

February 9, 2021

Dear Dr. Robert A. Martin, Trustee and Chairperson, Westfield State University President Search Committee,

I am excited to submit my application for the Westfield State University (Westfield State) President position. I have the higher education experience and accomplishments to serve as the next President of Westfield State. The incoming President to Westfield State has a strong foundation to build upon in advancing the Owl's mission and vision as a renowned public comprehensive university offering quality liberal arts, science, and professional programs in an inclusive and welcoming community. Moreover, Westfield State's founding by Horace Mann as the Barre Normal School (1839), "...the nation's first public, co-educational teacher training institute...without barrier to gender or economic class..." resonates with me too. I have worked at two other universities, namely Illinois State and Appalachian State, whose roots as Normal Schools undergird their approaches today to student teaching, learning and success as research and comprehensive universities respectively. After being nominated for this position, I have carefully reviewed the President's Leadership Profile and also consulted with Robert Luke from WittKieffer. I believe that my experiences and accomplishments outlined in this letter and detailed in my CV position me to effectively lead Westfield State.

I would bring a breadth and depth of experience from four different public comprehensive and research universities in the last 25 years. With each successive role I have assumed increased responsibilities and have attained measurable demonstrated success. In addition, I am a principled strategic and innovative leader grounded in shared process and success. I seek to collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to grow and inspire the larger university community by seeking opportunities while confronting head on the dynamic changes that challenge higher education to be entrepreneurial for the public good. I have worked collaboratively with other institutions within the University of North Carolina System (UNC-System) and the University of Louisiana System. The University of Massachusetts System is a strong and well respected System on the higher education landscape. I know first-hand the power of university Systems in ensuring accessibility, transferability, and excellence. For example, our campus worked collaboratively with the UNC-System Provost to ensure that all Appalachian degree programs did not exceed 120 credit hours and that students scoring 3 on advanced placement examinations would receive college credit. These collaborative System-Institution initiatives ensured: (1) student access and success and (2) also positively contributed to the UNC-System strategic planning metrics with an emphasis on access, success, and affordability. I also collaborated with the UNC-System and sister institution Provosts on a plethora of other initiatives that included among others accreditation, establishing new programs/certificates, and addressing food insecurity and homelessness. It is this collaborative spirit that I would bring as Westfield State President to strengthen and further elevate the Massachusetts System including Westfield State.

This February (2020) after five years of successful leadership, I made the decision to step down as Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor because I was a finalist in a public search and did not want to be a distraction to Appalachian effectively advancing our mission. The large volume of

heartfelt communications and on-campus conversations that I have experienced is humbling and a tribute to my successful leadership as Provost. During the spring semester, I assisted with the interim Provost transition and completed an inclusive excellence inventory project I initiated as Provost. I was on research (fall 2020) and now FMLA (spring 2021) leave preparing to return to the faculty in fall 2021. During my leave this year, I have more directly connected with the teaching and learning mission of Appalachian and comprehensive regional universities like Westfield State rooted in the liberal arts. For example, I have developed two new online geography courses with the liberal arts at their core.

I am an innovative and inspirational leader who connects novel initiatives to strategic and campus master plans to ensure the vibrancy of institutions. This is essential given the changing higher education landscape more generally and especially now given COVID-19. I am excited about the Westfield State President position because of the consonance of my core values with those of Westfield State. My higher education successes and experiences are rooted in two core values that have remained consistent and deepened over the last 20 years: (1) the teacher-scholar faculty model and (2) inclusive excellence.

First, I value the teacher-scholar faculty model to deliver high impact academic experiences rooted in the liberal arts. I have done this successfully as a faculty member and administrator. I love teaching and practice the teacher-scholar model in teaching, reading and writing about the historical geography of nineteenth century South Africa and geography education. I was recognized early in my career with the Tom and Mayme Scott Endowed Professorship for my teaching excellence. In administrative roles at Illinois State and Appalachian State, I successfully invested in faculty and programs to deepen the teacher-scholar model footprint. Selected significant investments that I have made using a team approach to our faculty teacher-scholars include: (1) faculty raises for four years, (2) restructured faculty professional development programming through the Center for Academic Excellence, (3) growth of undergraduate research funding and participation, and (4) Fulbright Faculty Scholars investments that resulted in Appalachian ranking first nationally for master's universities in the last two years. In addition, as an administrator I value mentoring direct reports and empowering them through teachable moments in administrative leadership. This is the perspective I would bring as Westfield State President providing leadership to deepen the effectiveness of the more than 500 full- and part-time faculty and approximately 450 full-time staff.

Secondly, I value inclusive excellence. Inclusive excellence is also valued at Westfield State. Westfield State University has experienced success in diversifying your approximately 5,400 student body with approximately 23% identifying as racial/ethnic minority. About 14% of Westfield State's faculty are minority. Growing the number of underrepresented faculty is a growth opportunity at Westfield State. I have demonstrated success, highlighted in my CV, in growing both student and faculty diversity at Appalachian. My tireless commitment to inclusive excellence stems from my lived southern African Ubuntu worldview. I value and thrive on engaging with all members of the campus community both internal (faculty, students and staff) and external (board members, alumni, state and local elected officials.) Nelson Mandela captures my lived Ubuntu worldview: "if you talk to a man (sic) in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart." Mandela uses language

here in a literal and metaphorical sense. Our campus and living communities have a diversity of languages and more metaphorical languages. As an educator and human being, I am always enriched through my interactions on college campuses in particular. For example, at Appalachian pre-COVID 19 I frequently dropped into the Multicultural Center in our Student Union with my lunch and sat down with students, introduced myself, and engaged in conversation about their major, how their semester was progressing and where they called home.

In addition to the consonance of my core values with those of Westfield State, I also have the requisite experiences and successes in areas that can build on the strong reputation that the Owls have as a top 26 public university in Regional Universities-North category. I have experiences and successes with: (1) shared governance trust building; (2) promoting shared vision through collaborative strategic- and campus-master planning; (3) achieving financial and enrollment sustainability; (4) growing community diversity, equity, and inclusion; and (5) strengthening external relationships and institutional visibility. I elaborate on these successes in the sections below that are identified as priorities in the President Leadership Profile. This narrative should be read in tandem with my CV that I reference in the narrative.

Shared Governance Trust Building: I have always valued, modeled and practiced shared governance working with faculty, staff and students. Dealing with people fairly and honestly builds trust. Trust strengthens campus culture. At Appalachian State I hosted Office Hours with the Provost (4 annually) and podcasts (5 in total) that were immensely powerful in building trust and strengthening campus culture for faculty, students and staff. Our success in educating students at Appalachian is in very large measure because of the quality of our faculty and academic support staff. At Appalachian we have over 1,000 full-time faculty. I value shared governance because having strong professional relationships built on trust is a recipe for successfully advancing the teaching, research, scholarship, creative expression and service mission of the university. At Illinois State University I have experience working with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME.) At Appalachian State I had a strong and positive relationship with our current Faculty Senate Chairperson and had the same relationship with each of the other two Faculty Senate Chairpersons who I worked with for two years each respectively. I also participated in all Faculty Senate monthly meetings and provided a Provost Report each month. In addition, we held four Chancellor Senate Advisory meetings each academic year—two per semester—where Senate Leadership and Senators met with the Chancellor and me to discuss any concerns and typically to provide updates and time for input from Senate. I also met monthly with the co-chairs of the Council of Chairs to discuss issues germane to the academic enterprise and the life of chairpersons. Students are the reason why universities exist, thrive, and remain vibrant communities. I relished my conversations with student leadership. As Provost I met regularly with our student government leadership. I met with the SGA Academic Affairs representative each month to hear about initiatives, ideas, and SGA priorities. I also shared updates and policy related matters with the SGA. In addition, I hosted lunches each semester where any SGA member or student was invited to eat lunch and engage in conversation with the Provost. My approach in building consensus among campus stakeholders often with perceived competing primary priorities is to focus on our common mission and values to advance the university. As President I know that one has many more constituents—both internal and external—to work collaboratively with for the

successful management and leadership of the university. At Westfield State I would harness aforementioned approaches that I found to be successful in fostering a positive campus culture and identify others that might be more effective locally with the Westfield State campus community.

Promoting Shared Vision through Collaborative Strategic- and Campus-Master Planning:

The Owl's strategic plan focuses on the student experience and academic excellence; growing enrollment; building a respectful, inclusively-excellent, and empathetic campus culture; and sustainable resource management through collaboration. The "Westfield State University Strategic Plan 2019-2024" has been developed with strong stakeholder buy-in and I will provide collaborative leadership to adjust, refocus, and adapt the plan given COVID-19 drawing on previous experiences and accomplishments. Throughout my leadership career I have used strategic and master plans to foster inspirational leadership particularly during challenging and uncertain times. These documents reflect institutional DNA that keeps community members anchored and university-centric. I am a collaborative leader who has extensive experience and success in: (1) facilitating strategic and campus master planning conversations, (2) getting strategic and campus master plans written with broad-based campus participation, and (3) making progress towards annual implementation of those plans tied to budget requests and allocations. I have provided leadership for strategic plans working at Illinois State University (advancing the research enterprise), with the National Geographic Society Education Foundation while leading the Illinois Geographic Alliance (promoting K-20 geographic literacy), and most recently at Appalachian State University (advancing strategic and campus master planning for the entire campus.) In the last five years as Provost I led Appalachian State University's campus strategic planning and campus master planning work. I look forward to collaboratively leading Westfield State University Strategic Plan 2019-2024" with internal and external stakeholders.

Achieving Financial and Enrollment Sustainability: Westfield State has a number of strategies and collaborations in place including, but not limited to, residence hall debt restructuring (Massachusetts State College Building Authority) and "You Act" (University Efficiency Analysis Advisory Committee) to ensure continued financial sustainability. Marshalling resources to grow and deepen the mission of Westfield State means continually working on multiple fronts including: enrollment management (recruitment, financial-aid packaging, and retention); legislative advocacy; friend- and fund-raising (alumni and donors); nurturing community and economic development; and creating internal efficiencies and budgetary creativity. Enrollment management is pivotal to financial sustainability. Nationally the demographic for first-time full-time high school graduates who will attend college will continue to decline. Westfield State located in the northeastern United States has and will continue to grapple with this reality given its geographical location in the national context. This reality necessitates a plethora of different campus-wide coordinated strategies to realize enrollment goals in the short, medium and long term. These include but are not limited to: (1) creative thinking in how we recruit, (2) rapid-fire response to student interest, (3) timely financial aid packaging, (4) developing partnerships that provide enrollment pipelines, (5) developing new degree and certificate programs (in face-to-face, hybrid and online formats) including stackable credentialing to reach all students on the higher education demographic profile. Westfield State has a number of excellent initiatives in place to build on your healthy enrollment including: The

Westfield Promise, The Westfield State Experience, MassTransfer, and Urban Education Program. Westfield State's Urban Education Program resonates strongly with my core values and success at Illinois State University where using a team approach I led a symbiotic urban education revitalization partnership project among Chicago Public schools, Little Village Community, and Illinois State University that is now more than 20-years. The National Center for Urban Education at Illinois State was funded with Federal and private Foundation resources that we secured over multiple years.

I have both experience and success in managing and growing enrollment at Appalachian State University. Using a team approach as Provost, I led efforts to grow enrollment from about 17,900 students in 2015 to 20,023 students in 2020. We have deliberately grown at a steady rate to ensure that we continue to deliver on the high quality transformational education experience and provide the requisite resources (new faculty positions, advisers, and buildings) to fuel that growth and maintain/grow first to second year retention and 6-year graduation rates. Despite our success in the enrollment arena, we have continued to evolve and adopt many of the aforementioned strategies I emphasized. These and others could be harnessed at Westfield State to reach enrollment goals and secure financial sustainability. Enrollment growth is not something that Appalachian or any university can take for granted. Working with enrollment management and business affairs stakeholders across campus I have led successful innovative and entrepreneurial initiatives to grow enrollment and diversify our student body. We have been intentional in identifying opportunities to partner with other stakeholders to shore up the pipeline of first-time fulltime students as well as transfer students to Appalachian. For example, two years ago Appalachian and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute (CCC&TI) signed an Aspire Appalachian Co-Admission Agreement. My counterpart and the President at CCC&TI and I met for an 18 month period to identify areas where we might collaborate. Aspire Appalachian enables a seamless transfer and guaranteed admission to Appalachian if a student meets admission requirements. Moreover, Appalachian and Caldwell collaborate in terms of advising, financial aid and student life opportunities for Aspire Appalachian students before they take courses at Appalachian. In addition to Aspire Appalachian, we have twelve articulation agreements with community colleges with high demand degree programs.

Campus collaboration is critical to ensure financial sustainability and I have experience and success doing so at Appalachian. Paul Forte, Vice Chancellor for Business Affairs and I collaborated on many projects for more than three years to advance the academic enterprise at Appalachian. Collaborations included but were not limited to resource allocation, enrollment management, town-gown zoning issues, summer school funding, launching and running our lab school and a plethora of capital projects. The latter were especially significant in that 21st century teaching and learning spaces were needed to support enrollment growth of 1.7% over the last 5 years. Let me share one example of that collaboration. Sanford Hall is a major academic building on campus with 4,600 students taking classes there each day—23,000 each week. Sanford Hall built in 1968 was in desperate need of upgrading and renovation that cost \$18 million and would extend the life of the building for up to 40 years. Paul Forte and I collaborated on securing the funding through self-liquidating debt approved by the North Carolina General Assembly. The project was completed in spring 2021 with upgraded instructional spaces and faculty offices. It is

this successful collaborative spirit that I would bring to Westfield State to grow enrollment in partnership with enrollment management, business affairs, and student affairs to ensure financial vibrancy.

Growing Community Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: “Equity First: Achieving Racial Justice in Higher Education,” the “Urban Education Program,” and the anticipated Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion demonstrate the Westfield State community’s commitment to Horace Mann’s visionary thinking in the first half of the nineteenth century in realizing diversity, equity, and inclusion. At the beginning of my letter I stressed that inclusive excellence is a core value for me. I am immensely proud of the significant growth we have experienced in the: (1) number of historically underrepresented students and (2) faculty at Appalachian. Appalachian is a predominantly white institution (PWI.) While growing overall enrollment we have also grown the number and percentage of historically underrepresented, rural, first-generation, and Pell-grant eligible students at the university. In fall 2020 our historically underrepresented students represented 18% of our overall student population—up from 13.9% in fall 2015. Westfield State’s student body is more diverse than Appalachian’s with 1 of every 4 students been underrepresented. Although Westfield State too has room for growth in this area, the university can grow diversity building on existing underrepresented populations including Hispanic/Latinx, Black/African American, Asian, Multiple Race and International. At Appalachian, on the faculty front we have grown faculty diversity for full-time faculty from 10.4% in fall 2015 to 12.5% in fall 2020. I charged our Deans with making inclusive excellence a priority in hiring faculty and staff. We implemented a number of strategies that will continue to deepen this work that is critically important to higher education as the student population across the country continues to become more diverse ethnically, socio-economically, geographically and generationally. For example, in Fall 2020 30% of newly hired Appalachian faculty were from underrepresented populations. Westfield State’s faculty is 13.6% minority and diversifying (ethno-racially and in terms of gender at the professor level in particular) your faculty represents a growth opportunity given the increasing diversity of students on college campuses including Westfield. I will also bring initiatives and perspectives to Westfield State including predictive data analytics for student success, financial aid packaging and holistic admissions for student enrollment, and faculty hiring practices to diversify the faculty. Growing faculty, staff and student diversity is essential and important through deliberate recruitment strategies. However, retention of underrepresented faculty, staff and students is equally important. One strategy to improve retention for all underrepresented members of the Westfield State is to make the built campus-scape more reflective of all members of the community. At Appalachian I led these efforts for three years chairing the Inclusive Campus Climate Stories Work Group at the request of the Chancellor. This work was one of the highlights as Provost because I was able to apply my formal training as an historical geographer to make our campus more inclusive through a representative campus-scape. The goal of the work group is to consider ways to make the campus-scape more inclusive through a thoughtful and holistic process with broad-based membership representation that includes 14 faculty, staff, and students. Accomplishments are documented in my CV.

Strengthening External Relationships and Institutional Visibility: Westfield State University is an anchor institution in the Pioneer Valley Region of western Massachusetts with a growing

Hispanic population and opportunities for symbiotic Westfield State-Community partnerships. Strengthening existing partnerships and growing new ones is critical to advance Westfield State-Community relationships. I have extensive experience collaborating with elected officials and community leaders at Appalachian State University, Illinois State University, and the University of Louisiana at Monroe. For example, at Illinois State I led the work of the Center for Emerging Entrepreneurs. As Provost, I worked directly and symbiotically with the mayor, town manager, and Appalachian Theatre of the High Country (ATHC) Board members to advance the academic enterprise while growing healthy town-gown relations. At Appalachian State, I have established strong and enduring relationships with external constituents including: the Board of Governors, the Board of Trustees, Elected Officials, Donors and Alumni to effectively advance the mission of the university with the larger High Country community. These relationships and external constituent collective support are critical to advance, grow, and strengthen the university. I will build on my experiences and successes in developing close relationships with trustees, advisory and foundation board members, and alumni to advance the mission of Westfield State University.

I also have extensive government relations experience and success at the local, state, and federal levels to grow resources at Illinois State University; leverage funding to strengthen K-20 geographic education in Louisiana and Illinois; and successfully advocate for passage of the \$2 billion CONNECT North Carolina Bond which resulted in the construction and opening of our new \$70 million Leon Levine Hall of Health Sciences in 2018. I have more than 5 years' experience working with the National Geographic Society Education Foundation advocating for federal funding for geography as a core subject. I developed interpersonal skills and experience when meeting with U.S. senators, representatives, and legislative staff in the Rayburn, Longworth, and Cannon Buildings in Washington D.C. This experience has translated to funding successes working with State Farm Insurance, the U.S. Department of Education, and other federal funding agencies at Illinois State. I have an additional seven years' experience traveling with faculty and staff to Washington D.C. to meet with funding agency staff about: (a) new funding proposals and (b) refining existing sponsored research and grant proposals in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. This work bore fruit as funded research dollars to the University and College of Education increased significantly. When the federal government was making federal earmarks, I led university efforts to develop our federal earmark booklet and shared this document with our legislators during on-site visits in D.C. At the state level, I met with elected officials in Louisiana and Illinois to advocate for public K-20 geography funding to match our endowment funds. In North Carolina I met with elected officials at more than a half dozen statewide events when the university sought public support for the \$2 billion CONNECT North Carolina Bond. The Chancellor and I spoke at these events emphasizing the importance of passing the Bond to provide rural healthcare services and education to the underserved part of western North Carolina. At the local level, I have worked with elected officials, town managers, and local leaders in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois; Boone, North Carolina; and Monroe, Louisiana to propel economic development, educational, and beautification partnerships. These experiences and skillset that I have developed over more than a decade position me to effectively communicate the mission, vision and values of Westfield State to multiple audiences. Given the

consonance of my core values with Westfield State's these are stories that I can tell from the head and heart to elevate Westfield State's reputation.

In conclusion, this letter and my CV emphasize my breadth and depth of experience and accomplishments at four different public universities over the last 25 years. This experience will make me an effective President for Westfield State leading the talented faculty and staff that will deepen the institutions footprint in the local community. This is an exciting opportunity to grow and strengthen Westfield State University working collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders to ensure that Westfield continues to live the mission and vision pioneered by Horace Mann.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Darrell P. Kruger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'D'.

Darrell P. Kruger, Ph.D.