

September 2, 2024

**Chair, Dean Search Committee
College of Business
Texas A&M University Commerce
Commerce, TX 75428**

Re: Letter of interest for the position of Dean of the College of Business

Dear Chairperson and members of the search committee:

I am very excited to submit my application for the role of Dean of the College of Business (COB) at Texas A&M Commerce. My qualifications, experience, and deep knowledge of the DFW market make me a strong candidate for this position, and I am eager to discuss my candidacy with the selection committee. As an accomplished administrator and faculty, I am confident that, through collaboration with faculty, students, staff, alumni, administrators, advisory board, and other external stakeholders, COB can be positioned as a leading institution of higher learning through a range of innovative programs and modality that not only adapts to the evolving employment landscape but also transforms students' lives through educational access and upward social mobility.

I am very blessed to be serving as Dean at the Meinders School of Business and have made significant contributions in the short duration I have been here – helped raise over \$ 12 million thus far, introduced multiple new programs, successfully secured AACSB reaffirmation under the new standards, repositioned the school on multiple fronts to attract diverse student body, increased student applications by a factor of 10, and enrollments by 61%.

COB represents an exceptional opportunity with a mission of transformational learning through innovation and continuous improvement that has a lasting impacting on student outcomes. This aligns very well with my personal philosophy and I want to be an integral part of such a mission.

In the following pages, I highlight how my experience is relevant and valuable in executing the priorities outlined in the job description.

I have been working as Dean of the Meinders School of Business (MSB) since July 2022 and before that, I worked as the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Satish & Yasmin Gupta College of Business at the University of Dallas (UD).

My record at MSB and UD can be categorized into a few broad areas that align well with the agenda for the Dean at COB. Specifically, I discuss the initiatives and accomplishments in the areas of providing visionary & collaborative leadership, academic program innovation, growing and sustaining student enrollment, leveraging industry networks, fundraising, and building relationships & external stakeholder management.

Collaborative leadership, shared decision-making, building strong relationships with faculty, staff, and students:

My values and philosophy have always demanded a very collaborative style of leadership in which decision-making is governed by faculty input, student outcomes, and staff satisfaction. I regularly meet with department chairs, faculty members, and staff and ensure that issues are clarified and discussed and that a decision is made that serves the needs of the institution and the stakeholders. I am a firm believer that an administrator who travels alone does not travel very far, hence building, maintaining & nurturing open, ethical, transparent, and honest relationships with faculty and staff are very important to me and guide my decision-making.

Academic program innovation and initiatives:

Business schools face growing vulnerability in response to the swiftly changing landscape of higher education. The pandemic further underscored this vulnerability. In this evolving environment, there is a pressing need for individuals who can not only appreciate the integrity of the academic experience but also possess the skills to develop sustainable academic programs. This includes innovations in curriculum design, curriculum delivery, micro-credentialing, stackable degrees, mini-masters, global outreach initiatives, fostering academic and corporate partnerships, enhancing tuition revenues, fundraising, and securing external grants. Renewed attention to these aspects is essential to ensure the sustainability and continued relevance of higher education institutions.

At MSB with the support of the faculty and staff and upon a thorough review of data from Lightcast, I helped introduce new MS degrees in Financial Analytics and Data Analytics to address the growing demand for professionals in the analytics domain. With a little restructuring of courses, I was not only able to help introduce MBA concentrations in Data Analytics and Financial analytics but also get them classified as STEM degrees. These STEM degrees are seeing tremendous growth in applications, especially from international students.

In collaboration with the finance faculty at MSB, I restructured the undergraduate finance major to include banking and real estate and rebranded the major as Banking Finance and Real Estate – to address an underserved market in the state of Oklahoma. This initiative received \$1.25 million from a donor who is passionate about community banking.

In collaboration with the faculty in accounting, I restructured the MS in accounting program course offerings to classify the program as a STEM degree starting in Fall 2024. We have already seen an uptick in applications for this program.

To address the need for entry-level supply chain professionals in the Oklahoma market and without having to invest in faculty resources at this early stage, I negotiated with Clayton State University in Georgia to offer our students their renowned online courses in the supply chain management program. MSB students will now be able to take a set of courses at Clayton that will lead to an MSB degree with a major in supply chain management.

Based on my interaction with top management teams of various banks in OKC and seeing the need for Trust and Wealth managers, I invited the dean of our Law school to collaborate with me to offer a certificate in Trust and Wealth management. Trust and legal courses from our Law school will be combined with wealth management courses from MSB to meet this growing demand. We intend to introduce this certificate program starting in the Spring of 2025. Similarly, I am working with the dean of our Arts and Science to offer Cybersecurity as a concentration for our MBA students. This MBA in Cybersecurity will be classified as STEM and is specifically being targeted to the military and aviation sectors. I am also working with the Dean of our Nursing school to explore the possibility of offering a certificate in healthcare analytics.

At UD, with the support of the Dean and faculty members, I reached out to programs housed in different colleges to start new academic programs. We titled it “Stackable Degrees.” For example, with the Braniff Graduate School of Liberal Arts, we launched a Strategic Leadership concentration for our MBA students. In this program, the leadership courses were offered by the Braniff School and the management courses came from the College of Business. Similarly, I helped launch two new internal stackable degrees within the College of Business where certain specific courses of the Cybersecurity program were combined with the Business Analytics program to offer a new master’s degree in CyberIntelligence. The other degree was a combination of Finance and Business Analytics leading to a master’s degree in Financial Analytics. Both these degrees were classified as STEM programs attracting a diverse student body including international students.

Just like at MSB, while at UD, I also collaborated with other universities to offer graduate students concentrations/specializations in Supply Chain Management (with Loyola - Chicago) and Healthcare Analytics (with Morsani College of Medicine, University of South Florida, Tampa). These degree offerings were our “external stackable” degrees. The same concept was applied to our Cybersecurity program wherein students from [Loyola](#) and [Queens University](#) took our courses towards either their concentration as a part of their graduate business degree or a certificate. At MSB I am actively working with two schools wherein our Energy management courses will serve as their MBA specialization courses. Such collaborative efforts are increasingly becoming the norm for sustained growth.

The external stackable degrees at UD and MSB are possible due to a very strong and robust online presence. While at UD, I designed and taught many courses online for over 18 years and am a “quality matters” certified course designer. Over 90% of my teaching at UD was fully online in an asynchronous format. My teaching style and engagement with students were widely recognized and led me to win the coveted ‘[Hagggar Award](#)’ for excellence in teaching, an award I won on multiple occasions.

At MSB I was able to work with the administration to decouple the tuition dollars with the credit hours to offer our MBA (MSB online MBA is priced at \$15,000) program as a recruiting and retention tool for two big organizations (keeping the tuition reimbursement under the IRS guidelines of \$5250 per year) in OKC yielding 70 students in two cohorts. I am also working with one of the largest hospital chains in the US to offer our online MBA in Healthcare Administration, which also counts towards CEC credits. Preliminary conversations have centered

around a cohort of 50 employees. Work is underway to leverage this concept in major metroplexes where MSB has a strong alumni base.

My philosophy embraces the fact that the faculty owns the curriculum. However, it is the responsibility of the leadership to bring the best practices from aspirant programs and world-class institutions to the faculty and develop an interest in the faculty and staff to embrace new initiatives in curriculum design and delivery that are holistic and responsive to the demands of the marketplace.

Growing Student Enrollment

MSB, like UD and COB, competes in a very competitive market. Growing enrollments is paramount to the success of OCU and MSB. I created a vision and strategy for enrollment growth through student programming & outcomes and presented the same to our President and eventually to a donor who in that very first meeting agreed to [a commitment of \\$3 Million](#) and wrote a check for \$1 Million.

With current enrollment growth well ahead of target, the same donor in May 2024 committed to a further \$3 Million gift to open a small footprint for MSB in Frisco (TX), one of the fastest growing cities in the USA. Plans are currently underway to secure a location before December 2024 and have the campus fully staffed and operational by Fall 2025.

Part of the enrollment growth strategy is to constantly monitor the degree and course offerings to determine their relevance through direct and indirect feedback. In the first few weeks of my deanship, I actively sought and met many CEOs and top management of corporations that employ our students. Utilizing the feedback from corporations and combining the feedback with a detailed review of data from Lightcast, I introduced multiple degree programs at MSB. Indicators of key metrics including admissions show that we are up by a factor of 10 compared to last year and most of these admissions are in new program offerings that were not on the books before my arrival here at MSB.

To help internationalize the school and increase enrollments, I helped create pathway programs through articulation agreements such as 3+2, 2+2, 4+1, etc. with large educational institutions in India and Taiwan and am in negotiations with a reputed Malaysian institute to offer our degree in Kula Lumpur. In years past OCU had campuses in Malaysia, China, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Singapore.

All external stackable degree programs at UD that I helped build were designed to increase enrollment. With little to no advertising, the MS in CyberIntelligence and Financial Analytics had over 50 new graduate students enrolling every year.

To improve the conversion of international students from 'admits to enrolled', I worked with our student advisors and career development office to create and offer a cohort-based F1 student experience. In this program, F1 visa students are given free soft skill training with over half a dozen, 90-minute, hands-on sessions to better prepare them for succeeding in their internship and

job pursuits. The goal is to offer the same soft skills development to all students of MSB in future semesters.

In my previous role as Associate Dean of International Initiatives at UD, I headed a staff of six and helped double the international enrollments within two years with significant growth coming from Asia.

At UD, to better track the application process and student enrollments I custom-built interactive dashboards from the ground up in PowerBi that quickly became the go-to standard, a dashboard that our Dean, Provost, EVP, and CFO relied on. These 'data-driven' daily updating dashboards gave us insights we did not previously have at our fingertips. Such information changed how we marketed and positioned certain degree programs. At MSB, we are accomplishing the same through the dedicated use of the Salesforce enrollment management system. At COB I will work collaboratively to ensure the right metrics are tracked on a daily basis.

Fundraising

Within a few weeks of assuming the role of Dean at MSB, I articulated a vision to position the school of business to become more innovative and offer relevant & rigorous programs leading to increased enrollments. This vision helped me secure close to \$6.8 million in my very first year. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the active collaboration of the VP of Advancement and President of OCU. So far, my fundraising efforts have yielded over \$12 million towards MSB.

Part of the brand-building process at MSB has been to ensure faculty continue to produce intellectual contributions that find a home in leading journals. I was able to raise funds to recognize and award faculty for publishing in high-impact journals. Through these funds, secured for 5 years, we can award up to 5 faculty members \$8,000 each for publishing in top ABDC journals. I am working on securing additional resources to increase the award to \$10,000 and have enough endowments to cover it for life.

Collaborating with our advancement team, I am working on a seven-figure ask to significantly impact scholarships for first-generation students. Currently, I have been able to secure a commitment from one donor to underwrite the entire tuition expenses for up to 20 transfer students from community colleges to pursue our bachelor's degree in business administration.

At UD as an associate dean, there were very few opportunities to engage in fundraising. However, I was blessed to have played a significant role in UD's **single largest gift of \$12 million**. Satish, the donor, approached me in 2012 to express his desire to make a major gift to UD, which resulted in a 50,000 sq ft building for the college. I represented UD on multiple occasions to negotiate one-on-one with the donor on the nature of the gift to UD. When Dr. Hibbs took office in 2019 as President of UD, he asked me to accompany him to visit Satish and Yasmin and make the formal introductions.

At COB, I am confident that I can work collaboratively with the advancement team to help raise funds that support faculty research, teaching innovation, and other initiatives that drive student outcomes including scholarships.

Building relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders

At MSB, I have strategically connected with many companies, actively participated in meetings, and invited top executives to become part of the MSB community in terms of providing mentoring, guest lecturing, and serving on our advisory board. Today, some of the leading companies are represented on my advisory board. Many of these companies have committed to providing guaranteed internship opportunities to our student body.

At UD, I spent a significant portion of my time strengthening and nurturing the relationships we already had in place, while reaching out to new stakeholders. For example, locally and regionally, I spent time working with the Indian Association of North Texas which became our largest community partner with over 8,000 members, and built the advisory board for the business analytics program with C-suite executives of companies such as Intuit, Bank of America, Core Logic, and GE Capital. I also worked very closely with our other community partners like National Black MBA and Prospanica to bring relevant executive educational programming and bridge alliances for degree offerings while ensuring that they had an active voice at the table.

I have sought out and connected with alumni from years past. Some of the alumni are from the early 80s. I have made it a point to meet with alumni in every country I visit. On my first official visit to Malaysia and Taiwan as Dean of MSB, I connected with numerous alumni, and such interactions have not only helped me build our alumni ambassador program but also helped open the doors for consulting and teaching opportunities to our faculty members. My goal at MSB has been to create an extensive alumni network that can act as ambassadors of the OCU programs such that new admits from those respective states and countries can get firsthand knowledge about OCU by interacting with them and sharing 'the OCU experience'. MSB has over 6,000 alumni just in Malaysia and Taiwan.

Working with others and collaborating sincerely with internal and external stakeholders is something I am very passionate about and look forward to playing an active role at COB.

Other important initiatives:

Working alongside the faculty and staff at OCU, I have been engaged in initiatives that demonstrate my commitment to equity, access, inclusiveness, diversity, and globalization. All my recent faculty hires at MSB show this commitment. My future faculty and staff hires will also continue to show the same commitment. I am also strategically partnering with international schools to increase the enrollment of women in STEM programs and have significantly increased access for our academic programs to first-generation students. I am also in the initial exploration stage with CodeRising to bring STEM learning opportunities for underserved 'K-12' students here in OKC.

As Dean of MSB, I have focused on ensuring student success with the realignment of our resources to not only increase enrollment but also ensure that students have gainful employment and pursue a path of lifelong learning.

In summary, I strongly believe that my years of working as an administrator have played a pivotal role in meeting and exceeding the expectations of the faculty, administration, and donors at my current place of employment. The past couple of years have provided me with many opportunities to prepare for a position that is more challenging and complex. I feel I am ready to take the next step to move to a position that is even more exciting and inspiring. The Dean's position at COB offers me the challenges and responsibilities that I seek and will also bring me back to DFW area which is near and dear to me.

I hope the search committee upon reviewing my credentials feels that I may be able to make a positive contribution to COB, build on the strategic plan, and grow and sustain enrollments in the undergraduate and graduate programs through quality and relevant programs that are innovative and engaging, promote student success, collaborate with other colleges to offer joint programming, champion social mobility initiatives, collaborate to raise funds, build external partnerships with community and corporations, provide support and guidance to faculty and staff and lead by example by publishing in high impact journals and position COB as a transformative place of higher learning.

I eagerly look forward to discussing my candidacy with the search committee in the near future. If you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at [REDACTED] or by calling my cell phone [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Sri Beldona
Dean and Professor of Management
Meinders School of Business
Oklahoma City University