



March 1, 2016

William M. Fischer, J.D.
Chair, Provost Search Committee
Vice President, Student Development
University of Dayton

Dear Bill and members of the search committee:

Please accept this letter, along with my curriculum vitae, as my application for the position of provost at the University of Dayton. I am grateful for the opportunity to be considered as a candidate for this position.

As the position description amply indicates, the University of Dayton's provost bears many weighty and wide-ranging responsibilities in support of the University's academic vision and mission. Fortunately, these responsibilities are to be interpreted and acted upon in collaboration with the University's faculty, staff, and students, as well as with fellow members of the administration. Were this culture of collaboration not rooted firmly in the University's stated values and purposes, I would be less inclined to apply for this position. By nature and by disciplinary disposition, I value critical reflection, particularly as it is directed toward my own perceptions, judgments, and capabilities. I know of no good way to pursue such critical self-reflection other than to seek others' counsel and draw upon their experiences, perspectives, and talents. For that reason (among others), I embrace the collective dimensions of the provost's work. At the same time, I recognize that the decisions a provost makes must ultimately be that individual's own responsibility, regardless of the consultation that helped to shape those decisions.

I am reluctant to make strong claims about my effectiveness as an academic leader and administrator, as others tend to be in a better position than me to assess that effectiveness. Nevertheless, in my experience in academic administration at the University as a program director, department chair, associate dean, dean, and now interim provost, many others appear to believe that I have been able to facilitate significant advances in the University's academic mission. Had others not responded favorably to my administrative work, I would not have remained in administrative positions. My primary joys as a faculty member always were teaching and scholarship, and I have relinquished a good deal of that work only because I seemed to be able to generate some compensating value for our students, faculty, and staff, as well as for the University's quality, through my administrative service. At the same time, the

qualities and habits that tend to yield excellence in teaching and in scholarship are also foundations for good academic leadership. I continue to think of pedagogy and research as essential dimensions of my work, even when these dimensions may be obscured by the complexities of university decision-making structures.

Turning to the specific areas of qualification that are presented in the position summary for this search, I believe that my academic qualifications meet or exceed the University's expectations for the provost. When I was teaching regularly, my students and colleagues normally rated my courses very highly, and I actively contributed to the development and delivery of a large number of courses in the Department of Philosophy and in the Humanities Core Program, at multiple levels of the curriculum and for a great variety of student populations. My scholarly work has been very well received and has been published in many of the top journals in my field and in widely cited edited volumes. I continue to produce published scholarship in moral psychology and social philosophy and have had book chapters published by Oxford University Press and by Routledge in the past two years. Those who worked with me closely as dean of the College or during my tenure as chair of the Department of Philosophy would confirm that my support for highly quality teaching and scholarship is enthusiastic and unwavering.

Since I joined the University's faculty in 1985, I have been fortunate to have many valuable opportunities to gain deeper understanding of Catholic higher education and to contribute to the University's academic mission as a distinctively Catholic and Marianist university. I was regularly involved in the design, delivery, and assessment of the Core Program and both the Humanities Base and Thematic Cluster components of the former General Education Program from approximately 1990 through 2005. Many of these efforts sought to address various understandings of integrated and connected learning, as well as to facilitate meaningful communities of learning across departments. These goals are especially important to a Catholic and Marianist understanding of education. I also was charged as an associate dean in 2005 with leading the development and implementation of integrated learning-living communities for first-year students, a structure that has continually been refined and renewed over the past decade. Of special significance in that work has been the opportunity to build close working relationships between Housing and Residence Life and the academic units. The quality of collaboration among these divisions at present and its effect on our students' academic engagement is, in my judgment, a particular point of pride for the University of Dayton.

One of the most stimulating, creative, and challenging university initiatives on which I worked as associate dean and then as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences was the design of the Common Academic Program (CAP). I learned as much about Catholic higher education, inclusive leadership, organizational complexity, shared faculty governance, and the pursuit of academic excellence by chairing the Marianist Educational Working Group and leading the writing of *Habits of Inquiry and Reflection* as through any other project in which I have been involved. While I appreciate that challenges remain in the implementation of some CAP components and in the assessment of CAP learning goals, I am proud of the program's creativity and ambitious vision for integrative learning throughout the entire undergraduate curriculum. I am pleased by the unparalleled financial and faculty development support that the University has invested in CAP since 2010. And I remain impressed with the many ways in which CAP aims to

embody, explore, and critically examine educational values and traditions that are central to Catholic and Marianist intellectual life.

My understanding of and appreciation for Catholic higher education have developed in similar ways through my role in helping to develop and facilitate mission-based faculty development efforts, including the annual hiring for mission retreats and the second-year faculty retreats. Likewise, whatever deeper capacities I might have acquired for Catholic university leadership have been shaped significantly over the past decade by my formation as a Marianist Educational Associate and my regular involvement in Leadership UD.

My experience effecting inclusive deliberation and timely academic decision-making within complex organizational environments can be illustrated through some of the projects and initiatives in which I have been involved since being appointed interim provost in July, 2014. Immediately upon taking this position I was expected to lead the process through which the academic units would discuss, interpret, and act upon the results of the academic climate survey that had been conducted in the spring of 2014. I also was asked to facilitate the President's Council's work with the Board of Trustees on a transitional strategic plan for 2015-17. In addition, I had to conduct national searches for the deans of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Law, assist with the transition of a new dean in the School of Engineering, search for an associate provost, begin to develop an administrative structure and funding support for a key strategic initiative in experiential learning, and oversee the launch of the Hanley Sustainability Institute (a project I had been cultivating as dean over the previous four years). My initial goal for 2014-15 had simply been to help stabilize the campus environment in the wake of an academic year that had been overcome by divisions and distrust of a magnitude that I had not previously experienced at the University. However, I found that, in the course of that work, we were able to reaffirm or create meaningful processes for inclusion and collaboration that also enabled us to advance a good deal of valuable academic work.

That experience left me hopeful about the prospects for continuing to promote important academic initiatives during 2015-16, even as we go through a presidential transition and conduct national searches for vice presidents for Enrollment Management and Marketing, for Diversity and Inclusion, and for Advancement, and begin to discuss in the School of Business Administration the priorities that should guide our search later this year for a new dean. Thus far, that hope has been warranted, as we have been able to achieve major commitments to: continue the expansion of our faculty; create a central resource team in the Learning Teaching Center to support experiential learning more effectively; increase funding for Research Council seed grants; study and create new graduate program offerings and develop interdisciplinary research centers (from human rights to energy informatics); and expand staffing to connect deans' offices and the Office of Learning Resources more effectively with the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Moreover, we have been able to invest in additional staff for Enrollment Management so that the reach of our domestic, undergraduate recruiting efforts can be sustained and so that the University's international presence can be deepened and diversified. We also have begun to remove or reduce some of the budget holes that have limited deans' flexibility, and we have clarified and expanded revenue-sharing opportunities for the academic units.

Other qualifications that I believe I bring to the provost position might be described by noting a characteristic that seems to have aided my work as an academic administrator thus far, namely, that I do not have difficulty discussing openly and non-defensively major areas in which the University falls short of its goals or needs improvement. At the same time, I normally am able to discuss institutional needs and shortcomings without generating demoralization or cynicism about our aspirations as a university. I am an ardent advocate for the excellence of our academic programs and research initiatives and firmly believe that we are in a favorable position to continue to elevate the quality and influence of our academic work. Here are three selected illustrations of my commitment to open and non-defensive discussion of areas that call for institutional improvement.

First, along with our vice president for finance and administrative services, Andy Horner, I have been quite open with our deans and faculty about the fact that our processes for strategic budget development need improvement. It is not wise, in the long run, to continue to increase academic budgets incrementally, across-the-board, and to leave strategically important funding needs for faculty, staff, and academic operations to individual requests for new resources. While it will take some time to construct and then implement a new budget planning process for the University, we must make this a high priority for continued development of our administrative decision-making systems. In the meantime, it is important that budget requests for new monies be linked clearly to identified academic priorities and to our core mission. During my service in the provost's office thus far, I believe that we have done that successfully, while also respecting the value of fiscal prudence and the wisdom of exercising due care when making long-term financial commitments.

Second, it is clear that we are in need of improved academic facilities in a number of areas for teaching, research, and artistic performance, as well as for creation of the less formally structured environments that foster richer mentoring and advising relationships and exciting new research collaborations. While the University has made vitally important investments in residential facilities and in some academic and research-related areas that have served us very well, some of our core academic facilities are struggling to meet current enrollments in particular departments and to support new pedagogies and burgeoning research programs. We will not be able to address these needs without major efforts in fundraising. However, I believe that, in concert with President-designate Spina, the academic deans and I can be powerful and effective advocates for new funding for our academic facilities. I enjoy and look forward to that work.

Third, I often have spoken candidly about ways in which the University needs to strengthen our strategies to support diversity and raise our aspirations for inclusive and intercultural excellence. My address in January to the symposium, "Critical Examination of Our Times: The State of Race on the University of Dayton Campus," organized through the Africana Studies Program, offers but one illustration of this. During my tenure as dean of the College, we constructed an ambitious plan for inclusive excellence and made notable progress in the recruitment and advancement of women and persons of color on our faculty. We also developed deeper working relationships with Admissions and Financial Aid, with the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and with the Learning Teaching Center that enabled the College to improve underrepresented students' retention, academic achievement, and persistence to graduation. We made numerous investments in faculty development opportunities to assist faculty in designing new course work

and learning new pedagogies to address diversity and intercultural education more effectively in the classroom. These included the creation of the Diversity Across the Curriculum faculty seminar and the Global Education Seminar. As dean, I also was actively involved in oversight of the NSF-funded LEADER Consortium and our faculty's efforts to support and advance women more effectively in STEM fields.

In my first year as interim provost, I carried through on this earlier work by helping to sponsor development of the campus-wide Creating Inclusive Communities initiative, by establishing the role of Special Adviser to the Provost for Gender, Equity, and Climate, and by funding new staff positions to connect academic offices with the Office of Multicultural Affairs. We also have underscored the role of deans in overseeing their units' faculty hiring plans and processes and have begun to see some further improvement in diversity hiring. I am especially enthused by the opportunity to work with a new vice president for diversity and inclusion, who will be able to assist the President's Council in focusing our priorities for inclusive excellence more clearly and in evaluating rigorously the effectiveness of our efforts.

In addition to the experience and capabilities that have been outlined above, two other features of my work may be worth noting. I tend to be successful in bringing diverse, independently minded people together for the sake of work on a shared enterprise from which they ultimately can derive academic inspiration and pride. That is, I tend to be a good team-builder, and I find that UD's academic community functions well and achieves much when we draw upon such potential for team building. Moreover, I approach academic leadership adaptively. I deliberately take care to avoid intransigence or narrow-mindedness about the academic goals and objectives we adopt. Yet I also seek to avoid the perils of directionless, uninspired academic management that seeks operational efficiency simply for its own sake. The Marianists' understanding of community building and the guidance of community through shared mission has been extremely helpful to me as I consider each day ways to cultivate and nourish compelling academic aspirations without becoming close-minded or inflexible.

Very few people would be equally capable and accomplished in all of the domains that the provost is expected to address, and I certainly am no exception. Let me simply underscore that I would very much like to continue to serve as provost, if the University judges that I can continue to make valuable contributions in this role to the quality and influence of our academic work. The provost's work is often difficult, but in a good way: It is energizing, it demands constant learning and imagination, it is meaningful, and it matters.

Thank you for your work on this search and for your evaluation of my application. Please let me know if you would like to receive additional information regarding my qualifications.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul H. Benson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Paul H. Benson, Ph.D.
Interim Provost