

# Mark A. Merrick, PhD, AT, ATC, FNATA

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29864 Saint Andrews Rd., Perrysburg OH 43551 | 614-323-5787 (mobile) | merrick.mark.a@gmail.com

**November 7, 2023**

Porsha Williams, Vice President of Higher Education  
Jacob Anderson, Senior Principle of Higher Education  
Five Concourse Parkway  
Suite 2875  
Atlanta, GA 30328

**Dear Ms. Williams, Mr. Anderson, and Members of the Search Committee:**

I would like to express my interest in the University of Cincinnati's opening for the dean of the College of Allied Health sciences. The strong success and upward trajectory of the college, coupled with the University's compelling vision for the future creates an opportunity that is extremely attractive to me. I have known former dean Tina Whalen for several years, primarily through the Midwest Deans group of the Association for Schools Advancing Health Professions (ASAHP). I am familiar with Tina's leadership of the college, its culture, her work to secure resources including its amazing new building, and its current standing as a leader in health professions education. I recently visited the college as a participant in the ASAHP regional summit it hosted earlier this year, and I was impressed by all that I saw. All of this further cements my enthusiasm for this position. Frankly, this position presents an extraordinary opportunity to lead a fantastic college to the next level of its aspirational vision. I presently serve as the Dean of the College of Health and Human Services at the University of Toledo where I am in my fourth year as dean. Prior to becoming the dean at Toledo, I spent 20 years as the Founding Director of the Division of Athletic Training in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences within Ohio State University's College of Medicine. Through this and additional national and international leadership roles, I bring valuable experience and perspectives, visionary leadership, and an unwavering commitment to partnerships for excellence. I am excited to explore how we might combine my passion for creating a visionary future with Cincinnati's "Next Lives Here" focus on urban impact, innovation, and academic excellence. I am genuinely excited about where Cincinnati is going, and I think I can play a valuable role in helping it get there.

My journey as an academic leader includes the progressively increasing roles and responsibilities that provide both the breadth and depth needed to succeed as dean. I am an Ohio native who started my faculty career in Cincinnati at Xavier University. I enjoyed my time in the Queen City and my wife and I would welcome the opportunity to return, particularly as it would keep me within easy driving distance of my two new grandchildren who are both in Ohio. While at Xavier, I was recruited to become the director of Indiana State University's undergraduate Athletic Training major and took on that role in just my second year as an assistant professor. Just a year later, I assumed leadership of their nationally prominent master's degree program and led its faculty through transformation of its curriculum. In 2000, the Ohio State University created an Athletic Training Division in their College of Medicine and recruited me as its founding director. In 20 years of leading Ohio State's AT Division, I gained valuable experience in what a strong culture is like and how to create, navigate and lead high achieving academic enterprises. Creating and leading an excellent team was foundational in creating that culture, preparing me to be a successful dean.

At Ohio State, I assembled from scratch a team that built a cutting-edge curriculum and revised it over time to maintain its status as a national leader; attracted and hired diverse faculty, created a highly collaborative culture and mentored our people into obtaining funding, promotion and tenure; managed budgets in both lean and prosperous years; established fiscal self-sustainability; partnered with

development in fund-raising; were highly effective at student recruitment and developed holistic admissions that resulted in increases in both diverse-student recruitment and enrollment; secured accreditation and re-accreditation (twice); saw our students pass their national board exam at a 100% rate for a then nation-leading seven consecutive years; developed outreach and international exchange programs; helped create a faculty grand-rounds program and a faculty “grants academy” that increased both grant submissions and funding; and overhauled departmental and college workload documents, AP&T documents, and faculty and student Handbooks. We developed strong collaborative interprofessional relationships with the School’s other 10 health professions programs as well as additional collaborations across Ohio State’s (Wexner) academic medical center and colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Optometry, and Veterinary Medicine. Together with our team, we succeeded in creating and transforming a fledgling start-up program into a flagship program of enduring national prominence. While it would be understandable as a leader to claim this success as my own. I know better. This was success created by teams who trusted and supported each other, and it was a pleasure and privilege to build and lead them.

In my leadership role as HHS dean at Toledo, I entered an entirely different culture and set of challenges with a college (and university) that was struggling and was far from thinking of itself as a team. We had to overcome monumental challenges as my first day started with a \$2.1M budget reduction, vacancies in 3 of 4 chair positions, budget-related sweeping of 13 open faculty and staff lines, staff furloughs, and implementing our COVID-related hybrid instructional plans. I started by letting everyone know they should call me “Mark” and not “Dean Merrick”, that we are a team and in this together, and we are going to succeed. Our first steps were to bring our leadership team together to identify and rapidly implement emergency measures to provide needed stability to survive the coming semester. We then rolled-up our sleeves to begin transforming the college’s culture, structure, processes, and resource stewardship. Steadfast commitment to integrity, fairness, transparency, accessibility, two-way communication, and partnership with faculty have been essential in fostering trust in a college where trust was rare. We are succeeding because we took the time to understand ourselves and our aspirations and then started focusing on where we are going instead of where we’ve been. It has involved a lot of dismantling of hierarchical barriers. I was surprised at the number of our faculty who told me they’d never spoken with their dean before, let alone helped them understand their programs and brainstorm ideas with them or being supported to try something new and innovative. As a college, we are far from a finished product, and I don’t want to overstate our progress. However, we are evolving from a weak culture where we worked “with” each other toward a strong culture where we work “for” each other.

As dean, managing complex and competing priorities is a reality that touches daily on aspects of academic affairs, faculty affairs, student affairs, student services, and enrollment management in addition to advancement, research and sponsored programs, governmental affairs, community relations (including over 1000 clinical affiliations), finance, and the strategic plan. Together with my leadership team and faculty, we’ve devised and launched new student recruitment and yield efforts, facilitated development of pipeline programs, designed, and launched student success and retention efforts. We’ve become a leader in the university’s student success monitoring and reporting efforts, faculty, and staff “Shout Outs” by students, and participation in faculty training on student success and QM online course certification. We’ve identified opportunities and created new programs, suspended others, and transformed others still (including moving some to fully online to capitalize on opportunities). We’ve also focused on expanding scholarship and extramural funding including creating a new Center for Health Equity Research and empowering faculty to go after grants they never dreamed of pursuing in the past. A part of academic leadership that I particularly enjoy is creating and implementing strategic plans and I have done so on program, school/department, college, university, and profession-wide levels. I chaired the creation of the Mission, Vision, and Values statements in my institutions “UToledo Reimagined” Strategic Plan for 2023. While these are the more enjoyable aspects of leadership, there are others that involve sensitive issues that require partnership with faculty affairs, student affairs, general counsel, and other vital administrative and compliance entities across the university including Title IX and Institutional Equity.

Working through such issues, I have valuable experience navigating within a collective bargaining environment and working to find common ground and promote trust and partnership where there was previously divisiveness.

My perspectives have been shaped through significant and relevant national and international leadership roles in my profession and the larger healthcare community. I have been named a Fellow of the National Athletic Trainers Association and a Distinguished Fellow of the National Academies of Practice. I am a recipient of the national Most Distinguished Athletic Trainer award, Koehneke Award for outstanding lifetime contributions to Athletic Training education and accreditation, as well as Outstanding Educator and Outstanding Journal Manuscript awards (3 times). I have served as an associate editor of my profession's primary journal and sat on our Research Foundation's research committee (study section) for 9 years including 4 years as its Vice-Chair for Grants (study section chair). I co-authored the multi-organization "white paper" that recommended moving my discipline's professional education to the master's degree level. I have extensive accreditation experience, having served as President of the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE), overseeing over 400 accredited programs. As President I strongly advocated for globalization of the Athletic Training profession through international partnerships. I initiated my profession's participation in the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine's Global Forum on Innovation in Health Professions' Education where I now serve as the Athletic Training profession's representative on the Forum. The Global Forum is "an ongoing, convening activity of the National Academies that brings together stakeholders from multiple nations and professions to network, discuss and illuminate issues within health professional education." As a member, I have contributed to the Forum's discussions and subsequently published proceedings including those on social determinants of health, the future of health professions education, accreditation on enhancing quality, health professions education economics, high value continuing education, health professions educational technology, design thinking and systems approaches to well-being, and social determinants of mental health. Helping to design the future of health professions education is among the most rewarding opportunities of my career and bringing the ideas from the forum back to my own college has been a treasure trove. My role with the Global Forum has been instrumental not only in my ability to help advance the future of health professions education, but also to help me see and help me shape the bigger landscape.

As I am sure you can see, my passion is to help people see the future vision and inspire them to turn it into reality. To realize the vision for the College of Allied Health Sciences, it will be essential to not only find a visionary dean, but one who connects with and inspires all the College's people and programs to dare to dream and then help them achieve their aspirations. The dean must be a good listener, an effective communicator, a committed team-builder, an analytical thinker, and a creative and inclusive problem solver. The role requires a diplomatic bridge-builder who can work with a variety of colleagues, students, and community members to accomplish the university's and college's strategic plans while also working to support and champion the aspirations and achievements of the college's programs, faculty members, students and stakeholders. The dean must be a careful steward of the college's resources while at the same time be willing to take strategic risks and make investments to achieve a shared vision of the future. The best dean's I have worked with have all been living examples of servant-leadership and I aspire to emulate them. I look forward to further discussing these aspects of my leadership vision and style with you while also exploring Cincinnati's vision and aspirations for the College of Allied Health Sciences and its dean. Thank you for your consideration for this exceptional opportunity.

**Sincerely,**



**Mark A. Merrick, PhD, AT, ATC, FNATA**