October 6, 2017

Dear Search Committee,

This letter and its supporting materials constitute my formal application for Endowed Chair & Director of Center for Educational Transformation at the University of Northern Iowa. My cover letter describes my leadership, scholarship, teaching, and service. Two professional goals underlie my leadership, scholarship, and teaching activities. The first goal is to increase access to higher education, to open doors of opportunity to underrepresented populations including students of color, non-traditional, and first-generation college students. The second goal is to create equitable, just, safe, healthy, and engaging learning environments and supports that enable all youth to thrive. The remainder of this cover letter details how these two goals define my past, present, and future work in academe.

Leadership

My leadership to the institution, the community, and the field of education has been extensive. This section details my university and the School of Education at the University of Washington Tacoma (UWT), community, and professional service contributions.

University Service

One of the most attractive aspects of my position is the opportunity to contribute to the rapid growth of the UWT. At UWT, there has been no shortage of opportunities for leadership through committee work. At UWT, my assignments have ranged in scope from School of Education level to tri-campus decision-making committees. My most substantive contributions to the institution have been threefold. First, over the last 5 years, I’ve served as Executive Director of the Center for Strong Schools (CSS). The idea of the CSS was sparked by former UW Tacoma Chancellor, the late Debra Friedman, Tacoma Public Schools Superintendent Carla Santorno and Deputy Superintendent Joshua Garcia. Chancellor Friedman asked me to start a center focused on community and school transformation and begin the work of partnership with Tacoma Public Schools, which at the time was one of the lowest performing school districts in the United States. I then developed the Center for Strong Schools and articulated a blueprint for school transformation, called the Tacoma Whole Child Initiative (TWCI). My leadership of the Center for Strong Schools includes extensive budgetary oversight, program development, fundraising, and supervision. The signature program developed through my leadership at the Center for Strong Schools is the TWCI blueprint, which has become a model for school and community transformation.

As noted above, the cornerstone of my work over the last five years as Executive Director of the UWT Center for Strong Schools is TWCI. TWCI is a decade-long partnership between two urban-serving institutions, Tacoma Public Schools and the UWT Center for Strong Schools. There are four distinct implementation segments or transformative shifts. One occurred for Schools (shift 1), one for Community Programs (shift 2), one for Families (shift 3) and one for Neighborhoods (shift 4). Through these four transformative shifts, TWCI has created an unprecedented level of stability, safety, health, and opportunity to Tacoma youth. We built community and school leadership teams to promote positive, respectful, responsible and safe behaviors across the city of Tacoma. The science of implementation and sustainable change was used to get neighborhoods, schools, families and other community partners on the same page for Tacoma youth in an unprecedented, authentic, and grass roots manner. The reader is encouraged to visit the Center for Strong Schools webpage to explore outcomes and press related to TWCI (http://depts.washington.edu/csstac/). TWCI has been a key component to the successful fundraising campaign effort at UWT (https://mooreink.cms/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/UW-Tacoma-case-statement.pdf).

The success of TWCI over the last 5 years has led to national visibility and opportunities. The Wallace Foundation, in partnership with the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Forum for Youth Investment (FYI), created the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative (PSELI). After nearly two years including the application process and planning grant year, Tacoma was selected as one of 6 cities nation-wide to receive social and emotional learning implementation grants. The amount of these awards will be $2M per year over the next 4 years. More about this work here: https://www.tacomaschools.org/news/Pages/Wallace-Foundation-Grant.aspx

Dissemination of the results of TWCI has just begun. While there have been many national and regional conference
opportunities to share outcomes, much work remains to disseminate through books and refereed journal articles. Scaling-out TWCI has also just begun. We just launched the Chief Leschi Whole Child Initiative, a decade-long partnership with Puyallup Tribal Schools, in September 2017.

The second university leadership contribution has been assisting in the development of a research infrastructure at our young urban institution. This work began in the summer of 2003 when I was selected to serve on the Research Task Force committee. In the spring of 2006, I was selected to serve on the Sponsored Research Task Force committee. The impact of this work has been resources allocated to establish clearer procedures at every step of the funding process, from identifying funding sources to handling post award fiscal administration. Moreover, more funds have been allocated to assistance to faculty in having research tools (e.g., professional publications and technologies), internal funding sources, manuscript preparation, qualitative and quantitative analysis expertise, and research design. The opportunity to contribute to improving research at one of the best public research universities in the country has been invaluable. It has been gratifying to be part of the rapid development of a research infrastructure at the UWT.

Third, I’ve led innovative efforts to improve teaching and learning at UWT. I was an active member of Teaching and Learning project team convened by UWT Assessment Steering Committee. Our charge was to improve and develop reliable and valid methods for evaluating the quality of teaching at the UWT, as opposed to using course evaluations only. Over the last several years, I was trained by nationally-recognized scholars on Dynamic Criteria Mapping, Portfolio Assessment, Student-Centered Learning, Self-Assessment, and Small Group Instructional Diagnosis. I worked closely with the UWT Center for Teaching, Learning, & Technology and the UW Center for Instructional Development and Research to develop better methods to measure student learning to improve teaching at the UWT. Faculty members at UWT have integrated these measures into their courses and report increased capacity to meet the professional and intellectual needs of learners in their courses. They reported that these measures helped them formatively address concepts that were not adequately taught and to align course objectives, assessment, professional standards, and course content. Moreover, my scholarship focuses on learning technologies and strategies not only for youth, but also for adult learners (see Literacy Study Group Grant below). For example, with funding from the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, we developed assessments and data dashboard systems to measure quality of professional development provided to educators in Washington state.

My work as Director of Field Supervision in the UWT Education Program afforded the opportunity to build the capacity of pre-service special and general educators to apply equitable and evidence-based behavioral and academic practices. I’ve worked closely with field supervisors, cooperating teachers, UWT Education Faculty, and interns to develop better ways to assess intern growth in professional teaching skills over the course of student teaching.

Community Service

I have led professional development and school transformation efforts in many school districts and communities. Over the last 13 years I have trained in-service teachers or professionals in over 120 different school districts across the states of Washington, California, Oregon, Louisiana, Idaho, Alaska, and South Carolina. Educators love my leadership approach and trainings. These experiences have not only allowed me to stay current on practices but to build my leadership capacity. Moreover, working with diverse communities, educators, families, and youth improve the usability, trustworthiness, applicability, and overall social validity of my scholarship.

Scholarship

The brief chronicle of my professional history begins at the College of Education at the University of Oregon. I received both my Bachelor of Science in Educational Studies and Sociology and Masters Degrees in Educational Policy and Management from the University of Oregon. As part of the first cohort of integrated licensure students in the College of Education at the University of Oregon, my training focused on both special and regular education. I received extensive training in positive behavioral supports, scientifically-based instruction, curriculum-based measurement, and assessment. My doctoral study was completed in Special Education with an emphasis in Emotional and Behavioral Disorders at the University of Nebraska, under the direction of Drs. J. Ron Nelson and Michael H. Epstein. This experience deepened my capacity to apply evidence-based practices to improve the academic and behavioral outcomes of youth with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD). My training focused on positive behavioral supports, community-based systems of care, systematic and preventive approaches to effective instruction, and research and evaluation. I served as Principal Investigator on a U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs funded project to investigate the responsiveness of children at risk of behavior disorders to phonological
awareness instruction. As Reading Assessment Coordinator at the Center for At Risk Children’s Services (CACS), my role was to develop effective systems for improving the responsiveness of students with reading difficulties to scientifically-based reading instruction, particularly those with EBD. As Wraparound Fidelity Specialist at CACS, my primary responsibility was to evaluate the fidelity of hundreds of wraparound service delivery meetings conducted in the homes and/or schools of families of youth with severe emotional disturbance. Thus, the combination of my doctoral program, training at the University of Oregon, and professional experiences have provided me with the essential tools to lead and advocate for improving outcomes for with youth with EBD and their families.

Funded Grants

While on faculty at the University of Washington Tacoma (UWT), a small branch campus of the University of Washington, I have served or am currently serving as Principal Investigator or other leadership role on 32 funded projects. The total amount of external grant funds awarded for these projects is over $15 million ($15,130,302). In 2015, the US Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences funded my four-year development and innovation study (IES Goal 2) entitled Literacy Study Group for Teachers of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders ($1,499,444). The purpose of this project is to develop Literacy Study Group (LSG), a web-based professional development innovation designed to build the capacity of teachers to deliver high-quality reading instruction to elementary school students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). More about the LSG study is available here: https://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/details.asp?ID=1615

Publications

As indicated by the brief summaries of funded work to date, my scholarly work over the last 14 years has been productive, enriching, and beneficial to regional and national efforts for improving services for students with EBD and/or academic difficulties. The results of these projects have been published in Exceptional Children, Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, Behavioral Disorders, Journal of Special Education, Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, Journal of Behavioral Education, and Education and Treatment of Children. Dissemination of my research through publications includes 56 peer-reviewed journal articles, two invited book chapters, one invited book, three non-refereed publications, and three online courses, to date. My book entitled, Instructional Practices for Students with Behavioral Disorders: Strategies for Reading, Writing, and Math was published in 2008. Guilford Press invited me to author the book with two other researchers on this topic as part of a series on what works with special needs learners. My task was to author chapters on fundamental instructional practices, foundational assessment practices, reading instruction, and math instruction.

Teaching

My work in the area of teaching has provided the opportunity to build the capacity of educators and service providers to increase access by opening doors of opportunity to underrepresented populations (goal 1) and to create equitable, just, safe, healthy, and engaging learning environments and supports that enable all students to thrive (goal 2). I strive to model evidence-based practices while communicating high expectations to students. In addition, I strongly believe in placing course content in the context of real world application. This provides the opportunity for students to bridge the gap between research and practice. I bring the community to the classroom and vice versa. Moreover, I constantly attempt to fuse teaching, scholarship, and service. This involves creating opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to take active roles in research and training them to be excellent research consumers.

Teaching Evaluations

Evidence of the effectiveness of my teaching in building the capacity of urban educators to apply best practices is found in my course evaluations. I have taught a range of courses for the Education Minor, Teacher Certification (TCP), Professional Certification (M.Ed.), and Secondary Science programs. Inspection of student evaluations of my teaching over the last thirteen years indicates an average rating falling between very good and excellent. The mean rating of my teaching across all of my courses taught at the UWT is 4.6, on a scale of 0 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). I’ve often taught two very challenging core classes (i.e., Understanding Educational Research and Classroom Assessment). I have not only taught a range of courses (9 different ones) but several (e.g., Educational Foundations) outside my areas of expertise over the last 14 years. As a result, I have devoted much of my time developing courses, gaining expertise in educational foundations, exploring research-based practices, and evaluating student work. Students have gained critical professional skills in my courses, through advising and
mentoring. Their comments and evaluations indicate that, while challenging, my courses provide opportunities for intellectual growth and professional development. Students do well because I provide high expectations, clear guidelines for assignments, prompt feedback, opportunities for collaboration, and respect for their diverse talents and perspectives. Students appreciate the direct application of course content and activities to the real life, day-to-day challenges in schools. Thus, my students tend to be motivated to put extra effort into courses by the greater good of improving the academic and behavioral outcomes of children, particularly those who evince academic or behavioral difficulties.

Conclusion

I have learned much in my professional life to this point and look forward to continued growth and enrichment. My work in the areas of leadership, teaching, research, and service has not only been personally fulfilling but led to better outcomes for youth locally and internationally. I am pleased with my progress and look ahead with great optimism. I look forward to continuing to work toward building community partnerships, innovation, and excellence as Endowed Chair & Director of Center for Educational Transformation at the University of Northern Iowa.