

November 1, 2024

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Chancellor Search Committee
University of Arkansas System
c/o AGB Search
666 K Street NW, Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20006

Dear University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Chancellor Search Committee:

I am writing to express my interest in the Chancellor position at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB). UAPB's vision to become a pre-eminent land-grant institution that is known for excellence in teaching, research, and outreach resonates with my previous experience and my own personal philosophy of education. I have 24 years of experience at public historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) with 18 years at the nation's largest land-grant HBCU, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T); moreover, my personal philosophy is that institutions of higher education should produce transformative servant leaders, or individuals who leverage their knowledge, skills, gifts, and talents, to improve their communities and our society. I am drawn to this opportunity because UAPB's vision and mission commit to advancing student success, empowering employees, and promoting institutional excellence through servant leadership.

My leadership experience across multiple roles in higher education reflects a commitment to foster learning that engages students in meaningful ways. Early in my career as a licensed K-12 teacher, I embraced culturally relevant pedagogy, which means that I strive to develop each student's "critical consciousness" where the individual must apply what is learned inside the classroom to the real world outside the classroom to improve people's lives and society. This approach continues to shape my philosophy toward leadership in higher education. For the past six years as Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and one year as interim Chancellor at Winston-Salem State University (WSSU), I have used this foundation to enhance student outcomes, advance institutional efficiency, and cultivate community partnerships. I am confident that my leadership—grounded in vision, collaboration, and strategic outcomes—positions me as a strong candidate for UAPB's chancellor.

Visionary Leadership: Building a Future through Collaboration and Strategy

The next President of UAPB must unify stakeholders around a bold and forward-thinking vision. My leadership experience demonstrates my ability to cast such a vision while grounding it in measurable outcomes. As Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at WSSU, I led the institution's strategic planning efforts amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaborating with a 174-member Strategic Planning Committee, we conducted comprehensive data analyses and trend assessments, resulting in the creation of *WSSU 2030: Unleash the Genius*, a plan centered on student success, academic excellence, and institutional evolution. We revised the university's vision, mission, and core values, and we developed an annual scorecard to track our progress to ensure transparency.

Beyond strategic planning, I believe that the foundation of every successful strategy lies in investing in people. As an educator, my leadership approach has always been "people centric" with an emphasis on professional growth. At WSSU, I required annual succession plans from my leadership team to build a pipeline of future campus leaders. I also initiated the *Provost Executive Leadership Training* seminar series, investing in the professional development of employees to nurture future leaders. I employed similar approaches at NC A&T where I designed initiatives to support faculty tenure, increase external funding, and foster leadership. My commitment to employee growth is essential to fostering a thriving campus community and reflects my dedication to servant leadership.

Student-Centered Leadership grounded in Excellence: Elevating the Student Experience

As a professionally trained and licensed K-12 educator, championing academic excellence is an innate characteristic; thus, student success is at the core of every decision that I make as an educational leader. As interim Chancellor at WSSU during the 2023-24 academic year, I initiated the *Elevate to Excellence* campaign to foster a campus culture of high achievement and accountability. Centered around this campaign, we also launched *The Rams Experience* to reimagine prospective student orientations, aligning them with a university-wide commitment to excellence. Working closely with the Chief Financial Officer, I also directed over \$1 million to Integrated Marketing Communication to update campus branding and marketing, yielding new way-finding signage, digital video boards, and branding that reflect institutional pride and professionalism. Through these types of strategic and intentional initiatives, we improved first-to-second-semester persistence rates to 93% and first-to-second-year retention rates to 77%, an increase of 2.6 percentage points from the previous academic year; moreover, we increased the institution's overall four-year completion rate by 1 percentage point and the four-year completion rate of Pell recipient students by 1.11 percentage points.

While serving as Provost, I worked collaboratively with academic deans, department chairs, faculty, and other support personnel to ground our academic curriculum in a skills-based approach. Leveraging data from recent alumni, employers, and workforce readiness research, we redesigned our curriculum and reduced our student learning outcomes to focus intentionally on what we termed as “power skills”—critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal communication, literacy, entrepreneurial spirit, and leadership; moreover, we integrated more strategically high-impact practices into our academic curriculum, creating opportunities for students to apply content knowledge and content skills into real world environments. We also worked to innovate our academic degree programs, onboarding new academic minors (e.g., data sciences, quantum information science), integrating workforce certifications into degree programs, and updating academic degree program names (e.g., medical laboratory science).

I also worked collaboratively with my leadership team, faculty, and staff across the campus to implement a comprehensive campus-wide Student Success and Retention Action Plan. Leveraging the expertise of committed employees across the campus as well as alumni, we increased the first-to-second-year retention rate to 76.8% and the second-to-third-year retention to 66.6%. We also increased the five-year graduation rates to 53%. This work required intentional data disaggregation to close achievement gaps for first-generation, low-income, and post-traditional students.

Most importantly, I believe that every institutional leader must actively engage with students to discuss their experience, assess their well-being, listen to their concerns and suggestions for improvement, and converse with them about student performance data. Students are major actors in this work, so it is imperative that we include them in conversations in a very transparent way; thus, I regularly meet with students. I have a standing monthly meeting with the Student Government Association (SGA) President and the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee President, and I also have a standing lunch meeting with the SGA Executive Leadership team, which I initiated during the 2019-20 academic year. I also launched the Provost's Student Advisory Council comprised of 15 undergraduate and graduate students with whom I meet once per semester; moreover, I regularly visit residence halls to converse with students, and I partner with the Chief of Police and Student Affairs leadership to facilitate a campus “Safety Walk” every semester in the evening to assess campus conditions. I also sponsor Town Halls and focus groups with different student groups to ensure that the voices of students inform our policies and programs.

This student-first approach will guide my leadership at UAPB, ensuring that all decisions align with the needs and aspirations of the students we serve; moreover, this work aligns closely with UAPB's mission to produce graduates who are equipped to excel through their contributions and leadership in a 21st century national and global community.

A Legacy of Mission-Driven Leadership: Advancing Outcomes through Partnerships

Throughout my career, I have prioritized student success by leveraging data and partnerships to create high-impact learning experiences. At WSSU, I worked with other campus leaders to position the university to move from regional rankings to national rankings in the *U.S. News & World Report*, making one of the largest jumps among any university in the 2025 rankings as the institution moved up 40 spots and moved up 22 spots in the top public school rankings. We also worked to make WSSU the top-ranked four-year institution of higher education in North Carolina for social and economic mobility as recognized by *The New York Times*. These accomplishments were supported by the university's *Signature Partnership Framework*, which I conceptualized and designed in collaboration with the Vice Chancellor for University Advancement. This new framework has attracted more than \$45 million in new sustainable funding to expand scholarships, study abroad opportunities, and research initiatives. We also leveraged these funds from businesses and philanthropic organizations to create new facilities like the Adobe Digital Literacy Lab, the Center for Applied Data Sciences, and a state-of-the-art virtual simulation hospital; these new facilities assist the campus community with promoting career readiness and student engagement. This work has contributed to WSSU's meteoric rise in the national rankings and its designation as North Carolina's top four-year institution for socioeconomic mobility.

As the interim Chancellor, I worked closely with the chairperson of the WSSU Foundation, Incorporated as well as its executive leadership and Board members to realign the organization's work to the university's strategic plan. Working collaboratively with the leadership of the WSSU Foundation, an associated entity to the university, we (re)directed funding to the university that supported strategic priorities, including funding for "gap scholarships" to students in financial distress, for professional development that supported travel to conferences for faculty and students, and for new events like the Chancellor's Speaker Series and the WSSU Foundation's Simon Green Atkins Gala, which were designed not only to fundraise for the university but also to market the institution's brand.

These efforts are an extension of my earlier work at NC A&T where I collaborated with the Tom Joyner Foundation and the Cemala Foundation to increase enrollment of Black male teachers in K-12 education. In addition to preparing future K-12 teachers in the classroom, I sponsored leadership initiatives like the *DreamKeepers Living and Learning Community* and the *Charles Hamilton Houston Leadership Institute for Black Males* which were designed to develop students holistically; thus, my focus on student success has never been limited to the classroom and has always focused on ways to develop learners personally and professionally outside the classroom.

I believe that UAPB's legacy as a transformative institution uniquely positions it to continue producing leaders and changemakers who influence society, and I am excited about the opportunity to extend this impact by working with internal and external stakeholders to evolve the university.

Financial Acumen: Ensuring Stability and Growth through Transparency

My leadership style emphasizes financial transparency and strategic resource management to achieve long-term stability. As interim Chancellor, I worked with senior leadership to develop the *WSSU Financial Stability Framework* that articulated explicit action steps to address budgetary challenges and align resources with strategic priorities. Under my leadership, we executed cost-saving initiatives and expanded revenue-generating opportunities, providing the financial foundation for sustainable growth. Throughout these challenges, transparency was central to this effort as I engaged stakeholders in open discussions about budget priorities and challenges, leveraging Town Halls for employees, students, and alumni as well as participating in the WSSU National Alumni Association meetings across the state and external to the state; moreover, I worked closely with the Faculty Senate President and the Staff Senate Chairperson to engage faculty and staff in appropriate settings.

As Provost, I worked with my leadership team to transform WSSU's research enterprise by revamping key administrative positions and investing in faculty development. These efforts led to an 182% increase in sponsored research funding, growing the institution's sponsored research portfolio from \$29 million to nearly \$90 million in four years. I also worked with the institution's leadership to increase our investment into Research and Development expenditures, achieving \$10,436,000 in R&D expenditures by 2022. With an increased investment in our research infrastructure, we also modernized the university's indirect cost policy that resulted in a 112% increase in overhead recovery. This significant funding windfall ensured that departments benefited from their research, which fostered innovation and enhanced student engagement through assistantships and professional development; moreover, faculty increased their ability to procure funding that supported new hires, increased student immersion in research and community engagement, and enhanced campus facilities with new technologies.

Shared Governance and Community Engagement: Building Trust and Collaboration

An effective president must cultivate trust through collaboration. I value the power of shared governance and inclusive leadership, ensuring that the voices of faculty, staff, students, and alumni are integral to institutional progress. Throughout my tenure as interim Chancellor, I fostered transparency by holding regular town halls and strategic meetings with faculty and staff senate leadership. I also worked closely with WSSU's Board of Trustees, shifting the board toward a strategic, corporate mindset that emphasized data-driven decision-making. I also cultivated relationships with the UNC System to align our institutional goals with broader System priorities; moreover, I worked with local, state, and federal elected officials to increase state and federal funding to the university for infrastructure improvements.


Beyond campus, I remain engaged in advancing education and workforce development through national and local service. I currently serve on several boards, including Deans for Impact, Goodwill Industries of Northwest North Carolina, Senior Services Incorporated, Habitat for Humanity, and the Winston-Salem YMCA. Additionally, I serve on the executive board of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and North Carolina's Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission. I also serve as the chairperson on Governor Roy Cooper's Developing a Responsive and Inclusive Vision of Education (DRIVE) Task Force, which focuses on diversifying North Carolina's K-12 teacher workforce. These experiences reflect my dedication to improving educational access, equity, and upward mobility for all.

The Ideal Fit for the Next President of University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

I believe that my leadership experience, strategic vision, and commitment to student-centered outcomes uniquely qualify me to serve as the next Chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. My journey from a classroom English teacher in a public school to interim Chancellor has prepared me to lead UAPB with integrity, innovation, and a visionary focus on evolutionary, sustainable growth. Inspired by the institution's mission, I am eager to collaborate with UAPB's stakeholders to build a future of excellence that honors its rich legacy while advancing student and community success.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss how my leadership aligns with the UAPB's needs and aspirations. My curriculum vita is enclosed. Please contact me at [REDACTED].com or ([REDACTED]). I look forward to the possibility of serving as UAPB's next Chancellor.

Sincerely,



Anthony Graham, Ph.D.