

FRANK J. SANSOSTI

Members of the Graduate School Search Committee,

As a committed and strategic-thinking academic administrator with rich experience in graduate education and administrative executive leadership, I am writing to express my interest in serving as Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Colorado – Colorado Springs (UCCS; Job #29152)). I am excited by the possibility of serving as the next Graduate Dean to engage with your community, build on the considerable strengths of the campus, and advance graduate and professional education. At the heart of my interest in this position is my commitment to equity and opportunity; student access and success; research and innovation; and results-oriented collaborations that enrich educational practice – all of which align with the mission, vision, and core values of UCCS.

I would bring to the Graduate Dean position considerable experience as an academic administrator and faculty member in a large, public research university. Currently, I serve as Director (Department Head) of the School of Lifespan Development and Educational Sciences (LDES) at Kent State University, where I also hold the rank of Professor in School Psychology. Kent State University is a public, R1 university with an eight-campus system that enrolls over 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The School of LDES is a large, interdisciplinary department where I oversee seven (predominantly graduate) academic program areas (American Sign Language/English Interpreting, Counselor Education and Supervision, Educational Psychology, Human Development and Family Studies, Long-Term Care Administration/Gerontology, School Psychology, and Special Education) and direct the administrative activities of three centers (Counseling Center, Career and Community Studies, and Center for Disability Studies). In nearly 17 years at my current institution, I have held successive administrative leadership positions (Program Coordinator/Director of Clinical Training, Assistant Director, Interim Director, Director) that have provided me opportunities to work with faculty, staff, students, administrators, and alums to lead strategic initiatives. Prior to my administrative work, I was promoted through the ranks of Assistant, Associate, and Professor in School Psychology, leading a program of research that bridged foundational principles of psychology and behavioral education to provide best practice instruction/intervention to students with autism spectrum disorder and related low-incidence disabilities through multi-tiered systems of supports within inclusive contexts – experiences that align well with the Special Education program at UCCS. My scholarship is interdisciplinary in nature, and I have collaborated with faculty colleagues in various disciplines including Psychology, Special Education, Counseling, and Human Development and Family Studies. Taken together, my leadership experiences at a doctoral research university, combined with my interdisciplinary scholarship have afforded me the skills to effectively lead innovation in graduate and professional programming at an institution that values integrated scholarship, such as UCCS.

It is no secret that continual assaults on higher education and significant shifts in providing distinctive programming that supports diverse learners needs within a more user-designed portfolio will require bold leadership and fiscal management. Now, more than ever, institutions need an advocate and servant leader who is approachable, responsive, caring, empathetic, inspirational, and entrepreneurial. I stand ready to serve UCCS, committed to building a vibrant future of graduate and professional education that has a demonstrated impact of indispensability to the region/state. In this letter, I will address how I meet the professional credentials and personal qualities you seek in your next Dean of the Graduate School.

Successful Experience in Academic Leadership

I possess a deep understanding of higher education, shared governance, and a demonstrated record of progressive, energetic, and collaborative leadership. In my current position as School Director (Department Head), I oversee an approximate \$15.5M general funds and \$4M research budget, 48 full-time and 39 part-time faculty members. In addition, I immediately supervise three administrative staff and oversee seven staff within three operational centers. In my oversight, I recommend resource allocations (we operate under a Responsibility Center Management model), review curriculum efficiencies, and ensure that the programs and centers are mission-driven and responsive to the KSU system. I am responsible for faculty and staff hiring, reappointment, tenure, and promotion, and oversight of various accreditation processes. As Director, I engage in community outreach to create partnerships and maintain alumni relations. Prior to my current appointment, I served as the Interim School Director, leading the department through complex challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. I also functioned as the

Assistant School Director of the School of LDES, a position that supported the day-to-day operations of the department, as well as the development and maintenance of recruitment and retention strategies for graduate degree programs, community engagement with educational and human services organizations, and academic program assessment.

Aside from managerial responsibilities, I have experience in strategic leadership. For the past two years, I worked with faculty to develop a multi-year strategic plan emphasizing: (a) marketing and enrollment growth through new programmatic offerings, (b) expanding research capacity and increasing external funding, and (c) fostering inclusive practices. Outside of the departmental level, I have been and remained engaged in strategic planning at multiple levels (i.e., Educational Policies Council, College Strategic Planning Committee, Center for Teaching and Learning Advisory Council). My active involvement led our Provost to invite me as a member of the Academic Affairs Strategic Steering Committee. During this process, I was nominated to Co-Chair of the Securing Our Financial Future subgroup. As co-chair (with another campus Dean), I engaged in yearlong discussions/activities across the campus community to develop specific goals/strategies/tactics (GOST framework) focused on foundational business practices and philanthropic activities. At the completion of this planning, I was invited by our Senior Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate College to co-chair the Implementation Team, which I accepted, and now am providing oversight and coordination of efforts as the strategic plan is embedded into practice.

Aside from such direct administrative involvement and strategic leadership, I serve as Co-Chair (with Provost) of the Chairs and Directors Council. In this role, I interact with all departmental heads on campus to address personnel issues, budget, curriculum, and policy concerns that impact departments/offices within the KSU system. In addition, I serve as an administrative appointee to the Joint Appeals Board, which is a faculty-administrative body that hears disputes/appeals affecting a faculty member's employment status. Taken together, I feel that possess a strong understanding of the diversity and range of disciplines that comprise a comprehensive University and am able to support faculty and staff objectively.

Serving across these leadership roles has provided me valuable experience into the operation, management, and leadership of large, complex academic units. These attributes, along with my working knowledge of fiscal stewardship, shared governance, and commitment to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belongingness (DEI-B), align well with the requirements and qualifications of the position. As such, I will work to advance the University's vision, while creating a vision for the Graduate School that addresses challenges (i.e., demographic shifts in student populations, financial instability, teacher preparation and certification, rural education) and charts a course that will sustain and further the University's strategic growth and momentum.

Excellence in Teaching, Advising, Mentorship, and Supervision of Graduate Students

Advising students and mentoring are a central facet of my academic [and administrative] identity. As a faculty member, I have taught predominantly graduate level courses associated with professional degree/licensure and doctoral research. Because I train individuals who will be licensed to work with children and families, I feel it necessary that students think about material being presented from a variety of different perspectives (i.e., behavioral, ecological, cognitive, developmental, social learning, cultural). Moreover, I feel that it is paramount that information learned is linked directly to practice. As a result, my goal as an instructor has been to have students grasp big ideas and concepts through "hands-on" learning. My overall goal is to encourage students to engage in active learning, be critical thinkers able to discuss differing sides of a situation, and emphasize the application of evidence-based science within real-world practice. I have provided mentorship and supervision of masters- and doctoral-level students in school psychology, educational psychology, instructional technology, and curriculum and instruction. My approach is, first and foremost, to be supportive of my students interests and establish a positive relationship. I do my best to foster an environment that is inclusive of students varied cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. Throughout supervision and mentoring, I work in collaboration with students to serve as a sounding board for ideas, concerns, and questions. I help students establish ambitious goals while offering encouragement (especially in those moments when things do not go as expected) and acting as a coach. This is especially true for those students that I have served as dissertation director.

As a departmental leader, I have promoted a variety of student success initiatives. I have worked with all of the Program Coordinators in my department to examine student success issues and to develop plans to improve student success. These plans have included increased instructor training (i.e., Anti-Bias Workshops), as well as curricular solutions (i.e. fostering engagement). We also have focused on developing high impact practices such as increasing undergraduate research opportunities. Due to increases in mental health needs of our student population, I have partnered with our Counseling Center and Student Affairs to support mental health programming. To this end, we have established mental health liaisons so faculty have readily available resources available to best serve their students during times of crisis.

In looking forward, I believe the nature of teaching, advising, and mentoring students continues to evolve. As Graduate Dean, I would strive for the Graduate School to be a hub for lifelong learning and serve as a resource center for graduate students. I would make student-centered holistic well-being a primary focus. Specifically, I would work to support graduate students, graduate assistants, faculty, staff, and administrators through the administration of campus policies, standards, and requirements for graduate study, while promoting the value of diversity and an inclusive environment that promotes professional and graduate student success.

Experience in Development, Implementation, and Oversight of Graduate/Innovative Programming

In order to navigate successfully the changing nature of higher education (i.e., demographic changes, public perception), I believe that a University has the choice to do one of two things: adapt or be left behind. As such, I view programmatic improvement as ongoing, needed to assess training standards and course alignment with necessary skills that make graduates more marketable. In addition, I believe it is important in a new era of higher education that we examine growth potential aligned with market demands. To that end, I have been engaged with several program areas to identify ways to grow/expand. Specifically, I am assisting (or have assisted) the development of transdisciplinary, professional Certificate programs (Autism Spectrum Disorder Certificate; Gerontology Certificate; Non-Profit Studies Certificate; Addictions Certificate[online]). In addition, I collaborate with the College to identify areas of increased online programming through the Office of Distance Education (e.g., Educational Psychology) and the Office of Professional Development and Outreach (e.g., Special Education Conference; Educational Leadership Cohort Program; School Psychology Conference Series). I also have been engaged with our Associate Dean in the development of an interdisciplinary online Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree, as well as cohort trainings through a local educational service center for the Behavioral Intervention Specialist Certificate (Special Education). Most recently, I have been selected to work with our Associate Dean and several other faculty and staff to develop a process for the creation, implementation, and evaluation of non-credit, professional micro-credentialing. Being asked to be a part of this team was very meaningful to me as I believe the future of higher education should examine learner profiles and match our audience with needed skill development in the community; and, I have experience in digital badging. In this group, we worked quickly (6 months) to develop and deliver several micro-credentials in specific focus areas. In my understanding of rising trends in academic programming, I advocated for the educational psychology program in my unit to develop and micro-credential in Data Science (emphasis focused on R). In addition, I am working to develop our online Addictions Certificate program as its own non-credit, micro-credential program that would afford current practicing counselors to earn licensure in chemical dependency.

In looking ahead, I feel strongly that academic innovation should align with market driven demands and be offered in more accessible ways so as learners of all ages can access ongoing education/development. As such, as Graduate Dean I would work to bolster current (or create new) programs to advance aspects of collaboration for public good—those that have high marketability for students and utilize faculty expertise to promote further engagement with local thought-leaders. This would include resource allocation and appropriate budget modeling to demonstrate short-term and long-term impact (both financially and collectively). Any academic changes, and the decisions about these issues, would be part of a deliberative process that emphasizes transparency, stakeholder participation, and clear, relevant reasoning.

Experience Mentoring Graduate Faculty and Staff

My enthusiasm for mentoring continues to be a key aspect of my identity as an administrator, working with faculty, staff, and administrators at various levels in advancing university community. In my administrative roles, I facilitate faculty work ranging from successful first-year experiences to ongoing development that establishes success for tenure and promotion. I employ a variety of approaches to support and further faculty research. First, I ensure that necessary time is allocated to faculty as they pursue important research and/or creative activities. At times, this may mean a reduced teaching load to coincide with grant applications or completion of pilot projects that have the potential to support an application for federal support. Second, I work to promote, recognize, and reward outstanding peer-reviewed research. This includes distributing notices of scholarly accomplishments within and outside my department. Third, I submit nominations of faculty for research-related awards, when possible. Fourth, I continue to support and develop a culture of undergraduate research. Specifically, I have worked with our programs to design experiences and involve undergraduates in creative activities through the university sponsored Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) program. Such experiences have afforded undergraduates opportunities to engage in early their own academic interests and has helped student recruitment at the graduate level.

As an academic leader in a department focused primarily on graduate and professional training, I have observed that Program Coordinators and staff involved in training at this level regularly turn-over (i.e., graduate programs changing graduate coordinators every few years). Despite this renewal, there was little in the way of an onboarding process for faculty and staff who support graduate education. In working with each of the program areas, I collaborated with our Associate Dean to develop an onboarding

process for new graduate coordinators and staff, as well as shared with students. This Graduate Handbook covered policy elements (i.e., admission, registration, transfer of credits, grading, graduation, dismissal), as well as information pertaining to theses/projects/dissertations and licensure. Aside from these procedural approaches, I currently am collaborating with our Center for Teaching and Learning to provide ongoing mentoring for our faculty (both full- and part-time). To date, we have covered a variety of topics during my monthly Program Coordinators meetings on teaching tactics (i.e., jigsaw methods, culturally inclusive teaching), assessment approaches (i.e., student response systems), and student success strategies (i.e., distributed practice).

I envision the Graduate School at UCCS as a resource center for professional and graduate education best practices, data analysis, policy, and administrative effectiveness. That is, I believe the Graduate School should serve as a centralized resource for faculty and staff for inquiries and guidance around university level policies, procedures, and workflows related to graduate education. Our collective teamwork would provide support to ensure knowledge of support and policies related to graduate students; and, more importantly, provide faculty and staff training/support on working with the 21st century graduate student.

Commitment and Leadership in Equity, Inclusiveness, Diversity, and Belonging

As a leader, it is incumbent upon me to work across the University to promote diversity, support equitable practices, and activate an inclusive environment. To those ends, I have worked closely with the KSU Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and with our College Office of Diversity Outreach and Development to assist with recruiting historically underrepresented faculty and staff. Such outreach and collaboration led to my success in negotiating supported hires in Counselor Education and Supervision, School Psychology, and Educational Psychology. In addition, I have advocated successfully for increased allocation for strategic Graduate Assistantship positions for students of color and commit matched funds from the department to support incoming students. As an academic leader, I recently developed the LDES Student Ambassadors for Inclusive Excellence program that is a deliberate assembly of faculty, staff, and students who work collaboratively to strengthen and support DEI-B and build working capacity for transformative change.

While I have demonstrated success in recruiting individuals from under-represented groups, I have learned, that for such people to stay, they must feel welcomed and valued. This is true for faculty, staff, and students. I feel strongly that it takes deliberate and intentional actions to foster a community that upholds inclusive practices. As such, I helped cultivate the development of a Climate Council within our department. Since its establishment, the council has revised policies/handbooks for anti-racist/anti-bias language; created an inclusion position statement; produced and shared a multicultural resource guide with faculty, staff, and students, and responded to patterns of faculty workload and equity issues. We have provided professional development to all full-time and part-time instructors (including teaching assistants) on developing inclusive syllabi that incorporate best-practices for setting tone, creating a sense of belonging, and delivering inclusive assignments. Next steps include developing a stratified mentorship process (aligned with principles outlined by Dr. Kerry Ann Rockquemore) and carrying out the goals/strategies of our three-year strategic plan that focuses on issues of belongingness, promotion, recruitment, and hiring.

As Graduate Dean, I would continue to align the Graduate School with the University strategic plan, ensuring that our people and programs support and promote equity and that our practices, processes, and procedures defeat systemic inequities. This would include communicating about the importance of equity, providing professional development opportunities, developing a system for faculty, staff, and students to share their voice, and identifying ways to refine our curriculum and research practices. Further, I would promote the development of a DEI-B Council focused on addressing inequalities and other systemic issues that impact persons of color by promoting programming and research, supporting intellectual connections and collaborative activities between disparate organizations, and developing community partnerships to amplify connections and invoke action. I would commit a portion of the overall operating budget towards such efforts.

Strategic Enrollment and Retention

Growing student enrollment is critical to continued success. A major source of resource generation is derived from strategic enrollment growth; and, as such, efforts to attract potential applicants must be an ongoing and responsive process. It is no secret that the competitive environment in higher education has changed significantly, requiring creativeness and innovation to deliver an exciting and interactive student experience. I would bring to the Graduate School considerable experience in strategically growing enrollment. While serving in the role of Assistant Director, I created a broad marketing campaign to increase the visibility of our programs. Specifically, I worked with each of the Program Coordinators to develop new marketing materials that focused on programmatic distinctions that demonstrated their connectedness to the needs of local communities. Through a yearlong process, we produced new programmatic information and student videos that resulted in a 26% increase in the number of graduate students over a three-year period. I worked with personnel in our Division of Enrollment Management to identify alternative and innovative methods to attract potential applicants. These included virtual recruitment events, use of social media

channels, creation of multicultural recruitment videos, and expanded opportunities to learn about financial aid/scholarships. As a result of such work, I was invited by the Dean of the College to co-chair the Recruitment and Retention committee and develop broad strategies that appeal to a new generation of diverse students. Such strategies have demonstrated a significant positive impact, as we are observing a slow, but steady increase in the number of applicants to our programs. More promising, our yield is higher than similar points of comparison, as are deposits.

Providing access and affordability to high-quality education, particularly for students who are first-generation or come from historically underrepresented, but growing, populations, requires high-touch recruitment strategies and high-impact retention methods critical to student success. As Graduate Dean, I would collaborate with University offices and faculty to promote the use of innovative, hands-on approaches (i.e., strategic communications/marketing, events/tours, scholarships, multicultural resources) not only to attract potential applicants to programs within the College, but also to promote student retention. Within my current capacity, I have examined data to understand student attrition; and, subsequently, identified possible strategies to promote student success. I believe that our focus to student success should center on three pillars that have the greatest impact: academic advising, cultivating a feeling of belonging, mental health support, and student finances. It would be my focus to develop a system of holistic approaches to support admitted students before, during, and after their graduation.

Academic Program Assessment and Accreditation

Academic excellence is a hallmark of the University of Colorado system and pursuing and maintaining accreditations not only testifies to such academic excellence, but also promotes student enrollment and enhanced job and wage prospects of graduates. Further, I believe that the duty of the Graduate Dean is to assist in maintaining strong annual databases for reporting that later can be used not only to generate effective accreditation/re-accreditation reports, but also provide positive messaging to external community partners. To that end, I possess vast, progressive experience in matters of accreditation and academic program assessment. Starting with my tenure as Graduate Program Coordinator/Director of Clinical Training, I successfully led the school psychology program through multiple successful national accreditations by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), as well as managed all yearly reports required by each learned society. In addition, I have had to prepare program reviews for the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) and create an alignment of experiences to meet state licensure standards with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the Ohio Board of Psychology (OBP). Collectively, these experiences provided me with a solid understanding of how to collect, monitor, and document student proficiency and programmatic outcomes, as well as how to organize the findings into meaningful products that demonstrate program effectiveness and student readiness.

As Assistant Director/Director, I have been/am responsible for assisting each academic program area to align learning/student outcomes with the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). I work closely with our Assistant Dean of Accreditation to ensure that assessment tools and strategies that programs use were/are effective in monitoring outcomes for forthcoming accreditation reports and visits (many of the data collection strategies that I used in the school psychology program have served as exemplars for the College; and, I have assisted other programs in the development of their own accountability/reporting systems). I oversee programs and offer assistance in responding to internal reviews (i.e. self-study and site visit) required by our Accreditation, Assessment, and Learning (AAL) Office. In addition, I have become familiar with the various requirements with discipline and program-specific accrediting authorities, including the National Association of Long-Term Care Administration Board (NAB); the Council of Education of the Deaf (CED); and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs/Council on Rehabilitation Education (CACREP/CORE); and, am comfortable meeting with external accreditor review teams.

Taken together, I am well versed in understanding the methods and means required for successful reporting to professional accrediting bodies, state-level agencies, and institutional offices, as well as supporting faculty in the process of best practices in programmatic assessment. In fact, I view such work as a strength and believe that accountability is vital to demonstrating indispensability to our constituents. As Graduate Dean, I would work to ensure that all programs engage in a comprehensive approach to examine program processes (i.e., student demographics, quality of faculty, allocated institutional support) and program outcomes (i.e., student-learning outcomes, professional skills competencies, graduate satisfaction, job placement success), as well as opportunity analyses (i.e., alternative delivery, potential for growth)

Engagement, Partnerships, and Fundraising

An essential element to building and leading a strong organization is establishing positive and impactful relationships with local communities. As such, I have developed and advanced the *Community Collaborative (C²)*, which is composed of local business, educational, and governmental professionals. The C² is focused on developing and maintaining collaborative partnerships that

increase: (a) the generation/dissemination of scholarship; (b) experiential learning opportunities for students, and (c) capacity of community partners to provide guidance aimed at workforce development/enhancement. The success of this approach has been recognized broadly and is being formulated to use within the entire College. Moreover, I have been invited to work with the Office of the Provost to discuss ideas for creating similar approaches.

An additional component of my work within the community has been my direct involvement in creation of and/or assistance with local engagement that features thought leaders and impact makers who are accelerating social change in education, mental health, and public policy (e.g., School Psychology Seminar Series, Badar-Kauffman Conference). The goal of such activities has been to provide a highly interactive learning experience that provides local/regional educators with 'hands-on' skills to make a difference within their respective work environment(s). Currently, the Director of the Counseling Center and I are working to develop a community series podcasts aimed at topics of resocialization for children/adolescents and the impact of addictions within rural Ohio. Specifically, these are intended to be quick videos with two to three takeaway messages regarding health, mental health, and outreach options for community members. As Graduate Dean, I would envision carrying out similar activities.

In addition to these activities, I have partnered closely with development professionals, faculty, and private donors, successfully adding \$575K in contributions to my department in the form of diversity scholarships, graduate assistantships, and an endowed Speaker Series. In keeping with my commitment to resource development, as Graduate Dean, I would be in constant communication with individuals, foundations, and corporations to share the work of our programs/colleagues. This would involve not only periodic communication, but also opportunities to host luncheons or other events to meet with prospective donors to cultivate relationships and provide information of the Graduate School's future capacity. Moreover, I would plan to host 8-3-1 Dinners (an approach used by philanthropic futurist, Trista Harris). As the name implies, 8-3-1 Dinners invite eight key constituents to a three-hour dinner to consider one bold idea. This approach would engage faculty/scholars/entrepreneurs to offer generative ideas aimed at enhancing and expanding academic programs, centers of excellence, or bold curricular innovation, among other critical topics. Such efforts would align with contemporary ways for engaging prospective donors by offering a mechanism of participatory engagement with the Graduate School and its people.

In closing, it would be my honor to build a well-aligned, collaborative relationship with the University's faculty, staff, alumni, and students, along with state, regional, national, and global stakeholders, as we work ahead to build UCCS as "the best regional comprehensive university in the nation." My professional accomplishments demonstrate my ability to bring energy, enthusiasm, wisdom, optimism, and visions to the role of Graduate Dean at UCCS. Together, we will create new possibilities and address challenges to ensure UCCS is poised for continued success as a student-centered campus community that prepares global citizens who shape economic, social, and cultural change within the larger community. I look forward to exploring joining you at this transformational time in higher education.

Sincerely,

Frank J. Sansosti, Ph.D., NCSP
Director and Professor, School of Lifespan Development and Educational Sciences
Kent State University