

February 10, 2026

Selection Committee
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Northern State University

Dear Colleagues:

I write to apply for the position of Provost and President for Academic Affairs at Northern State University. I am ready and eager to join your academic community and achieve the objectives outlined in the position description. Leading in aligned collaboration and contributing to NSU's continued growth as a dynamic and learning-centered institution appeals to me as a senior leader. I am intent on achieving student success and the fulfillment of student, faculty, and staff potential as your next Vice President for Academic Affairs.

My academic career is dedicated to assuring quality higher education as a possibility for all. I value the application of innovations to achieve student and staff success and the use of assessment tied to budgeting for continuous improvement. What follows is a statement of my experience and, in tandem, of my vision for the position.

As an undergraduate student, I discerned a vocation to become a professor and to instill in other students the love of learning and all that it can bring by way of life chances and opportunities. Probing the possibilities and limits of human endeavor and pushing at both extremes of idealism and realism result in new theories, creations, and discoveries. Good teaching, instruction, and co-curricular activities achieve the same results. Universities change lives through their outstanding curricula, the work of distinguished faculty and staff, and a rich campus life.

As a professor and administrator, I have collaborated with and led efforts at the unit, department, college, and university levels to develop relevant and rigorous educational programming. A university constantly scans and implements curricula that resonate with students' interests and catalyze their self-development and pursuit of excellence. These curricula must align with market opportunities related to careers or advanced degrees. Creating honors options in all arts and sciences programs, my state's first international studies degree at a public university, and senior thesis/capstone options for all undergraduate degree programs are examples of the creativity I possess and have deployed.

These initiatives arose from and were informed by the processes of program review and academic assessment while I was a department chairperson, college assessment lead, and assistant, then associate, provost for curriculum and assessment. The key to market share for the continued vitality of Northern State's lived mission is evolving educational programming that meets society's demands, builds on faculty expertise, and captures students' energies. I know

how to gather deans, chairs, and faculty behind a process of analysis and action to spawn new learning pathways that garner student enrollments, retention, and graduation.

Instructional and co-curricular projects result from collaborations with faculty, external partners, and stakeholders. They are based on assessment and the use of its results to guide budget allocations. My experience in Academic Affairs with annual planning has contributed to these innovations and those of colleagues. I am the lead member of the division for budgeting in terms of faculty and academic staff contracts. My writing on mindfulness in shared governance and planning also reflects related dispositions, which will be evident in the communications and initiatives I undertake at NSU.

Comfortable with and a strong proponent of shared governance, I work seamlessly with Faculty Senate leaders, leaders of our faculty union, and other stakeholders. I have developed policies on faculty credentials, the hiring and review of faculty adjuncts, graduation success initiatives, and the selection of academic chairpersons. I have participated in the negotiation of four collective bargaining agreements. I am the Academic Affairs lead for the compliance process with a variety of federal, state, and local mandates. I have devised training around the important topics of modality switching and communications among faculty and with supervisors. These examples illustrate my commitment to compliance, as well as to providing respect for the voice of faculty and staff and aligning with expectations of accreditors and other relevant authorities.

I have supervised the Center for Teaching and Research Excellence, which includes faculty development. I instituted peer mentoring of tenure-track faculty at Chicago State and have begun a similar process for part-time and adjunct faculty. The life cycle of faculty development requires targeted supports that meet the needs of junior and senior faculty, as well as those who staff academic and instructional offices. Third-party opportunities, release time, and mentoring circles for new hires are necessary ways to create satisfied faculty who perform better for student success, as well as achieve their own teaching and research goals.

As the university continues to develop its partnerships and collaborations with corporate and international partners in the Aberdeen region, my experiences, contacts, and eagerness to gather Academic Affairs stakeholders behind aligned developments will be an asset. I have negotiated and implemented memoranda of understanding, sister school and exchange agreements, curricular crosswalks and transfer guides, and initiatives with foundations and institutions for academic achievement. Recently, I have been spearheading an initiative with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities at CSU to improve course scheduling, with specific reference to international enrollment patterns and the needs of corporate partners seeking to attract and potentially recruit students.

Good strategic and annual planning is not a document that reads well, has all the signatures, and then sits on a shelf. Good plans are limited, focused, ambitious, metrics-based, and capable of change and adaptation over their lifetime. My work as Provost will focus on substantive actions and annual implementation emphases in alignment with President LaFave and colleagues. I

already have a strong background in building budgets aligned with strategic priorities and in collaborative planning, including efforts to enhance operating and capital budgets, the latter to include new and updated facilities, classrooms, labs, and offices.

Excellence in planning enables the constructive use of reallocated resources. When new revenue streams are limited, the tools for identifying revenue to support mission-driven improvements and new initiatives can often come from within. I have enabled the ongoing provision of quality curricula during periods of fiscal constraint as well as better times. The creative application of scarce resources has been a regular feature of my leadership. Organizational and programmatic modifications can often occur without many pain points, enabling increased efficiency and freeing up resources. These efforts dovetail with interdisciplinary collaborations and multi-disciplinary organizational approaches. My experience includes the targeted use of annual planning to track the performance of curricula and non-instructional operations, as well as the utilization of assessment and institutional effectiveness data for budgeting purposes.

My work at CSU has involved the resolution of student complaints and management of faculty tenure/promotion/retention and other actions, as well as course scheduling. This also entails management of the offices conducting student evaluations and faculty portfolios (Watermark/Faculty Success solutions). I have served as the lead for addressing sanctions and grievances under the CBA and for developing mediation practices to mitigate conflict and increase the use of informal resolution. I conduct sensitive conversations with a concern for the employee or student and their long-term development, as well as the university's potential liability and needs. In such matters, I liaise and take input collaboratively from Legal Affairs.

I also understand the importance of data in enhancing efficiency and guiding student pathways, as well as the concept of continuous improvement. Examples of my commitment to problem-solving include work related to the assessment of program curricula, general education courses, and co-curricular activities. Again, I have participated in and led all levels of university activity, making changes that align with an institution's mission, vision, and values – its tradition.

For over 15 years, I have contributed to the accrediting agency work of the Higher Learning Commission as a peer reviewer and consultant. This work keeps me abreast and active in contributing to the discussion of leading issues in higher education and how to address them for continuous improvement. This past April, the HLC staff honored me with a related award. I know what sensible curricula and student success strategies look like and how they run. I know how to intervene, again in collaboration, to drive improvements in student learning, satisfaction, graduation success, and employer visibility.

A key to enrollment growth for many institutions is opening a university's excellent curricula and pathways to newer audiences. Targeted financial aid, flexible course offerings, modalities, and locations all contribute to extending teaching and learning excellence for students of all ages and places. The same goes for accelerated degree offerings and alternative paths to degree

completion. Evaluating prior learning, quality general education, interdisciplinary offerings, and individual degree programs are also areas for continual scanning and potential actions.

I have a working understanding of many challenges facing institutions of higher education, as well as specific concerns for the NSU context. Integrating and aligning the needs of traditional and non-traditional student populations, evermore focused on value for investments in a college degree, requires close attention to the needs of South Dakotans in the region, state, and beyond. I know that not every proposed innovation is good, but standing still is not an option. Creating a three-year degree, dual enrollment, easing pathways from two-year institutions, and optimizing the working relationships among the institution's colleges with those of partner institutions would be among my priorities in this area. Certainly, cybersecurity, the provision of public health infrastructure and best health practices, and the application of artificial intelligence and machine learning are other possible keys to Northern State's continued growth in excellence.

Building and retaining a world-class faculty is grounded in the teacher/scholar model. Enhancing the capacity for and institutional provision of research and creative activity goes hand in hand with innovative curricula and with recruiting and retaining outstanding faculty and staff. I have worked as a chair, associate dean, and assistant and associate provost to support the hiring of credentialed faculty who value research. I have collaborated to implement the use of release time/reassigned time to incentivize faculty research. That has also involved introducing related expectations into retention/tenure/promotion criteria documents. Faculty research is also enlivened by faculty development programs that target/ elicit new, mid-career, and senior faculty and by micro-grants. Applications for Fulbright and other significant awards and experiences would be an emphasis for me as well.

Widening the sphere of contacts and links to related organizations will also be key to my leadership. As a believer in the power of international education, I will collaborate with colleagues to expand NSU's partnerships with local, national, and international educational institutions and join efforts to address the needs and interests of regional non-profits and corporations. We can capitalize on the lessons of the COVID pandemic and the challenges to democratic government worldwide as opportunities to renew higher education. Likewise, demographic, economic, and environmental threats and opportunities all provide meaningful avenues for programmatic and co-curricular development. Based on these intentions, Northern State University will continue to create investments in faculty and programs that can bring positive change to individual lives and the broader society.

I have worked closely with senior leaders, deans and chairs, and our Advancement (Foundation) offices at Chicago State for much of my time at the institution on annual fundraising events, focused donor fundraising, institutional (family) campaigns, alumni fundraising, seeking grants from endowments, and related efforts. The major initiative of which I was a college and departmental leader was a Circle of Friends Campaign. We succeeded in identifying two dozen local leaders of government and business who agreed to serve as mentors for our students. Many

of these leaders also provided donations and other support to the university. I helped to identify members of the Circle and worked with them for students in university departments and on targeted fundraising appeals. I have also served as a unit/departmental and college leader of institutional fundraising appeals. I have assisted senior leaders in seeking foundation and individual grants and gifts. I have supervised grants and work seamlessly with our grants office on matters related to the use of funds, compliance, institutional research, and contracts.

For systems that help students move from college to careers, providing valuable information to students and faculty can be leveraged through targeted investments in higher education technology and improved design of policies and practices. Forward-thinking campuses invest in new solutions that update technology, thereby reducing the chances of human error, empowering students and faculty/staff, and making each student's path to graduation success more transparent. Recently, I have worked with our Academic Services areas at Chicago State to update and enhance degree auditing software (DegreeWorks), analytics for improved course scheduling (Ad Astra), curriculum and catalog software (Acalog and Curriculog), faculty evaluation and portfolio software (Watermark), and a new learning management system (Brightspace). Likewise, I know what a good practice set of academic pathways for incoming first-year, transfer, and continuing students is and is not. Examining and further strengthening the smooth interaction between support offices and instructional units, as well as with administrative and faculty colleagues, would form a key focus for collaborations at NSU.

As AI continues to revolutionize American and global society as well as learning, higher education institutions must envision and implement curricula, learning processes, and research innovations that build on its potential. This also must occur with awareness of the need to bound and monitor, as well as assess and improve, how faculty and students use AI as well as model it for social use more generally. I have been invited to the advisory board of Packback, a leading provider of learning technologies around AI and higher education. Introducing AI as a part of general education, making sure that students utilize it in their major courses, and developing concentrations and options that catalyze new insights and discoveries, building on the power of AI, would be a proposal of my aligned vision. Making sure that Northern State's faculty and staff have a clear understanding of AI, its potential, and its limits would also be a key early initiative through faculty development.

Supported by peer mentoring, learning assistants, tutoring, coaching, mentoring circles, and related internships and practical experiences within their degree pursuits, a successful university prioritizes making the students' degree plans clear and intentional. This methodology for enrollment, retention, and graduation success can form a continued center of shared efforts for student success, building and maintaining energy and resilience that fosters student success and fulfilled employees.

My work has also been committed to providing higher education for traditional and non-traditional students. Their needs and goals renew the face of democracy in any country interested

in freedom through education. A key to enrollment growth for many institutions is opening university curricula and pathways to new audiences. The use of targeted financial aid, flexible course offerings, modalities, and locations all contribute to extending teaching and learning excellence for students of all ages and places. The evaluation of prior learning, quality general education, interdisciplinary offerings, and individual degree programs also makes possible increased enrollments.

My commitment to higher education has benefited from active work and interaction with Student Affairs, as well as my appreciation for the experiences of residential life and intramural and organized athletics. I initiated a campus pep rally to recognize student leaders and foster campus pride, known as Spirit Day, now in its 26th year. I have served as a Faculty Athletics Representative and would be a visible supporter of student-athletes and The Wolves, as well as intramural programming. I also believe in building global educational experiences, being a lifelong student of Korean politics, society, and culture, as well as related study abroad programs. Campus communities must also further develop mechanisms for promoting wellness and mental health among students and employees.

Northern State University values a community of belonging for relevant learning, teaching, and holistic development. Its academic vision is of an opportunity university for students and employees that dedicates itself to timely and responsive instructional programming, resulting in citizens who contribute to South Dakota and the world through their learning, skills attainment, and degrees. This academic vision requires an intentional effort to remain current, to communicate that programming and provision it, to measure its success as a learning enterprise, and to apply that data to demonstrate performance and iterate improvement. It extends the idea that all employees of Academic Affairs are leaders and partners for aligned change, responsible to the citizens of South Dakota for the use of appropriate resources, and informed partners in the processes of higher education.

The future of higher education is to face ongoing but piqued challenges to enrollment with the demographic cliff underway. It concerns continuing efforts to add quality and market value to existing degree pathways, but also by adding other marketable pathways. It requires reaching non-traditional students who have some college but no degree. It also concerns valuing internationalism to enliven curricula and the student body. Faculty and staff remain the keys to provisioning pathways through institutional consensus-building. Varied modalities and accelerated terms, as well as prior learning, military credit, and dual enrollment strategies, all come into play for achieving enrollment and graduation success.

The current generation of students wants clear academic degree plans, mentoring, coaching, and a supportive academic environment attuned to mental health challenges and other touchstones for student success. Excellent pedagogy involves not only conveying content through subject matter expertise but also reflects a concern for andragogy. Excellent instructional, co-curricular, and

student success programs embody the necessary aspects of teaching and learning to achieve retention and graduation success.

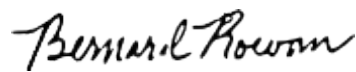
A university that does not rationalize and update its degree portfolio runs the risk of being left behind in achievement metrics. To do that and to continue innovation requires a campus-wide understanding that currency and energy are everyone's role and that "everyone has skin in the game. A strategic plan is necessary to gather and memorialize these intentions. It charts the priorities and commitments of the university community to its present and future and allows stakeholders to better understand the reason for investing in NSU.

I think that all members of an institution of higher learning do not have the same roles, but we are equals in a commitment to the Northern State mission and vision. Faculty and staff retention is key to student retention. Honoring and making clear pathways for leadership and the advancement of staff and faculty would be a top priority for me. Recognizing those who lead and building the ranks of senior mentors are proven methods of aiding in this process.

I will approach the role of Vice President for Academic Affairs at Northern State University with boldness and a vision that harnesses the energy of students, colleagues, and university stakeholders. I identify with the mission, vision, and values of the university and would pledge to keep them as the drumbeat of my energies each day. Realizing student projects of lifelong learning and committed employees would be core motivations. It would be an honor and joy to join in the mission and vision of NSU's administration, faculty, and students. Thank you for considering my application.

I look forward to sharing with you a more detailed presentation of the aims and intentions of this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernard Rowan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bernard Rowan