starting an English Club with students and expanding our membership in Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society. At St. John’s, I arranged for a very popular student event with Misty Copeland, the first African-American principal dancer in the American Ballet Theater. The event was held virtually, which increased participation. I received feedback from numerous students afterward who appreciated the affirmation Ms. Copeland offered. In addition, I raised the \$20,000 by using internal relationships that I had built across the university.

Operational and administrative acumen: As department chair, I oversaw the largest department in the College of Liberal Arts with twenty-five full time faculty and approximately twelve adjuncts. Our department operating budget was \$1.5 million, including faculty salaries, fringe benefits, and discretionary spending. While I was chair, I managed search committees for three hires—one named chair professorship, one new faculty in the writing program, and one department administrator. In my position at St. John’s, I work with the Associate Dean for Fiscal and Administrative Affairs to optimize costs. We have approximately 240 full-time faculty and 450 adjuncts, and I am responsible for overseeing course cancellations, faculty overloads, and approving adjunct contracts. I am also responsible for managing the Jean Hecht endowed fund that currently has \$700,000 to be used for campus events. I manage four assistant deans and two staff, and I have implemented processes to streamline their work.

Adaptability and agility: I began my position at St. John’s University in 2019 and had one “normal” semester. By March of 2020, the pandemic had shut down the campus and I had to find a way to move all of my responsibilities fully online. I changed the process for course schedules, student advising and registration, teaching schedules, and other student-centered processes. Though the university has returned to majority in person classes as of spring 2021, many of the processes I initiated remain in use. The registrar’s office was so pleased with my new course scheduling protocol, they asked the other schools and colleges to emulate my set up. I was also able to re-align the job responsibilities in my office as well as the responsibilities of department secretaries to increase transparency in reporting structures. These tasks were not actually a part of my original job description, but I was able to pivot and change with relative ease.

I have enclosed my CV that outlines my professional qualifications, and what I can bring to the position. I would welcome the opportunity to be of service as Cleveland State University crafts a new path in our emerging post-pandemic world with CSU 2.0. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Sincerely,



Srividhya Swaminathan