

December 15, 2019

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to you to express my interest in serving as the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) at Northern Illinois University. I hope the accompanying CV will illustrate that I have strong experience as a university administrator, a background in a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary higher education settings, and a track record of increasing responsibility. All of my higher education experience has been in the context of medium-sized public comprehensive universities, and in shared governance environments.

I am applying for this position because I seek to use my knowledge and expertise to enhance the role of the College and to increase the value of a liberal arts education at NIU by working directly with faculty, staff and students. I have experience in and enjoy working within academic affairs, working with faculty and students in developing and building academic programs, and working with the community to support faculty work and student success.

NIU's mission and values appeal to me. As the dean of the CLAS, I would use the skills and knowledge I have gained over 17 years of experience in higher education and through my extensive training efforts, including my recent ACE Fellowship, to serve an institution that has the same values I have, and which believes as I do in innovation, creativity, educational excellence, respect, equity and inclusion, and stewardship.

In the first part of this letter, I present my leadership style and the values that guide my work; the second part discusses my qualifications for the position of Dean of the CLAS.

#### **A. Leadership style and values**

I am a first-generation college student and an international student. I relied on scholarships to get through school. I started college in the US as an older adult, without a clear understanding of the higher education environment. I did not know what to expect from my program of study, how to study, how to interact with faculty and students, or even how to use critical thinking. As a student, I was fortunate that a faculty member took me under his wing and mentored me. My educational experience shaped how I approach every role I have had: faculty, researcher, administrator, leader, community member.

Nationally, only 60% of students graduate within 6 years (NCES, 2019) Only 46% of students at NIU graduate within six years. With CLAS having the largest share of the enrollment within the University, the CLAS community has a great opportunity to lead the process of shaping student success through supporting faculty success and community engagement in order to better assist students who, like me, need the right kind of extra attention.

I am a transformative leader.

In all the roles I have had, beginning with being a junior faculty member, I planted the seeds for creating visions of potential opportunities for organizations. Working collaboratively with faculty, students, staff and community members, we transformed those seeds into strong visions and work plans. For example, as the program director for the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance (NLA) program at Eastern Michigan University (EMU), I transformed an under the radar student

program into the cornerstone of the University's community engagement efforts, which in turn led to increasing enrollments and building strong community partnerships. My work with NLA significantly contributed to EMU twice receiving the Carnegie Community Engagement designation.

I created new visions for the future of the units I led in my administrative positions. For example, as the leader of the strategic planning process at College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) at EMU, I worked with the college and university leadership, faculty, staff and students to develop a long-term vision for the College and a mission.

I always work hard to instill in my colleagues and staff a commitment to embrace change. I have had responsibilities to reshape organizational practices to adapt to environmental changes. For example, in my role in the College of Arts and Sciences (EMU), I worked with the associate deans to create a program review process that supported department and college level decision making and institutional change, and alignment with the HLC's accreditation criteria. I also worked with the department chairs to create a faculty led annual planning process.

When I served as the chair in the Political Science Department at Eastern Michigan University we faced the challenge of losing our core feeder course due to a general education reform process. This was a mandatory course for all students (over 20,000). I worked with the faculty to understand the new gen ed framework and to find ways to adapt our curriculum and 100 level course offerings to the new gen ed program.

In my current position of Chief Strategy Officer, I work collaboratively with campus leaders and with the President to implement the strategic plan, and to develop processes and structures that support and strengthen collaboration among all university areas. In this role, I have the responsibility to "connect the dots" among these areas. For example, within the newly launched EAA: Excellence in Academic Advising project (guided by NACADA and the Gardner Institute), I work with staff, faculty and students from across the campus to assess advising practices and to develop a comprehensive campus wide strategy for advising. I also work with the Office of Institutional Research to develop analytical models to understand issues such as students' high drop-out rates and to develop interventions to address them.

As the dean of the Graduate School (formerly Graduate Education) at Oakland University (OU), I provided academic leadership and vision to advance graduate education. When I started that job, graduate education was marginalized across the university's structures. Through dialogue with key campus leaders, faculty, undergraduate and graduate students and alumni, we developed a new vision for the Graduate School and strengthened graduate education's role on campus as shown in the new OU Strategic Enrollment Management plan.

My *modus operandi* in the above roles, as well as in all the roles I have had, is to develop a strong communication framework, to engage in dialogue with campus-wide and community stakeholders, to listen and seek out new ideas that ultimately lead to developing and implementing organizational changes, and to communicate all changes in a timely manner.

## **B. Qualifications for the position**

In the paragraphs below, I briefly describe how my qualifications align with those in the position profile. Text in *italics* is drawn directly from the qualifications identified in the profile.

### *Establish and Implement a new Vision for the College*

Strategic planning is one of my areas of expertise. As a leader of strategic planning processes within higher education and nonprofit organizations, I have led vision development processes by focusing on the strengths of the organization. I believe that every challenge is an opportunity. For example, I see the 31% decline in enrollment in the College between 2009-2018 as an opportunity to engage in healthy conversations about the future of the College and in finding innovative ways to move forward.

By using a collaborative process focused on opportunities rather than on challenges, I would work with the College's stakeholders (university leadership, faculty, staff, alumni, students, community partners, business leaders, other academic and non-academic units) to engage in productive dialogues that take into consideration NIU's and the College's strengths and opportunities, the strengths of the community and trends in higher education.

In leading the process of developing the CLAS' vision we would consider internal factors such as the faculty's reputation and expertise, the hands-on learning programs for students such as REU, new programs like the PhD in Computer Science, the national reputation of College's programs, the interdisciplinary centers, the partnerships with Argonne National Laboratory and Fermilab, NIU's current partnership with Wiley Education Services, among others. We would also look at national trends in higher education in technology, economic/job market needs, environment and politics. Initiatives such as Student Success, College to Career, that I developed an expertise in while at Georgia State as an ACE fellow, are great ways to elevate and explain the value of liberal arts education through course outcomes.

I led my first large scale strategic planning process for the College of Arts and Sciences at Eastern Michigan University (EMU), the largest academic unit on campus with over 700 faculty and 8,000 students. Working within the framework set by the AAUP contract, taking into consideration the internal and external challenges faced by the College and the University, while working collaboratively with the leadership, faculty, staff and students, I led a strategic planning process that resulted in the creation of a new vision, mission and goals. I then developed the implementation framework and worked with the department chairs in developing implementation plans for the college's goals. The lessons learned from this experience have been enhanced as my administrative career progressed.

### *Build Resources in Support of Excellence through Fund-raising*

Fundraising is a team process and I am a good team player. I began fundraising as soon as I was appointed to my first administrative role, campus director for the American Humanics (now Nonprofit Leadership Alliance) program. Building an advisory board, then working with it and with dedicated students, we raised money for students travel and scholarships. We created endowments. As department chair I developed relationships with alumni. One relationship in particular led to a \$1million donation to the University. More recently, the relationship I have built with board members of the OU's Graduate School Advisory Board (that I created) led to two endowments worth \$500,000 to provide financial support to students who experience financial hardship.

From my earliest days as a faculty member, I have been working with nonprofit organizations and their boards in developing strategies of growth. When EMU and OU were looking for new

ways to raise funds, my nonprofit expertise was tapped. It contributed to developing new ways to harness the power of women as philanthropists through the creation of Women in Philanthropy groups.

I have considerable grant writing experience. Working collaboratively with faculty from various disciplines, together we have applied for grants from community foundations, state and federal agencies. I understand the effort needed to write small and large grant applications and the importance of creating an infrastructure that supports this challenging enterprise. As the co-director of an applied research institute at EMU, I worked hard to create an infrastructure that supported interdisciplinary research.

*Provide Collaborative Leadership in an Environment of Shared Governance, Advancing both the Needs of the College and the University as a Whole*

For all of my career in academia, I have been working in institutions with shared governance structures and parameters set through union, including faculty union, contracts. As an administrator, I have always been mindful of providing faculty and staff opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. I see shared, collaborative, governance as an opportunity for creativity and innovation.

Currently, as the Chief Strategy Officer, I am deeply familiar with the trends in and needs of the higher education sector and the best practices in addressing these needs. I bring this knowledge to dialogues such developing a research plan, developing a healthy campus, re-imagining the university, and developing a strong student success program. My knowledge can serve CLAS as it is building its path forward.

As the dean of the Graduate School, I established campus-wide collaborations with academic and non-academic units, I developed recruitment strategies and a recruitment unit, marketing strategies and initiated dialogues about student retention. This collaborative work led to outcomes such as: stabilization of enrollment, an increase in number of credit hours, an increase in student satisfaction, increased faculty satisfaction and experience with graduate education. Under my leadership, new fully accelerated undergraduate – graduate programs have been initiated, a new program review process based upon a SWOT analysis has been launched, and all internal processes have been evaluated and improved.

With grassroots support, after eight months in the job, I launched the first ever Graduate Student Research Conference with no new resources. Three years later, this conference is part of the institutional culture and a keystone of a student-centered culture. Under my tenure as dean, we increased the number of international agreements, MOUs and international enrollment. I established the first ever Graduate Advisory Board, which plays an important role in fundraising for graduate education as part of OU's newly launched capital campaign. Based on re-evaluation and reprioritization of our budget expenditures, I created a fund of \$100,000/year for new scholarships to recruit and retain students. We had none before.

*Manage with skill and delegate authority*

I believe that success is driven by collaborative teamwork. I build teams that bring a diversity of knowledge and ideas to develop innovative and creative solutions to challenges we face. I strive to build a community of thinkers and doers.

I believe that every team member has skills that support organizational goals and the job duties should match those skills. I believe that as a leader/manager one of my responsibilities is to help my direct reports succeed. Therefore, I have been engaging my teams in free-thinking problem-solving dialogues. I make timely decisions based on input. Once decisions are made, my team members and I share the responsibility of implementing solutions and getting the work done based on “who does what by when” plans. I believe in helping my staff succeed both in their assignments and in their careers, and in providing them with the tools and means needed to do so.

In every role I have had, I created an open-door policy. I share information. I am transparent about the decisions I make through regular communication with targeted audiences. I provide regular updates of my work to all constituents.

### **Summary**

I am a transformational leader. I believe in empowering people to be innovative and out-of-the box thinkers. I am a problem solver who aims to look at the world with a fresh mindset, who strives to understand others and to respect their opinions. I work collaboratively to find data-driven solutions to challenges. I see every challenge as an opportunity for being creative and innovative. I have an aptitude for getting things done in a timely manner and for innovative problem solving.

It would be an honor for me to use my knowledge and skills to work with the College and University community, with Provost Ingram, with NIU leaders, with the alumni and the regional community to shape the vision and direction for the College. It would be an honor for me to serve as the next Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Sincerely,



*Claudia Petrescu, Ph.D.*