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Search Committee

Dean, College - Conservatory of Music

University of Cincinnati

Dear Members of the Search Committee;

Please accept this letter of application for the position of Dean of the College - Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati. It is the opportunity to work in an environment which values innovation in the arts in the context of an urban research university which ignited an interest in this position. I currently serve as the Executive Associate Dean of the College of Music and Dramatic Arts (CMDA); the Director of the School of Theatre; and Producer of Swine Place, a professional Equity theatre company, at Louisiana State University. In addition, I recently completed a two-and-half year term as the Interim Dean of the CMDA and a nearly one-year appointment as the Interim Executive Director of the LSU Museum of Art, a stand-alone cultural leader in downtown Baton Rouge. As you will see from my materials, my career has been focused on promoting student, faculty and staff success through an entrepreneurial approach to the administration of academic and cultural enterprises and a strong commitment to transparent and inclusive leadership.

As I reviewed the leadership profile for the prospective Dean of CCM and the *Next Lives Here* agenda, I noticed the key elements of innovation, inclusion and impact which resonate with my own background and align my experience with the needs of the College during this critical period in higher education. Each of these reflects my own philosophy about the transformational power of the arts and my experience promoting interdisciplinary arts programs in an effort to address issues of social relevance. I view the arts as a central avenue to explore the human experience and I am energized by the opportunity to work across the College to encourage our students to investigate how their work can serve as a catalyst to engage communities both locally and globally to address the most pressing issues of contemporary society.

As Interim Dean, I led the College of Music and Dramatic Arts through transformational change both in the current context of higher education as well as within LSU as we engaged in a system-wide strategic planning process and an overhaul of the budget and funding model. The role of Interim Dean is one of many leadership positions I have held at LSU allowing me the opportunity to advance my vision for the arts while engaging in the University's efforts toward professionalization in curriculum development; student enrollment; philanthropy and other areas which support faculty, staff and student success.

In 2022, I was asked by the Provost to provide executive leadership to the LSU Museum of Art during their transition to a new Executive Director. Located in downtown Baton Rouge, the LSU MOA comprises 13,000 square feet distributed among 14 galleries and is accredited by the AAM. This is my second appointment in this capacity as I spent 2015 in a similar role. During that time, the Museum finalized plans and completed fundraising for a major reinstallation of the MOA's permanent collection of Louisiana art, the most significant project the Museum had undertaken in more than a decade. I worked collectively with the staff, Advisory Board and a small task force to create a compelling story surrounding the transformational impact of the reinstallation which energized the donor base and solidified our ability to complete an aggressive fundraising campaign. During my recent appointment, we continued to advance the goals and objectives of the Museum specifically as they related to efforts to diversify the MOA's exhibitions and create a space which represents

more wholly the regional and national community while becoming more fully connected to the greater university.

As Director of the School of Theatre, I successfully evolved the culture of the unit aligning our priorities with those of the University and implementing programs to maximize our growth potential. During my tenure, the School spearheaded curricular initiatives including major revisions to the B.A. and M.F.A. programs and the creation of a B.F.A. in Film and Television to ensure that we are delivering programs that are responsive to the evolving nature of the industry and which prepare our students for the marketplace. In addition, we professionalized our enrollment management program, implementing a comprehensive recruitment and communication strategy and maximizing faculty participation. As a result of our collective efforts, undergraduate applications rose 400% and enrollment increased by nearly 50% over the past decade including 2020 in which we experienced a 100% increase in first-year and transfer students.

To increase retention across the College and advance student success, I have spearheaded many student success initiatives including working with a donor to create a partnership with LSU Psychological Services to embed a mental health counselor in the College of Music and Dramatic Arts to provide more immediate access to mental health resources for students within the College and LSU Bands. In addition, I spearheaded the creation of an Office of Student Success which integrates a variety of college-level services including recruitment and advising to ensure that we engage in student success efforts from a prospective student's first point of contact through their entire academic career.

Additional initiatives aimed at retention include an in-house tutoring and study skills program, a Theatre Boot Camp for incoming students to better prepare them for the challenges of an academic career, and the creation of a Visual and Performing Arts Residential College. This joint initiative between the College of Art and Design and the College of Music and Dramatic Arts creates an interdisciplinary living and learning environment with the goal of fostering creative practice and entrepreneurial activity beginning in our students' first days on campus. It also provides an independent space to reinforce skills such as creativity, communication and collaboration which are inherent in arts training and highly valued in the marketplace.

Two focus areas marked my recent tenure as Interim Dean: advancing diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to create a strategic approach to DEI across the college and promoting research, creative activity and community engagement by raising the profile of the College's current successes while developing a framework for strategic areas of growth. Toward a commitment to these goals, I created the positions of Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Associate Dean of Research, Creative Practice and Community Engagement.

In both of these areas, the new Associate Deans have engaged in listening sessions with faculty, staff and students as initial steps toward understanding the context within the College as a framework for a strategic planning process which will leverage our assets while preparing us for continued growth.

Issues of diversity, equity and inclusion have always been a priority in my work. As an example, in 2015 I led a faculty/staff discussion on the major priorities of the School of Theatre specifically related to artistic programming. The result was an established set of criteria including diversity, interdisciplinarity and relevance to our community as factors used across the unit when making decisions related to public programs; guest artists and scholars; and other curricular and co-curricular initiatives. This effort codified the unit's ongoing commitment to view our academic and public programs as the prime indicator of our internal priorities.

More recently and in response to the events of the past several years, the School of Theatre assembled the Alliance for the Future: Eliminating Bias and Racism in the School of Theatre Task Force comprised of faculty, staff, students and alumni to lead the school's efforts to radically transform the culture of the School. As part of the efforts, we conducted a school climate survey to identify relevant issues in the department and to serve as a tool to benchmark progress; engaged DEI facilitators to conduct year-long faculty and staff training; conducted Decolonizing the Classroom workshops; and began a

review of policies, processes and forward-facing materials to ensure they do not support racist or bias practices. I transferred many of these initiatives to the College including administering the first College-wide climate survey, offering workshops on Culturally Responsive Teaching, Restorative Justice practices, and Decolonizing the Classroom and engaging in roundtables around DEI as it relates to demographics, recruiting, retention and community agreements.

I am dedicated to ensuring that the institution can attract and retain the highest level of both faculty and staff. Leading a unit with both scholars and creative practitioners in multiple disciplines requires that I am acutely aware of the varying expectations for those faculty and therefore must create support structures which address the needs of faculty on an individual basis. As mentioned above, the role of the Associate Dean for Research, Creative Practice and Community Engagement is to provide additional resources for faculty and staff to advance their research, scholarship and creative practice. The College has collaborated with the Office of Research and Economic Development to present grant writing workshops, developed a research hub on the college website and launched an annual faculty, staff and student Research Expo. As staff are the backbone of the university and essential to creating a positive student experience, I dedicate resources to professional staff conference travel and other internal and external professional development opportunities.

On a national level, I currently serve as the co-Director of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education Leadership Institute. This initiative is not only designed to cultivate future academic administrators but also to assist all faculty to foster their ability to “lead from where they are”. I believe that faculty leadership development is critical for the success of our system of shared governance as well as our ability to engage in the cultural shifts necessary to better promote our values of equity, diversity and inclusion.

On campus, I have served as the Chair of the Academic Leadership Development Program working with the Office of Academic Affairs to provide programming activities for mid-level leadership across campus; served as the first Chair of the Associate Deans Advisory Council which provides the Vice Provost of Academic Affairs with input on academic policies and other issues; and am currently a member of LSU’s National Science Foundation ADVANCE Grant Leadership Development Committee.

Effective arts advocacy is facilitated by creating programming which is relevant and allows for multiple points of entry. It is for this reason that my work reflects my strong commitment to interdisciplinary collaborations and community engagement. For instance, I have advanced Swine Palace’s mission to produce plays which explore issues of social relevance providing the opportunity to collaborate with units across campus as well as within the community to address such issues as the criminal justice system, human rights, education, poverty, labor issues, and global health care. As an example, in 2014 Swine Palace premiered *Spill*, a multi-media event and visual art installation, which explored issues surrounding the Deepwater Horizon disaster. To augment the production, Swine Palace presented a Science of the Spill seminar series which featured scientists, engineers, and social scientists, speaking about various aspects of the environmental and human dimensions of the oil spill.

In 2016, I collaborated with an Associate Professor in the LSU Law Center to conduct a Law and the Arts Conference which convened international and national scholars, performers, practicing attorneys and students to discuss law and authorship in the arts in the face of challenges issued by artists who engage in appropriation. The conference’s keynote address was by Bill Ivey, former chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts.

I have an ongoing collaboration with a colleague in Biological Sciences which is a multi-pronged effort to connect the arts and science/technology through informal public events; a commitment to programming works with scientific themes; and educational outreach. The largest initiative of this SciArts program was a Science and Theatre New Play Festival which brought together scientists and artists to evaluate nearly 200 new plays three of which were presented at a SciArt mini-conference in October 2019.

As a professional arts administrator, I have extensive experience providing artistic and managerial leadership to both academic units and arts organizations including overseeing human resource functions; implementing robust marketing and branding campaigns; financial management and resource development. Leading professional arts organizations, Swine Palace and the LSU Museum of Art, has allowed me to maintain an entrepreneurial focus within an academic structure and has kept me connected with the broader donor community including alumni; national, state and local arts granting agencies as well as community leaders through the Boards and Advisory Boards associated with these organizations.

Up until recently, LSU maintained a decentralized budget process system. As such, each unit carefully managed and generated resources for operations and major initiatives. Last year, we began the implementation of a zero-based budgeting system, requiring each College to effectively advocate for the resources necessary for its operation and placing even more emphasis on strategic growth and external resources. This effort was in conjunction with a new formula for graduate assistantship funding. Through collaborative advocacy efforts, the College was able to maintain the majority of graduate assistantship lines dedicated to terminal degrees with a stipend which was double the previous amount and maintained funding for non-terminal Masters degrees which was to be mostly eliminated across the University. In addition, I successfully secured a University commitment to provide twelve full-tuition waivers annually to recruit undergraduate students in target music areas.

During my tenure as Interim Dean, I worked with the College Advancement office to raise nearly \$3 million and previously I was part of a team which secured three of the largest gifts in the School of Theatre's history totaling over \$2 million. It is a great privilege to be able to work with donors on these types of transformational gifts which support the growth and development of our students, faculty and staff.

Through successfully securing internal LSU grants and other state-wide funding opportunities, the unit has invested nearly \$750,000 in technology, equipment and facility upgrades over the past decade to ensure that our students have access to resources which will make them competitive in the marketplace.

I have also worked extensively on infrastructure realignment efforts, reorganizing essential functions within the College to increase effectiveness for faculty, staff and students and to advance strategic priorities within the College. These efforts included reorganizing the College's Business Office structure including creating a budget and financial management system for the School of Music.

I approach my work by cultivating a mission-based culture within the unit; clearly communicating institutional goals and their relationship to unit goals; allowing for sufficient research and deliberation to ensure that critical decisions are made through a system where all faculty and staff have ample opportunity to contribute to the process and maintaining a high-level of transparency.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my experience and interests could contribute to the further advancement of the College - Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati. Enclosed please find my curriculum vitae. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Kristin Sosnowsky (she/her)