

October 9, 2024

Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR), Texas A&M University-Commerce

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I was very excited when I was nominated to apply for the Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR), at Texas A&M University-Commerce. I have served in the USDA/ARS and at four land-grant universities where I developed a deep respect for the mission that Texas A&M-Commerce and CASNR fulfill as an engine for social, cultural, and economic growth. I am very familiar with the missions of CASNR and Texas A&M-Commerce, and my breadth of experience addresses the criteria contained in the position announcement and the programs represented in the College. My professional pathway aligns very well with this leadership role, and I believe my thirty years of experience within higher education in teaching, research and outreach roles along with senior leadership experiences providing responsibility and growth of robust teaching, research (Experiment Station) and outreach (Extension) programs, development of programs to support stakeholders and underrepresented populations, and international experience prepare me to be an excellent choice to lead and build an innovative and vibrant future for the College and beyond. To facilitate educating well-rounded graduates prepared to be critical thinkers, leaders, and community citizens I have embraced high-impact pedagogy, and championed a sense of community in the programs that I have led. While I am aware of the many challenges facing higher education today, I see pathways to address these current concerns, strengthen a sense of community and culture, and grow the local, national and international impact of the multiple missions. I see tremendous opportunity for an exceptional future for the College and university. We will elevate the reputation nationally and internationally as the preeminent College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, and the exemplar of an engaged public institution of the 21st century!

Examples of recent accomplishments:

1. Fund-raised, friend-raised and oversaw construction of approximately \$150M in facilities.
2. Secured largest single gift in university history.
3. Raised nearly \$20M in endowed and current use scholarships in 4 years.
4. Created largest named scholarship program in university history.
5. Established team that was awarded the largest federal grant (\$80M) in university history.
6. Raised approximately \$35M targeted and \$8.5M in discretionary funds to support and grow programs.
7. Corrected severe budget deficits, grew new revenue streams, merged departments, sunset programs, re-branded programs, created new high-demand programs, expanded interdisciplinary engagement teams.
8. Established 3 endowed Department Head positions.
9. Established 7 endowed faculty Professorship or Chair positions.
10. Created 5 new degree programs (accredited, online, professional, first in nation) in response to stakeholder and workforce needs, and a novel program focused on indigenous culture/knowledge.
11. Facilitated several multi-institutional partnerships (domestic and international) for education, research and outreach.
12. Developed strong Access, Inclusion, and Belonging culture.

In addition to growing enrollments I have diversified and grown revenue streams to reduce dependence upon tuition and enrollment; addressed deferred maintenance on the ability to provide world-class educational, research and engagement opportunities; maintained relevance in a rapidly evolving and competitive higher education market; and recruited and retained the best students, faculty and staff are all examples of areas that I have extensive experience and success. Focus on impactful learning, culture and place, student mentoring, development of transferable skills, access to robust co-curricular activities, and relationship building coupled with strong alumni and community support are cornerstones of an educational experience that will set the College's graduates apart and prepare them for success with the next opportunities and challenges that await them. I am excited to work with the

agricultural and natural resources, and broader communities to imagine the next BOLD initiatives that will further differentiate the education, research, and engagement provided by our programs. We have an excellent platform to make the College and Texas A&M-Commerce not only a premier destination for an undergraduate/graduate degree, but also an institution that can support the life-long learning needs of alumni, stakeholders, and others as they advance through their careers!

Relationships: I have extensive experience in relationship building throughout my career. Relationship building has been an important aspect of my leadership agendas. Examples include:

1. Managed departmental mergers related to personnel, infrastructure, budgets, and stakeholders.
2. Led creation of a multi-college accredited Biochemistry Degree program.
3. Repaired an inherited strained relationship with an external agency resulting in their commitment to build new facility on campus to enhance support of faculty and students.
4. Established new relationships with industry, campus-wide and external academic units, NGO, foundations, state, and federal partners to support new programs in precision technologies, in cybersecurity and in a new Center of Excellence.
5. Served on various community and industry boards to grow relationship with university.
6. Developed numerous community-based activities to enhance town and gown relationships.

Leadership: My leadership style has always been based on relationship building, collaborative, and is forward-thinking and innovative while being respectful to and building upon the unique culture and areas of existing strength. I use a data-informed approach in my decision-making process and to identify areas of opportunity that will have the greatest impact. As the Dean, I would foster a climate of collaboration and excellence that supports its people, respects its culture, and positions us as a highly engaged and premier educator of future leaders in the state, nation and globally. To accomplish these goals, we will have:

1. Programs with a growth-mindset embracing a collegial and inclusive environment and promotes inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration, and embraces the unique location, resources, needs and opportunities of NE Texas, Dallas, and the region.
2. Leadership that supports strong two-way communication, development of shared vision and transparency with decision processes, and efficient use of resources.
3. Culture of empowerment of individuals and teams without micromanaging their activities.
4. Inclusive, first-class, experiential educational opportunities for the students served by the University that result in increased access, recruitment, retention, and success.
5. Impactful programs that graduate students that lead lives of purpose and community.
6. World-class, impactful, fundamental, and applied research to grow the innovation leadership role and to ensure relevance to local stakeholders.
7. Excellence across our core mission areas and development of programs of distinction.
8. Capacity to create new, innovative programs to address current and future needs.
9. Increased opportunities for synergies between units across campus, and with external entities to enhance engagement with novel stakeholder groups and create opportunities for students.
10. Entrepreneurial spirit to fund the ambitions of the College and the communities it serves.
11. Translate our vast array of efforts to serve as an economic, cultural, and social engine for the state, region, and nation.

Vision, Innovation and Strategic Planning: My approach includes consultation with faculty and diverse stakeholder groups; evaluation of our capacity and the existing or future competition; relevance to our region, state, and nation; impact on our students and stakeholders; alignment with institutional mission; potential for sustained growth; and predictions from various federal and industry reports. The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources has a tremendous foundation upon which to build brand recognition as it grows its reputation and market

in the Southern region and beyond. Examples of how I and my teams have made progress in addressing enrollment challenges throughout my academic career can be traced back to my first academic appointment.

As faculty member: To address a costly flow of top students leaving the state, I led the effort to create a new accredited Biochemistry major for West Virginia University resulting in an influx of nearly two hundred outstanding students into the program and university. During the same period, I was integral in the establishment of the nation's first FBI-Forensics program to meet the student demand in this emerging field.

As department head: I worked with my faculty to extend a strong residential program in ecological sciences and developed the nation's first accredited online degree program in this discipline that tremendously expanded our recruitment area, but also created a totally new revenue stream that resulted in our ability to fund and hire numerous new faculty members and provided resources to grow other programs.

As an endowed dean: In response to unmet regional and national needs my team and I:

- Established the nation's first four-year degree program in precision agriculture (PA).
- Led fund-raising and construction of a new \$46M, 123,000 ft² facility for the PA program.
- Established a unique accredited Veterinary 2+2 DVM program to serve rural communities.
- Made strategic new faculty hires that resulted in an \$80M federal competitive grant award for climate change that is largest in university history.
- Enhanced Extension programming and opportunities for stakeholders.
- Led successful collaborative teams located throughout the state, nation and internationally.

Enrollment Management and Marketplace: Great degree programs need to be matched with robust recruitment, retention and timely graduation efforts that are critical components of a strategic enrollment management program. We employ significant recruitment, student success and early alert measures to impact retention and graduation metrics. Additionally, my teams have developed targeted recruitment efforts to increase numbers and representation within our student populations. Examples include:

1. Enhanced branding and partnered with recruiters located in targeted national/international markets.
2. Participate in a multi-day on-campus residential program for immigrants and first-generation eighth grade and high school students, specifically targeting schools with high percentages of this demographic.
3. Provide educational and support services to the families and parents of these potential students, often in native languages regarding college application/financing/well-being.

Based on my knowledge of the current state of programs at CASNR, I see opportunities to build upon the solid foundation, the unique location especially regarding proximity to Dallas, demographics, and industries along with the already strong teaching, research, and engagement programs. I see potential to grow enrollments and student success, and tremendous opportunities to expand areas of distinction. The opportunity exists to strengthen STEM, agricultural/natural resource sciences, physical sciences, food security/safety, One Health, digital agriculture, business, informatics, and related technology areas to support sustainability, policymakers, local industries, and business growth. The ability to position the College as the life-long and career-long provider of degrees and continuing education will not only bolster enrollment but also strengthen the value alumni and community place on our programs. The application of technology in curriculum and outreach delivery, and the creation of additional key strategic partnerships will increase demand for, and value of programs.

Fund and Friend Raising: Growth of the College will require even greater philanthropic support to facilitate infrastructure and programmatic needs, increase student support funds, and provide adequate resources to attract and retain the best students, faculty, and staff. I have had extensive development experience that has involved alumni, passionate supporters, industry partners, NGOs, foundations, local, state, and federal governmental agencies as we have funded various facilities, scholarships, and other student/faculty support projects. I look forward to establishing

a very robust development program for the College and to further cultivating a culture of giving that will help fund our bold aspirations!

Resource Generation and Management: In addition to extensive development experience, I have managed large and complex budgets across teaching, research, and outreach programs. We have been aggressively diversifying our revenue streams to minimize impacts from changes in enrollment and reductions in state dollars. We have increased development activities, grown endowment and other external sources of funding to support our programs, created public-private partnerships, increased royalty funds through commercializing IP, increased our scholarship funds pool, created new programs, and expanded our branding and marketing campaigns. I co-chaired a university-wide conversion from a centralized budget model to a hybrid responsibility centered budget model to better link budget decisions to data and incentivize continuous program improvement.

Access, Belonging, and Opportunity: Access, belonging, and opportunity are topics that I work on every day to make a reality, and hold a very personal importance to me. As a first-generation student I grew up in a home where I was raised by a single immigrant mother who had limited English skills, a high school education, but a tremendous work ethic. I understand the importance of work, access and opportunity to the future of individuals and the pathways available to them. I am so grateful for the opportunities that others have made available to me, and I have attempted to provide the same to those I serve.

1. As a young adult I served as a Big Brother to young boys that did not have positive male role models in their lives helping to build self-confidence and explore their interests.
2. As a faculty member I secured funding for a Minority Research Apprenticeship Program that provided underrepresented high school seniors a residential, mentored 10-week laboratory internship.
3. As an administrator I have:
 - a. Made concerted efforts to address access and equity issues within my programs.
 - b. Fostered a culture of equity and inclusiveness.
 - c. Completed Search Advocate and NSF-ADVANCE training, and successfully hired and supported a diverse group of highly talented faculty and staff.
 - d. Seen tremendous progress in the representative makeup of our faculty and staff.
 - e. Enhanced access to higher education and elevated indigenous culture for American Indian students by establishing the Wizipan Leadership and Sustainability program, a partnership with the Indian University of North America at the Crazy Horse Memorial. This unique program is delivered through a combined lens of both indigenous and western knowledge.

As I have addressed many of the points shared in the Dean Position Prospectus, I have demonstrated the requisite skills, knowledge, characteristics and experience needed for this position. I am enthused by the opportunities I see, especially the prospects to build upon the tremendous foundation, unique culture, traditions, and characteristics of the College to help guide it to an even brighter and more impactful future. I would embrace the chance to partner with the University, administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and stakeholders to further enhance the reputation and impact of the College as it fulfills its unique mission in education, discovery, engagement, and access. Texas A&M-Commere, and the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources are poised to be not only locally relevant and nationally preeminent, but truly the premier modern engaged public university of the 21st Century that transforms lives and communities! Thank you for considering my candidacy and I look forward to visiting with you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Kelly", written in a cursive style.