

April 11, 2009

To: Members of the Search Committee for the position of Dean of the A.R. Sanchez School of Business at Texas A&M International University.

I write this letter to express my interest in being considered in your deliberations for the selection of the next Dean of the A.R. Sanchez School of Business at Texas A&M International University (TAMIU). Below I provide a brief background of my business and academic history, my reasons for applying to TAMIU, and a discussion of those areas in which you seek leadership from the next dean of your college and relate to you my personal perspectives and experiences in these areas.

Personal Professional Background in Business and Higher Education

I grew up in Odessa, Texas, working in the family business – grocery stores and fast-food franchise restaurants. I went to College graduating from Texas Tech University (TTU). Upon graduation, I went back into the family business, eventually returning to college to earn my Master's degree. From there, I enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As I finished my Ph.D., I began my academic career in the College of Commerce and Business Administration at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where I was promoted and tenured.

Around the time of my promotion, my father died unexpectedly, and it became necessary that I seek a position closer to the businesses. I was hired as a Professor of Finance and Director for the Institute in Banking and Financial Studies in the College of Business Administration at Texas Tech University (TTU). Over the next several years, I divested myself of ownership of the businesses and, while on the faculty, moved from the position as Director, to Department Chair, to Interim Dean, to finally to Senior Executive Associate Dean, a role that was part of a dual-dean team.

While serving as the Interim Dean, I was responsible for the operations of the College, including fundraising. In the eight months while I served in this role, the College raised approximately \$1.8 million and when the new Dean came, I continued my work in the fundraising area by assisting the new Dean in these efforts and the two of us worked together in forming the first College Board of Advisors. I remained in the Office of the Dean as the Senior Executive Associate Dean and oversaw the internal operations of the College while the new Dean began to work on external relations and while serving in this capacity, I oversaw the re-affirmation of accreditation of the College of AACSB-International in spring 2003. Following this, I returned to full-time teaching at the time the new Dean was ready to assume full leadership of the College.

During spring 2005, I was contacted by a national search firm conducting the search for the next Dean of the College of Business and Economics at West Virginia University (WVU) and served as the Milan Puskar Dean and Professor of Finance in the College from August 2005 until July 2008. During my three years as Dean, the College went through an extensive process of self-

evaluation for the purpose of setting a Vision, Strategic Plan, and Positioning Statement/Brand Image.

Why Texas A&M International University?

When I joined the faculty at WVU, we immediately began a process of self-evaluation for the purpose of understanding our strengths and weaknesses in order to move forward a college that was in need of direction and focus. To assist in this process, I hired a professional consulting firm to help the College prepare for an extensive strategic planning, visioning, and branding process. The output of this faculty-shared process produced a set of goals, objectives, strategies, key success indicators, and resource needs believed necessary to accomplish the vision the College had set. This led to the development of a Strategic Fund Raising Plan, along with an external engagement campaign to accomplish the goals of the Plan. The College was now poised to move forward with a new vision and branding strategy that created new excitement among key donors about the future we could create. Over my tenure as dean, over \$3 million in major gifts (\geq \$250,000) were secured in response to the new Plan and Vision.

From my conversations with Dr. Lawless, it is my understanding that you are also seeking a leader with strategic planning and visioning experience who can work with the Sanchez School whose faculty, staff, and constituents are excited about moving forward by building upon its strengths. After reading about the Sanchez School, I am especially drawn to the opportunities you have for the future. In particular, I am supportive of: (1) the emphasis at TAMIU on a student-centered learning environment; (2) your desire to work with the local community through the expansion of collaborative relationships; (3) your commitment to improving the quality of life in your region (which is much like the region in which I was raised), and, perhaps most importantly, (4) your recognition that TAMIU can best leverage its geographical location through the development of an international reputation by building global relationships – both economically, as well as educationally. Being a native West Texan, and a first generation college graduate, I am familiar with the challenges you face and the opportunities you have as you move the University and Sanchez School forward and the role TAMIU plays in the culturally diverse Laredo community and the surrounding border and cross-border region.

In the sections below, I relate how I believe my prior administrative experiences intersect with what I see as those areas of leadership you seek from your next Dean as well as provide you with personal perspectives on your situation. From my reading, you seek a Dean who: (1) will embrace the Mission and Values of TAMIU, (2) has experience in visioning and effectively mapping a Strategic Plan, along with fund-raising initiatives, to accomplish that Vision, (3) has a leadership style that is conducive to working with faculty and staff in building a collegial work environment, (4) shares with you the importance of developing international programs and business/economic relationships, (5) has experience in working with the business community in developing collaborative relationships, (6) has experience in budgeting and resource planning, and (7) is comfortable in working with the AACSB.

1. The Dean must embrace the Mission and Values of TAMIU

Having spent 43 years of my life living in West Texas as a businessman, student, and professor, I am familiar with the challenges and opportunities that exist for TAMIU. Both Odessa and Lubbock share many similarities with Laredo. As an educator, I fully embrace the mission of TAMIU which has as one of its cornerstones, improving the quality of life in the South Texas region. As a first generation college graduate from my family, I understand the importance of having a college education and the windows it opens for those who have it. As I will discuss in later sections, the Sanchez School has many pieces in place – your outstanding faculty, your research, your resource centers, and in particular, your location, to make a meaningful difference in not only the lives of students and their families, but also in the Laredo business community and beyond – *but*, you can do much more. To go to the next level will require careful visioning, effective planning, and a commitment on the part of the University and the Sanchez School. If selected as your next Dean, I hope to join your efforts and become part of a team that makes a difference.

2. Setting a Vision and developing Strategic and Fundraising Plans to support the Vision

It was the strong desire by WVU that, as Dean, I work with the College in developing a Vision and Strategic Plan for the future. In my first semester as Dean at WVU, I divided the College – all faculty and staff – into non-overlapping groups and held meetings with each group for the purpose of getting to know each of the over 100 people in the College on a more personal basis. Following this preliminary assessment phase, and, with the aid of a professional consulting firm, the College started a visioning process. Faculty and staff, along with external business professionals, members of the College Board of Advisors, the President and Provost, and separate student focus groups representing all degree programs in the College, were selected for intensive one-on-one (confidential) or group interviews with a member of the consulting team for the purpose of dialoging on the strengths and weaknesses of the College.

The output of this process produced the “10 x 10 x 10” Vision Statement: “The College of Business and Economics at WVU aspires that for each year, over the next 10 years, to rise by 10% in rankings of business schools, so that at the end of the 10 year period, the College will be in the top 10% in rankings”. Once the Vision was set, the College was divided into several non-overlapping groups of faculty and staff for the purpose of finalizing a Mission Statement, Vision Statement, Core Values Statements, and developing a Strategic Plan along with its goals, objectives, key success indicators, and measurements. To promote transparency and to allow for faculty governance, meetings were held for the entire college to discuss the findings. The same process was conducted separately for student groups and members of the Board so as to develop consensus within and across several groups.

In the end, the College of Business and Economics Strategic Plan was completed and was used to develop a list of fundraising initiatives for meeting the resource needs of strategic objectives. In response to our efforts on visioning and strategic planning, several large gifts (\geq \$250,000) were secured from donors to support the needs of the College as identified in the Vision and Plan, including \$1.75 million to support a chair and Center in Free Markets and another gift of

\$500,000 to support continued research in this same area. In addition, gifts to support our Entrepreneurship Center and to establish a new professorship in accounting were received. In all, in excess of \$3 million in large gifts was secured during my tenure as dean.

Finally, a Position/Brand Statement was developed. At WVU, we defined our positioning statement as “Make Your Move” as a means of effectively positioning the College with our peers and competitors. It is my belief that continuous use of the same message builds awareness, then an identity, and eventually, recognition for a business school.

In reviewing the information at the website for the Sanchez School and TAMIU, I note a Strategic Plan for the University, with an ending date of 2005, but did not see one for the Sanchez School. It is my belief that it is critical for the goals of the strategic plan for an individual business school to be the same as those for the University, but, yet, with its own Plan, the business school can uniquely define itself within the overall University Plan.

I would recommend that the Sanchez School begin a dialogue about developing a Strategic Plan. From my experiences at both TTU and WVU, the first step is to identify a Vision – that is, who do we want to be in five or ten years and for what accomplishments do we want to be recognized? Once you have developed a Vision Statement, then you will be ready to plan strategically – the Strategic Plan provides the roadmap for how to accomplish the Vision. The development of the Strategic Plan in turn leads to resource needs (fundraising initiatives) to support the Plan and Vision. Visioning and planning must start from within the organization and then build outward with consensus from other constituents – students, university administrators, business leaders, etc., if it is to be successful. A well-crafted Vision and Strategic Plan lays the groundwork for effective fundraising.

3. Leadership Style and Building a Collegial Work Environment

I see my personal leadership style as one of a consensus builder. Having an open atmosphere in the College is conducive to creating a feeling of collegiality, and a feeling of belonging. A collegial atmosphere within a business school starts with an effective faculty governance process for decision-making with open meetings to discuss and approve matters of importance to the college and the effective communication of outcomes. While I served as Dean at WVU, there were regular bi-weekly meetings of college administrators. In addition, each faculty division has regular faculty meetings, and the College has an annual planning meeting every August, along with regular College meetings. The Staff also has regular monthly meetings as well to discuss staff matters.

Complementing the formal meetings’ process above, I began a series of *informal* communications meetings. I started a “have lunch with the dean” one day each month in an effort to promote discussion on topics of interest to faculty and staff. In addition, I directed my external relations director to begin having informal coffees once a month for the college. Finally, I met once a year with every non-tenured faculty member to discuss expectations for teaching and research, as well to let them discuss matters of concern with me. These meetings with untenured faculty were developed with a faculty mentoring program I started.

4. Developing International Programs

Your name – Texas A&M International University -- tells others who you are and the importance of international programs and relationships to the University. Unlike other business schools who claim to have an international focus in their degree programs, you have a unique quality and that is your location. Because of your location to the Texas/Mexico border, you are not only focusing on international programs, but your constituents – students, the community, and across the border – all are strongly international. While other business schools must leverage the quality of their faculty to build international programs and attract interested students, you have the added advantage of location.

My reading of your degree programs is that you have the usual major offerings at the baccalaureate and masters levels, with the added distinction that for your MBA International Business concentration, you offer this program in both English and Spanish. One aspect that I did not see, however, was the presence of any joint programs at the graduate level – either with sister colleges on campus, or more interestingly, with other universities, particularly in Mexico.

While I was in the Dean's Office at TTU, we developed a joint MBA program with the Universidad de Anahuac in Mexico. This was a rather novel program in that it was jointly degreed by both universities, with courses taught both in Mexico and the U.S. (Lubbock), in cohort fashion. As we learned from the Anahuac experience, many working business professionals in Mexico came into the program with a wide variety of experiences and connections. Because of these corporate connections, students enrolled in the program at that time had unique opportunities for internships and eventual employment. Given the location of Laredo to the border, and in particular, its proximity to Monterrey, I would think that opportunities exist for expansion of your MBA into Mexico with a partner.

I note that you have an Executive MBA in Egypt. Has the School done a feasibility study of starting an Executive MBA for the Laredo and surrounding region? Given the population and business growth in this region of Texas and your position as part of the TAMU System, this would be an excellent opportunity. This, in turn, can lead to stronger community and regional business relationships with the Sanchez School. At TTU, while serving as the Senior Executive Associate Dean, the College developed an EMBA targeted toward working physicians, given the extensive health-care community in Lubbock and the South Plains area. In West Virginia, we are more logistically challenged; consequently, in order to access students, the EMBA program is delivered via distance learning in nine different physical locations in the State and new cohorts are started every fall and spring. An EMBA program can enhance the revenue streams for the Sanchez School, and can assist in building business relationships.

In the area of doctoral programs, I was particularly impressed with your International Ph.D. program, approved in 2004. I note that in addition to the oversight provided by a faculty admissions committee, that you have a Global Advisory Board of approximately 12 members. At WVU, we have been working for over two years to introduce an International Joint DBA program in the College, in collaboration with several universities in Europe. While the College has a Ph.D. program in Economics, discussions with universities in Europe have led to working on such a program – one that would be more practitioner-oriented to meet the education needs of

professionals in Europe. If this program becomes a reality, courses will be taught both in Morgantown, and in Europe, by faculty here and there, with the ultimate degree being awarded by WVU.

Finally, another aspect of international programs is providing students and faculty the opportunity to travel to other countries to take and teach courses. At WVU, each year, as part of the requirements of our MBA (and EMBA, if they choose to do so), students can travel to China, Italy, Germany, and Poland for international experiences as part of courses in their curriculum. China has been a particularly large program for the College at WVU, dating back to 1995. Each year, businesses in West Virginia are linked with businesses in China for the purpose of building trade alliances. To complement this collaboration, we bring Chinese executives to the College each year to learn about business in the US in a six-month program. The involvement of the College in this growing area was highlighted in a special cover issue of *Business Week* in December 2007/January 2008, which displayed the skyline of Shanghai where the College hosted a special dinner and reception attended by over 40 businesses from West Virginia and 40 graduates of our six-month program who were representing businesses in China. Given the proximity of TAMIU to Mexico, I would think a venture similar to this would be rewarding both educationally and culturally.

5. Building Community Relationships

A well-functioning Advisory Board, in my opinion, is the first step in building and expanding business community relationships. I worked with the new Dean at TTU in setting up the first board there and while serving as the Dean at WVU, I reorganized the Board into four working committees: (1) development and fundraising, (2) college placement and student recruiting, (3) strategic planning and programmatic improvement, and (4) membership. In 2007, we added to our Board here our first executive from China.

While a College Advisory Board is usually comprised of alums or other individuals with some affinity to the College and whose memberships come from a large geographical area, at TTU, we found that having a local (Laredo, in your case) business group actively involved with the College was beneficial. Our Chief Executives' Roundtable was comprised of Lubbock business leaders who met once a month to discuss issues germane to the College, University, and the city.

A third area of collaboration that I have done both at TTU and WVU has been the establishment of Corporate Junior Boards of Directors, where selected students meet on a monthly basis, in a "mock board" format with officers of the corporation to learn about the business, as well as local and regional issues. These junior board structures provide valuable experiential learning and have been used as excellent opportunities for internships and job placements.

6. Budgeting and Resource Planning

At WVU, Deans are given flexibility in using resources for purposes deemed appropriate to support the mission of WVU and the College. With this "all funds budgeting concept", a five-year, pro-forma planning resource plan was constructed to best utilize idle resources to enrich and expand programs in the College. Some of the more significant resource re-allocation

decisions made from the use of the five-year resource planning tool to support our programs included:

- (a) Doubling the annual resource allocation for faculty summer support for competitive research grants from \$30,000 to \$60,000.
- (b) Tripling the annual amount of College support for research databases from approximately \$35,000 to an allocation in excess of \$100,000.
- (c) Creating five new College Dean's professorships, each providing \$15,000 in annual stipends, to support scholarship. Three of these have been awarded internally, with two more still awaiting awards.
- (d) Creating the first graduate scholarship program in the College by earmarking \$100,000 from the College reserves.
- (e) Creating a freshman admit scholarship program for the recruitment of high-quality high school students by earmarking an initial \$25,000 from reserves which will eventually become an annual allocation of \$100,000 (four-year scholarships).

7. Have experience in Working with AACSB—International

While serving as Interim Dean at TTU, the College was approaching its next accreditation review with a self-study year to occur during 2001-2002, and the year of the site visit coming in 2002-2003. During my tenure as Interim Dean and then as Senior Executive Associate Dean, I was in charge of overseeing the accreditation process for the College. It was a difficult time for the College in that we had many problems facing us from an accreditation vantage point, but we got through it. While serving as Dean at WVU, I have regularly attended conferences on accreditation and have taken training on serving as a committee member on visiting teams.

Closing Statement

In closing, I want to thank you for allowing me to share with you some of my experiences as a Dean and I appreciate the opportunity to be considered as a candidate in your deliberations. I feel that the Sanchez School has many strengths and a promising future. I welcome the opportunity to discuss that future with you.

Steve Sears
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