

October 14, 2015

Alberto Pimentel, Managing Partner
Storbeck/Pimentel & Associates
6512 Painter Avenue
Whittier, CA 90601

Dear Mr. Pimentel and Search Committee,

With enthusiasm I submit my application for the President of the University of Wyoming. I have carefully considered the opportunities presented by this position and feel that it is an excellent fit with my professional preparation and career aspirations.

Almost my entire higher education experience has been at land-grant universities. I attended South Dakota State as a first-generation college student and experienced first-hand the advantages that a university education offers. As I moved from SDSU into a much larger world, I earned graduate degrees from two major land grant institutions and became grounded in the land grant philosophy. Spending 27 years as faculty member and administrator at the University of Idaho and South Dakota State University has deepened my appreciation for access, affordability, and a tripartite mission of learning, discovery, and engagement. At this point in my career, I aspire to be a President at a land-grant university where I feel passion for mission and can draw upon my experiences to provide visionary leadership.

Following a faculty position at the University of Idaho, my career brought me back to my alma mater of South Dakota State University. In the past 21 years I have provided leadership as an academic Dean, completed an American Council on Education (ACE) fellowship, served as Interim President at Northern State University, and currently serve as Provost and Executive Vice President at SDSU. Each position has presented opportunities to grow in my knowledge of higher education, to deal with increasingly complex responsibilities, and to develop stronger leadership skills. I have come to appreciate the unique contributions that each discipline makes to a vibrant university, and to understand that universities like the University of Wyoming are both gateways of opportunity for those who seek a higher education, and economic drivers for those communities, states, and indeed our nation.

My professional experiences have prepared me for the responsibilities of being a President. In my seventh year as Provost, I serve as the chief academic officer and executive operating officer of South Dakota State University, a university of 12,600 students. It has been an honor to work with faculty, department chairs and deans as we develop and deliver quality academic programs on campus, and extend the reach of the university through off-campus regional education centers, regional Extension centers, on-line education, and collaborative relationships with other institutions. Keeping a big picture perspective has allowed me to focus on student and faculty success, promote interdisciplinary initiatives, stimulate research, and enhance academic quality at the university. As executive operating officer, I have oversight of shared governance, campus operations, facilities, and budget.

SDSU is on a fast-paced upward trajectory as we have completed one strategic plan and launched a second 5-year plan. *Impact 2018: A Strategic Vision for South Dakota State University* was developed through a 14-month planning process led by a Leadership Council, which I chaired. We took the time to develop a highly engaged campus process in which every department/unit was heard and campus dialogue was facilitated. State-wide listening sessions gave voice to alumni, constituents and stake-holders. The rich listening and data gathering resulted in a grounded, yet ambitious plan that emerged as a shared vision. As we launched *Impact 2018* and are now in the second year of implementation, one senses optimism and excitement, as together we are building a stronger university.

My background provides experience working with state legislators, Board of Regents, federal and state agencies, business/industry leaders, and private donors. Each relationship is critical as higher education funding increasingly relies on tuition, fees and other revenue sources to cover basic costs. My experiences as Dean, Provost, and Interim President have developed strong financial management and resource generation skills. I have managed budget cuts, distributed newly allocated monies, developed a performance funding budget model, and now am now involved in changing an entire university budget from a centralized, incremental budget to a decentralized (responsibility-centered) budget. I have also learned to live within our means yet strive toward a diversified revenue stream where the focus is not solely state funding but a healthy combination of state, federal, tuition/fees, private, and industry support.

Today's university is one in which diversity enhances excellence. In South Dakota, where Native Americans are 10% of the population, I have co-developed a program called the '2+2+2' where we partnered with reservation high schools and tribal colleges to matriculate students through high school, into tribal colleges, and on to SDSU for baccalaureate degrees in agricultural, food, and human sciences. The program was highly successful and evolved into the 'Prairie Ph.D.' where a cohort of 17 tribal college faculty completed graduate degrees from SDSU. Most recently, I am project director on a seven-institution FIPSE First in the World grant to assist some 900 low income and American Indian students from South Dakota to complete a baccalaureate degree. When done right, I believe that diversity work can open minds, open doors and moves a campus beyond outreach to authentic engagement.

My experiences as a faculty member have spanned teaching, research and service and as Provost I have been especially passionate about facilitating student success. As an ACE Fellow, I was exposed to national dialogues about increasing the number of college graduates, keeping higher education affordable, and understanding changing demographics. At the core of student success are goals of recruiting, retaining and graduating more students in four years. As knowledge of student success evolves, the use of data analytics and technology is increasingly important and will provide a competitive advantage to students at the University of Wyoming.

While the above experiences and my curriculum vitae provide my background, I would like to briefly express my thoughts concerning leadership at the University of Wyoming.

My vision as President will be to strive for excellence in all that we do. I believe that reputation follows quality; the greatest outcome of any institution should be graduates who are professionally competent and globally competitive, prepared to assume leadership positions in their professions and communities. Being accessible and inclusive is essential and not only makes for a richer and more diverse learning environment, but provides opportunity and ensures a positive future for the state. I envision the University of Wyoming as a primary economic engine for Wyoming. Developing economic, social and human capital is what universities do best. Creating a prosperous future for the people of Wyoming goes beyond excellence in education to include innovation and new knowledge creation. By putting knowledge to work, we can enhance the viability of the economy and support vibrant communities where people enjoy living and working.

Universities are home to intercollegiate athletics, the performing and visual arts, and global/cultural enrichment. These programs serve as the “front porch” to the university and often conjure enthusiasm for, and pride of the university. Competitive athletics and a place where creative expression and discourse are celebrated will develop well-rounded, educated, socially responsible alumni who are passionate about the U of WY.

While I have had experiences at a variety of other institutions, I particularly understand the context of primarily rural states. For 21 years and particularly in the past eight years I have worked closely with the South Dakota Board of Regents and Board staff. I understand working within a public, higher education system and will advocate strong collaboration and seamless articulation between the University of Wyoming and community colleges across the state.


As a President, I will provide leadership to create a shared vision for the institution and then develop an inclusive strategic plan for achieving this vision. I believe that planning is critical to strong institutions and that it not only helps set a direction, but also ensures wise allocation of resources. Ultimately a strong plan makes the institution more accountable to stakeholders and a more exciting, meaningful place for faculty, staff and students.

My personal and administrative style centers on the principles of mutual respect and support. I see my role of leader as one who expects good work, opens doors, addresses barriers, and assists with resources. I am frank and honest when we are not performing at the level needed but I consistently follow through with support, ideas and resources so that we can quickly move to a stronger place. Personally, I am passionate about working with people, enthusiastic about my work, and enjoy seeing others succeed. Ultimately, leadership for me is about relationship.

Finally, I believe in collaboration through shared governance of faculty, staff and students; and with external groups such as employers, stakeholders, alumni, and friends. Through collaboration better ideas are generated and solutions to problems are strengthened. I enjoy bringing diverse groups together to solve problems, address issues, or develop teaching, research or outreach possibilities. In the process, I also find morale is heightened and those outside the university develop much stronger respect for the institution. When done well, collaboration and teamwork present win-win situations for everyone involved.

I conclude my letter of application by drawing your attention to my curriculum vitae where I provide accomplishments under each of the leadership roles that I have held. As I end, I reaffirm my enthusiasm and fit for this position. I look forward to visiting with you about my qualifications as you work to name the next President of the University of Wyoming.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurie Stenberg Nichols".

Laurie Stenberg Nichols
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
South Dakota State University