
GREGORY F. PETERSON, ED.D.

March 18, 2024

Salt Lake Community College Presidential Search Committee
4600 South Redwood Road
Salt Lake City, UT 84123

Dear Presidential Search Committee:

It is with great humility that I submit this letter of interest for the President position at Salt Lake Community College. In researching the institution, it is clear that SLCC is a model for inclusive and transformative education and seeks to live the values it proclaims. The College's mission, vision, and values align with my personal leadership beliefs and inspire me to join SLCC's leadership team. I hope this letter demonstrates this alignment and the contribution I could make as SLCC's ninth president.

I completed my Ed.D. in Educational Administration, Community College Leadership, at The University of Texas at Austin in 2007, and this launched my 17-year journey as an executive-level community college leader. In addition to eleven years at the vice president level in student services and academic affairs, I have served the past six years as the President of Chandler-Gilbert Community College (CGCC), a Maricopa Community College in Phoenix, Arizona. In these roles, I have hired, developed, and empowered successful teams of leaders—including faculty, staff, and students—representing a breadth of diversity in backgrounds, experiences, and strengths. Using CGCC as an example, our leadership team has established a culture of care, innovation, and student success that has led to increased enrollment, increased transfer rates, decreased equity gaps in student completion, and national recognition for workforce programs in artificial intelligence and semiconductor technology—despite the challenges and uncertainties resulting from the global pandemic. Our leadership team has also been successful in securing new resources and bolstering employee morale, important aspects to sustaining the long-term success of the college.

The Presidential profile identified a list of strategic opportunities that I would like to specifically address below:

Lead the campus strategic plan and a unified vision for supporting the state and the region's 2-year college needs. SLCC is fortunate to have a solid strategic plan that outlines both the big trends facing the organization and strategic goals to address those trends. These big trends and strategic goals feel very familiar to me, as they are the same trends and goals we have identified at CGCC. Arizona has many commonalities with Utah: the Phoenix metropolitan area is one of the fastest-growing communities in the nation, and we are expected to become a minority-majority state by 2030. While this growth has minimized some of the impact of decreasing k-12 student enrollment, CGCC has been pushed to expand instructional programs and services for older, non-traditional students to ensure we continue to serve our communities. Similar to SLCC, we are working with our local communities to address increasing mental health needs, affordable housing shortages and

environmental issues impacting water and heat. While public support for community colleges in Arizona fortunately continues to remain strong, Arizona does have a similar legislative landscape to Utah and we too have been challenged in maintaining our commitment to the success of all of our local communities in response to an anti-DEI political climate.

While we have identified sub-strategies addressing these big trends, CGCC has similarly adopted strategic goals to focus our work. With my team, I have led the college in focusing on completion, from successful course completion to credential attainment and/or transfer, and this has resulted in pathways and structures supporting student momentum and success. We have seen successes in the completion of college credentials for high school students and national recognition for transfer, including significant increases for our students of color. CGCC is recognized as a workforce leader in the state for artificial intelligence, aviation technology, and semiconductor technology, and we boast strong programs in IT, business and finance, and healthcare. And we have brought in more than \$5 million through grants and industry partnerships over the past few years.

To achieve these strategic goals, I have worked diligently to cultivate and maintain successful partnerships with both internal and external stakeholders. I meet monthly with our full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, and staff leaders (and multiple times each semester with student leaders) to ensure their concerns, interests, and ideas inform the daily operationalization of our strategic plan and our broader policy work. We firmly believe that shared governance is crucial to achieving our mission and vision. Our governance council structure also drives the College's strategic planning process and helps to connect our internal efforts with the needs of our external communities. I also work closely with k-12 districts, industry partners, chambers of commerce, and local officials in crafting and promoting career pathways, civic engagement, and solutions to local challenges such as housing. In addition, I have regularly met with state legislators, either in their offices or through tours on campus, to educate them on the impact of CGCC and the opportunities and challenges we face. During my career, I have had the opportunity to advocate for student learning and success in local communities, at the state level, and even at the White House. While I currently serve in a multi-college district with a chancellor reporting directly to our elected governing board, as a college president I regularly interact with our board members, co-host events, and support board member engagement on campus.

Serve as an advocate for the institution, its missions, and its programs within the higher education landscape of the state and region. I deeply believe in the mission of the community college, its fundamental role in a healthy democracy, and the importance of both ensuring access for all while also fostering learning, progress towards, and achievement of academic and career goals. To maintain this balance, our team at CGCC has focused on the relevance of our academic programs, setting college goals to close equity gaps in completion rates while also reviewing our instructional portfolio to maintain alignment with local community needs. This has included working with our faculty to sunset workforce programs no longer in demand locally, leveraging local industry partnerships to expand pathways in STEM while diversifying student enrollment in these programs, and strengthening transfer pathways with state universities. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to support workforce development, and we have expanded our offerings in micro- and industry-recognized credentials, stackable certificates, and customized training to

bolster the workforce talent pipeline and upskill incumbent workers—examples of this work include partnerships with Boeing, Gulfstream, and Intel.

Advocating for the work of community colleges like SLCC also requires investment in targeted, local communities that have been traditionally underserved and a focus on innovation and growth. During my tenure at CGCC, we have made concerted efforts to understand and address the needs of the Gila River Indian Community in partnership with tribal leadership, improving services and resources and elevating the knowledge our native students bring to the classroom. We have also grown our outreach programs with our local Title I schools as we recognize CGCC is strategically positioned to increase college participation rates for communities traditionally underrepresented in higher education classrooms. In addition, I have worked with my team to be forward-thinking, and this has led the College to be a leader in artificial intelligence and machine learning and to offer one of the largest esports programs in the state.

Foster a welcoming and positive campus environment throughout the SLCC system, recognizing and supporting students, faculty, and staff. I am impressed by the work SLCC has done in creating a welcoming, supporting environment on campus for all its students. We at CGCC have also focused on creating a sense of belonging for students, and we have found success in our efforts by building upon a caring and inclusive culture for faculty and staff. Having a degree in postsecondary education and having taught at the community, undergraduate, and graduate levels, I am profoundly aware of the impact our faculty have in the lives of our students and the time and energy this work requires. While our faculty spend the most time with our students, many students are most likely to have their first and most meaningful interactions with our staff. As a leader through the pandemic, I learned acutely the need for kindness, mutual respect, and care in leading people, and these lessons have helped us establish a reputation at CGCC as a kind and welcoming college and a place for all members of our communities.

Over the past 18 years, I have served at four Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and was fortunate to be present at CGCC as we achieved this designation. We have engaged in significant dialogue as to how we will be Hispanic “serving” and not just “enrolling,” and the outcomes of these conversations are captured in our college plans and reflected in the Title V grant we were awarded a year after achieving HSI status. I currently serve as a board member for the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and I participate in Excelencia for Education’s Presidents for Latino Student Success network. I believe it is my responsibility to continue to learn how to best serve our communities and model this for the college.

I and my team have also learned a lot through the pandemic, and we have pivoted in our approach to providing programs and services. To ensure access, we stood up a robust call center and fully virtual student services including tutoring and testing services, and we increased our course offerings in online, live online, and hybrid formats. We have also been strategic in deploying in-person services at our multiple locations and we have embedded advisors into local high schools to support dual enrollment and college admissions processes. Like the rest of the nation, we have experienced political polarization and tension in our communities, and CGCC has made a committed effort to promote dialogue and civility through hosting multiple community events on campus on topics such as law enforcement,

teen violence, and panel presentations by local, state, and federal elected officials. In addition to CGCC boasting a robust service-learning program in which our students provided over 6,100 hours of service this past year, we were recently recognized by Campus Compact for our efforts in promoting student voter registration and hosting a polling site on campus.

Champion completion of academic and technical credentials. Four years ago, we set at CGCC a wildly important goal to increase student completion rates and close equity gaps that exist for our students of color. While overall completion rates dropped during the pandemic, we have seen recent gains and increases in our transfer rate, especially for students of color. We have also seen gains in student progress towards completion, including term-to-term retention and reduced time to completion for non-traditional students. Two years ago, we made completion a focus in our early college programs and provided each high school with a plan by which students could complete the Arizona general education curriculum (AGEC) by high school graduation and implemented new career pathways with embedded industry credentials in cybersecurity.

Lead a financially sustainable education model that provides for expansion of SLCC's campuses in service to their communities. In order to lead a financially sustainable education model, a college needs to understand and leverage its strategic position. For CGCC, this has meant different strategies at each of our locations: building out k-12 partnerships, transfer pathways (including housing Northern Arizona University bachelor's programs on-site), and expanding IT, cybersecurity, and business and finance programs at the Pecos Campus; growing aerospace programs—including aviation maintenance, unmanned aircraft systems, flight, and engineering—in partnership with industry partners, enhancing the nursing program, and strengthening the transfer partnership with co-located Arizona State University at the Williams Campus; building out the instructional portfolio of justice studies, small business development and entrepreneurialism, and emerging technologies for the Queen Creek Community; and leveraging the noncredit lifelong learning program at the Sun Lakes Center. Similar to SLCC, each college location has a unique focus that must be supported for the entire college to succeed.

Maricopa Community Colleges is one of the largest community college districts in the nation, and as you can imagine is relatively complex. I serve on the executive board for the Maricopa Community Colleges Foundation and have led employee fundraising drives, community campaigns, and targeted asks in partnership with local industry partners. We have also been successful in bringing in grant funds and in attracting special funding from the State. I also serve as a tri-chair of the district's Advisory Budget Council and have guided budget development for all ten colleges in our system. Finally, I have been able to engage in facilities planning and space management efforts, most recently in discussions with the Arizona Commerce Authority in expanding facilities for aerospace technology at one of our campuses. This has required a solid understanding of demographic trends, the development of a well-informed academic plan, and a multi-phased approach for growth.

Lead through innovation and a willingness to embrace the current higher education landscape. I have learned as a leader in higher education that our organizations are made up of people, and when I lead a college it is all about leading people. This is important to understand as the landscape of higher education continues to change and we will be

required to adapt and find new ways of fulfilling our mission. Over the past six years, I have done a lot of change management as we weathered the uncertainties of the pandemic, navigated enrollment and budget challenges, embraced new workforce opportunities, expanded online programs and services, and came to terms with equity gaps in our student performance data. I have worked with faculty and staff to implement sustainable remote work guidelines; developed new short-term instructional offerings and partnership programs with businesses, cities and k-12 partners; and focused in on the strategic identity of each of our campuses and instructional sites. We will also be offering our first bachelor's degree program in Artificial Intelligence in the fall of 2025, a strategy which makes sense in the evolving higher education landscape in Arizona.

Navigating these changes is only possible by establishing trust, creating space for dialogue and diverse perspectives to be considered, ensuring stability and consistency in the application of processes and procedures, and remaining focused on our mission of student learning and the long-term success of our communities. This is the approach I would bring to SLCC as together we continue to thrive into the future.

I hope what I have provided speaks to the type of leader you are seeking and the experiences the next president at SLCC will need to sustain the success of the college. I'm very interested in exploring this opportunity more with you and I look forward to future interactions. Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'G' followed by a horizontal line that ends in a small arrowhead pointing to the right.

Greg Peterson