

March 31, 2023

Dear Search Committee,

Please accept this letter as my application for the position of Dean of the Graduate School at University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS).

I currently serve as Dean of Graduate Studies and Research and am a tenured Professor of Psychological Sciences at Western Oregon University (WOU). Prior to joining WOU, I was a tenured Professor of Child and Family Studies at University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK). In fact, my first tenure-track faculty position was at UTK, where I came up through the ranks and reached full professor as well as gaining administrative training and experiences that led me to pursue leadership positions. Prior to joining the faculty at UTK, I spent 4 years at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which provided me with valuable research and grant experience. Prior to NIH, I completed my Ph.D. in anthropology (specializing in cross-cultural child development) from Washington State University. I completed my undergraduate degrees at Central Washington University in both psychology and anthropology.

Although I am happy in my current position, many aspects of the UCCS Dean of the Graduate School position caught my attention because of the clear alignment with my background and professional goals. I have over 8 years of progressive leadership experience, including positions at department and university levels, culminating in my current position as a Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. My current position is split between two areas, overseeing WOU Graduate Programs as well as the Office of Research (sponsored projects, research compliance, grant funded research centers). I have enjoyed this experience and for the next phase of my career, I would like to focus on graduate education at a larger regional comprehensive university. My first administrative experience was as Director of Graduate Studies for the UTK Child and Family Studies department. The highlight of my career has been mentoring and supporting graduate students first as a faculty member and then as an administrator. Thus, I am interested in moving into a position where I can deepen my engagement with graduate education and support a larger array of graduate programs.

In the remainder of the letter, I outline how my leadership track record aligns with the duties and the qualifications for the position.

### **Leadership Track Record**

During my time at WOU, I have had the opportunity to execute academic and research strategies across disciplines through building a new structure for the campus: the graduate studies and research office. This has meant assessing and expanding the graduate program portfolio of WOU and building the Graduate Studies and Research Office that integrates graduate programs and sponsored projects, identifying synergies and efficiencies of a combined office. These opportunities have led to some major accomplishments including:

- increase in applications for graduate programs by nearly 30% (comparing Fall 2021 to Fall 2022),

- implementation of a new CRM for graduate admissions and streamlining graduate admissions processes to remove barriers for students,
- bringing the university to a new degree level with the introduction of professional doctorates,
- developing and obtaining approval for a new Occupational Therapy Doctorate program through work with campus and community stakeholders,
- forming the Dean's Graduate Student Advisory Board,
- updating the graduate faculty policy and transfer credit policy to align with current national standards and trends,
- implementing an accelerated undergraduate to master's pathway,
- creating an academic policy structure for forthcoming doctoral programs,
- creating a process for obtaining market analyses to support new program development,
- co-leading the campus Enrollment Strategies Committee and bringing together all areas of campus that impact enrollment,
- co-facilitating a college restructure task force resulting in a college restructuring plan,
- co-leading a campus Title III (institutional improvement) grant proposal including a campus-wide SWOT analysis focused on student success and retention,
- increase in grant funding by 90% over a three-year period (as of March, 2023),
- design and implementation of a student research funding opportunity to promote and support graduate research across disciplines, and
- implementation of a new indirect cost recovery policy for campus so that colleges, departments, and PIs receive budget relief and incentives for their grant efforts.

These accomplishments have involved multiple layers of strategic leadership, careful and creative financial management, and extensive collaboration with the campus community, shared governance structures, accreditation structures, advancement and government relations, and community partners. Many regional comprehensive universities across the country have been facing financial challenges for quite some time and the pandemic exacerbated or further exposed these issues. Thus, during my time as Dean, I have had the opportunity to analyze complex budgets and to carefully, creatively, and transparently support new and continuing initiatives using limited resources.

Prior to my time as a Dean, my leadership positions were primarily focused within my college and department (i.e., Director of Graduate Studies, Graduate Program Coordinator, Chair of Promotion and Tenure, Faculty Mentor for tenure-track faculty). However, during my last few years at UTK, I moved into roles at the university level supporting faculty development and reporting to the Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement. Throughout my 14 years at UTK, I was deeply engaged in graduate education. I predominantly taught graduate courses and I also mentored and supervised many graduate students in their dissertation or thesis research, in addition to serving on dissertation or thesis committees across disciplines during my time at UTK. I also served on the UTK Graduate Council for 5 years, which gave me a deep understanding and respect for importance of shared governance in graduate education and related curriculum and policy processes.

I am an active member of the Council of Graduate Schools and the Western Association of Graduate schools and regularly attend their respective meetings. In fact, this past summer I was

invited to speak at the Council of Graduate Schools about the experiences of becoming a Graduate Dean during the pandemic.

During my time as Dean at WOU, I have had the wonderful opportunity to mentor graduate faculty and staff. I work closely with graduate program coordinators from across campus and have mentored them around student success as well as recruitment of new students. I also mentor the three staff members in the Graduate Programs Office and we work on joint initiatives to improve graduate student recruitment, success, and retention. Most of the programs at WOU are hybrid or online, so we have focused considerable attention on how to support and facilitate community and a sense of belonging for students who do not live or work near WOU. We have seen great strides in this area and now have graduate students (including fully online students) represented on major student organizations across campus, including those that influence decisions around tuition and fee structures. My collaborative work with graduate faculty and staff has also focused on improving program quality through improved assessment procedures and updating of graduate student learning outcomes.

Although much of my work around program development and program quality has focused on degree programs, I have also supported the launch of new certificate programs in juvenile justice and organizational leadership and a new micro-credential in educational technology. My experience with certificates pre-dates by time as Dean; as a faculty member at UTK I developed, launched, and oversaw a certificate program on international children and families. Certificate programs and micro-credentials, and even more so stackable credentials, are an important part of a sustainable graduate education portfolio and provide opportunities to generate additional revenue by reaching students that are not able to engage in lengthier degree programs. Thus, these programs are especially important for regional comprehensive universities that are uniquely committed to student access. I am passionate about this growing area of graduate education because of the implications for student social mobility and making higher education accessible and meaningful to people from a wide array of backgrounds.

Strategic enrollment and retention initiatives are high priorities in my current position, as WOU has been facing gradual enrollment declines over the past decade and these declines worsened during the pandemic. In response to this, the university formed an Enrollment Strategies Committee that brings together every area of campus that touches and therefore impacts enrollment (from recruitment to retention and completion). This includes members from academic affairs, student affairs, the registrar, the business office, undergraduate admissions, graduate admissions, student success and advising, new student programs (i.e., orientation), etc. I have had the great opportunity to co-lead this group with our Vice President for Student Affairs. Every week we review reports on enrollment and retention patterns, which we use to inform our strategic initiatives. This group has been one of the largest cross-departmental collaborations that I have participated in and it has demonstrated to me the power of breaking down silos and working in coordination across areas to support students from recruitment all the way through completion of their degree or credential. We have made large strides and our graduate applications are up 30% and still rising.

During my time at WOU and UTK, I have had many opportunities to successfully recruit and retain faculty, staff, and administrators. My experiences have included serving as hiring

manager, search advocate, search committee chair, and search committee member. I have guided hiring, onboarding, as well as developed new mentoring programs to enhance faculty retention. I also served as a faculty mentor for many years at UTK focusing on retaining and supporting faculty with historically underrepresented or minoritized identities.

In sum, I have had a variety of leadership experiences both in my current position at WOU and in my previous positions at UTK. Woven throughout all of these experiences is my drive and commitment to graduate education, student success, faculty and staff development, shared governance, continuous improvement and assessment, innovation and program development, and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

In closing, UCCS is a vibrant and thriving campus that I would be honored to serve. I am particularly excited by the opportunity to support graduate students, faculty, and staff; pursue new partnerships and grants to support graduate education at UCCS; support or refine structures for continuous improvement and assessment in graduate education; and to collaborate across disciplines and areas to support the campus as a whole.

My core leadership values are centered on collaboration, transparency, continuous improvement, shared governance, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. These aren't just values; they are a daily practice and are woven into every decision and action that I take as a leader. I am compelled by UCCS's commitment to providing life-enriching experience to a diverse and changing student population and see clear alignment with my leadership values and experiences.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my application and for all of the impactful work you are doing to support students, faculty, and staff at UCCS.

Sincerely,

Hillary N. Fouts, Ph.D.  
Dean of Graduate Studies and Research  
Professor of Psychological Sciences  
Western Oregon University