Dear Charlene;

Please accept this letter as my formal application for the position of Provost and Executive Vice President at Western Washington University. In what follows, I outline my record, background, and qualifications as specified in the position profile/announcement. Also, please find attached as separate documents my curriculum vita and ADEI statement.

Introduction and General Background

I begin by confessing frankly that although I am not covetous of the position of Provost in and of itself, at the same time, I am compelled to apply for several important reasons. Broadly, I see significant opportunities for the Academic Affairs Division and for the University, and I also see equally significant challenges; Western may well be at one of the most important crossroads in its modern history. We still find ourselves working within the fluctuations of a global pandemic (endemic?), one that has caused Western to pivot in directions and on time scales that would surely have been called impossible three years ago, and which will doubtless continue to ring out over the coming years. Against that textured backdrop, and noting the range of backgrounds represented in senior leadership, the choice between an internal and external candidate for Provost and EVP is at this juncture a substantial consideration. My experience and judgment lead me to the belief that right now an internal person, with experience at and with Western, building upon established working relationships and ties, with an understanding of the history and possessing a working knowledge of operations management across components of Academic Affairs as well as other Divisions at WWU, can act more efficiently and effectively on both the challenges and opportunities facing the institution. While I don’t possess the hubris to assume I am the only internal option, I have been a part of Western in many roles over many years, each of which have lent themselves to gaining the experiences required for the position of Provost. Broadly and frankly, what I have found most exhilarating about my Western journey has been the opportunity to play a role in supporting and working to empower others, and in so doing to move the institution forward. Largely, there have always been people around me who knew more, or were possessed of broader skill sets than mine, and the opportunity to play a role in connecting gifted people and ideas has been a personal driver. In short, I offer a combination of new ideas and methodologies, coupled with continuity and substantive in-house experience. Hopefully, this clarifies my impetus to apply for this position at this time.
In order to properly frame my responses to the posted job qualifications, some contextual background regarding my career path getting to WWU is in order. My early career trajectory was typical for an individual on the research-1 academic faculty track; after a four-year post-doctoral research fellowship, during which I also served as a non-tenure track instructor at WWU, I applied for and won a tenure-track position at the University of New Mexico, that state’s flagship R1 institution. That year (1996), the UNM job was the only physics theory position open at an R1 in the US, and I was unimaginably fortunate to be offered the job. However, during my time at UNM, I pointedly re-evaluated and re-assessed my career goals, and in the Fall of 1997 accepted a special opportunity offer to join the faculty at Western. This decision was significant for many reasons. For one, I had seriously re-considered my innate passion for the role of ‘teacher-scholar,’ one in which undergraduate students play a key role—both in the classroom and the research lab—and for the general ethos of broad-based liberal arts education that I had encountered at WWU, and I therefore decided that WWU offered a more appropriate setting and culture for the kind of balance that I considered optimum. For another, the position at WWU more effectively played to my strengths, including leadership. As part of the expectations in my original offer, in addition to building a strong undergraduate-inclusive research life and teaching a broad spectrum of courses, I was expected to make time to directly participate in leading the direction of the physics department. It was this guidance work, at a time when the B.S. program in physics itself was under significant scrutiny, when the department faculty was entering a transition period, and when the Communications Facility was in the planning phase, that my collaborative leadership skills, vision, connections with many talented people, and affection for the community and culture at WWU started me on the road to become department chair in the late spring of 2002. Some details of my experiences from that point are elaborated below as they relate to the job qualifications for Provost and EVP as stated in the profile document. In the interest of brevity, some details and specific data supporting the information below are truncated or omitted (but are available upon request).

**Required Qualifications**

To help facilitate evaluating my suitability for the position, I briefly list examples from my record that address the stated qualifications in a bulleted order corresponding to the bullets in the position profile, beginning with the ‘required’ list.

- I have an earned Ph.D. in theoretical physics from the University of Colorado, Boulder and currently hold the rank of full professor in a CSE department. Since my arrival at Western, I have made every effort to be a model of the teacher-scholar. I have 50 peer-reviewed publications in major journals. I have mentored more than 50 undergraduate researchers and have sent most to conferences to give talks and present posters; 19 undergraduates have been co-authors on peer-reviewed papers. In addition, I have taught every course in the physics curriculum (except for electronics and the upper-division lab sequences), from introductory physics and astronomy to senior theory courses in quantum mechanics and mathematical methods. I have developed significant curriculum at all levels and have always had strong student and peer evaluations of teaching.

- I have thirteen years of experience as a department chair, slightly less than three years of experience as Associate Dean of the College of Science and Engineering, and nearly five years of experience as Dean of CSE. All 20+ years of my administrative experience has included varying levels of responsibility for budget development and management (in times of both feast and
extreme famine), evaluation of faculty and staff, and supervision of office and technical staff as well as student workers. I have collaboratively lead efforts in every area, from strategic planning to successful program development, to advancement, and financial planning.

- Transparency is integral to my approach in every arena; my leadership style is highly collaborative, so sharing of information and process is fundamental. An example includes the annual strategic planning process implemented in CSE, wherein each step of the process is shared out via multiple channels, from the initial call for ideas from all stakeholders to the vetting process (designed to include college leadership, shared governance groups, and faculty and staff at large), to the close-the-loop steps communicating back to the original proposers. Also, we have worked as a college to integrate equity and inclusion best practices into every policy and process, from hiring to evaluation, in a broad and formal way, including a variety of stakeholders and practitioners. Lastly, we have set points in every college leadership and governance group to share out the college financial state and planning, utilizing formal/quantitative presentation, and invite feedback as it pertains to management, policy, and process.

- I have long experience with shared governance from a variety of perspectives, including service and leadership roles as a faculty member and as an administrator. From the faculty perspective, my experience includes multi-term service on the WWU Faculty Senate, UPRC, various ad hoc groups tasked with specific outcomes clustered around intersecting governance (such as institutional strategic and budget planning), as well as the primary college faculty governance groups. As an administrator, I have worked to establish highly-functioning, collaborative relationships with governance groups at all levels; the college faculty governance group responsible for policy planning and budget advising is a primary example. Working to advocate for staff and student participation in policy and planning is another core theme. I am committed to the ideals of public education and academic freedom; I have spent my life and career in public education, attending public universities and serving in research, teaching, and administrative roles over more than 35 years in public institutions, and I have encountered opportunities to define and refine the nature of academic freedom throughout my career.

- My attached/separate ADEI statement contains a detailed accounting of my experiences in the ADEI space in general, and in advancing ADEI on campus, so I will for the most part refer to that document for a more substantive response regarding this required qualification. Briefly, I have participated in, and provided support and resourcing for, several disparate initiatives led by individuals and small groups to progress several areas of need, including professional development for faculty and staff focused on awareness, culture and climate analysis and change; identifying bias in policy and process; recruiting diverse candidates for faculty and staff positions; and community building. I have subsequently been working to provide a college-wide integrated structure for ADEI work that is built upon the many individual foundational efforts, with the goal of increasing participation in and ‘normalizing’ ADEI work in all aspects of college operations. Lastly, I point out that I have working knowledge of Affirmative Action processes and Title IX compliance.

- During my time at Western, I have worked hard to develop effective leadership skills, including communication, organization, and interpersonal relationships; I am by nature an extroverted person, and my natural state is to work collaboratively and to build consensus whenever possible.
A large component of my leadership philosophy is centered on empowering and engaging others, and includes some of the well-known pillars of effective team building: strategic thinking, inclusion, people-first focus, working toward shared vision and shared goals, pragmatic optimism, and effective utilization of data. I would posit that many of the CSE college successes are directly the result of effective teamwork, including our many successful strategic initiatives, capital projects, and advancement and fundraising activities. As a college, we collaborate internally via the leadership group (more formal) and by creating connections around common ideas (less formal). Key to effective team leadership is recognizing those moments and opportunities when connections around good ideas arise and, subsequently, providing conduit to allow others to move forward. Lastly, I have an established track record of building external relationships, achieved by ensuring a compelling and coherent vision of what engagement and connection to the institution brings, and conversely, by finding strategic overlap of mutual benefit. I have made connections with a number of regional industrial partners, other institutions of higher education (four-year and CTC’s), engaged local community leaders, and numerous Western alumni. I have also served on the boards of several local non-profits.

As stated above, I have spent a long career in higher education, and have tried to pay attention to the many forces at work influencing, pushing, pulling, and sometimes ripping at the fabric of the culture and structure of higher education (broadly). During my time as dean, it has become imperative to pay attention to the broad spectrum of pushes and pulls, both internal and external. On a national level, there are several key issues influencing operations in the public four-year higher ed sector. These include (not exhaustive!):

- A quantitative prediction of declining enrollments for traditional undergraduate students, based upon decreasing numbers in the traditional demographics (declines separate from, and independent of, COVID-related declines). The prediction exists nationwide, and to varying degrees by region. Many regional public institutions are working to mitigate enrollment declines by recruiting more broadly, and by creating programming designed to reach market sectors outside their normal influence, including online and remote operations. For Western, it is difficult to predict with exactitude, but there will likely be declines in the base of traditional students over the next decade. There are mitigation strategies, such as broader recruitment and marketing beyond the region and targeting of the increasing regional populations of underserved groups, including first-generation students, by increasing awareness of and participation in college-bound programming and FAFSA information and participation.

- The threat of deep social and political divides, which can negatively influence both legislative and general public support for the basic staples of regional public institutions, including per-student funding, financial aid, ADEI efforts, curricular independence and value, and academic freedom. Institutions of higher ed are, of course, a focal point for First Amendment issues from both sides of the political divide, both in the academic and in the practical sense. Many scholars and administrators nationwide consider the pulling of academe into the center of the culture fray to be one of the most significant threats/challenges to higher education in general.
Nonhomogeneous amplification of achievement gaps brought about by the pandemic. Presumed to be based on the curricular and instructional delivery disruptions resulting from the pandemic, early data indicates that learning gains have flagged, and already-vulnerable populations have been more significantly impacted. A watchful eye and proactive mitigation are important as the pandemic continues to evolve.

Declines in international students, global exchange, and cooperation. I broke this subcategory out separately, but the influence of the political divide and climate under this category is undeniable.

Value. Over the past decade, significant scrutiny has emerged around the ‘value’ of higher education, including tuition, costs and quantified student debt, metrics for assessing outcomes, and competing career-path centered alternatives to traditional four-year degree programs. In Washington State, the governor’s Career Connect program is a very interesting example of the latter, and finding four-year higher-ed’s role in the structural framework of the program has been an interesting challenge.

Privacy and security. Cybersecurity, broadly speaking, is a critical concern for institutions, particularly regarding student record keeping, distribution, and data usage.

As I have alluded to previously, for me, a primary pillar supporting any leadership and/or collaboration activity is access to, and understanding of, appropriate data and information bases. Numerical modelling and effective presentation of data are a significant component of my academic discipline, and I might therefore posit that ‘data-driven’ is in my DNA! Over the past 20 years, I have learned about and made significant use of the institution’s data sources, including Factbook, Navigate/Student Success Collaborative, and Banner. I believe that I have been able to refine the skills needed to build strategic thinking around the appropriate use of data, particularly in the generation and quantitative assessment of ideas and directions.

I hesitate to comfortably assign the term ‘superb’ to any skill set of mine; perhaps that judgment is better left to evaluators other than myself! I do strive to start with respect in any interaction/situation, to listen first, and to utilize the demonstrable strength of diverse voices in any complex problem-solving endeavor (the adage ‘homogeneous group thinking is never smarter than the smartest person in the room’ comes to mind). I am also hesitant to speak for others regarding inspiration. I hope that the many relationships I have cultivated over my experience at WWU—internal and external—are valuable in checking me against this requirement.

As a faculty member, my first goal was/is always academic excellence, defined as the combination of effective use of the classroom and the research lab and a level of commitment expected of myself and my students. Hopefully my academic record speaks to this commitment. My goal as an administrator has not changed, but my role now is to work with a broader range of people to set up for and facilitate excellence. The good news is that, by-and-large, faculty work very hard at the general idea of academic excellence, so we are on the same team! Trust is built, in part, by letting faculty and staff alike know that we are working towards the same goals, by word and deed from my part, and to be as clear, as honest, and as transparent as a given situation will allow.
I have no doubt overused the term ‘collaborative’ in this missive. However, from my picture of the institution and my particular place in it, it is the adjective most central to everything I have either accomplished or played a role in. As a part of a people-first approach, which acknowledges that the university is its people, collaboration is a necessary element to any productive relationship, and in itself needs to be nurtured. Once again, I assert that my record demonstrates my commitment to catalyzing and fostering productive relationships, from building participation around strategic thinking and initiatives (internal and external), to bringing about change in culture and climate, to bringing ideas to fruition in the form of new programming and direction.

I began fundraising work as a department chair—once resulting in the major naming gift to the WWU Spanel Planetarium—and upon moving to the Dean’s office, I dedicated much more time and effort to advancement endeavors college- and university-wide. I have a working knowledge of and experience with all components of the fundraising enterprise, from prospect cultivation and relationship-building to ‘the ask’ and stewardship. I have experience with private donors and corporations, alumni relations, and estate gifts. Working in collaboration with WWU Foundation professionals at all levels—most closely with the CSE Director of Development—the college has attracted roughly $2 Million per year over the past five years, not including the major $10 Million gift to anchor the Kaiser Borsari Hall Capital Campaign, which I also participated in. I have worked with leadership groups from major regional industrial partners to establish working relationships resulting in student pipelines as well as research partnerships and philanthropic gifts.

Preferred Qualifications

My understanding of interest-based approaches towards labor relations is rooted in my experiences as part of the WWU Administrative bargaining team for the past three years as well as my relationships with the UFWW leadership over the past eight years in the Dean’s office. I have participated in many formal and informal negotiations and conversations, all from a basic point of view that there exists a path that is mutually strategic and nets mutual gain and understanding. I believe I am aided by my long experience as a faculty member, my essential goal of advocacy for faculty success, and by being mindful that it is a privilege to be a part of that process.

As elaborated above, I have many years of experience working on advancement projects of all sizes, all in partnership with advancement professionals at all levels.

The remainder of this letter will be utilized to frame some of my record within the structure of the position profile narrative, outlining the stated role(s) and expectations for the Provost and EVP.

Role of the Provost and EVP

The central role of the provost is that of leadership and oversight of the academic operations of the campus, and I believe my many years of both academic and administrative leadership experience at WWU have prepared me to step into the role and to effectively learn about the facets of the position that I have not experienced. I hope that, via my record, I have demonstrated both my commitment to the culture and values of Western and my willingness and initiative to look for positive change and move the university in new directions. I believe also that my record demonstrates a core commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, founded in a personal journey of continued learning and discovery, and put into practice in
collaboration with others to examine structures, policy, and practice, as well as to challenge established norms when they may be orthogonal to mission and values.

Specific components of the role highlighted in the position profile include:

**Teaching and Learning.** A primary driver that led me to WWU was my commitment to teaching and learning; I have experience leading projects focused on circular change and development, pedagogical paradigms, and broad structural ideas. I have leadership and administrative experience with graduate and undergraduate education, and have developed key working relationships with OCE. I also lead an effort to develop a program at the Poulsbo campus, and continue to be active in oversight and collaborative work to move forward with specific program elements as well as the broad philosophical structure for programs on the Peninsulas and at other locations.

**Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity.** Again, I would emphasize that an important motivator that led me to WWU was the blend of my own perspective on scholarship with the place of research and creative activity in the ethos at Western. I have been committed to supporting scholarship as a means to provide what might be considered one of the purest forms of teaching: creating opportunities for students to participate in original scholarly pursuits (broadly) in an authentic way. As such, I have remained myself an active scholar and attracted external funding throughout my career (as faculty and an administrator). I have participated in founding and leading multi- and inter-disciplinary centers and institutes focused on promoting new models and research, obtaining external funding, and supporting students.

**Academic Personnel.** I have experience working with policies and systems for all personnel actions at WWU, including hiring, tenure and promotion, post tenure review, and staff evaluations. I have had working knowledge of and experience with the WWU-UFWW collective bargaining agreement(s) since its inception, having participated in the first organizational meetings following the passing of the enabling legislation. I have established relationships with current and past union leadership, have served as a member of the administration bargaining team, and as a foundational precept, have consistently approached work with the union from a perspective of shared goals.

**Budgets and Infrastructure.** In all of my administrative roles at WWU, I have had budgetary responsibilities. I have approached those responsibilities from a quantitative and pragmatic perspective, which required learning how the budget structure of individual units, as well as that of the broader institution, are constructed and executed. I have participated on budget groups of all stripes, from planning to review, including operating and capital budget processes. I have also worked intentionally to not only understand, but meaningfully participate in critically examining and changing current structures or creating new ones. This is likely most evident at the College level, with the advent of the annual planning and proposal process alluded to above.

**Governance.** As stated in the profile, the Provost is an essential partner in the WWU shared governance model. I posit that there are a number of essential partners, but I do understand the intent! I would also posit that the essential piece is that a Provost at WWU needs to be an individual who understands, appreciates, and in a genuine way enjoys working with faculty—as well as with The Faculty. Here faculty are the individuals, and The Faculty are the groups comprised of individuals that represent faculty in shared governance. I believe the same is true for my role as Dean.
Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

This section of the profile is focused on four broader topical areas, each with a bit of overlapping content to the sections outlined above. Some connections to my record follow.

Lead efforts to advance inclusive student success. Under this subheading, the major thematic topics are retention/graduation rates and closing of achievement gaps, and more coherent connection to the shifting demographics and needs of incoming students, with an emphasis on programs beyond the Bellingham campus. I have collaboratively lead efforts in both areas over many years, and indeed, there are strategic proposals in progress as I write (from the college) that are specifically focused on building out, connecting, and providing resource support for programmatic components constructed of recruiting, cohort- and community-building, and professional development. As I mentioned briefly above, recent data indicates non-uniform widening of achievement gaps as a direct result of the pandemic, which threatens progress in many areas, and which will require attention; to make tangible progress, it is important to examine broader strategic goals around the achievement and graduation rate metrics that provide for flexible tactical pathways that address the immediate, pandemic-related perturbations, but also effectively work in the long-term to reach the broad goals. At a high level, my interest is in building upon the things Western does well, utilizing research-based and empirically supported ideas, to add to our ability to serve students more effectively, to serve students that we have historically underserved, and to carefully examine differential barriers to student success. The associated tactical components include all the tools at hand, including programmatic operations on the peninsulas and other remote sites.

Develop and execute plans for increasing graduate education. This is an area I have been involved with at Western for a long time, particularly since assuming the role of dean. Even within the college, there is a diverse set of graduate programs, occupying different niches in both the space of the program-specific and the space of purpose and outcomes. Therefore, looking at graduate program development provides rich opportunity, ranging from creative expansion of existing programs (targeting access and/or adapting to changing roles and fields), to the development of new programs altogether which, strategically, either augment a pipeline from an existing undergraduate program or create a connection with a regional market. In terms of idea development and execution, I have worked with a variety of stakeholders, including the Dean of the Graduate School, VP for Outreach and Continuing Education, and faculty and staff from various departments. There are a number of exemplar initiatives in progress that I have played a role in developing.

Strengthen excellence and innovation. This heading, as expressed in the profile, encompasses a most significant variety of important subtopics of wide scope! A bulleted format addressing the various subtopics follows:

- I hope that my record is clear regarding my perspective and experience with curriculum, pedagogy, and professional development, ranging from individual course construction and execution to broad programmatic strategic construction and implementation. I have a long and active research career (ongoing), and have collaborated on models for support and integration of scholarly activities into new programmatic models. I have served on several formal institution-wide bodies looking to structuralize resourcing and other support for research, scholarship, and creative activities—including how to effectively and appropriately incentivize and balance workload constraints.
• I have been directly involved with recruiting faculty and staff at all levels and in many roles, from search committee chair to overall development of broad strategic initiatives that involve several faculty and staff in targeted roles. The need to diversify the university through careful and intentional recruiting is clear, and can be done in concert with collaborative programmatic planning designed to set new hires up for success. My focused experience includes collaborative work on a Search Coordinator structure, improving job ads and descriptions to attract a broader diversity of candidates, and professional development efforts to increase search committee effectiveness in all areas.

• I have been involved with the Honors College in different capacities—as faculty and as administration—and have been involved in conversations around structure and planning, but this is an area where I have a bit less direct leadership experience; certainly, I know and have worked with folks on all sides of the program.

• I have some experience with internationalization from both ‘sides,’ that is, opportunities for international students to come to WWU and for students and faculty to participate in and with institutions abroad. Examples include connections made via Study Group for specific programmatic demand areas (i.e., resourcing of capacity and other support), and travelling to institutions abroad with goals to establish working relationships and to collaborate on constructing pathways and program development for exchange structures that include research and course work. Although I have not worked formally with the Institute for Global Engagement, I am aware of the IGE mission and much of the recent work done to restart opportunities—following the pandemic shutdown—for students to study abroad (as well as faculty-led experiences). I would hope to expand my connections with, and knowledge of, the IGE.

• My record and my ADEI statement should provide evidence that I work consistently to model a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and to promote the integration of best practices and best execution towards supporting a variety of opportunities for people from all areas to meaningfully participate in improving culture and climate and lowering barriers, all as an essential component of planning and operation.

• My experience in developing effective strategic partnerships with regional industrial, NGO, municipal, and federal organizations has well-prepared me for connecting intentionally with changing workforce needs, which also plays a role in what I think is an important strategic focus moving forward: to broaden and deepen the impact of Western’s operations on the region. The impacts of changing trends in higher education are wrapped into this broad goal, and, as I addressed above, my involvement with partnership creation requires a working knowledge of the many external influences on the paths and possibilities associated with Higher Education in general and with Western in particular.

• Lastly, as expressed more completely above, I have experience both in program development and in structural planning and construction in tandem with OCE, as a part of a larger process of establishing broader reach and impact (access) beyond Bellingham.

Establish strong operational and budget processes to support Western’s growth and success. I will lead off this section by calling out two distinct pieces of my background: my long career in numerical modeling and quantitative analysis, and my long quest to understand the various components of the Western budget structure, construction, accounting, and implementation. Between these two ‘skill sets,’ if that term applies, I believe I thus have two essential additive components for creating and fostering a
collaborative relationship with the VP for BFA. I also bring to that collaboration an understanding of the situational financial challenges facing the Division and much of the rest of the enterprise, including the many nuances. I also believe my record of pushing the university in new development directions—including fundraising models and strategic philanthropic partnerships—sets me up to build fruitful connections with the VP for University Advancement, focused on new avenues and processes for resourcing the academic enterprise, broadly speaking. We have made significant progress in building a wide culture of philanthropy within the College of Science and Engineering, with many successes as a result. I believe the time is right to closely examine once-thought-essential funding paradigms, and to widely integrate the practice of engaging private-sector financial partners who are invested, literally and figuratively, in Western’s mission and ideals.

I will close with a brief high-level summary of my experiences and the traits that accompany them. I hope that I have provided enough highlights of my time at WWU to underscore my fundamental commitment to Western as a community, to its mission and values, and to the fact that Western is its people. I have been involved with leadership on campus in varying roles for more than 20 years, during which time I have tried to grow with, and be mindful of, my own strengths—which include an informal and collegial personal style that I hope fosters teamwork and inclusiveness—in order to promote new ideas and connections both within the university and the broader community.

Clearly, the COVID pandemic has altered the landscape across the board. Coping with the manifold perturbations will continue to be an important challenge in the near- and intermediate-term. In this context, there are some important guiding principles that I have successfully implemented: i) in managing resources, it is imperative that programs not be put into situations where good people, working together, cannot succeed. This may sound obvious, but it is often interesting to watch how quickly the details of a problem cloud important principles! Therefore, leadership must provide context, guidance, and be skilled at recognizing the ‘tipping point.’ At the same time, good leadership must also allow for and accurately evaluate new ideas, bold approaches, and be able to construct a way forward that maintains morale and a space for individuals to do what they do best. Good leadership starts the collaborative process early, is transparent and inclusive, and is not afraid to change the working model for any given process; ii) no ‘solution’ is permanent, in good times or in bad. It is helpful to remember that making decisions leads to successes and mistakes. The proper course in any event is to honestly evaluate the outcomes and be able to adapt the course of action using the new data. I have cultivated these skills in the ‘trenches,’ and I believe my record speaks to this effort.

The preceding is a sample of my experiences; I would be happy to elaborate on others in person! I thank you for your consideration, and I hope for the opportunity to share my ideas and to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Brad Johnson, Dean
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