



The Letter of Interest

(Submitted as part of the Application Package for the Positions of the Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor of the University of Kansas)

19 August 2019

The Provost Search Committee
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas 66045

Dear Committee members,

I would like to apply for the position of the Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor (Provost) of the University of Kansas. I joined KU in 1988. Excluding my regular position in Tata Institute (Mumbai), I did two post-doctoral jobs before joining KU – one in Universitat Regensburg (Germany) and one in MSRI, Berkeley. To me, being a college educator was always meant to be a public service oriented profession, and this does not bode too well with the ambition to earn at the corporate rate. In terms of salary expectations, I will do this job for \$250,000 annually. **There is no accredited standardized program or qualifications (as in Engineering, Law and Medicine) that prepares one to be a university administrator.** It has become customary to go by vague and arbitrary proclamations that the selected candidate was “best in the nation”. I know how to balance the budget, and all responsible households do that. There is no excuse for not balancing the budget, while managing other people’s money. I have some good insight in to the functioning of KU, due to my service as the Chair of the mathematics department. My experience as the chair was fairly intense, and I would be competitive in terms of experiences and knowledge of the functioning of KU and the campus. For me, this is an opportunity to contribute to the goal to deliver college education to Kansas High School graduates **at an affordable cost.**

Since Provost Shulenburger left in 2006, KU had a total of seven Provosts, including four interim Provosts. At the time of his departure in 2006, Provost Shulenburger’s annual salary was \$215,430. Since then, KU had seven Provosts (including interims), serving from three months to 5.5 years. Provost Bendapudi’s exit salary rate at KU was \$464,000 annually in 2018. According to Wikipedia site [G], median personal income, for male/female population in US rose from \$30,513/\$17,629 to \$38,869/\$24,892 (in actual dollar) during approximately the same period (2004-2016). While Provost’s salary

increased by 115 percent, the tuition paying parents (male/female) median income rose by 27/41 percent. Further, legislators instituted numerous cuts on KU budget during this period. In spite of all that, the KU authorities found justifications to inflate Provost's salary by 115 percent. **Why is it sustainable?** Somewhere along the way, the leadership of this public service oriented profession has lost their way, nationally. Those who expect this level of pay and those who approve the same lost their way. No celebrity hire brought any magic trick to KU under their sleeves. Did each one or anyone of these seven appointees make KU a better or a more affordable place for the Kansas High School graduates? If yes, we would not be where we are now.

Governor Dunleavy of Alaska used the "Administrative-Bloat" argument to justify his 41 percent cut (*now half of that*) to state funding for the universities [B]. While I do not agree with this cut, there seems to be a convergence of opinion between the political left and the right that "Administrative-Bloat" is an issue that needs to be curbed. **Governor's reference to "Administrative-Bloat" indicates that this phenomenon has become a serious liability, in terms of obtaining state funding.** Avoiding high cost (celebrity) appointments to the Administrative positions would be the norm that I plan to implement. Cost vs. quality (benefits) analysis would be of paramount consideration in these appointments. A salary cap (structure) for these positions would have to be implemented. There is an abundance of low cost intellectual resources within KU. It would be easier to attract talented members within KU for these jobs, at a lower cost, than high cost appointments. Such appointments would be helpful to blur the evident cultural divide between the Administrative and the faculty community. Homogeneity of the whole community would enhance the overall academic atmosphere on campus.

The external candidates cannot match my familiarity with KU community and it's functioning. You can trust that my commitment to KU and this great State of Kansas goes much beyond a short migration halt. At the final analysis of cost and benefits, I am confident that I offer a unique option for the search committee, for \$250,000 annually. **There is an abundance of low cost high-skill resources within KU. I am among of them.**

What follows after my signature are various aspects of my leadership philosophy and goals under several subheading.

Sincerely Yours,



Satyagopal Mandal
Professor, Department of Mathematics
University of Kansas

Administrative Philosophy

My constant and humbling reminder that KU is a government entity and we are all public servants would remain as the foundation of my administrative philosophy. We would follow the norms expected of government departments. In particular, ethical norms and transparency expected in appointments in government positions would also be followed in KU recruitments. Laws and ethical norms would be followed both in spirit and letters. The Provost does not have the flexibility that the Governor of the State does not enjoy. Governor of the state cannot hire anyone without following the established procedures. Provost would not make any appointment likewise. No recruitment (TT positions, in particular) would be done in ad hoc basis. **For the sake of fairness to the public, every eligible candidate would have an equal shot at each open position.**

Philosophically speaking, the universities run because the faculty teaches the classes, do their research and the chairs schedule classes (thanks to the Registrar's offices). The faculty and chairs would be empowered to do their jobs.

The Policy Library would be reinstated. Written policies would be followed. The provost would not make any decision or implement anything that is contrary to the written policies.

The Leadership Goal

The main reason KU exists, in my view, is **to deliver college education to the Kansas High School Graduates, at an affordable cost.** That would be the centerpiece of my leadership goal as the Provost. *Admission at KU would be need-blind, meaning your financial need will not impede your chances of admission. Financial Aid would be based entirely on need, not merit.* While it may sound like a very original and radical idea, I simply lifted these two lines from Harvard University website. For families with annual incomes below \$65,000, the expected contribution is zero, in Harvard. We would do the same for High School Graduates from Kansas. If Harvard can do it for international students, we can do the same for Kansas-students. During the last campaign, KU Endowment raised \$1.67 billions for "scholarships, faculty support, facilities and other initiatives". At 4.4 percent rate, that would bring \$73 millions in revenue annually. At the rate of \$10500 in state tuition rate, that could give full tuition waiver for 7000 students, every year. That is how the Harvard model can be implemented in Kansas. I worked with KU Endowment, in my capacity as chair of the mathematics department. They are very good at what they do. I would like to work with them, to steer the fundraising initiatives in the direction of and with emphasis on scholarships. Yes, full tuition waiver for all Kansas students, if the family income is below the median household income in Kansas.

The Future Success Model for Public Universities

The story [B] of 41 percent cut (*now half of that*) in the budget for the universities in Alaska did not surprise me. This could have happened in Kansas and **something similar is more likely to happen than not**, in Kansas anytime in future. The State funding of the

universities would continue to be depleted, nationally [A]. The only question remains, how bold a state government would be and how soon? This is not what I want, **but this is what is coming**. The university leaderships may have been in deceiving themselves, and everyone else, that somehow the wheels would turn. No charm offensive of a smart administrator would be able to reverse this. Estimated half the voting population do not have a stake; they cannot afford college education for their children. **Why would they be perturbed by budget cuts in state allocations to the universities?** This is not the first time I felt that, **the future model of successful public universities would have to be more close to the model of private universities**. Unless we plan and walk to this only model of success, **KU will reduce to commonality**. We need to prepare for this and we need to have a long-term contingency plan. **Sooner we start better it would be.**

I hope to work with the Alumni and KU Endowment to prepare for this model of success. In terms of financial model, we need to shift toward the model of private colleges, create a contingency fund, and stop expecting that things will change in Topeka. Good news is that KU Endowment is very good at what they do and Alumni have been generous. KU Endowment raised \$1.67 billions in the last campaign. Most of it went for construction. This could have been diverted to tuitions support, salary support, and a contingency fund. Perhaps, all the full professor's salary should be augmented by Endowment. I am familiar with the concept and importance of donor's wishes. It would be the job of the KU leadership, to provide proper guidance to the donors.

The Recruitments

The Tenure Track faculty appointments are the most important recruitments we make. These are entitlements to guaranteed employment for 30-40-50 years, in these publicly funded positions. As a public servant, I take this responsibility and trust to make these recruitment decisions with utmost sincerity. The job market has been favorable for the employers. There is no excuse for making bad decisions, in this market. On the other hand, denial of tenure is an unpleasant experience for all. Such events, in some cases, leave lasting impact on the climate and congeniality of the respective departments. This should be avoided as best as we can. However, if it becomes clear that granting of tenure to a candidate would be contrary to the trust given to me by the public, I would not breach that trust. And, if I have to deny tenure to some such candidate, I would like to have a discussion with the Dean and the Chair, what went wrong and who is accountable?

Next comes the hiring at the Administrative positions. Cost would be a major issue in these decisions. Cost and quality (benefit) analysis would be imperative. External candidates would be more expensive than internal candidates. External candidates would have a **learning curve**, in terms of getting used to the campus. Internal candidates, with less experience, would also have a learning curve. Most external recruits never get integrated with the campus community. They are more likely to quit in a few years, with destabilizing effect on the whole program. At the end, in my cost and benefit analysis, I lean on the side of internal appointments. The campus is full of resourceful faculty. Many would like to do these jobs just for two months summer salary. I plan to tap in to these low cost intellectual resources available on campus. A strategy for succession

preparedness and training internal resources can be helpful.

Some years ago, the college Dean instituted a **new compensation model for the chairs**. The practice of raises given to the base salary of the chairs, when hired or renewed, was replaced by administrative supplements only. The administrative supplement would not be folded into the base salary of the chair, when they relinquish the position, as used to be the practice. He reasoned that college has more than 50 departments and on an average we renew or replace ten chairs, every year. So, increase in base salary whenever we do that is not sustainable. Same reasoning should apply for any appointment in any other administrative position. I plan to look into this model, for hiring administrators.

All positions starting from staffs and above would be advertised in proper outlets, so that every eligible candidate has an equal shot at each of these positions.

Salary, Support and Retention

I would refrain from making promises of benefits, unless I can identify sources of revenue. As indicated above, additional revenue would not come from increase in state allocations or tuition hike. Like the model of private colleges, additional support for academic part of KU would have to come by generating Endowment funds.

The practice of significant raises to preempt or match counter offers has not been fair to many equally qualified members. In fact, this practice shows bad taste. If someone writes an application in good faith to a peer university he/she should take the job, if they make the good offer. Nobody should play games and KU should also refrain from participating in this game, with our peer institutions. Many members would refrain from playing this game. Some other equally qualified members cannot leave because they have deeper roots in Kansas. Members should not be penalized for their ties and roots in Kansas. It also creates artificial salary structures within the departments and poisons the climate. **This practice should be discontinued.**

It is not arguable that KU faculty salary is significantly lower than that in the peer institutions. This is having all the expected “side effects”. Promotion from associate to full professor level should be made further streamlined. Associate professors, who are in the same position longer than usual, should be encouraged to do self-nomination. Self-nomination process should go through all three levels. **At the time of post tenure review**, promotion possibility of each associate professor should be considered proactively.

I propose to add one more level (say Sr. professor) of positions, between full and (university) distinguished professors (DP). **During each post tenure review**, we review each professor’s dossier for promotion to the next level. At this time, attaching financial reward with this promotion would have to remain as a goal only. I did some number crunching. By some publicly available websites, we have 278 full professors, 55 distinguished professors (excluding dual appointments). Hypothetically, assume half the full professors (139) would be elevated to the level of Sr. professors. Ten thousand dollar

raise for the 139 Sr. professors would cost \$1,390,000 annually. An endowed fund of \$32,000,000 would generate more than \$1,400,000 at 4.4 percent rate of return. In the light of information that KU Endowment raised \$1.67 billion in their last campaign, raising \$32,000,000 would be an achievable goal. **This may be necessary to retain the quality of KU faculty.**

Travel support

I am a great believer of the magic of travelling. Information gets transmitted when we travel. It also sparks interest. Particularly, for unfunded members, travel is a lifeline for research. It is a fact of life that a good chunk of our members would be without external funding. We are already vested in this group. Supporting research of the unfunded members can increase the return in investment in this group. I would try to solidify and enhance the already existing travel support on campus. **The college travel fund (and its counter parts) is one of them.** Ideally, unfunded faculty members should be given a contingency travel fund. Some of them travel with their own after tax dollars. A contingency travel fund would save the taxes paid on such professional travel expenses.

On Teaching and Teaching Online

I have been greatly an instructor of this techno age. I invite you to review my techno teaching portfolio site: <http://mandal.faculty.ku.edu/TEACHING/> and my home page. Almost at the inception of Internet, by year 2002, I started offering fully online courses, through Independent Study (now CODL). To do this, I singlehandedly created a cgi and sql based online homework package. The homework was graded electronically by the system. I also stopped using textbooks, since a long time. I do this by providing online lecture notes and homework problems (sometimes including solutions). There would be more on this in my resume.

I have two takeaways from my teaching methods. First, if university communities did its job the textbook industry would probably not survive this long, saving the cost of textbooks for the students. A professor should be able to compile his/her own pedagogic contents, and deliver electronically. One can write his/her own "textbook" and deliver online or compile it from already available textbook like materials online. My second takeaway from my experiences with teaching online courses is that the tuition rate for online courses should not be the same as that of classroom courses. For fairness, there is no cost for classrooms and utilities. Neither materialized because of lack of leadership, locally and nationally. The question of fairness has not been relevant to the job of the leaders, because we have captive buyers - our students. However, my primary leadership goal being delivery of college education at affordable cost, I see a window of opportunity. Some courses, not all, can be taught fully online, at lower cost. Such online course options would be more suitable for some students who need some flexibility.

It does not surprise me that the article [D] outlines some of the opportunities and the inevitability of online courses. The article indicates growth of the student population, who used to be known as nontraditional. They include adults needing to keep up with

technology, young parents who do not have the option without the flexibility, and of course those who are looking for cheaper college level education. This is a huge market and **KU is behind**. I would not repeat what is already in this article. The article makes it clear that **if we do not take our place in this online market; someone else will take our place**. If we cannot beat them in price (tuition) they will take our market share. Some of the numbers in this article is astonishing. Out of 95000 enrolments in Arizona State University, 28000 enrolled online.

When possible, each undergraduate course should have an online section, offered at a cheaper tuition rate. **If we do not do it, for-profit institutions will take our students.** (*It is not clear to me, why KU is still sleeping on this front?*)

Associate Degree Option and Graduation Rate

An associate degree option should be available for those who finish equivalent of half the requirement for a BA or BS. When we recruit a student and collect more than \$20,000 in tuitions, we make a commitment to give them something back. The article [F] points to many evils of dropout rates that most of us know, and do not know what to do about it. The article commented that, some of the college dropout, with some credit, ***“are actually worse off economically than if they hadn’t started college”*** because they leave with a ***“pile of debt”***. Some of the comments are quite unflattering. Let me quote one: *“The priority for many college presidents is getting freshmen in the door and tuition dollars in the bank”*. I do not want to be part of the any debate whether administrators are depriving the faculty community their fair share from this tuition revenue, which is earned in this manner. If we recruit a student, we make a commitment that they get their money’s worth. A middle ground is to create an option for an Associate degree.

Regarding graduation rates, minor redressal may not do anything significant. A cultural change is needed how we grade, how we give examinations, as much as in how we teach. The college education, as we know it, **may not survive too long, unless we change our ways**. Among other things, **we are competing with the for-profits**, who are doing it cheaper.

On Research

KU recently hired a new Vice Chancellor of Research (VCR), through a national search. Recently, KU also made other serious investments in research. One of them being appointments of some of the Foundation Professors. Investment in newer facilities is also another instance. This may be a good time to consolidate this investment. We have reasons to believe that the office of the VCR would facilitate this by supporting the leaders in research.

Questions on Structure

This section remains as questions to think about, regarding the tradition of the three-tier system in college education - the University, the Schools and the College, and the

Departments. I am used to raising non-traditional (unconventional) questions.

Since I am more familiar with the college, let me talk about the college first. Since 2001, we had four deans and numerous interim deans. Only one of them served five years, and the rest served three years or less. **The college dean position has largely served as a stepping-stone** for its occupants to climb the level of the provost, somewhere else. This came at the expense of stability in the college. The college lacked any sincere leadership, because the Deans always knew that they were moving. I am sorry to report, in my experience as a chair and as a faculty, the cultural atmosphere at the College is, perhaps, fairly toxic. The culture is out of touch with the faculty and lacks empathy for the tuition paying parents of the student. I would leave it at that. The other side of the coin is that, the college is too big and too diverse. It has always been unrealistic to expect anyone to provide any meaningful and coherent leadership to such a diverse group. Therefore, I have the question whether it would be a good idea to **split the college to several schools**: Fine Arts, Humanities, International Studies, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Social Sciences. Each of these subgroups used to be supervised by an Associate Dean. We can elevate these Associate Deans positions to the position of the Deans (low cost). That way each subdivided college would have a size comparable to the other schools. **The fact that the college Deans serve only for a short stint seems like a good enough reason to eliminate the position of the college Dean.**

I am hopeful situation in the offices of the Deans in other schools are better and more meaningful. Obviously, Deans in smaller schools are more in touch with the faculty. However, questions remains how much of this three tier system is due to inertia of tradition and what portion is relevant? These remain as questions. I take calculated risk only, and in a controlled manner. There would be no changes made without consultation with the academics and without adequate studies. Changes, if any, would be implemented in a controlled manner only.

Staff Benefits

I would not make promises that I may not be able to keep. My understanding at this point is that staff benefits are mainly decided at Topeka. However, I would make one commitment, that my input regarding the benefits to the faculty and staffs would be guided by same principles. One example comes to my mind is the Modified Instructional Duty [E] that tenure track faculty members are entitled to, when they have a baby. This is a substitute for maternity or paternity leave for one semester, while it is not leave from duties. I would explore, if something similar can be arranged for the regular staffs? (*I was told, some offices in Topeka allow the parents to bring the baby to the office for six months.*)

Trees, Bushes and Plants

There would be more tall trees, untamed bushes and plants all over the campus. An areal view of the campus would see less cemented surface, and would be full of lashes of green.

References

- A) Kevin Carey, *How Higher Education Became a Pawn in the Partisan Forever War*, July 9, 2019 https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Higher-Education-Became-a/246628?cid=wcontentlist_hp_5
- B) Sarah Brown, *Here's Why Alaska's Governor Thinks His University System Needs Steep Cuts — and Why Experts Say He's Wrong*, July 25, 2019 https://www.chronicle.com/article/Here-s-Why-Alaska-s/246779?cid=wsinglestory_hp_3
- C) Allison M. Vaillancourt, *Are We Too Captivated by Charisma in Hiring?* July 23, 2019 <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Are-We-Too-Captivated-by/246722?cid=wsinglestory>
- D) Lee Gardner, *The Rise of the Mega University*, February 18, 2019, https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/Trend19-MegaU-Main?cid=wcontentgrid_2Trends
- E) The Policy Library, *Modified Instructional Duty* <https://policy.ku.edu/provost/modified-instructional-duties>
- F) David Kirp, *The College Dropout Scandal*, July 26 2019, https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20190726-dropout-scandal?cid=wsinglestory_hp_1
- G) Personal Income in the United States, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_income_in_the_United_States