

Mark Curtis-Chávez

September 19, 2021

Dear Members of the Presidential Search Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm and respect that I submit this request for consideration to serve as the next president of Wayne Community College and build on its remarkable efforts at increasing student success.

As a **first-generation college graduate and the son of a Mexican immigrant**, I am living testimony to the democratizing power that higher education invests in those who are fortunate enough to navigate its world. Initially my family did not understand the value of higher education but celebrated wildly when I beat the odds to earn two college degrees in English and start my career as a college teacher. The challenges in my lived experience mirror those of so many of our students who must work while going to college and do so with little parental financial support, who have little to no experience with higher education, and who have unforeseen cultural barriers and obstacles to overcome.

My commitment to the community college mission of **transforming lives and communities** through educational opportunity has deepened alongside my regard for our courageous students over my **22-years in higher education**. From early struggles to make a living as an adjunct, to realizing my dream of becoming a full-time faculty member, to stepping up to the call of increasing roles of leadership, I have been gifted with great mentors and broad growth experiences in all aspects of college operations—**instruction and student services, accreditation, budget and enrollment management, community relations, fundraising, high school and business partnerships, workforce development, legislative affairs, governing board relations, and respectful stakeholder engagement to advance student equity and success**.

My professional experiences have spanned diverse institutions, including **Arizona Western College (AWC), Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C), Lone Star College (LSC), and College of DuPage (COD)** in roles from division chair to dean to the provost. Currently, I am honored to be an **Aspen Institute Rising Presidential Fellow** and member of the **National Community College Hispanic Council Board of Directors**, the **National Alliance of Community & Technical Colleges** board, and the **American Association of Community College's Commission on Student Success**.

In examining the context, expectations and ideal characteristics outlined in the Presidential Profile, I am inspired by the recognition of my shared values and expertise that I see in your call for leadership. Below I offer two overarching areas with examples of how the breadth, depth, and diversity of my background and experiences have honed my purpose and skills to match what I believe you seek in your next leader.

Student Access & Success

Student access and student success have always been the driving force behind my leadership. During my tenure at Tri-C, LSC-University Park, and LSC-CyFair, we grew enrollment with targeted outreach efforts. At Tri-C, we created an **Evening/Weekend program**, allowing working students to finish an A.A. degree in two years, introduced hybrid courses to provide more sections during prime time, and bolstered online offerings, leading to an enrollment growth of 3% at a time when the county lost nearly 10% of its population. At LSC-CyFair, we launched a **targeted student recovery strategy called “nudges.”** Using data analytics, we identified students with at least a 2.5 GPA in the spring semester who had not enrolled in summer or fall terms. Using a nudge campaign of emails, social media ads, text messages, and phone calls, we recovered 652 students (11.5%).

Other student success initiatives I helped lead over the years include a two-week summer bridge program that allowed **75% of our new student athletes and ESL students to enroll in a higher-level English course**, culturally based **learning community training** for faculty, an **early alert program** to increase student persistence, **College Now** centers at area high schools, **Online Education Resources** that saved students \$1.1 million in textbook costs for AY2021, and a bridge program that enabled **90% of incoming students to enroll in English 101**. The exciting part of the story of this accelerated English program is that follow-up data showed these students

succeeded in subsequent courses as well or better than those testing directly into college English, with **reduced equity gaps for students of color** who were typically left behind in developmental courses. Our new Guided Pathways **Navigators** are showing promise in getting first-time students off to a strong start.

At COD I have promoted the idea that **our main thing—what we are here for—is student success**, specifically, persistence, completion, transfer, and employment. Seems straightforward but translating our values into action is what counts. One big step we have taken recently is that faculty have committed to providing students with early course progress information (official first quarter and midterm grades) rather than just end-of-course grades. We recognized we needed to move away from **autopsy data**—a record of the students who had not succeeded—to **diagnostic data**—information that could signal the need for targeted advising, tutoring, or financial services in time to make a difference before they face dropping or failing a course.

My commitment to student access and success is grounded in **experience, results, and customized care**. Over my career I have overseen all areas of instruction (academic, career/technical, workforce, small business development, job training, continuing education, entrepreneurship) and student services. In each role I have been a champion for equity and inclusion in every aspect of campus life. As your next president, I will be committed to maximizing access to Wayne Community College and to expanding the success of all our students.

Community & Culture

My experience as a leader has taught me that faculty, staff, and administration are here to serve students. When I came to COD, I met with local Black leaders, including the DuPage county NAACP president. I learned from him and others that we were not serving our Black students as effectively as we could, as evidenced by their high transfer but low graduation rates. So we created articulation agreements with several HBCUs to provide the best of both worlds to our students who wanted to attend these historic institutions. This example **demonstrates the need to reach all students where they are with what they need**, which translates into dual credit, new workforce degrees and certificates, supplemental instruction in gateway courses, and other innovations to help our students get on the path that leads to living-wage employment. At LSC, I worked with the local ISD to **more than double dual credit enrollment**. However, the district had a keen interest in making sure its AP students continued in their college trajectory, so I explained that dual credit would only increase the number of college-going students the district graduated by opening opportunities to students who may not be taking AP courses.

Leaders must engage with business and industry as well. To meet the growing industry demand for cloud computing graduates, I worked with Hewlett Packard, SAP, and other hardware and software companies to create an advanced technology certificate. Engagement must also occur with our governmental leaders, which I have experience with, and especially with faculty and staff, who are key to the development and support of these programs. **Students are the lifeblood of the institution**, but faculty and staff are its heart, and the community its body that gives it the framework in which to live and thrive.

Wayne County possesses many similarities to the communities I have lived and worked in, from a strong manufacturing element to farming to a military based located nearby. At Arizona Western College, we had the latter two, a strong farming community, the Marine Corps Air Station, and the Yuma Proving Grounds. For our military students we provided an on-site advisor, offered college credit for military training, and held on-site courses. For the farming community, we had satellite campuses providing full services. As Division Chair, I was able to station a full-time faculty there and double the number of English class offerings, **increasing our division FTE by 21%**.

In closing, if you are looking for a leader who has risen through the ranks, who has experience at large complex institutions, who has managed both academic and student affairs, who knows how to engage with business and industry and community leaders, who values partners in the educational pipeline, who casts a vision to increase equity-minded access and success, then I would be honored to be given further consideration to serve as your president. Working together I believe we could build on the extraordinary legacy of Wayne Community College.

Sincerely,

Mark Curtis-Chávez, Ph.D.

