

May 30, 2014

Search Committee
Director of International Programs & Services
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC 28723

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to express my interest in the position of Director of International Programs and Services. This position and its responsibilities are perfectly aligned with my background, experience, skills, and passion for international education. I welcome the opportunity to help enrich the academic experience of all our students, especially those participating in international study, service, and work.

As a teacher of international relations and global affairs, I am well aware of the impact that study abroad, international exchange, interaction with international students, and globally-minded curriculum can have on students' education. As an undergraduate student I had the opportunity to study abroad in Kenya, and as a faculty member I have been intent on getting my students to participate in experiences outside the country. I urge all my students to consider studying abroad, and along with an interdisciplinary team of professors, I have organized an alternative spring break service-learning trip to Jamaica for the past three years.

Managing the Jamaica trip has been an informative experience, and I have learned a great deal about developing a trip budget, coordinating with international institutions and community leaders in Jamaica, and managing the inherent risks that are part of any international trip. One of the biggest challenges is helping students make meaning out of the trip and link the learning that takes place abroad with what they learn in the classroom at home. In my own published research on the scholarship of teaching and learning, I have written about the effort to help students make these connections and get the most out of international experiences.

In addition to my own faculty-led trip, I have administrative experience working with the College Park Scholars – International Studies living-learning program at the University of Maryland. As Associate Director, I was responsible for supervising a team of graduate TAs, designing curriculum, coordinating experiential learning activities, and supervising student research, internships, and service projects. While working with the program I developed a collaborative leadership style that focuses on identifying and capitalizing on the strengths of my team, providing the support each person needs to achieve their best work.

I also have business experience from my years working in the banking industry. As a result, I bring a familiarity with business culture and etiquette, regulatory compliance, and risk management. I have experience communicating and working with diverse clients, including business leaders, professional groups, officials in the public sector, and individuals from all walks of life. Working in business also made me into a leader who learns new skills and competencies quickly, who values consensus building, and who expects a disciplined work ethic from my team and myself.

As a faculty member, I have extensive experience working with students. As a result, I understand the academic, financial, and time constraints students face when considering study abroad, faculty-led trips, international service, and internships. I also know many of them have a deep desire to travel, to learn more about the world, and to enrich their classroom experience with real-world experience. I believe we have a great deal of potential to increase the number of students who study, work, or serve abroad as well as the quality of those experiences. I also appreciate the dedication, skills, and extraordinary resources our faculty bring to the university community. I understand the demands on faculty for quality teaching, research, and service, as well as many faculty members' desire to bring global competency and awareness to their students.

Working with the Provost's office this summer, I have had the opportunity to begin work on revising the policies and procedures for faculty-led travel at WCU, and to help develop a new initiative called WCU Away, which will provide financial support for students to study, work, and serve abroad during the summer. These projects are emblematic of the vision and direction I would like to bring to the IPS office. I believe that whenever we can simplify and improve the process of developing and participating in international exchanges, we make these opportunities more accessible to faculty and students. As processes improve, we increase the likelihood of growth in these programs. Initiatives like WCU Away that make international exchange available to students who otherwise could not participate are critical for growth. I welcome the opportunity to continue developing these and similar programs in the future.

What is difficult to convey on a CV and in a short cover letter is how much I care about the programs and services administered by this office. Applying for a position that will require me to step out of a faculty role and into an administrative role is not a decision I made easily. However, I am passionate about helping students encounter the world around them, and helping faculty internationalize their curriculum and develop their own trips.

In sum, I am prepared for the position of IPS director, and I believe I am a good fit for the job. I sincerely appreciate your consideration of my application, and I welcome the opportunity to engage more with the committee. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Michael K. McDonald