

October 23, 2024

Dear Search Committee:

I am writing to you today to express my sincere interest in the opportunities and challenges that the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) position with Michigan Technological University (MTU) can provide. I received both my bachelor's degree in accounting (1998) and my Master of Accountancy (2003) from the University of South Florida. I completed my Master of Business Administration program at Virginia Tech in August of 2008 as well as my bachelor's degree in finance from Liberty University (2014). I maintained full time employment while earning my bachelor's degree and 2nd master's degree. For the most part, I did the same while earning my 1st master's degree. I am a lifelong learner, and I am currently working on my doctorate degree in the Executive Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership (Higher Education Administration) at the College of William & Mary. I have attained a great deal of valuable experience since earning my first B.S. degree (accounting) over 25 years ago, with 19 years of that experience coming in the college/university setting, both large and small, public, and private.

I believe I possess the quality experience as well as the necessary skills and abilities to be successful as Michigan Technological University's CFO. I am a thought partner that will assist the president and executive team in making informed decisions for financially sound opportunities. I am accustomed to strategic planning and return on investment analysis. I believe in being creative with revenue diversification. I have overseen various public-private partnerships and private-private partnerships in my career that ultimately led to successful academic programs being created that were also good revenue drivers. I am truly excited about the opportunity to join a student-centric, thriving institution that is also community and research minded.

Additionally, here are some further ways I am well poised to be the MTU's Chief Financial Officer. I also produce long-term financial forecasts including long-term cash flow projections to ensure we are using our resources in the best possible way and exploring all possible pathways while keeping a close eye on performance to maximize credit ratings and to keep positive community and partner relations. I have worked on and written plans specific to funding and maintaining capital and facilities as well as information technology replacement and sustainability. I can advise very well on budgets as well as the best practices for an inclusive and transparent budgeting model. After implementing two ERPs, I can also advise on matters related to financial systems and technology.

Most recently, I was the Vice President for Finance and Administration at Western Illinois University (WIU), a public university with approximately 1,400 full time employees and nearly \$215 million annual operating budget. I oversaw a division of 250 staff with eight direct reports in the following areas: Business and Finance, Budget, Human Resources, Equal Opportunity & Access, Financial Aid, Facilities Management, and Information Technology. Among many things while at WIU, I oversaw the procurement of a multimillion-dollar ERP system. Also, I oversaw the construction of a state of the art \$120 million Center for the Performing Arts.

In my previous position with Richard Bland College, I oversaw an effort to begin a shared services consortium in Virginia. Also at RBC, after inheriting 13 audit points and a SACSCOC "warning" status, I quickly led teams to clear 11 of the 13 audit points as well as being removed from "warning" status within one full year. In the second year, the remaining two audit points were removed, giving RBC a clean audit. This was accomplished while simultaneously balancing the budget and building the reserves for the first time in years.

I have been an adjunct instructor for Liberty University for nearly 17 years. I certainly understand the core mission of education and building new and innovative academic programs. As well, I thoroughly understand the importance of collaboration through partnerships, building grants and research, as well as reading the changing landscape of higher education to understand the role of online education especially in today's environment. In my previous position with the University of Tennessee's Health Science Center, along with finance, IT, and HR functions, I also oversaw facilities and space utilization functions as well. Also,

compliance is and has been embedded in every position I have held. I am versed in the academic as well as administrative functions of a college/university.

I enjoy being challenged. I am an outside of the box thinker, and I am rather creative/innovative. I don't like to say "no", instead I like to ask, "how can I help you achieve your goals?" If I hadn't started as an accountant, I would be a psychologist. I believe relationships are crucial to success. I am a strategic risk-taker who is nimble and thrives on finding creative solutions to problems and challenges. I enjoy building and advancing initiatives and strategic goals. I am not a micromanager. I very much believe in an authentic, servant type of leadership. I am an energetic, results driven leader who stimulates positive outcomes through the use of best practices and an engaged team. While I certainly keep the big picture in mind, I am detail-oriented and possess very strong analytical skills. My strong organizational skills allow me to be able to handle multiple tasks. My problem-solving skills are excellent, and I am a critical/logical thinker. I have the ability to clearly communicate both verbally and in writing to a wide variety of audiences. I have experience communicating and presenting to a variety of audiences to include Board members, executives, faculty, staff, students, legislators, and auditors.

I am committed to diversity and inclusion within my life as a whole, but also very specifically within my workplace and professional setting. I believe promoting diversity comes down to focus and persistence. I also believe promoting diversity is not accidental as it must be very intentional. I think that forward-looking organizations take its diversity seriously and build it into day-to-day management. As it pertains to acting on these values as a leader/manager in my higher education setting, I act with purpose and intentionality daily. While I have certainly built diversity/inclusivity into my daily thinking and overall management philosophy and mindset, I am seeking to build up those around me in all ways, yet specifically in this arena as this will be a critically important linchpin is the success story of our teams and the college as a whole. Even though higher education is fairly resistant to change sticking with the old ways of doing things, I firmly believe our future success will come through the innovation that the diverse backgrounds, perspectives and points of view will offer because I think to continue the way we always have is recipe for stagnation or worse yet, failure, and thus to continue to thrive in the future of what higher education will likely be shaped to be, we will need to innovate. I will purposefully and intentionally foster an environment of diversity and inclusion because it is the right thing to do, but it will also lead to the innovation necessary to succeed as well.

I am a military veteran who has a very strong work ethic that is coupled with a great desire to learn. I have a heart and mind for service to others. I enjoy being an agent for positive change. Further, I love planning for growth as well as other positive, innovative, and exciting advancements. I am a seasoned, transparent, forward-thinking, team-oriented leader who looks forward to joining a team of enthusiastic educators ready to support and carry forward the university's strategic plan in support of a shared mission and vision through excellence and innovation. I believe my experience, knowledge, skills, and abilities would be a great benefit to MTU and I am confident that I can make an immediate contribution.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have or to arrange a time to meet. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*Paul S. Edwards*

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