

Members of the Search Committee;

I am submitting this letter in application for the Dean of the new College of Humanities and Social Science position at Eastern Washington University (EWU). My vision, as described in the paragraphs that follow, my statement of diversity, and my vita, are consistent with the responsibilities and qualifications in the job listing. Through my personal and professional career as a first-generation Latinx immigrant woman of color navigating various higher education institutions across Texas, New Mexico, Indiana, and now Washington State, I commonly defy the interpretation of my unique sets of skills as advantages rather than deficiencies. These experiences are the foundation that have led me to actively seek opportunities for professional and personal growth where the needs and strengths of underrepresented students, families, and communities are at the center of developing meaningful and long-lasting transformation. It is the experience of transforming what may appear as challenges into vital tools to open up doors to new opportunities if we approach them creatively, which has provided the preparation necessary to be the next Dean for the new College of Humanities and Social Science at EWU. I will make my approach clear through the following pages: Recruitment, Retention, Interdisciplinarity, Collaboration, Community Engagement, and Fundraising.

Recruiting and retaining students, a majority of which are first-generation, low-income, and underprepared for college possess challenges, yet also brings important opportunities for new approaches. I believe that as I describe my practice to connect and support students, their families, and communities through the work that I have done in the Chicana/o/x Studies Program, some of those opportunities will become clear. I began by committing to put the needs of students, families, and the community at the center of our efforts and increasing the number of students in our program as a natural outcome rather than a core goal. This approach might sound in opposition to "normal" efforts such as institutions assessing academic units' value by counting the number of declared minors/majors belonging to each program and department. This approach begins with understanding students' needs, cultures, and desires, as well as those of their families and the communities that we aim to serve; it is more straight-forwardly supportive of social justice than the more common process. In my approach, I put into place structures and services designed to recruit *families* and help *communities* because establishing relationships and building trust will naturally lead to recruitment and retention of students. It also has the potential to lead to fundraising opportunities.

Let me give you an example of a high-impact, low-cost project I carried out as the director of Chicana/o/x Studies. With the support of my team, I changed our website from one that reflected the traditional academic structure to one with a more inclusive design that is student-, family-, and community-centered, and is culturally responsive. Accessibility for our students and their families begins with language, so we transformed our website into a bilingual one. Because retention and recruitment are campus-wide efforts, we reached out to vital units across campus to share our project and request the inclusion of links to necessary resources for informing and supporting students and their families. One resulting collaboration was our partnership with the Recruitment and Admissions teams to provide bilingual resources for parents and contact information to their bilingual staff on our website. Moreover, we became a key partner for these teams when they reached out to Spanish-speaking audiences.

Furthermore, reaching out to organizations in the community to highlight on the Chicana/o/x website led to developing unexpected relationships with companies, such as Sherwin Williams. Although I had not known this previously, Sherwin Williams serves the construction industry, which has a high demand for the unique skills that our Latinx students offer: bilingualism, multiculturalism, a strong work ethic, community networks, creativity, and more. The Chicana/o/x Studies website now highlights and links to such organizations to create a connection that supports both our students and the community. This approach of centering our students', families', and communities' needs helps us set the foundation for developing meaningful and long-lasting relationships that will serve our Program and our institution; it also has the potential to transform families and communities

My specific approach to student retention considers the challenges of equipping underprepared students to address real-world problems in an uncertain future for jobs that do not yet exist in a context of uncertainty in higher education. I am the Principal Investigator and Academic Director of the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), a federally funded program designed to support students from migrant and seasonal farmworker backgrounds. However, the Program assists students solely through their first year at EWU. I am actively working on developing a curriculum that integrates STEM, Healthcare, Arts, Humanities, and Social Science areas as well as community engagement. While the resources and support services offered through the CAMP grant open the door to our migrant students, the one-year program is insufficient to close the gap of social, economic, academic, and emotional inequities that these students have to overcome to survive and thrive at EWU. Therefore, I am actively working to develop a curriculum that integrates STEM, Healthcare, Arts, Humanities, and Social Science areas as well as community engagement. Therefore, through the Chicana/o/x Program, I have created a multilayered mentoring program and two-credit complementary (not remedial) courses to support any student in academic need (whether or not they belong to the CAMP program) at any stage of their journey at EWU, innovations which could potentially impact the retention of many students.

I believe a crucial element to recruiting, retaining, and preparing first-generation, low-income, underprepared students is reframing our ideas about who they are and what their needs are. These students and their communities have unique abilities that are commonly invisible to those in academia because these skills are not part of the traditional Eurocentric academic model. A typical scenario for a first-generation, low-income, rural student includes inadequate academic preparation from underfunded public schools while balancing work, family, and college. Such students arrive at our institution equipped with resilience, a strong work ethic, adaptability, community and family networks, multiculturalism, bilingualism, desires to succeed, and a personal interest in social justice. These are all necessary skills for a 21st Century job market. Moving away from a deficit model that embraces the notion that marginalized students must be fixed is about reframing their talents as worthy of cultivating. Therefore, I intentionally developed curriculums and learning outcomes for the Chicana/o/x Peer Mentoring Programs, the CAMP courses, and cultural programming centered on the framework of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). The assets-based theory of CCW is defined as "an array of knowledges, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism

and other forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005). Focusing on the resources our students arrive with is a pathway for creating a sense of belonging and empowerment at EWU.

Building relationships and trust with families is essential to recruit and retain our students; however, one of the problems is that first-generation college students and parents do not understand the value of having an education with both depth and breadth to face an uncertain future. Global market needs, economic crises, and future uncertainty require a college education to be much more than getting a job. We do not need to tell first-generation students and parents that technology and science are essential. Still, we do need to explain that in addition to technology and science, they need to know how to write, how to read poetry, how to appreciate the arts, how to think critically about history, economics, philosophy, gender, race, sexuality, and how to develop cultural humility about the world. We need to explain the value of non-cognitive soft skills, such as creativity, originality, critical thinking, negotiation, emotional intelligence, leadership, and flexibility as foundational to the emerging labor demands. To address this need, I have established collaborations with alumni, professionals, graduate students, medical students, visual artists, poets, and community organizations, such as the Hispanic Business and Professional Association of Spokane (HBPA) and RAIZ of Planned Parenthood. I have developed an inclusive curriculum that integrates academic skills like reading, writing, and basic research strategies, alongside opportunities to reflect on the need for non-academic skills.

For example, in the Spring, I am bringing two sets of speakers for our Chicana/o/x mentoring and CAMP programs to discuss medical school pathways and applications. The first group includes a group of first-generation Latinx medical students from Washington State University and the Director of the Office of Diversity and Equity for Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine in New Jersey, Dr. Tade Ayani. This group will explain the challenges, strategies, assets, and significance for first-generation students to attend medical school. The second set of speakers will include a representative for RAIZ of Planned Parenthood. This community-based healthcare program focuses on providing sustainable healthcare access to the Latinx communities in Spokane and Central Washington. The founder of Latinx Arts of Spokane, Miguel Gonzales, will also join us to discuss the importance of Latinx art for mental health and community building. These interactions offer an invaluable opportunity to engage students in reflecting on the multiple ways that their personal experiences (across culture, language, family, community, and work), soft-skills, and technical-skills can intersect in the job market and contribute to social justice.

Another essential element in innovating to recruit and retain students requires pooling both resources and needs across units and organizations. For example, in collaboration with the Hispanic Business and Professional Association (HBPA), the Carl Maxey Center, and Dr. Okera Nsombi from Africana Studies, I am building a three-tier mentoring program with Latinx and African American students. The Africana Studies Program previously had a mentoring program that connected African American college students with high school students before the pandemic. However, the pandemic halted this effort. In the case of Chicana/o/x Studies, we have a peer-mentoring program that connects first- and second-year, Latinx first-generation college students with more advanced students of similar backgrounds to help them navigate EWU. Finally, HBPA and the Carl Maxey Center are developing a student engagement mentorship

program for students of color, young and returning professionals. So, Dr. Nsombi and I will connect our mentoring programs to help students from high school transition to EWU. Simultaneously, HBPA and The Carl Maxey Center will help us secure our EWU students with professional mentors, internship opportunities, and community resources. Students from formally educated and affluent families are commonly equipped with a wealth of passed-down generational knowledge. In contrast, first-generation college students of color typically do not have access to a family network of family expertise and resources to guide them through the transitions from high school to higher education to a professional job. Joining forces in such a way as this is necessary to be successful in these efforts to establishing an integrated mentoring program.

Interdisciplinary Efforts and Cross Collaborations

As a new college with approximately 165 faculty members distributed across 14 academic units, the potential for cross-disciplinary collaboration is fantastic and necessary for the survival of higher education and the mindful preparation of students for the job market's required skills and challenges in the 21st Century. However, the challenge is how to break down the traditional academic silos without creating an additional sense of burden for faculty and staff. In theory, the potential of collaboration is a necessary and urgent need for our community. In practice, it is asking overextended faculty to develop new classes, new research collaborations, and new community engagement while simultaneously serving a growing student bodies of first-generation students that are underprepared. This is an arduous task to accomplish if we do not begin laying the most basic foundation to develop relationships and trust among all the stakeholders, including those who are commonly left out, such as lecturers and community members. How do we start to build these new relationships to help fuel our University's transformation? As a historian, I look to the past to bring old ideas into a new context. The role of coffee and tea houses, or "Penny Universities" as they were known in the 17th and 18th century, served as the spaces where ideas, creativity, and collaborations were sparked, opening the doors to the revolutionary power of our current society. For centuries now, gathering for coffee and tea has provided space (and energy) to socialize and share ideas, and the practice remains relevant. Coffee and tea's affordability makes it realistic amid austerity measures, after months of social distancing, opportunities to connect and socialize are highly valued. I propose to begin our journey towards transformation by creating and valuing the spaces and opportunities to build relationships and trust among *all* of us, allowing for creativity, collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and joy to develop through coffee and tea talks organically.

In Conclusion

Through these pages, I have shared my vision for the future of a new college, but most importantly, my approach for the ways that higher education needs to transform to ignite generational transformation for all our students, their families, and our region. My personal experience has informed my philosophy of leadership and service to ALL communities as a first-generation, low-income, immigrant woman of color who everyday navigates spaces and institutions that have not been created with my needs and strengths in mind. However, my time at Eastern Washington University (EWU) has given me the most significant opportunity to

nurture my ability to be an effective agent of change to serve underrepresented communities. As a professor, adviser, and community member, I had the opportunity to contribute to a wide range of initiatives related to EWU's core mission and objectives. However, in my role as the Chicana/o/x Studies Program Director and the CAMP Academic Director, I have had the opportunity to develop and implement my vision for a more comprehensive and effective learning environment to serve students, families, and communities. Therefore, my interest in applying for the position of Dean for the College of Humanities and Social Science is a natural continuation of my commitment to build and implement meaningful changes to create effective learning environments, academic programs, research, and fundraising opportunities that support the needs and value the strengths of our students, their families, and communities. Details on all of the above are included in my vita. I have also provided a list of references who can speak to these details and my readiness for the position. Thank you for your consideration of my application.

Statement Identifying Satisfaction of Basic Responsibilities and Attributes

I have read, understood, and I am satisfied with the fifteen basic responsibilities for the position of Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Science as outlined in the job description (2021002EP).

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Pronouns: She/her/hers/ella

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