

March 1, 2013

Search Committee: Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs  
The University of Montana  
Electronic Submission

Dear Colleagues,

Please accept this letter to represent my interest in the position of Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at The University of Montana. I see many opportunities and am impressed by its academic programs which do much to serve students and the community. As such, I gladly present my application materials for review. I believe I have many of the traits you listed in the position announcement.

Few in higher education can claim they hold a position that is the endpoint, or midpoint, of a well-crafted plan. My career is no exception as little in my formal education – I hold a doctorate in Experimental Psychology from the University of Georgia – led me to believe that I would move into academic administration.

My administrative career began with my first appointment when Marietta College hired me as chair of the Department of Psychology and assistant professor. There, I was able to fill vacancies created by retirements and resignations. Together my new colleagues and I rebuilt the department's curriculum shifting its near exclusive focus on radical behaviorism to a more contemporary survey of the discipline.

I decided to expand my administrative experience by becoming the psychology department head at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga where I was responsible for a much larger and more complex department that offered popular undergraduate and graduate degrees. The student body was also much more diverse than Marietta's as the University System was under a federal court decree to increase the diversity of its student body and faculty.

In 2004, the provost invited me to be the Associate Provost for Academic Administration. In that role, I oversaw the academic affairs budget and many offices including Academic and Research Computer Services, Advisement and Retention, Adult Services, Continuing Education, Faculty Records, Financial Aid, International Students, and Records and Registration.

While I very much enjoyed the administrative work, I wanted to be closer to the curriculum and have direct involvement with program development; a goal I realized when I became the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Marshall University. Marshall is much like Montana regarding size, scope, and mission. The College, which contains the humanities and social sciences, has the greatest number of faculty (150 at last count) and produces approximately 35% of the University's schedule credit hours, twice as many as the next most productive college.

As the Associate Provost at Chattanooga, I worked closely with the deans (Arts and Sciences, Business, Education and Human Services, Engineering, and Graduate Programs) regarding their budgets, personnel needs, and long-term planning. Such collaboration allowed me to better understand specific budget and staffing needs, as well as the colleges' need to attend to the many demands of accrediting agencies. We were also able to create new academic programs that served the economic needs of the community.

Working with the school of nursing and local hospitals, I helped to develop a program to allow working nurses to earn the BSN. A similar collaboration between the owners of local contracting firms and our colleges of Business and Engineering produced a degree in engineering

management. These experiences helped me to understand how a university directly contributes to the economic development of the community and how to bring together people from different organizations who have common objectives.

My administrative work has also required me to develop programs that increase the diversity of students, faculty, and staff. At Chattanooga we developed a scholarship program for minority students that complied with specific Supreme Court rulings. At Marshall, I work closely with our division of Multicultural Affairs to provide an academic milieu that is attractive to a diverse student body. I am now collaborating with our Library on the *Muslim Journeys* project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Throughout my career I have worked to create an environment that supports the diversity of ideas within educational programs, diversity among faculty, and diversity among students. A pillar of higher education is an abiding respect for people, their cultures, and their perspectives. We are therefore beholden to help our students better understand how they will live and work in an increasingly multicultural environment. To that end, students majoring in the liberal arts complete a sequence of four courses in a second language – French, German, Latin, Japanese, or Spanish – in addition to courses that focus on literature, the humanities, international concerns, and multicultural topics.

I have very much enjoyed learning more about the University's proposed Native American Center and the Native American Studies degree program. Universities have a unique opportunity and responsibility to study and preserve languages, histories, and cultures, especially those of the region. Both the Center and the major represent the benefits of collaboration between an engaged university and a supportive community.

A good quality college education provides students an open marketplace of ideas and the tools of reason and judgment to weigh the value of different perspectives. That is, a contemporary college education instills the habits of critical thought that serve all disciplines. Although the disciplinary lens may define one's focus, the processes of analysis, synthesis, and conclusion remain universal skills that serve students in their adult lives as they progress through several career changes and become engaged citizens. Such values are the defining features of a liberal arts education and remain essential to preparing students for the worlds of thought, commerce, and civic engagement. Contemporary universities also respond to the ever changing nature of the economy and work experience that graduates will encounter. As such, schools need to prepare students not for their first job, but for a lifetime of changing work responsibilities.

Students who have more opportunities to learn outside the classroom – through independent study, service learning projects, study abroad, and faculty supervised research – are more likely to remain in school and graduate in a timely manner. Moreover, they develop a work ethic that serves them well in their professional careers. Montana has a long and proud history as a member of Campus Compact and early supporter of service learning. The school's strategic plan also gives much appropriate attention to study abroad and research opportunities for students. Success on these projects will benefit the students and the University.

Currently, I collaborate with other deans on various projects. For example, the dean of the College of Business and I created a dual degree program in International Business and Modern Language, and we are now developing a Masters of Public Administration (MPA) that will make use of faculty from both colleges. This degree will be the only one of its kind in the state with its focus on preparing students to work in governmental agencies, not-for-profits, and nongovernmental organizations. Although there are other examples, I present these to

demonstrate my support of interdisciplinary programs that make the best use of faculty talents across colleges and meet student interest.

Corporations are more likely to locate in communities with a strong and engaged metropolitan university. This engagement represents the school's ability to offer a sound general education degree in addition to specialized programs of study that supports the local industries. Students who graduate from these schools are more likely to remain in the community as they begin work for local businesses. Consequently, I am always eager to bring together the economic and opinion leaders in the local community to meet with university faculty to discuss common interests.

I am impressed by the integration of the Missoula College within the University. From my experiences at Chattanooga and Marshall, I find that working closely with two-year schools provides many opportunities to recruit talented students who will succeed in a four-year environment. At the same time, I recognize that two-year systems are invaluable in the community by providing employers a robust array of graduates who have valued skills sets.

My work at Chattanooga and Marshall has required me to make continual adjustments to budgets to support long-term academic objectives, academic integrity, and support for student initiatives. In some cases these changes were made in response to state mandates. For example, Marshall's state supplement for fiscal year 2014 will be reduced by \$5 million with pending reductions in future years. As such, I am working with the department chairs to reduce the college's overall operating budget.

After much discussion, we found that merging several smaller departments with cognate interests allows us to reduce our operating budgets without a reduction in force. We felt it essential to preserve our academic mission by retaining full-time faculty. Indeed, we are now finishing up the process to hire nine new tenure eligible faculty to the college. We have also implemented a plan that allows departments to earn revenue from summer and on-line courses.

While some of my administrative work has been in response to calls for reduction, I have also been able to build new programs. For instance, I reinstated the University's speech and debate team. The rationale for supporting, and retaining, this program is simple; having the team allows us to recruit and retain bright students.

I am particularly proud of the development of The Simon Perry Center for Constitutional Democracy, an interdisciplinary academic program that examines the historical and contemporary perspectives of the United States Constitution. The goal of the program is to increase the level of civic literacy on the campus and in the community. The program now has a founding director, an innovative curriculum, and a growing endowment.

The teaching loads at Marietta and Chattanooga are four courses a semester. While I did receive reassigned time, the adjustment was for administrative work. Nevertheless, I was able to pursue my research and I have written many research papers and several books. I have also received several grants.

My experiences as a junior faculty guide my administrative work. Specifically, I ensure that new faculty receive a reduced teaching load during their first year and, where practicable, a modest research grant. Similarly, I gladly give course releases to faculty to prepare a grant proposal.

I am particularly impressed with your Pedagogy Project. My experience has been that faculty support groups such as these benefit junior as well as senior faculty. Moreover these support systems do much to support teaching effectiveness and scholarly productivity.

One of my current responsibilities is fund development. To promote the good work of the College, I edit and publish the *College of Liberal Arts Annual Report* which includes stories about the accomplishments of the students and faculty. I send this report to the State's federal and local elected officials, and to patrons and alumni. This effort, along with other fund development activities, has increased the number of contributions to the college and the amounts contributed.

Patrons find fulfillment in helping students. A patron donated \$50,000 when I mentioned that I wanted to create an essay contest that coincided with Constitution Day. Other patrons have donated to the College after attending one of our Visiting Writer's Series or other lectures, or are former members of the speech and debate team. My work has taught me that establishing a culture of philanthropy depends on promoting the good work of the institution and allowing supports to see that their donation is an investment in students.

I believe my administrative style can best be described as open door. That is to say, I welcome lively discussions to help inform the decisions I need to make. As such, I am mindful that questions are more complex than they first appear and that data often require additional exploration to yield sensible interpretation. I also find that those with whom I work do their best when given the encouragement and resources to pursue novel ideas that support the mission of the institution.

When I began at Marshall University, I arranged hour-long meetings with each of the faculty and staff. My introduction to the conversation was simple: "I want to understand Marshall University and the College of Liberal Arts from your perspective." I heard a lot. These conversations allowed me to work through an agenda to address important matters faculty and staff identified. Such changes include improvements in our interpretation and implementation of College policies, increasing faculty and staffing levels, and drawing attention to the good work of the College.

Along the way I have had to make difficult decisions related to budgeting, prioritization of academic programs, promotion and tenure, and the leadership of academic departments. Where appropriate, I made clear to others that my decisions reflected the well-being and future success of our academic programs. Looking back, I have no regrets for the decisions I made and I can point to the improvements each has created.

There are, of course, other characteristics your school seeks in its next provost and there are other components of my career that I would like to review. I am hopeful that this letter provides a sufficient introduction to warrant further and more focused discussion.

It will be my honor should I be considered for this important position and welcome the opportunity to talk more about the many opportunities available for the new Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at The University of Montana.

Sincerely,

David J. Pittenger