

March 28, 2016

To: Jeanne Ratfield  
Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs  
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From: Andrea Katalin Molnar  
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2013 Presidential Engagement Professor  
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RE: **LETTER OF INTEREST FOR THE POSITION –DIRECTOR OF UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM**

Dear Dr. Ratfield,

I hereby would like to express my interest in the directorship of the University Honors Program. I am excited about this opportunity to possibly contribute to NIU's academic mission beyond the capacity of regular faculty. High standards and high quality of education have always been very important to me. I believe that my educational philosophy as well as the wide ranging and varied professional and personal experiences I can bring to the position can positively impact the continuation and enhancement of the Honors Program's mission at NIU and maintain and continue to enhance the vibrancy and excellence of the program.

My philosophy and attitudes about education over the past twenty years at NIU, and indeed prior to my arrival at this institution, have always focused on fostering a passion for a life-long love of learning while cultivating the appreciation for academic excellence and self-confidence in my students. I also endeavored to contribute to the shaping of a sense of civic responsibility in my students and the ways that knowledge and research can address current human problems. Thus, as critically thinking citizens we all have a responsibility to engage with and contribute to society in addressing such societal issues whether in small or big ways. I always taught my students to stand up for what is right and always utilize what they have learned in such undertakings. I continually endeavor to raise student awareness of the dynamics of interconnectedness between local, national, regional, and global and the value of international education and awareness. I strongly believe that every single student has the capacity to strive for excellence if the proper mentoring and educational opportunities are provided. I always attempt to foster in my students a deep commitment to and true respect and appreciation for diversity and the ways such diversity makes our society 'richer' –whether it is ethnic, racial, disability, gender and other kinds of diversity. Furthermore, I strongly believe, perhaps because of my anthropology background and my undergraduate training in the medical/natural sciences, that one must shape the thinking of our students in a way that brings a recognition and appreciation that human beings are both biological and cultural beings and thus if we want to contribute to the betterment of society we cannot simply stick to strict disciplinary boundaries but to must collaborate between disciplines as each can contribute in a complementary and collaborative manner. I believe that creative ways of in-depth

learning (including research engagement), a multidisciplinary perspective, experiential and service learning (or ENGAGED learning), while participating in learning communities of peers of diverse backgrounds (whether this is done through pathways, themes, etc.) are all essential for a thorough and quality undergraduate education.

Many of the above points espoused in my philosophy about education come not just from my academic training and experiences but also from personal experiences which make me empathetic to the range of needs of our students. I am a formal political refugee and immigrant woman who has endeavored to manage a chronic autoimmune illness that affects the joints. As a transnational (with so far 2 citizenships – awaiting t my third citizenship as this year I will become also American) I have a truly international educational outlook and training from Europe, Canada and Australia and I have applied this international perspective to my work at NIU in multiple capacities—teaching, research, engagement and service. I was keenly aware where other nations or regions of the world were way ahead of our standards of education and I wanted to level the playing field for my students regardless of not being able to attend an Ivy League college. I had a very different perspective on standards of education and I constantly endeavored to bring international standards and approaches to my teaching. I had several goals: one was to ensure that the next generation of scholars indeed do remain leaders in the world in their disciplines –after all this is the number one country in the world but if we are left behind by the education systems of other parts of the world this would be in jeopardy. Second, I wanted to provide my students with the level and quality of education that is characteristic of top ranked universities. Our students are highly capable and all they need is the right educational environment and high quality standards with continued innovation to achieve the same or actually outperform their peers from other parts of the world.

I would argue that my attitudes and philosophy on education are very much in line with what honors education is all about, as well as with a quality Baccalaureate education, and also demonstrate my commitment to enhancing academic excellence and quality of experience for my NIU students. My diverse background and training and twenty years of teaching, research, engagement and service experiences at NIU provided me with skills and knowledge necessary for the position of heading the University Honors Program.

While I have never held a formal administrative position, such as chairperson, I have acquired over the past 20 years a range of skills that would be important for an administrative position. My Curriculum Vitae does contain most of these relevant experiences, however, here I would like to highlight some of these.

I have been involved with the honors program over the past twenty years in various capacities: supervised capstone honors thesis, taught honors mini sections, and taught honors contract students. I have also participated in a number curriculum development workshops that would enhance the educational experience of NIU students which would also attest to my commitment to high quality education. For example,

- General Pathways-Plus; Global Connections 2015  
Anth 220 already transformed during early summer with collaborative group exercises and especially the collaborative graded group project/paper added and transformations have been applied in Fall 2015
- Completed Faculty Development Workshop on **Baccalaureate Reform: Strategies to Move Forward** on October 15, 2010
- Multiculturalism Workshop 1997
- CLAS Option-A by Dr. Fred Kitterle (Dean, CLAS) 1998

I have engaged students through the URAP and Study abroad programs. I am also engaged with multidisciplinary educational units such as the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and the NGO Leadership and Development—I am an Associate in both. I am also an Ally for LGBT student community. Since at NIU, I have designed new courses that I am currently teaching—Muslim Cultures in

Anthropological Perspective, Political Anthropology, Social organization and kinship, Religion and Cosmology of Southeast Asia.

Internationally there have always been too many involvements in my career than I could possibly list here, however, just a couple of contributions that might be relevant: I have created international linkages for NIU with Thai and Indonesian universities which I annually follow up on and act as a liaison. Please note that this requires careful culturally sensitive diplomacy and also investment of time even when I am not on contract. I am also involved in a number of engagement activities with communities internationally—specifically bringing my anthropological knowledge, skills, and international networks to the aid of addressing local issues in Thailand, Indonesia and Timor Leste. The last two years I have also designed and delivered training workshops/seminars on a range of topics for faculty members in Burmese (Myanmar) Universities whose training and knowledge and access to textbooks remained at the 1950s level under a coup regime. I have also provided service to agencies such as the Carter Center's Democracy Program (NGO of former President Jimmy Carter). I have served as Peace and Conflict expert for the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) in Thailand. I have conceptualized and designed a PhD program (and its curriculum) in Peace and Conflict studies along with a Strategic Plan for its implementation (including budget, and human resources development) in Thailand. I have been the executive editor on Southeast Asia for the journal, Asian Affairs: an American Review for five and a half years. This is a journal not just of academic interest but is read by State Department and Congressional staff, and the oldest continuously published journal on Asia in the United States. I have also served as international consultant and policy writer for the Indonesian Biodiversity Project funded by the Asia Development Bank. I have also served as the Chair of the Indonesia and Timor Leste Studies Committee of the Association of Asian Studies.

I have served on many committees around our university including the Academic Planning Council which does Program Reviews across the university and last year was very involved in the design of the categories and criteria for Program Prioritization reports and now is engaged with the revision of templates for Program Review based more on Program Prioritization narratives. I have served on the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences College Council several times. I am also actively engaged with the Center for Southeast Asian studies on its advisory committee (advisory to the Director) as well as on the Thai Studies Committee (re: endowment for NIU from the Thai government). I have lead a number of committees including search committees. I have served as acting chair for two months in 2006 for Anthropology during the summer period –duties mainly focused on student advising. Budgeting experiences only come from managing my research budgets. However, the constant wage freezes and lack of raises over the past 20 years, also required extreme and creative budgeting of home finances as well. Thus, whether doing research in the field or at home minimal budgets always needed to be stretched as far as possible. While these experiences provide me with knowledge and skills for administrative duties, I never held the position of Chair in the past --however I am a fast and willing learner.

I believe that what I described above along with my fuller record in the CV do attest to the fact that I am able to work in a diverse environment and with multiple constituencies in an effective and productive manner mindful of collegiality and mutual respect. I have been Lillian Cobb Fellow 3 times and was named 2013 Presidential Engagement Professor. Within the Department of Anthropology I was also named the Outstanding Teacher of the Year for 2014. I am also member of the Phi Beta Delta International Scholar Honor Society.

I would be grateful for an opportunity to contribute to the Honors program in maintaining its existing excellence while continuing with recruiting talented students into the program from different colleges and paying very close attention to diversity. The continued improvement of students-centered experience starting with advising to the development of new innovative learning opportunities will remain a focus. Aside from developing multidisciplinary theme based peer learning group opportunities

within each of the areas of Social Science, Natural Science, and Humanities, I would like to explore opportunities to develop collaborative student seminars and potential projects between social science/humanities with engineering/natural sciences around themes based on real world social problems—this might require more focused recruiting of talented honors students from the non-social science/humanities fields and also promoting the visibility of the Honors program across colleges and programs. Also the recruiting must pay attention not just to incoming freshman but students already at NIU who never thought they could do their studies at an Honors level either for lack of advising or lack of self-confidence—I truly enjoy encouraging students to challenge themselves. Another thing I would be interested in exploring is the establishment of an e-portfolio opportunity for honors students that could be useful towards their job search and graduate school applications. I would also like to continue NIU's participation in the ongoing biannual professional meetings of HERU (Honors Education at Research Universities) that allows peer institutions to learn from each other and to share innovations in honors education.

As a last point, I feel this is the right juncture in my career to contribute to NIU's educational mission in a different capacity from that of a regular faculty member.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you. If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,  
Andrea K. Molnar