

April Sanders, Ph.D.

August 24, 2024

Dear Search Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong interest in the Dean of College of Innovation and Design position at Texas A&M University – Commerce (TAMUC). With over 15 years of experience in higher education and over 5 years in leadership, including my current role as Interim Dean of the College of Innovation and Design at TAMUC, I possess the qualifications, vision, and passion to lead the college in achieving its goals of innovation, growth, and student success. My experience in developing and overseeing competency-based education programs, fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration, and driving enrollment growth aligns perfectly with the forward-thinking mission of the College of Innovation and Design (CID).

I would like to highlight various experiences throughout my journey as an educator that have prepared me for the available position of Dean of the College of Innovation and Design. Most recently, I am serving as the Interim Dean of CID since July 2024. I was the Associate Dean of the College of Innovation and Design at TAMUC from 2022 to 2024. Prior to that role, I was the Department Head of Curriculum and Instruction at TAMUC and Division Chair of Education at Spring Hill College (SHC). I was a district-level administrator in K-12 before entering higher education. My strategic hiring efforts, faculty development investments, and securing of external partnerships have greatly contributed to elevating the quality and reputation of the programs under my purview. In my short time serving as Interim Dean, I have launched two new competency-based programs (Human Resources and City Planning) and finalized important partnerships with the Texas Military Department and Collegiate Edu-Nation. I am responsible for both CBE programs flourishing as well as our traditional programs in CID and overseeing a Student Success Team that provides a separate admissions process at the university along with wrap-around services to students. As Associate Dean in the College of Innovation and Design, I was responsible for 6 CBE programs. In my leadership capacity as Department Head of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education and Human Services, I was responsible for leading the largest department at the university with 16 programs and certificates spanning undergraduate and graduate level. These administrative leadership positions have allowed me to develop expertise in strategic planning, budgeting, curriculum development, faculty hiring and evaluation, and promoting student success.

My background also includes extensive experience teaching at the K-12 and university levels. I have achieved tenure at two institutions along with promotion to associate professor. Prior to that, I was an associate professor in the Division of Education at Spring Hill College. I have designed and instructed a wide range of undergraduate and graduate courses related to curriculum studies, literacy education, educational technology, and teacher preparation. My

passion for teaching is matched by my commitment to research, as demonstrated by my publications, presentations, and successful grant efforts. I have cultivated comprehensive expertise in program development, curriculum enhancement, and strategic problem-solving within the field of education and in competency-based education. This well-rounded experience has equipped me with valuable insights that will allow me to make meaningful contributions as Dean of CID.

I joined the Division of Education at Spring Hill College in the fall of 2013 after completing my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in Language and Literacy at the University of North Texas. Both my undergraduate and graduate degrees are in English Literature. In addition to my language arts education, I have completed my master's degree in educational administration. Prior to my doctoral work, I worked as a classroom teacher teaching English and reading at the secondary level (grades 6-9), and then I served as a district-level administrator for 5 years in the role of English Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator with my responsibilities spanning K-12. My certifications are for 6-12 English and EC-12 Principalship in the state of Texas. I received tenure and promotion to associate professor in April 2019 at Spring Hill College, and I was the Division Chair when I left in December 2020. In my current role, I retain the rank of Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education and Human Services at A&M-Commerce, and I received tenure in the Fall of 2023.

Since accepting the role as Interim Dean of CID, I have been working to develop a model for efficiently supporting students and providing wrap-around services. Additionally, I am working with Travis County EMS to collaborate in potentially building a CBE degree in emergency management; this collaboration would not only increase the rigor of our courses, but also establish a partnership that can provide a pipeline of potential students. Additionally, as Associate Dean in CID, I was largely responsible for the CBE programs and overseeing faculty hiring, development, scheduling, and applicable budgeting. These roles have helped expand my leadership experience beyond the field of education and better understand how CBE can be utilized as a rigorous and flexible option for the modern student. One project that has been a strong support for our students has been building a student success team. Through collaboration with the program director, we launched a separate admissions process for CBE program in the college in February 2024.

I am a strong advocate for developing future-focused academic programs that address emerging needs in education. As the Associate Dean of the College of Innovation and Design, my first large project was to launch collaboration with faculty from the Department of C&I for undergraduate coursework related to Pride Pathway. During Summer 2022, I helped write a grant (THECB) to design curriculum for an education emphasis in the BAAS in Organizational Leadership program to provide support for students working on that degree to eventually move into alternative teacher certification. I put together a small group of faculty members who trained on competency-based education (CBE) in the Department of C&I, and they worked with CID faculty to develop the teacher education emphasis courses. I designed a seamless transition for students between the Organization Leadership degree with a Teacher Preparation

Emphasis and CBE alternative certification courses. Next, I oversaw the development of an alternative certification program fully designed and delivered in CBE format, which launched in the summer of 2023. Throughout this process, I brought in collaborators from across the university who could help launch this program. I am PI for a funded grant through the Department of Education that is helping fund the creation of a strong infrastructure and student scholarships for our CBE alternative certification program.

My leadership experience at A&M-Commerce prior to working in CID has been varied. While serving as Assistant Department Head in C&I, I was tasked with working with the different Centers in preparing for edTPA, and in April 2021, I stepped into the role of edTPA Coordinator for our department. After becoming the edTPA Coordinator for Curriculum and Instruction, I wrote a grant funded by TEA to help prepare organization, training, and preparation for edTPA. I also lead a group of faculty who were working on critical assignments in ECE undergraduate courses and helped design a curriculum framework to better support secondary students.

After moving into the Department Head position for Curriculum and Instruction, I began working with the US PREP Leadership Team and Raise Your Hand Texas to facilitate grant funding the department was utilizing for curriculum development. I began leading our TCLAS committee with ISD partners who were approved Decision 5 funding under the TCLAS grant. During the fall semester, we worked to understand the parameters and expectations of the grant, and I lead the development of an MOU template that we use with districts partnering specifically with our department for the TCLAS program. One of my main projects as department head was preparing for our TEA Audit in January 2022, and I oversaw collaborative efforts to ensure we demonstrated that we were in-sync with state accreditation requirements. Also, I oversaw the scheduling of undergraduate and graduate programs and conducted the evaluations for 38 faculty and 5 staff members. The C&I budget was my responsibility, and I made sure to accommodate faculty needs, travel, and general expenditures.

In my previous experience at Spring Hill College, I was responsible for scheduling and staffing undergraduate and graduate courses as well as complying with expectations and guidelines from the Alabama State Department of Education. I moved our graduate programs to online status in the Fall of 2020 with 7-week semesters, and I lead our department in preparing for a program review that was conducted by the State Department in Fall 2020. To help prepare for an upcoming CAEP visit, I added a CAEP Coordinator to the department and worked with that coordinator to ensure we were preparing on schedule. Prior to my role as Department Head, I was the edTPA Coordinator and taught literacy courses.

My K-12 experience ranges from the classroom to district level administration. I worked for five years as the English Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator for Hudson Independent School District. While serving in this position, I developed several programs that enhanced curriculum development with the ability to monitor curriculum goals. I also coordinated a vertical alignment project to create online curriculum for teachers in the district. These opportunities in curriculum provided me strong leadership capacities and curriculum development skills.

Additionally, I worked closely with campus principals to evaluate ELA teachers, since I was certified as a Texas appraiser, and helped with the hiring and growth plan processes.

In my various roles, I have successfully led accreditation review efforts, implemented new programs to grow enrollments, fostered faculty development, and cultivated partnerships with local schools and organizations. With this experience working closely with deans, provosts, accrediting bodies, and state regulators, I have developed a deep understanding of the complexities and opportunities in academic leadership. I am well-versed in developing innovative, student-centered curricula that meet rigorous standards. My collaborative approach emphasizes inclusive decision-making, transparency, and creating a supportive environment for faculty, staff, and student success. Furthermore, I have significant expertise in institutional effectiveness, strategic planning, budgeting, and using data to drive continuous improvement. I believe strongly in developing a clear, inspirational vision while empowering stakeholders at all levels to shape and execute plans aligned with that vision.

Perhaps most importantly, I am a leader who recognizes the importance of building strong relationships with colleagues across the institution to effectively address shared challenges. With my background and student-focused philosophy, I am well-prepared to embrace the responsibilities outlined for this role. My approach to leadership is grounded in creating inclusive environments that value diversity of thought and continuous improvement. I welcome the chance to discuss my qualifications, leadership philosophy, and vision for elevating the College of Innovation and Design to new heights of excellence.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "April Sanders".

April Sanders, Ph.D.