

# Dr. P. Grady Dixon

26 August 2024

University of Washington Bothell  
School of Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics  
Dean Search  
WittKieffer

Dear, Dr. Ratner and Search-Committee members:

My wide array of experiences over the last 20 years have prepared me well to serve as Dean of the School of Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics at UW Bothell. I am excited about the alignment of UW Bothell's priorities and assets with my own leadership philosophies and successes. At both research-intensive and teaching-focused institutions, my record shows that I have thrived. For several years, I have worked successfully to grow enrollment by developing new programs that offer novel formats or collaborations. I have been an active and productive fundraiser, and I am confident in my abilities in this area. Despite political "headwinds" in my state, I have overseen consistent improvements in the diversity of our faculty and student populations. The job profile suggests that my strengths match your needs while your strengths make UW Bothell an attractive institution with tremendous potential. Writing this letter has made me excited and optimistic about our future.

This is my 7<sup>th</sup> year as dean of the Werth College of Science, Technology, and Mathematics at Fort Hays State University (FHSU) in Hays, Kansas. My current institution is much more complex than a typical master's-level comprehensive university in rural America. FHSU serves ~13,000 students (3500 on campus, 6500 online, and 3000 in international partnerships on campuses around the world). I am responsible for an annual operating budget of \$8 million and an endowment of \$12 million. I have learned to manage programs spanning all modalities, including partnerships in China, Senegal, and Cambodia. Our college also includes a variety of non-academic endeavors in the Sternberg Museum of Natural History, the Kansas Wetlands Education Center, the 3400-acre University Farm, and the FHSU Rodeo Team. These have all given me valuable experiences in community outreach, public-private partnerships, capital projects, retail management, athlete recruiting and compliance, animal welfare, and more while learning to work with several different advisory and leadership boards. While my title may suggest that I am an "academic dean," I am quite proud of how I have been able to lead this college to success with far more than just academics.

## Develop and Communicate Vision and Strategy

At UW Bothell, I see numerous opportunities for vision connected to community and industry partnerships, making use of high-impact educational practices, and showing pride in our diversity and sustainability. Before we can start to agree on our vision, I will want to focus on two initial priorities for our team. The first is to ensure that "every day" processes and short-term needs are functional. This may not sound exciting, but vision can sometimes be derailed if colleagues are frustrated by policies and practices. My second priority is to promote school-wide participation to establish and pursue our vision. If the first priority is handled well, colleagues will be better able to propose their own ideas, so no single person must shoulder the burden of being the visionary. Based on what I can gather from online research, UW Bothell is doing well with both of these, so I should be able to "hit the ground running."

While I will always seek broad input, I appreciate the magnitude of the dean's role, and I am prepared to be decisive. My current college was just 2 years old when I became dean. I have worked patiently but steadily toward a unified set of goals that were proposed and embraced by students and

faculty in disciplines ranging from cultural geography to animal science and physics to construction management. Now the college has a collective identity of embracing change and helping make each other better. After creating and strengthening this culture, I spent the last couple of years working with departments on their own strategic plans. This has required intensive, local efforts to understand their histories, their challenges, their needs, and their opportunities. I am encouraged that they all are showing strong trajectories now, but that was not true even just a few years ago.

To be successful with my efforts to champion a unifying mission, I have to know and understand the students, faculty, and staff. This requires my presence in their spaces. The simple steps include frequent attendance of School events, being active on social media, and being visible on campus. I do those things now, and I continually see the importance of colleagues getting to know me in common situations so that they are comfortable with me in formal settings. I have had a lot of success with a lunch/coffee series where I invite faculty to meet with me at least once a year for either option. This is especially helpful for those who are new to the university. I have also led a variety of field trips, including a Study Abroad course open to students, alumni, and the general public. These help me to build lasting friendships and mentoring relationships. In my current role, my social-media presence is a bit more muted because we work collectively to keep the focus on our departments or on our university president, and I would need to reassess that style at UW Bothell.

It is impossible to overcommunicate in most situations. However, it is very easy to create problems with lacking communication. In a variety of situations and formats ranging from the classroom to the capitol and from newsletters to televised news, I have experience with successful communication. I have been featured in live interviews on national networks for my research, I have fielded questions from callers during a public radio interview, and I have been quoted or featured more than 200 times in popular media representing at least 20 different countries. I am comfortable in settings that require prepared remarks or impromptu responses and discussion.

### **Student Success**

Our entire institution should be focused on the success of our students, and UW Bothell is generally doing a great job in this area. There are so many ways to measure and improve student success, but the typical metrics are quite outdated. Ideally, we will ask every student about their individual goals and then measure success against those goals. Even if that is not feasible, I think it is safe to say that we always want to improve our retention and graduation rates along with post-graduation success metrics.

Our future success depends on offering valuable credentials in accessible formats for a variety of potential students. There is little value in outdated “deficit” perspectives that accept, or perhaps celebrate, courses or programs with high failure rates. Instead, we should be proactively developing new and stronger methods for engagement, mentoring, and assessment. Universities consistently recognized as “innovative” are those embracing strategies of continuous improvement for students. In my time at FHSU, we have raised our retention rate from 68% to 77%, and my college’s retention has improved from 69% to 79% during my tenure as dean. These are strong numbers for a regional comprehensive university with a large percentage of online and nontraditional students. Likewise, our 4-year graduation rate has increased by 9 points in only 3 years!

There is rarely a “one size fits all” solution, but there is always something to improve as we nurture a student-centered culture. Much of our success at FHSU is the result of more and better experiential learning opportunities. Undergraduate research thrives in my current college, and our success and enthusiasm has spread to other colleges. In my time as dean, we have tripled the number of departments offering Study Abroad, and we are now the leader of entrepreneurship at our university. For the past two years, I have organized a STEM-focused entrepreneurship challenge between FHSU and University of Connecticut that is similar to the Boeing Innovation Challenge @ UW. In the first year, UConn faculty and students came to FHSU for a 2-day event, where FHSU students prevailed, and we will take a contingent to Connecticut later this semester for the second annual installment.

## Partnerships

I love the adage, *If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.* I understand the importance of collaboration across the UW campuses. At a variety of scales, collaboration has been key to success throughout my career. I am currently on a team that is leading the affiliation of FHSU with two state technical colleges, and I am on the advisory board of a research institute (the Kansas Water Office) hosted by our state's land-grant university. I have been involved recently with three new graduate degrees that are partnerships between Chemistry and Education, Agriculture and Business, and Geography and Criminal Justice. We have a pending program proposal that combines Leadership Studies and Computer Science, and I am often asked to be the Academic Affairs rep who works with Student Affairs, University Counsel, International Affairs, etc. From research papers to disaster-response plans, my C.V. is filled with examples of collaboration leading to novel ideas and methods. These efforts are often challenging, but they yield more durable outcomes. True collaboration requires creation of new ideas and strategies that are informed by the collective experiences of the group. It is not as simple as just choosing one existing model. Therefore, our path should not always look like that of other universities, but it should be informed by them.

In my current role, I regularly have discussions with local, state, and federal officials. Likewise, I have personal relationships with the leaders of companies and organizations that employ large numbers of Werth College graduates. For the past two Novembers, I organized and led a summit between state legislators and agriculture-industry leaders from western Kansas. Indirectly, our university benefits from this effort, but the more immediate purpose is to help the citizens of our state. This sort of community engagement is a win for all parties involved.

Of course, there are also important off-campus partners who do not fit into any of the previous groups. It is the duty of university leaders to help everyone see the institution's value to them. At UW Bothell, we want residents of western Washington to appreciate our presence and be our advocates. As dean, I will continue to take advantage of invitations to speak to non-academic groups about the impacts of our university. Regardless of the setting, these valuable opportunities show our neighbors what we contribute to improve the community.

## DEIJB and Employee Retention

Since 2017, I have mentored and helped provide advanced training for ~140 academic professionals seeking to be better advocates for diversity. I was the principal investigator on a \$400,000 NSF grant designed to empower influential geosciences faculty with skills to communicate about diversity in the discipline. I have more than a dozen publications and presentations on our successes, and I continue expanding that experience to become a stronger leader for diversity. I am leading a university project, called JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Advisors, that places a non-voting member on faculty and staff searches for the purpose of improving processes, especially as they relate to diversity and inclusion. In the first 3 years of the project, 45% of our hires were from underrepresented groups! We nearly tripled the mean applicants per search compared to the previous 5 years. We increased our Black faculty by 50%, and we hired women faculty at a rate 16.2 percentage points higher than before. We had 50+ faculty and staff volunteer to participate in Year 3, and 84% of volunteers agreed that the experience increased their abilities and confidence as they relate to the project goals. Our success helped the President's Office secure a \$10 million grant to support further diversity improvement after our state legislature defunded such efforts.

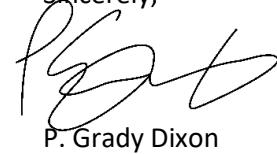
If we can be successful in the rural High Plains of Kansas, I am excited about what we can do at UW Bothell. I know it will not be easy anywhere, but I have learned quite a bit, and I understand that success depends on crafting a strategy based on existing advantages rather than just following a recipe from somewhere else. At UW Bothell, I think a project like this can also act to improve faculty and staff retention as it is a highly visible effort that reduces obstacles for job applicants, empowers employees to be creative and proactive, and helps our colleagues from underrepresented groups find advocates. The best recruiting tool is strong retention due to a healthy culture.

**Fundraising**

In less than 7 years as dean, I have helped our Foundation garner more than \$10 million in gifts to our college, which is more than any other at FHSU. Our donors include alumni, non-profits, and regional corporations that want to promote the “hometown” university to bolster local communities and to recruit future employees. I interact every week with these donors and partners. I have also traveled across the country (from Arizona to Connecticut and Oregon to Florida) visiting donors and potential donors. I genuinely enjoy this part of my job, and I look forward to quickly learning about the passionate alumni of UW Bothell as well as the nearby industries who are eager to support an institution that is training their future leaders. My fundraising philosophy is to do what it takes to help the entire university. I have spent significant time assisting our Advancement team solicit funds for athletics and for other colleges because they appreciate how I represent the institution enthusiastically and optimistically.

I would love to discuss my candidacy with you in-person, so I hope you will contact me via email [REDACTED] or phone [REDACTED] Best of luck with this search.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Grady Dixon".

P. Grady Dixon