

Dear Committee Members,

It is with great enthusiasm that I apply for the position of Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at **Emporia State University (ESU)**. I believe my unique background is an excellent fit for the job description provided in the leadership profile. I have a strong record of sustained academic achievement in research and teaching, and substantial and broad leadership experience in and outside academia. Across my career, I have worked collaboratively with faculty and staff to create and grow innovative programs and tackle important challenges. I have been a long-time contributor to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives for faculty and students, have academic and administrative experience addressing issues of student learning and student success, and have worked with the community and other stakeholders to develop and deepen partnerships.

ESU has a long history of providing high-quality undergraduate and graduate education to its students and making important contributions to the region through research, community engagement and economic development. The *Adaptive University* Strategic Plan provides a compelling vision of ESU's future. To achieve this vision, the Provost will need to harness the creative energy of faculty, staff and students by creating an environment for productive collaboration. It will also be necessary to effectively utilize resources to achieve key priorities and fix processes or policies that inhibit innovation or student success. The Provost must also work to support faculty to create and grow innovative academic programs, to enrich their research and instructional expertise, to foster student success, and to help lead the institutional drive to recruit and retain a diverse faculty, staff and student body. In the following paragraphs, I describe how my background and experience is relevant to these challenging tasks.

*Envisioning, Building and Supporting Innovative Academic Programs.* Successful academic programs are aligned with the needs of students, the changing nature of work, the academic values underlying a college education, and the expertise of the faculty. In leadership roles stretching back to the beginning of my career, I helped create new programs designed to meet the needs of students that built upon existing faculty strengths. As Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHS) at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), I have worked with our faculty to build on the skills developed by a liberal arts education by pairing it with experiential learning opportunities such as internships and research. In addition, we have collaborated with other colleges (e.g., Business and Engineering) on programs designed to increase students' ability to graduate with sought-after skills. We have also developed partnerships with the business and non-profit community in the region to get their input on the skills needed for jobs in their industries. To provide greater flexibility to those students who need it (e.g., students working full-time), we provided in-person courses at convenient times or in the online modality. Finally, we have worked to support innovative programs and give them the resources they need to succeed and grow.

*Supporting Faculty Instruction and Research.* ESU provides a high-quality education to its students and conducts research that makes important contributions to the region, state and nation. Neither is possible without faculty expertise, and the support necessary to continue to grow that expertise. The support of faculty teaching is an important focus for our college. For example, CAHS has an incentive program to support the creation of high-quality online instruction that predate the pandemic. In preparation for Fall 2020, we expanded those efforts to include both incentives and the hiring of part-time instructional staff to assist faculty in preparing their courses for an online format. We have also increased our support for faculty research. For instance, we created an incentive program for the submission of extramural funding proposals that has dramatically increased both submissions and awards (e.g., FBI, Naval Research, NASA). Beyond incentive programs, we also invested in staff development to ensure that faculty who receive awards have strong administrative support. These are modest steps that are appropriate for our college, but there are many opportunities for the future Provost to work with the Office of Research and Grants to grow faculty research support across ESU's campus.

*Supporting Student Success.* At both the college and university level, I have helped create stronger support for student success. At the beginning of my term as Dean, I hired a recruiting and retention coordinator, the first time the college had such a role. In the years since, we have created deeper engagement with our students in person and through social media, have overhauled our advising system to move from a passive, drop-in model to a proactive, "intrusive" approach, and improved access to critical data. The college has a diverse student body and we have also focused on providing better engagement and support. At the

university level, I helped advocate for the establishment of a new student success advocate unit (ASAP) and worked to improve the quality and immediacy of student success data. As Acting Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, following a reorganization, we refocused the unit to support international and graduate student retention and graduation. I also have extensive experience in recruiting and enrollment at the undergraduate and graduate levels (e.g., I oversaw admissions at the LSU Graduate School).

*Commitment to DEI.* Across my career, I have worked to further diversity, equity and inclusion in various roles. For example, as a faculty member and Associate Chair of the Psychology department at LSU, I worked to deepen our relationship with HBCUs in our region and contributed to the Initiative for Maximizing Student Development (IMSD), an NIH-funded program which supports diversity in the biomedical and behavioral sciences. As Dean of CAHS, I have worked with faculty to expand our DEI efforts. I formed the first college-wide DEI steering committee, and we have worked together to strengthen our faculty and staff hiring practices, develop new academic programs (a newly approved minor in Justice and Equity Studies), create new ways to communicate our support for our diverse student body, and collaborate with minority-serving higher education institutions in our community. In addition, our Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies program (a minor and a Student Center) has very robust programming and serves our large LGBTQIA+ population. During my tenure, we have greatly diversified leadership at the college and department levels, and I recently instituted a new program to increase the availability of college-level leadership experience to a broader set of faculty. I have also been heavily involved in DEI efforts at the university level. For instance, I am a member of the Police Advisory Board that was formed following an off-campus incident involving our campus police, and which has focused on developing a more productive relationship with campus constituents. I am a member of the Advisory Committee and Internal Executive Committee of an NSF ADVANCE grant awarded to UAH, aimed at increasing the participation and advancement of women in STEM fields. I was co-chair, with the Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, of the University Strategic Planning Sub-Committee for DEI. Finally, we have worked to deepen our connection to the broader community. Our college recently partnered with local HBCUs and community groups to bring Opal Lee, known as the Grandmother of Juneteenth, for a three-day event.

*Collaborative Leadership.* My leadership style is collaborative, inclusive, and focused on long-term results. One of the great strengths of universities is the diversity of knowledge and experience that faculty and staff can bring to solving problems. The importance of listening and being inquisitive cannot be overstated. In my first semester at UAH, I met with every faculty and staff member in the college to understand their background, as well as their hopes and concerns for the college. As we began to tackle specific issues (e.g., retention and graduation), we established short-lived ad hoc working groups with a diverse membership. Each group is given a clear charge to identify the core issues, provide a small set of prioritized potential solutions and specify ways of measuring the success of those solutions. The focused and time limited nature of these groups is designed to respect faculty workloads while providing fresh ideas and input. Subsequently, small-scale initiatives are performed with the goal of learning quickly what works and what does not. Beyond these ad-hoc groups, we instituted other ways to gather input from other constituencies. For instance, I was the first CAHS Dean to have regular meetings with our faculty senators to give them updates on college issues and solicit their input. In addition, we often use surveys and focus groups of faculty and students to identify pressing issues, and increased their use during the pandemic. My focus on long-term results is an appreciation of the complicated path to improvement for any reasonably complex problem. In some cases, great ideas do not work out as planned, and in those situations, the ideas need to be modified or new ones implemented. The emphasis remains on the long-term goals, and on pursuing progress in the face of challenges. This approach was influenced by my experience working in user experience (UX) in the early 2000's in the San Francisco Bay Area. Finally, I have regularly sought out opportunities to continue to learn and grow as a leader. Most recently, I was selected to be a fellow of the ASU/Georgetown Academy for Innovative Higher Education Leadership.

*Developing Community Partnerships.* Universities not only bring their distinctive histories, but they are part and parcel of their geographic and cultural locations. This is certainly true at UAH, which has deep connections to NASA, the US Army, the FBI (more recently) and the associated business community. Our college provides important contributions to the community in the form of arts programs, public lectures and research. We have sought out partnerships with organizations throughout the community (e.g., Businesses, Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, Huntsville Ballet, the FBI), and these relationships have led to opportunities for our faculty (e.g., contracts), our students (e.g., internships and jobs), the institution (e.g., co-sponsored events)

and for our partner organizations (e.g., helping them to solve problems). Input from our partners also led us to consider new academic programs (e.g., a graduate degree in International Security and Intelligence).

*Synopsis of Leadership Positions and Professional Experience.* I have held a variety of leadership positions across my career. My current role is as Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. UAH is a STEM-focused university. Our college is known for its highly quality instruction, its unique research areas, and for our arts division's innovative use of technology (STEAM). Our animation program is the top-rated in the state, our music program was honored as a Yamaha Institution of Excellence, and our Theatre program is known for its innovative work in lighting and set design. During my time here, we implemented a major initiative to prepare for Fall 2020 instruction under COVID-19 conditions, created a strategic plan, increased extramural funding, increased online course and program availability, created new academic programs (including the first Ph.D. program at the college), worked with other colleges to encourage interdisciplinary education (e.g., with College of Business), overhauled our recruiting and retention efforts, led diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, deepened engagement with alumni and the community, and increased fundraising efforts at the college. Furthermore, we increased resources and opportunities for our programs, helped the Music Department to navigate the NASM accreditation process, and raised funds for scholarships and other activities. I work extensively at the university level with other Deans and university committees on retention and graduation, online learning, and diversity, equity and inclusion. In November 2020, I was appointed Acting Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School and served concurrently in this second role until last October. I oversaw the operations of the Graduate School and International Services. During this time, we reorganized the unit, hired new staff, and focused on increasing graduate student retention and graduation. I also worked with the Graduate Council to draft bylaws, update policies, and streamline procedures.

Prior to coming to UAH, I served as AD of the Graduate School at Louisiana State University. In that role, I did university and unit-level strategic planning, helped lead change and restructuring within our unit, supervised admissions staff, worked with faculty on new program development, and conducted outreach activities with regional industry partners. Other previous positions provided me with relevant experience. I led the development of two doctoral programs earlier in my career. In my industry leadership roles in the technology sector in the Silicon Valley, I worked with large interdisciplinary teams, oversaw a team of designers and user researchers, and did business development. In my work as a professor, I was a leader in my department in introducing active learning techniques into the classroom and helped create an innovative online course for new majors. My research is in the area of memory and learning, which provides me insight into ways that student learning can be effectively facilitated and evaluated, and teacher expertise can be developed. I received external funding for my research (e.g., NSF, FBI) and worked on a number of large interdisciplinary projects. In all my roles, communication has been a strength. I believe in the importance of "giving science away" and have regularly talked or written about the relevance of my research to the public (e.g., appearances on television), the private sector, government (e.g., judges) and practitioners (e.g., law enforcement). In my administrative roles, I have similarly been called upon to articulate the value of programs and initiatives to a diverse set of stakeholders, as well as carefully listen to their challenges, and identify areas for collaboration.

*Closing.* I place a high value on the accessibility of higher education partly because of the role it played in the opportunities we had as a family. My father was born in Butte, Montana, the son of a copper miner. His life (and his children's) was transformed because the GI Bill enabled him to become the first in his family to attend college, and eventually, a professor. My own student experience, fueled by interactions with dedicated faculty and staff, profoundly influenced the course of my career by helping me to see what was possible to achieve. ESU's commitment to supporting students from diverse backgrounds and providing a transformational experience for them, resonates deeply with my own passion for these goals.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with the committee to discuss the fit between my experience and the position of Provost and Vice President. ESU has exceptional faculty and students, and the opportunity to create an even stronger institution. I would love to work together to accomplish this vision of the future.

Sincerely,

**Sean M. Lane, Ph.D.**

Dean, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences  
University of Alabama in Huntsville