

April 13, 2023

Dean, College of Business, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Dear Members of the Dean Search Committee:

My name is Som Bhattacharya and I am the Dean of the College of Business and Management at the University of Illinois Springfield. I write to apply for the College of Business (CoB, hereafter) Dean Opportunity at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS, hereafter).

I am a 1994 Ph.D. in Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting from the University of South Florida (AACSB accredited at both the Business and Accounting levels). I have been an administrator since 2006...17+ years of progressive administrative experience. This has been as Director of the School of Accounting and the School of Accounting Executive Programs, Associate Dean, Acting Dean, and Interim Dean at Florida Atlantic University (AACSB-accredited). Then came the Dean opportunity at the Gus Machado School of Business at St. Thomas University, Miami. My current position is that of Dean of the College of Business and Management at the University of Illinois Springfield (AACSB-accredited). I have been a full professor since 2009.

Higher education today is increasingly competitive and in a state of flux. In this context, my early goals would be to advance the CoB's academic aspirations via the following:

Evidence of strong leadership: I believe that at the heart of any college's undergraduate success lies a clear path from enrollment, through retention, ending in career placement or graduate studies. As the cost of attending college soars, some have questioned returns from this investment. Growing skepticism regarding the value of a college education and a perception of inadequate student skills upon graduation have led to employers eschewing degree requirements in favor of short-term career-specific and employer-specific certifications. Coupled with the nationwide drop in high-school graduations, this has cast enormous pressure on institutions of higher learning to justify the need for and value of higher education in the United States (see: <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/collegeroi/>).

I would explore creative ways to advance the CoB's access to Colorado Springs and surrounding-area high-school students. At the same time, we may want to

explore 3-year accelerated degree programs and 3+2 accelerated programs leading to the awarding of both undergraduate and master's degrees simultaneously. Given UCCS' role as an anchor institution in Colorado Springs, CoB students have enviable access to prized internship and experiential learning opportunities. I would leverage these to further faculty- and student- experiential learning and research.

It would be a mistake, however, to succeed at attracting the best and the brightest and not pay commensurate attention to retention. The art of retention incorporates clearly articulated and efficient paths to timely graduation, experiential learning opportunities like internships, undergraduate research with faculty, strong industry connections and career placement and/or graduate degree opportunities. For instance, in the College of Business & Management at UIS, we require students to complete 3-6 CH internships that are critical to experiential learning and eventually to career placement.

As the demographic profile of college-going students in the United States changes, with fewer expected high school graduations between now and 2032, the CoB (and UCCS) must turn its attention to include working-age and adult students. A recent report by *Lightcast*, a labor market analysis company, finds that returning to school is a particularly good investment for adult learners (see: <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2022/07/25/major-returns-adult-learners-going-back-college#.Yt6AM7fRqds.link>). The coming domestic demographic bomb, in terms of the anticipated drop in domestic high school graduates nationwide, could thus be somewhat mitigated by leveraging the CoB's enviable Colorado Springs location and scholarly reputation to draw working adults and international students into the fold.

I plan to work with Admissions, Retention, Housing, local school districts, the Career Center, staff, and faculty to develop a sustainable undergraduate enrollment management plan for the CoB. Some of the ways we might be able to mitigate the impact of the imminent demographic challenge would be to: (a) put greater emphasis on online programs; (b) put greater emphasis on niche market-relevant programs that are not readily available at proximate institutions; (c) A focus on non-degree programs aimed at adult-learners; (d) a focus on stackable, short-term certificate programs as degree alternatives; (e) a strong and systemic drive to recruit international students, etc.

Our graduate programs must be cognizant of the profile of today's graduate students, mostly working adults, unable/unwilling/both to remove themselves from the workforce at a time of high opportunity costs in an environment of almost full-employment. To that end, the CBM at UIS has reduced most of its

graduate programs to 30 CH and 8-week sub-terms, allowing students to graduate in as little as a calendar year. This, coupled with five starts a year, has helped grow both the College and the institution.

Enrollment challenges were one of the first things I addressed as Dean at UIS. We brought about curricular changes, making Business Communications and Data Analytics part of the undergraduate core, articulation agreements with Lincoln Land Community College and the Community College System of Illinois, removed the need for GMAT/GRE for graduate admissions, reduced our graduate courses to 30 CH programs (other than the MAcc), and moved all our graduate courses to 8-week terms. We also entered a partnership with an Online Program Management Company, *Academic Partnerships*, on a revenue-sharing basis to market our programs and recruit students nationally. We expanded our slate of offerings by increasing the number of market-relevant programs.

One of the highlights of our online OPM-supported MBA program is the ability for students to earn short-term certificates that are built into the program. Students can further their MBA via several 9-12 CH certificates. We are also looking into for-credit and not-for-credit programs offered to corporate partners (the CoB at UCCS is well poised for this area). The CBM is readying to offer degree-alternative stackable certificates. Institutionally, we have entered a partnership with *Shorelight* for international students.

These articulated, intentional, and informed enrollment management strategies have yielded a 6.7% increase in institutional enrollment over 2022-2023, and the College of Business & Management has sustained almost 8% gain in enrollment over the same period.

Knowledge of the AACSB accreditation process: I took the College of Business and Management at UIS through AACSB reaccreditation under the 2020 Business Standards at the height of the Pandemic in 2021. I have also served on several peer review teams for the AACSB and as a panelist for AACSB's symposia on the use of Online Program Managers and Assessment of Learning for Online Programs (see: https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_22395z3g/213011553 and https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_o9cf8851/213011553)

Knowledge of policies, criteria, and accreditation affecting programs; knowledge of trends and issues in higher education: I am inspired by Dr. Jason Wingard's book entitled: *The College Devaluation Crisis*. Dr. Wingard, president of Temple University, discusses the growing Expectations Gap between what universities are producing (graduating students) and what employers are looking for. Dr. Wingard contends, and I agree with him, that unless we, in academia,

strive to narrow and close this gap, higher education is at increasing risk of becoming irrelevant to the employment marketplace. We are already witnessing this with the advent of companies like Google offering their own credentials in lieu of seeking evidence of proficiency through traditional higher education credentials.

I have concluded that our seats of higher learning, including schools/colleges of Business, must engage a lot more in interdisciplinary programs and provide students with avenues for experiential learning. These approaches are critical to our quest to close the gap between the skill sets that students are graduating with and those sought by their employers.

My interest in the CoB Dean position at UCCS stems from the multitude of interdisciplinary and experiential learning opportunities that abound at the College and at UCCS. I would explore opportunities for interdisciplinary programs with UCCS' Colleges of Nursing and Health Sciences and Engineering & Applied Science through joint undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Experiential learning and interdisciplinary programs are important because today's employers seek students (interns, potential employees) steeped in interdisciplinary pursuits to address current day 'wicked'/urgent problems. I would work to stand up innovative and innovation pathways to create niche experiential learning and interdisciplinary programs at the CoB at UCCS. Niche programs also have the advantage of drawing in out-of-state and international students.

At FAU, I headed the University's committee to select startup applicants for the FAU Research Park. Initiatives included a joint Engineering and Business project where Engineering students developed an underwater robot submarine for Lockheed-Martin and students from the College of Business evaluated issues of RoI, cost-benefit analyses, etc. My experiential learning initiatives have included the creation of Student Managed Investment Funds at both STU and UIS, establishing mandatory internship requirements for undergraduate students, again both at UIS and at STU.

I have always had an interest in and conviction that we need to break academic silos and promote interdisciplinary and experiential learning. Since the end of the Second World War, though, Higher Education in the United States has thrived from an unending supply of domestic- and international- students. The incentives to break silos and respond to what Wingard calls the 'expectations gap' have been weak. Unfortunately, that time of somewhat indolent success is now behind us. The marketplace is creating pathways for employment that eschew the need for college degrees. Some of this is in response to students' reluctance to take on debt for college. Some of it stems from the perception that college education is no longer relevant for today's employment marketplace (questions of RoI). At the

same time, countries such as China and India are making large investments in Higher Education. Their goal is to stem brain drain to the West, particularly to the United States. We face a new paradigm and we must respond to this new paradigm of falling high school graduations, falling birth rates, perceptions of diminishing returns from college education, flagging student interest, increasing competition for international students, with urgency. I believe that this new paradigm calls for interdisciplinary approaches to experiential learning.

Demonstrated experience in budget management: We launched three major initiatives in the CBM under my watch. Of these, the administrative restructuring of the College is now complete; the College's reaccreditation by the AACSB under the 2020 Business Standards is also complete. The College's attempts to create new paths to enrollment growth and revenues for the College and the University, in partnership with an Online Program Management Company (OPM), *Academic Partnerships* (AP), and with *Shorelight* for international graduate students, are currently underway and the early returns on these are promising.

The collaboration with the OPM required the CBM and its leadership to work with the full gamut of UI(S) administration. This included the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor, Provost, UI Contracting Services, UIS and System CFOs, the System Provost's Office, the Registrar's Office, Admissions, Financial Aid, Information Technology Services, Campus Senate, and the UI Senate Conference Committee.

The CBM has demonstrated its ability to traverse new avenues for growth under my leadership. To date, the CBM, in partnership with AP, has launched an online MBA with eight concentrations, a fully online MS in Finance, a fully online MS in Human Resource Management, a fully online MS in Healthcare Informatics, a fully online MS in Management Information Systems and a fully online MS in Cybersecurity Management.

I have enjoyed a modicum of success in drawing philanthropy into my colleges and programs. These have included designing and naming (including architect- and builder- selection) the then School of Business at St. Thomas University along with establishing an endowed professorship in Cybersecurity Management and a Faculty Fellowship in Sports Administration (all at St. Thomas University). I would bring this experience to bear on the CoB at UCCS.

Demonstrated commitment to servant leadership, inclusive excellence, and personal and professional integrity: I view faculty and staff as the second-most important constituents (second only to students) of any institution. I believe in shared governance. To that end, I was part of the team representing UIS Administration in negotiations with UISUF on the renewal of our Collective

Bargaining Agreement. This agreement has now been ratified by the UI Board of Trustees.

I believe that we must nurture a culture of diversity and inclusivity where every member of the College, be (s)he staff, faculty, or student, feels that (s)he has a voice and that (s)he matters.

I would work to explore a DEI Stance Statement for the CoB, tying the College's Mission and Strategic Plan to a respectful and inclusive environment. Such a Statement would work with an annual initiative highlighting the College's goal of creating a welcoming experience for students, faculty, staff, and all stakeholders.

In this context, it is important to note that diversity and inclusion do not always run in tandem with each other. For instance, one can have a very diverse organization that is not at all inclusive or an inclusive organization that is not at all diverse. Hence, my goal, as the CoB Dean, would be to grow both our diversity and inclusivity quotients by attempting to recruit and retain more minority faculty, staff, and students to the College. Our goal would be for our students to see themselves and the American diaspora in their professors and staff members at their college of choice. To that end, diversity and inclusivity go together with equity and belonging as our overarching goals.

Over the years I have overseen negotiating with and recruiting many faculty members at various stages of their careers to the School of Accounting at FAU; the College of Business at FAU; as Dean of the Machado School of Business at STU; and as Dean of the College of Business and Management at UIS. A number of these faculty members are/were minorities and my colleges and institutions gained from this diversity in innumerable ways.

The faculty and staff of the College of Business and Management at UIS reorganized the College from five departments down to three shortly after my assuming the CBM Deanship at UIS. This has led to a flourish of new programs; cross-disciplinary research; the development of (i) undergraduate business analytics and (ii) business communication as core courses; and a general boost to faculty and staff morale.

While the college's reorganization was underway, I charged the CBM Faculty Development Committee (FDC) to develop journal rankings and criteria for intellectual contributions for annual faculty reviews. The FDC responded by developing multimodal and multidimensional measures of both intellectual contributions and teaching effectiveness. The FDC formed a Journals Review Subcommittee (JRS) to formulate a college-wide journals list and journal rankings

based on the Australian Business Deans' Council criteria (see: <https://abdc.edu.au/research/abdc-journal-quality-list/>) and the Chartered Association of Business Schools criterion (see: <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2018/>). The UIS CBM Journals List goes beyond both the ABDC and the ABS criteria because it allows for faculty petitions for journal inclusions and allows for extra-business disciplines. We presented our first award for excellence in intellectual contributions in 2020. Teaching and Service Awards began in 2022.

In homage to intellectual pluralism, I eschew advocating for any given genre or methodology of research. In fact, while a firm believer in the need for quality (of intellectual contribution), I find that the adoption of the mores of intellectual plurality makes it far more likely to achieve quality than favoring certain genres of research or methodology over others.

CoB Advocacy: A College of Business must be in and of the community that it lives in. At UIS, I make it a practice to have three to five faculty members attend every Dean's Advisory Board meeting in the CBM. My goal is for external stakeholders to view the CBM as a repository of knowledge and expertise for local and regional business. My faculty routinely present their research to the Board in the context of how our students and research can help address (local) business issues and contribute to the community.

I recently paired a new assistant professor of cyber security management with one of the leading civil engineering firms in Illinois headquartered here in Springfield. The faculty member devised experiments in penetration testing and phishing with the entity's cyber security experts and collected behavioral data on employees' proclivity to commit cyber errors. We are now in discussions for her to engage with one of the leading banks in town. Both firms' COOs are on my Dean's Advisory Board.

Another area of engagement with the community and region that I would like to explore at the CoB is in workforce development. Workforce development encompasses academic entrepreneurship and lifelong learning by alumni and workers already in the workforce. The CoB, then, could position itself as Colorado Springs' primary resource for local- and state- workforce development. I would envision the CoB leveraging its research and teaching to add to the community's ability to maintain currency, bringing conceptual, technical and technological fluency to the local workforce.

Personal Integrity: I believe in leading by example. To that end, my personal integrity is of paramount importance to me. Integrity, transparency, and honesty

go a long way in engaging faculty and staff and in winning their confidence. At the end of the day, the Dean can only succeed in ways that his/her students, faculty, and staff members allow him/her to, and they do so because they align with his/her vision for the College. I am yet to come across a successful Dean who did not have his/her faculty and staff's (and students') support as the main ingredient behind his/her success.

Conclusion: In conclusion, I will be a servant-leader, facilitator and enabler for my students, faculty, and staff as Dean of the College of Business at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. I will act in concert with Provost Marchand-Martella, Chancellor Reddy, peer Deans, peer administrators, chairs, heads, faculty, staff, and, most importantly, students, to address their (our) needs and not be an inhibitor to the entrepreneurial endeavors of the College of Business. High visibility, the establishment of niche interdisciplinary programs in addition to mainstream programs, experiential learning opportunities for our students, the best in infrastructure, enriching College facilities, and transparency, are all on my list of goals as the next Dean of the College of Business at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for considering my application for the College of Business Dean Opportunity at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

Thank you.