

11/14/2019

Lori Underwood, Ph.D.
Christopher Newport University

Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for the position Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at The University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. My experience in higher education as a teacher-scholar and administrator, my devotion to the principles of public education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences, and the shared mission and values between my current institution and UTC make me an ideal fit. Like UTC, Christopher Newport is a comprehensive state university dedicated to helping our sons and daughters lead lives of significance as well as success. I currently serve as the Dean of Arts and Humanities, previously served as chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion, and hold a Ph.D. in Philosophy at the rank of full professor.

UTC's vision and core values inspired me to apply for this position. The commitment to educate students for lives of leadership in a global society, to expand human knowledge, and serve the world, is at the very heart of my philosophy of education. An emphasis on nurturing intellectual curiosity, promoting diversity of perspective, and encouraging ethical living that transforms the lives of students and prepares them for purpose-focused lives that enhance their communities has been a touchstone throughout my career. My curricular and programmatic improvements, the international initiatives I have developed, and my service contributions have all been founded on the idea that we should mentor students and help them not only to develop their talents, but to see those talents as tools for bettering their communities. I believe that through this approach to education, we can build a better society one student at a time. A comprehensive, liberal arts based education can, and should, teach students a broader view of the successful life; one that cares for the future they are creating. In the words of William Cronon, liberal education "aspires to nurture the growth of human talent in the service of human freedom."

As a first generation college student from Cleveland, Tennessee, I know how important and life-altering education can be. It is because of my parents' commitment to my education that I have been able to live a life that I did not even imagine possible as a child. I have always been cognizant of my responsibility to help ensure access to that same opportunity for others. That is why, although I remain an active teacher and scholar, I decided to move into academic administration. It is a privilege to invest in the success of academic faculty and staff as they invested in mine.

As Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at Christopher Newport University, I work each day to support strong undergraduate programs grounded in the traditional liberal arts and sciences that serve as foundations for excellent graduate and professional education. As director of CNU's Presidential Scholars program for the past 16 years, I have developed a program that prepares students to lead lives as conscientious global citizens as well as lives of success. Through a unique and demanding series of co-curricular activities and a study abroad experience these students learn to measure value by what they give rather than what they receive. In the Good Society course that is the capstone of the program (taught at Harris Manchester College, Oxford), each student is asked to study fundamental issues of justice facing our global community. Each student is then asked to do intensive research and write a policy proposal for a project that will contribute to creating a better society by addressing a cause they care for deeply. When we return to campus, I help the students find funding through our Center for Community Engagement so they have the chance to put their research into action. The goal is to teach them that education is for others as well as ourselves.

The Presidential Scholars are challenged to use their talents as tools for bettering their communities as well as seeking to prepare themselves for the most challenging of graduate and professional experiences. My experience with this program provides me with a solid foundation to support the faculty as they continue to develop and enhance the exceptional academic programs at UTC.

In my work recruiting the Presidential Scholars as well as my work with faculty search committees in my capacity as dean, I work diligently to enhance the diversity of our student and faculty representation at the university. I research and share the best strategies for building a more diverse candidate pool and for creating a more welcoming recruitment environment for those from diverse backgrounds. I also host an international conference on campus each spring that brings scholars from across the world to interact with our students so that they have the opportunity to experience diverse perspectives on important issues outside the classroom. We regularly partner with an HBCU from our region on programming and presentations for the conference. My faculty and I understand that diversity and inclusion is a multi-focal issue, so we take steps to approach it as such.

I have worked with other institutions to create opportunities for our students to become more globally engaged. In addition to the summer program I developed at Oxford for the Presidential Scholars, this summer, I negotiated an agreement with the University of Glasgow that created an opportunity for students in my college to enter into a 3+1+1 program between our two institutions. This allows students in the Arts & Humanities to study for three years and Christopher Newport, study abroad at Glasgow in their senior year, and then return to complete an MPhil in the fifth year at University of Glasgow. Students have the benefits of studying abroad with a diverse student body as well as a magisterial degree from one of the top 100 schools in the world. By creating partnership pathways like these, we not only enhance student success, we also greatly expand recruitment opportunities for our home institutions.

When one reads through the duties one would undertake as dean of UTC, it brings clearly to mind that in order to thrive, a university must be adequately resourced and intellectually nurtured. I have the experience to contribute in both areas. I worked with Advancement to acquire support for three endowed professorships, our summer vocal Institute, and a number of endowed scholarships during my tenure as dean. A dean must constantly seek opportunities to further support for the programs in her college. It makes the difference between a thriving, dynamic university and a stagnant or waning one. Attention to a vibrant curriculum is also critical. To make the final step from evaluation and analysis to synthesis, students need high impact learning experiences like those offered by international education, internships, community service activities, and collaborative research initiatives. I have worked with faculty to add interdisciplinary programs in digital humanities and museum studies as well as founding the Global Conference on Women and Gender and the Summer Humanities Institute. These programs integrate technological and scientific literacy into humanities-centered teaching and scholarship.

I have worked with IT and Planning & Budget to develop a state of the art digital humanities classroom and lab for our new library expansion. Our students will now have a place to develop, store, and showcase their digital artifacts. The development of new programs and the evolution of existing ones are fundamental to the strength of an institution. The marketplace of ideas is ever evolving, as is the vocational marketplace. When combined with the variabilities of politics that affect funding and the availability of grants, a strong administrator must be flexible and knowledgeable of current trends. Just as professional and applied programs can offer students an opportunity to further their education, so can expanding our approach to the traditional liberal arts. I have had the opportunity to be a faculty leader and administrator throughout dramatic institutional change as well as dramatic changes in public funding. I have learned how to make sensible and forward-looking decisions in times of consequence.

Having served as vice president of the Faculty Senate, department chair, dean, and a recruiter and director for one of our university's elite scholarship programs, I understand that student engagement and academic success are intrinsically connected and quite complex. In my various roles, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with faculty,

staff, and administrators across the university to develop and advance strategic initiatives for student success. I serve on our Student Success Steering Committee and have worked closely with our consultants and staff on recruitment, retention and student life initiatives. When I began at the university our 4-year graduation rate was 10.5%, it is now 70%. I am always in awe at the positive change that can be generated by a group of committed, passionate people who share a vision. It is only through shared commitments and shared decision making that we can advance as an institution.

I am accustomed to upholding high standards in difficult situations. I work closely with our Athletic Student Success coordinator to address the issues that uniquely affect our student athletes. As the mother of two athletes, I know how challenging it can be to balance obligations to the team and academics, and I want to be sure our athletes have everything they need to succeed. I work closely with Student Affairs and our Center for Community Standards to help develop policies that will ensure that all of our students enjoy a wide range of productive and safe extra-curricular activities. I also serve on our Threat Assessment Team. It is important to develop appropriate parameters, making tough decisions when necessary, to create a safe, productive learning and living environment for our academic community.

As a trusted decision maker on my campus, I am one of four senior administrators responsible for reviewing Title IX appeals and rendering final decisions on those appeals. It is a somber responsibility, but a crucial one if we are to have a fair and transparent process for such an important issue. I also worked as a part of our recently successful SACSCOC reaccreditation team. While the work required fastidious attention to detail, it also gave me the opportunity to work with data sets from across the university and get to know the institution from a broader perspective.

A successful student body relies upon a successful faculty. As dean, I have developed a faculty evaluation system that incentivizes participation in student mentoring, collaborative student/faculty research, supervision of internships, service learning, and international education. As administrators, it is crucial that we find innovative ways of rewarding faculty for student-focused activities beyond the classroom even within the constraints of limited resources. My faculty have achieved a markedly higher level of involvement in nurturing undergraduate research and fostering international education.

The key to the success of this system is that it was developed in collaboration, not merely consultation, with the faculty. I am deeply committed to strong shared governance, because through collaboration there can be both transparency and accountability. Our teacher-scholars are at the heart of what we do as a university community. I have found that if we build institutional support and evaluation structures that are clearly articulated, fair, and transparent; which also support and acknowledge faculty contributions, then faculty will contribute far beyond our expectations. As a dean I have developed a number of formal and informal programs to advance faculty recruitment, development, and evaluation.

I have extensive experience with the planning and budget process, having served on our university budget advisory committee for 14 years. That committee sets priorities for our university's \$150 million budget each year. I directly manage a budget in my own college of over \$12 million. The enrollment trends and economic shifts in our society necessitate the development of new and innovative approaches to funding that maximize revenue without compromising academic and student life quality standards. The key to the development of this kind of model is effective strategic planning, consulting constituencies both within and external to the university.

I have a highly collaborative, open approach to leadership. I work closely with faculty, students, parents, donors, and upper administration and am comfortable working with all constituencies to advance the mission of the university. I believe that we must be open to change but purposeful and informed about the direction that change should take. The best decisions are those undertaken after research and consultation. I have worked to enhance the diversity of

our faculty and student body, not only because it is important morally and in the marketplace, but because diversity of ideas is essential for making the best decisions. I have implemented a multi-tiered approach to strategic planning in my college, because I believe it is essential to gather feedback from all stakeholders. I would welcome the opportunity to work with UTC's president and community on strategic planning to advance its mission.

UTC is an institution that always strives toward continued advancements in excellence. As colleges and universities evolve, it is essential to have leaders that have enthusiasm for the future as well as respect for the core traditions upon which the institution has built its reputation. It is our responsibility as educators not only to train our students on innovative trends in science, industry, and technology, but also to help them understand the consequences knowledge can have on their communities. It is our duty to give our students a lens through which their knowledge has context, through which they can assign meaning, value, and purpose. In simplest terms, a dean's job is to create a community in which students are excited to come and learn and faculty and staff are excited to come and work. Beyond that, a dean in an institution committed to intellectual and ethical values as core elements of the university's institutional identity is responsible for laying the groundwork through which students and faculty will equip themselves to be agents for goodness in a world that tells them that goal is pointless. Nurturing the growth of that kind of community would be a dream opportunity for any educator. It is certainly mine.

I have substantial experience in academic administration at an institution committed to academic excellence grounded in the liberal arts, but with a scope and vision that provide a transformative experience for students. I believe these are UTC's core values as well. I have served at Christopher Newport during a time of dramatic transformation. I have been blessed to have the opportunity to be a part of that transformation and I have learned a great deal from the experience. I would love the opportunity to share those skills and knowledge. As a lifelong scholar of the liberal arts and a seasoned administrator who is passionate about educating the whole person, I am strongly committed to the mission of UTC. I thank you for your consideration.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lori J. Underwood".

Lori J. Underwood, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Arts & Humanities