

Robert Ayala Ph.D.

December 21, 2019

Academic Search Committee
Sul Ross Rio Grande College

RE: Vice President Middle Rio Grande College

To the Academic Search Committee:

Please accept this letter as interest for the position of Vice President Middle Rio Grande College. I currently serve as Division Chair of Arts and Sciences as well as the Title V Director and Principle Investigator under the Vice President of Academic Affairs at Southwest Texas Junior College, a position I have held since July 2012.

I am an experienced academic leader who is a trusted advisor for administrators and community leaders. I am committed to high-quality teaching, student success, diversity and inclusion, and engagement throughout the larger community while efficiently and effectively making consequential organizational decisions to advance the progress and impact of our community college. I would welcome the opportunity to serve in the vanguard and the community of Sul Ross Middle Rio Grande College to advance the goals of student-centered education, faculty development, and community engagement for the institution and the larger Sul Ross and Texas Tech college system.

As described below, I've served across the higher education community, with appointments at the department, college, and university levels. I have served as Principal Investigator of several large research projects, and am currently PI of two grants--a \$2.4 million Department of Education grant to develop a partnership with Angelo State University to develop an Associate of Science in Engineering Science degree (A.S.E.S) at SWTJC and form a pipeline to ASU for a B.S. in Civil Engineering. Additionally, I have just secured a \$2.9 million grant from the Department of Education to develop a program to increase the enrollment, retention, and graduation of low income and Hispanic students in STEM. My record shows that I am a dedicated teacher-administrator with commitments to experiential and service learning, student-faculty engagement, high-impact teaching practices, distance education, dual credit opportunities, and the First-Year Experience.

My teaching and administrative experiences have allowed me to work with a range of students—from high school dual credit students, undergraduates at a community college and strong state-supported university, to doctoral students at a Tier 1 research institution. My current institution serves southwest Texas, a region marked by high levels of school drop-out, unemployment, and poverty. We seek to be a beacon of hope for the students of this region—most of them Hispanic or low income—opening up high quality, accessible education and career opportunities. In light of these interests and concerns, I have led the college in building successful high school academic programs and course offerings, linked developmental courses, budding internships, collegiate academies, and a new first-year experience camps in STEM marked by service, experiential learning, and personalized instruction. In all cases, I have sought to create programs that build pathways to student success in college and career, and that hopefully positively impact the lives of these largely first-generation college and underserved students.

It is my hope that this brief introduction provides an overview of my experiences and interests as an academic leader. I include more information below about my academic background and educational leadership.

Academic Administration and Leadership

As the Division Chair of Arts and Sciences, the division has become the largest academic school at our institution and is now an active and prominent part of the college's academic and student life. The division currently houses faculty that teach undergraduate courses in 14 fields, including Biology, Chemistry, Nutrition, Humanities, Philosophy, English, Math, Physics, Engineering, Speech, Fine Arts, Spanish, Education, as well as the linking developmental Courses. Under my leadership, we have

expanded course offerings and in turn, increased student enrollment significantly for both dual credit and traditional students. I have been involved in the development of Unit Action Plans for all the departments, developing strategies that will improve student learning and outcomes. I have also been involved in the development of several academic initiatives, including a STEM initiative to increase enrollment and persistence in STEM degrees.

I also brought new usefulness and flexibility to the Associates of Science Program by developing more options for degree concentrations; by working on developing different modes of instruction, hybrid, online, and distance learning, and developing faculty to excel in teaching these different modes of instruction. I continue to develop new academic opportunities through my leadership in new programs such as our STEM initiative. This initiative—featuring pathways with high schools and four-year institutions--has great promise to serve students and the workplace. With the coordination of high school superintendents, assistant superintendent of curriculum, and academics deans of our 26 partnering school K-12 school districts, I have been able to develop a unique, first in Texas, 1+1+2 partnership with a four-year institution to highlight a pathway to a civil engineering degree that starts with Dual Credit during high school, greatly reducing the time and cost to degree attainment.

As Division Chair of Arts and Sciences, I not only actively promote the School's academic programs, but also supervise the activities of 38 full-time faculty, numerous adjunct and dual credit instructors, faculty lead instructors, and several full-time staff members. I am directly involved with all budgeting, strategic planning, course scheduling, assessment, staff and faculty hiring, campus and external relations, student recruitment, and day-to-day operations of the School. My efforts to create shared governance in the Division of Arts and Sciences have produced a broad-based system of leadership among the faculty. I have also been active in breaking down the operation silos, getting student services and the business aspect of the college involved in the many initiative planned for our various initiatives. I am a firm advocate that for any initiative to truly be successful and have the maximum service and impact on our students, all aspects of the institution must be involved and supported.

I am extremely proud of the work I've completed as Division Chair of Arts and Sciences. Under my direction, Arts and Sciences have been a leader in enrollment growth, student engagement, and faculty involvement. Importantly, I have worked tirelessly to build trust and consensus among faculty, staff, and administrators, and I continue to look for ways that SWTJC employees can build capacity as better teachers, community partners, and college leaders. I am committed to goals of student success and engaged communities; and I embrace the broad diversity encountered throughout higher education among students, staff, administrators, faculty, and the communities they serve.

In conclusion, I am an innovative and experienced academic professional who has demonstrated commitments to students and their communities throughout my career. Over the years, I've enjoyed success not only in research and instruction, but also in curriculum design, project development, strategic planning, student recruitment, and fundraising. I have planned and executed a number of experiences for students; actively promoted diversity in higher education; and developed many multi-disciplinary collaborations with faculty, students, and the community. I continue to collaborate with high school, four-year, and community college leaders and faculty, building useful pathways for student success. I am interested in further expanding these leadership and higher education experiences as the Vice President Middle Rio Grande College for Sul Ross Middle Rio Grande, creating and implementing programs and policies that stabilize and advance opportunities for students, faculty, and members of all community constituencies. I believe the experiences and credentials discussed in this letter all point toward my ability to lead as a successful, innovative, and student-centered Vice President.

I thank you for your consideration and please don't hesitate to contact me or any of my listed references if we can provide further information about my academic background, scholarly interests, teaching, and educational leadership experiences.

Sincerely,
Robert Ayala, Ph.D.