

November 15, 2019

Betty Turner Asher, Partner  
Patricia J. Gibbs, Senior Executive Leadership Consultant  
Greenwood/Asher & Associates, Inc.  
42 Business Centre Drive, Suite 206  
Miramar Beach, Florida 32550

Dear Ms. Turner Asher and Ms. Gibbs:

I am writing to apply for the Dean of the Liberal Arts and Sciences at Northern Illinois University. I believe that the role is a great fit for my skills. I would welcome the opportunity to serve as the college's leader. This letter reviews my background and experience and how they will assist the university in the coming years.

There is no doubt that higher education is going through tremendous change. Whether it is up and down enrollment patterns or meeting the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, universities have to find new ways to react to a changing landscape. I believe that I have the skills needed to help to guide the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences into a successful and dynamic future that meets the needs of students, faculty, staff, and the broader university community. The University has evolved with the times and earned tremendous respect for delivering quality undergraduate and graduate programs and I would look forward to continuing and enhancing this tradition.

I am interested in the position because I believe that the college is an excellent fit for my skills. It is clear that the University seeks a new visionary dean who can not only advance and revise the college's strategic plan, but also work to develop new high-demand programs, enhance revenue, work collaboratively with the faculty, support and enhance diversity initiatives, and grow the town/gown relationships. In the following paragraphs, I will detail my experience in these areas.

When a strategic plan is developed, it has input from all stakeholders of an institution. As such, it provides a roadmap for leaders to follow. I know that there have been some strategic changes at the university as of late. Recently, I was part of the team that worked on our Middle States Reaccreditation. I co-chaired the Mission and Vision subcommittee of the team due to my experience in strategic planning at not only Hofstra University but also at the University of South Florida and the National Cave and Karst Research Institute. Using this experience, I would welcome the opportunity to work with all stakeholders in developing and implementing a plan.

I am also very familiar with enrollment management and the development of key new programs to help enhance revenue. As Dean of Graduate Studies at Hofstra University, I grew new graduate offerings to match the economic development and employment needs of the Long

Island and greater New York area. We have created or are in the midst of creating new graduate programs in Engineering Management, Cybersecurity, Cardiac Perfusion, Physician Assistants, Physical Therapy, and several others in health and technology areas. I am very comfortable working in partnership with local business and non-profit leaders to advance the regional economic mission that matches the university's enrollment initiatives. I have a great deal of experience in economic development and I understand how important education is to a region's economic strength.

I also have experience in growing international enrollment at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Like most American universities, we have seen a general decline in international student enrollment. To combat this, we developed a partnership with an international pathway provider that will help us recruit and retain international students. I was the academic lead on this initiative and I am very familiar with efforts to internationalize universities.

I think it is important to note that I have experience at both a large public university (University of South Florida) and a comprehensive liberal arts university (Hofstra University). The liberal arts are more important than ever in our increasingly fractured society. Over my career I grew two departments (the Department of Geography and the Department of Environmental Science and Policy) at the University of South Florida from very small units to large research and teaching powerhouses within the university. As the first Chair of the Department of Environmental Science and Policy, I expanded enrollment and faculty and developed clear interdisciplinary links that allowed the unit to thrive. I also served as the Interim Associate Dean for Faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences. In addition, I worked very closely on a number of undergraduate issues including living/learning communities, general education, and program development. I have always worked with student affairs professionals. There is so much that the academic and student affairs sides of the house can accomplish together.

Funding, of course, is a major issue at any university. I worked hard at Hofstra to enhance funding from a number of different sources in my role as Vice Provost for Research. I was able to strategically increase the funding we received at a time when there were many uncertainties about federal and state funding and national research policy and direction. I also worked with our regional economic development council to earn funding for our university and have worked with elected officials to promote our research agenda.

Innovation and collaboration across all units of the university have proven to be the key to success. Here are some initiatives that I instituted to promote growth of grants to help drive economic development in our region:

- Served on the writing team for the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council that was appointed by Governor Andrew Cuomo. This group brought millions of state dollars for investment in economic development projects to the region.
- Development of a science collaboratorium to share ideas and research space within distinct buildings.
- Development of grant workshops and training.
- Grant writing support for faculty working on complex grants.
- Creation of opportunities for faculty to share research with each other in formal and informal settings.
- Strong support for centers and institutes in order to focus research in key strategic areas.

- Focus on economic development and government outreach to Washington D.C. and Albany to enhance research opportunities.
- Ensure the environmental health and safety of the campus.
- Develop key graduate programs that match the economic needs of the region.
- Significantly increase high-profile grant applications.
- Significantly increase grant funding overall.

In that position, I worked very closely with our finance, student affairs, and legal teams on everything from complex budgets to patent applications. I am very comfortable with university budget processes and university legal issues.

Fund raising is also very important for the dean position. I am adept at raising funds in the community and from alumni. I recently completed a fundraising effort to create an endowed scholarship for a friend of mine who retired from Michigan State University and I also earned a major annual award from the Tampa Hillsborough Human Rights Council for fundraising work I did in the Tampa Bay area. I love to network and meet people and I am very glad to serve in a fundraising capacity for the university.

The faculty and staff in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences have worked hard over the last several years on a number of new initiatives. It is clear from what I learned that they are an amazing group who seek to work in partnership with administration to advance the university's goals. I have always worked well with faculty and staff and have served as a faculty member on just about every possible committee I could be on including curriculum committees, tenure and promotion committees, university senate, and many others. I believe in shared governance and I would look forward to great collaborative relationships.

It is clear that diversity and inclusion are key priorities for the new dean at Northern Illinois University. As a member of the LGBTQ community, this is a priority I can heartily embrace. I started the first Diversity Committee at the University of South Florida and I have been very active in the LGBTQ and Latinx communities in Tampa and Long Island. I worked on the LGBTQ Task Force at Hofstra and I also oversaw our Center for "Race", Culture, and Social Justice in my role as overseer of all centers on campus. Diversity is not about creating a single day or event, but about an institutional commitment. My husband Mario Gomez is a real asset to me in my work in the community.

I would like to conclude by noting that I have been a very active member of my profession and that I remain an active scholar. I have served in a number of leadership positions professionally and was most recently Chair of the Board of the National Cave and Karst Research Institute, a Federally funded national research institute. I also served on the American Geosciences Institute's Critical Needs Working Group that develops policy statements for the nation on the current priorities in geoscience policy. In 2020, the University Press of Florida will publish a book I edited (with Sandra Garren) on suburban sustainability and this year, Palgrave published my new book, *Environmental Sustainability in a Time of Change*. My textbook, *Introduction to Sustainability* is going into a second edition next year. I also serve as the editor for a book series on environmental sustainability with Palgrave Macmillan. I know that sustainability has been embraced by Northern Illinois and I hope that I could support sustainability initiatives on campus.

I stepped away from my vice provost position this summer and returned to the faculty due to changes of leadership in the Provost Office here. However, I am prepared to lead the College of

Liberal Arts and Sciences into a new future that is dynamic, abundant, thoughtful, and creative. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and thank you for giving me the opportunity to be considered for the position.

Sincerely,

Robert Brinkmann  
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Professor of Geology, Environment, and Sustainability  
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