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Provost Search Committee  
Angelo State University  
2601 W. Avenue N  
San Angelo, TX 76909

To the Search Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs position at Angelo State University. I was aware of the vacancy from conversations over the Christmas break with one of my former students who is now on the faculty at ASU. I was provided additional valuable information by Rachel Kadosh with Storbeck/Pimentel. Though I had no intention of leaving Southwestern Oklahoma State University, the opportunities and challenges in this position piqued my interest. I have been at SWOSU for twenty years and have been the Senior Vice President and Provost for the past five. Most of the goals I had while in the Chemistry and Physics Department and as provost have been accomplished and I believe I am in a position where a move is possible.

I am familiar with the mission and culture of Angelo State University and I believe I would be comfortable in the environment. SWOSU and ASU are similar in many ways. We are in relatively “rural” settings with many of our students coming from the small communities that surround us. Our mission is to educate and train our students, help build our economies and improve the quality of life for our communities. A high percentage of our students arrive underprepared and it has become our responsibility to “bring them up to speed.” For many, education is one of only a few paths to a better life. I am familiar with the challenges our universities face. Additionally, my ties to Texas are very strong. I am a graduate of Texas A&M with a wife who is a native Houstonian.

Throughout my career, I have been a goal-oriented, project-oriented person. Some of the larger projects I’ve been associated with include the authorization and design of a new academic building at the Air Force Academy and the total renovation of the chemistry facilities at SWOSU. While on faculty at the Academy in the late ‘70s, a few of the chemistry faculty realized that the stainless steel benches in the labs were wearing out and that our facilities would not satisfy emerging EPA and OSHA regulations. Ultimately, we proposed a new building to house the chemistry facility and I became the chemistry project officer and part of a team tasked with obtaining Air Force and Congressional approval and designing the new facility. The facility obtained Congressional approval shortly before my retirement from the Air Force and completed four years later. At SWOSU, we obtained approval to renovate the entire chemistry and physics facilities and as department chair, my responsibilities were to coordinate the final design of the facilities, establish a renovation schedule and schedule classes and labs so that classes could occur while construction was taking place. We completed three-fourths of the

renovation prior to my acceptance of the provost position. The three-year project was completed in six phases without cancelling or moving any classes or labs to other buildings.

As provost at SWOSU, some of my goals were to increase the quality and quantity of research, re-establish our academic priorities in some disciplines and develop a program to increase the retention rate of the underprepared students. I believe that a healthy research program is important in invigorating the faculty and providing opportunities for students to extend their knowledge and skills. To increase research, our strategy was to emphasize its benefits, increase seed money, provide sufficient resources (facilities and instrumentation), and allow reassigned time to jumpstart projects. Though the faculty knows that research is an important component in tenure and promotion, we make every effort to avoid using T/P as a stick. Our research efforts continue to increase and the number of faculty involved has more than doubled in the past five years.

In the aftermath of 9/11 when funding was drastically reduced and many programs were struggling to remain viable, the emphasis in some programs drifted towards numbers and away from rigor and quality. My goal was to refocus our efforts on quality. We de-emphasized numbers and emphasized student success. As vacancies opened, we hired chairs and faculty who would continue this effort and strive for the next level. We are making excellent progress.

To improve retention among underprepared students, we developed a tracking system, required students to remediate deficiencies as quickly as possible, developed a mandatory college success course (study skills) for deficient students, assigned faculty mentors and created learning cohorts. Many are first-generation college students from small communities with limited educational resources. They are often without parental assistance and adequate guidance from high school counselors. As a result, many lack sufficient college savvy for success. We began the program in Fall 2009 and to date, we've experienced a significant increase in the fall-to-spring reenrollment rate. Though the percentage of students on academic probation did not decrease sufficiently to our satisfaction, the severity of the academic problems decreased. We will closely monitor the first-year retention and academic probation rates.

In governance, the goal of the university has been to foster transparent and shared governance. We have a number of councils (Executive, Administrative, Deans, and Academic) where administrative and academic issues are discussed openly and information disseminated. Most academic decisions are made by the Council of Dean with input from their Councils of Chairs and the Faculty Senate. I meet with the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate monthly to discuss recommendations and issues of importance to the faculty. I give the Faculty Senate opportunity for input into all academic decisions. I believe that my role as provost is to empower and enable our colleges, schools, departments and faculty to provide the best education and training for our students. My focus is student success and success after graduation and a strong and aggressive faculty is required to accomplish it.

Again, thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Blake I. Sonobe