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Dear Members of the Search Committee,

A university provost and chief academic officer brings a sense of unity to faculty and staff, keeping everyone committed to student success and getting them to work together on mission-oriented tasks. I have served in a related role and am excited to get back into that environment. As such, please consider this cover letter as my application for the position of Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs at Northern State University.

In terms of being prepared for the position, my leadership experiences include serving as a department chair, large program director, dean, VPAA, and provost. As chief academic officer I oversaw a university that delivered undergraduate and graduate programs in face-to-face, online, and hybrid modes at multiple campuses. In fact, at Trine University where I worked for 14 years, we delivered instruction not only at the main campus in Indiana, but also at locations in Detroit, Phoenix, Reston VA, China, and Malaysia.

From these experiences I developed a comprehensive understanding of higher education on multiple levels, all the while gaining an appreciation for the significance of the workplace environment. Is it positive? Is the culture dynamic or static? Is there a willingness to make changes that improve processes? These are important questions, and I endeavor to create a culture that embraces innovation, continually looks to improve, demonstrates integrity in all endeavors, and aspires to provide quality in all of its programs.

In addition, my experience hiring academic faculty and staff is extensive. I have reviewed literally thousands of applications for academic appointments, interviewed hundreds of candidates, and successfully hired countless of them for positions.

I also understand accreditation extremely well. While at Indiana Tech, I served as the Accreditation Liaison Officer to the Higher Learning Commission, and for about eight years at Trine University, the ALO reported directly to me. I have overseen successful accreditation visits from HLC for the university as a whole, CAEP for education programs, ACBSP and IACBE for business, ABET for engineering, ABA for law, CAPTE for physical therapy, ARC-PA for physician assistant studies, CAHIIM for health informatics, CCNE for nursing, and CAAHEP and ARC-STSA for surgical technology. Accreditation was maintained in all of these areas because we were always cognizant of quality assurance, continuous improvement, and institutional integrity, which is what accreditors are most concerned with.

My leadership philosophy is grounded in response to one question: Will this decision or action positively impact students? I ask it whenever an important decision needs to be made. The result is that students are always put first in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, universities achieve excellence through the successes of their students, and students are successful when they are learning, persisting in their studies, graduating, and going on to

become productive members of their communities. Helping students get to that end point often hinges upon engagement; the more involved students are in their own learning process as well as in campus life activities, the more likely they are to persist in their studies. Improving student retention involves fostering strong collaboration among faculty and staff and heightening their appreciation for the importance of staying focused on student success. It is a team effort, and when that focus is maintained, students receive the necessary support to excel in their studies.

Additionally, telling Northern State University's story locally, regionally, and beyond promotes its accomplishments and builds excitement for its activities. In a similar manner, I have spoken with many community organizations to inform them and establish strong relationships with them. I have also met with local, state, and national political figures to enlist their support for the university I was working at. These efforts reflect my view that higher education is inseparable from its surrounding community and should partner with it in every way possible.

One way to increase outreach involves having the University's finger on the pulse of regional workforce needs. This starts by understanding those needs and then developing pathway programs between the school and its partners. Educational programs can be created that offer stackable credentials leading to stackable certificates leading to degrees. These programs provide upskilling for workers while showing them that they can succeed at the college level. Everyone wins: the employers, the university, and the students.

Moreover, in discussions with employers I have heard repeatedly that the recent university graduates they have hired had the necessary technical skills for success but often lacked the crucial abilities in the "power" skills that are essential for success in their careers. These power skills include being able to communicate effectively both when speaking and writing, put together an evidence-based proposal, creatively solve a problem, reason quantitatively, think critically, and work seamlessly as part of a team. **Developing these power skills should be an inherent component of every academic program.** It involves focusing on students as both learners and people. Ultimately, graduates with these impactful abilities will be prepared for success in their careers and lives going forward.

Lastly, an academic culture based on trust and confidence is built in part by the provost's leadership, whose words and actions motivate others to bring to life this culture. When people are inspired to do the right things in the right way, excellence ensues. When students are put first in the decision-making process, they thrive. When innovation is promoted, positive change occurs. I would work to inspire confidence, motivate others to excellence, and promote innovation as Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs at Northern State University.

Thank you for your consideration of my candidacy.



John Shannon, Ph.D.
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