

Neal H. Schnoor, Ph.D.
President, Northern State University

February 2025

Members of the Chancellor Search Advisory Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this letter and vitae regarding the position of Chancellor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

For over twenty-eight years I have served as a faculty member and in executive leadership roles at four multicampus systems and regional comprehensive universities. Each is unique though all share an enduring commitment to affordable and equitable access, academic quality, robust student support, and serve a high percentage of first-generation and Pell-eligible students. I was one of those students. My experience at a regional public institution was transformative and I am driven to ensure similar opportunities for future generations.

My roots are in Nebraska. I was raised in the rural community of Pierce, earned degrees from Wayne State College and the University of Nebraska Lincoln, taught in public schools in Wakefield, Kearney, and Lincoln, and served UNK for twenty years as a member of the faculty and in executive administration. My wife and I raised our children in central Nebraska, both she and our daughter earned degrees at UNK, and she has served as principal at Central Elementary School in Kearney since 2007. We share a commitment to removing barriers to educational opportunities for students of all ages and a deep connection with UNK, Kearney and the state of Nebraska.

I read the position description and additional system information with great interest. The campus vision and investments have positioned UNK to expand its mission to serve greater Nebraska. Academic programs are preparing students to think critically and creatively to solve problems, to be engaged citizens, and to serve critical education and workforce needs in their communities. I am confident UNK is poised to expand its irreplaceable role in providing access to transformative education, as a center for rural health, wellness, arts, culture, athletics and civic engagement, and as an engine for economic development for the region and state.

For these same reasons I am proud to serve as president at Northern State University. My approach to leadership is based on trust, a strong work ethic, and high visibility and engagement on campus and in the community. I have led a highly effective leadership team through empowerment and accountability by clarifying expectations and providing regular constructive feedback. We continue to nurture a mission-focused culture that values excellence, responsibility, shared governance, diversity and civility. Together we are removing barriers to student access and success through a combination of innovation and simply *doing the right things right*. We have also engaged our campus and community in identifying challenges and opportunities, taking informed and decisive action, and deepening collaborations to better serve the public good.

Our approach to strategic planning has been iterative. We identified five clear priorities, updated action plans annually, and implemented and managed significant change while eliminating a considerable recurring revenue gap. We recently approved a new Strategic Pathway that will guide us through our Higher Learning Commission reaccreditation process. Faculty members have

embraced experiential learning as our quality initiative and developed a spiraling four-year approach that culminates with substantive research projects, performances, study abroad, and internships. Faculty also place a strong emphasis on student-led/faculty-mentored projects to develop students' research skills. Since 2013, over ninety-five percent of our honors student research projects have been accepted for presentation at the National Collegiate Honors Conference compared to the overall conference acceptance rate of sixty-five percent.

We have invested in distinct deans for our School of Business and Millicent Atkins School of Education. The School of Business has completed multiple program revisions, increased enrollment, and is leading the state in new collaborative programs. Our Agricultural Business degree includes four South Dakota State University agricultural economics courses, and our seamless co-enrollment business pathway with Southeast Technical College is a first-of-kind collaboration between a Board of Regents and Board of Technical Education institution. The Millicent Atkins School of Education is generating enrollment in the high-demand areas of education, early childhood education, counseling, and health-related fields and every faculty member has completed Hyflex certification to expand access to students of all ages.

Few programs will have a greater impact on the future of regional healthcare and economic development than our new Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. South Dakota is projected to have the third-highest shortfall of registered nurses in the United States by 2030. Our BSN program includes a four-year option, LPN to RN bridge option, and a three-year accelerated pathway. Our associate dean and faculty are experienced practitioners and educators and will continue to practice in area hospitals and clinics. Cultivating strong partnerships with healthcare providers has yielded strong support for our simulation lab, clinicals, and cost-of-attendance sponsorships. Although our first cohort will begin this fall, we have already secured \$4.3 million for operations, \$1.7 million for endowed scholarships, and significant gifts for annual scholarships.

I led a coalition with area legislators to secure \$31 million to construct our new Business and Health Innovation Center. It represents the first state appropriation to fully fund a new academic facility at Northern in over fifty years. The center will house our School of Business, Innovation and Start-up Center, and Department of Nursing and introduce an innovative community-access model, with extended hours and public access, focused on directly supporting work, education, and health monitoring. The facility and programs are already generating strong private support for scholarships and operations approaching \$9M. A state appropriation match is also allowing us to complete a \$5 million renovation for our Millicent Atkins School of Education. Combined with our most recent campaign, private and state investments totaling over \$160 million have funded leading-edge space for all academic units, two suite-style residence halls, Jewett Regional Science Center, Dacotah Bank Stadium, Koehler Softball Complex, recreational fields, and remarkable new facility for the South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Growth was a critical priority for NSU following a trend of declining enrollment. I restructured Admissions, created the position of Chief Enrollment Management Officer, secured private funding for NSU's first strategic enrollment management plan, and appointed an Enrollment Management Council. The council has engaged campus, implemented six-month action plans, optimized processes and metrics, and enhanced campus visit and orientation experiences. Since implementing our plan two years ago, fall 2024 enrollments outpaced 2022 in headcount (11%), first-time students (20%), graduate students (15%), total credit hours (9%), and full-time equivalent enrollment (9.5%). Two years ago, we started the Northern Academy to create an on-campus

college experience with wraparound support services for high school dual-credit students. We are also in the early phases of a four-year donor-funded initiative to significantly improve branding and marketing, market awareness and penetration, and recruitment across all platforms.

NSU has also prioritized student success. In the last four years, we have steadily increased our first-year retention rate to seventy-seven percent—an increase of nine percent. We unified Student Success and Student Support offices in our Opportunity Center, implemented a centralized advising model, and 100% of faculty members have utilized early warning referrals. We partnered with community medical and counseling agencies to provide students access to comprehensive health and mental health services beyond those offered on campus. A newly appointed Opportunity for All Council conducts regularized satisfaction surveys and identifies priority improvements. We have also enhanced campus safety by revising emergency operations procedures and implementing real-time notification and communication with the Aberdeen Police Department and Brown County Emergency Management via *I am Responding* and *Everbridge*.

NSU continues to grow public and private partnerships to better serve the public good. The School of Business has partnered with the Center for Rural Innovation to pilot a new model for growing digital economies in rural communities, received a \$1.5 million Build-to-Scale grant from the US Economic Development Administration, and created the Northern Startup and Innovation Center. In two years, we have experienced a rapid increase in the number and quality of events and participation has increased exponentially with requests to stream events across the region and state. We recently launched the Cramer Center for Design and Innovation with Jim Cramer—alumnus and former CEO of The American Institute of Architects. Together we are engaging community leaders in rural innovation and revitalization efforts. Three years ago, we formed our Center for Public History and Civic Engagement. The center presents civic events and forums, supports community voter registration activities, recruits legislative interns, and supports K-12 teachers through pedagogy and content workshops.

Nurturing a collaborative partnership with our NSU Foundation and president has been a high priority. The foundation has aligned its strategic plan with university priorities and increased donor and alumni engagement. In the last few years, we have increased our endowment from \$34 million to over \$50 million, annual scholarships from \$2.6 million to over \$4 million, and raised over \$1M through Give-N-Day. With momentum increasing around new facilities and programs, we are accelerating plans for a campaign focused on increasing support for scholarships and operations.

I have remained deeply engaged with Division I and Division II athletics through a period of unprecedented change. Regular contact with commissioners, athletic directors, consultants and organizations have informed my advocacy with state and national legislators. I serve on the Board of Directors and Strategic Planning Committee of the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference. I previously served as President of the Board and a member of the Investment Committee. Community engagement has also been a priority. I work closely with city and county officials, served on the Boards of the Aberdeen Development Corporation and United Way of Northeastern South Dakota, and I annually present the culminating session for Leadership Aberdeen hosted by the Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce.

Prior executive-level experience at UNK and CSULB has provided me opportunities to collaborate with diverse governing boards, system colleagues, and legislative and community leaders. I gained valuable experience with multiple approaches to fiscal and capital planning, academic and student

services, compliance, enrollment management, intercollegiate athletics, communications, marketing, and development. I co-led strategic planning at UNK and finalized CSULB's Beach 2030 with the president. I represented CSULB's president on the Boards of the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation and Long Beach Economic Partnership—including task forces for Workforce Recovery and Readiness and Housing Affordability. At CSULB, I worked to enhance relationships with diverse campus and community groups, drafted the first comprehensive President's Equity and Change Report, and provided oversight for the President's commissions on the Status of Women, Sustainability, and Equity & Change.

My academic experience includes serving as dean for the School of Education and Counseling at Wayne State College, managing all facets of the academic unit, and leading a comprehensive renewal of all undergraduate and graduate education programs. Faculty experience at UNK included a joint appointment and tenure in the College of Fine Arts and Humanities and the College of Education. I earned "outstanding" ratings for teaching in all annual peer and chair reviews, had a cumulative average of 4.85 on a 5.0 scale on student evaluations for all courses taught, and pursued scholarly activities in nearly every avenue available to me. I was honored to be elected President of the Nebraska Music Educators Association and Nebraska State Bandmasters Association, awarded the national *Paula Krider Outstanding Band Director Award*, and inducted into the *UNK Academy for Teacher Education Excellence*.

Among the most fulfilling aspects of serving as president is meaningful engagement with students, faculty, staff, community, alumni, donors, and legislators. I meet regularly with Student Government Association leaders and enjoy attending student events, concerts, and contests. I established a Staff Council and regularly attend Faculty Senate meetings. I also enjoy working closely with legislators and delivering our university's annual report to the Joint Committee on Appropriations of the South Dakota Legislature. Athletic events have provided ideal opportunities to engage with supporters and constituents and it is truly a pleasure to greet students and families at all recruiting, orientation, and convocation events.

I am thankful for your consideration and would welcome the opportunity to learn more about this leadership position and the vision for the University of Nebraska at Kearney and NU system.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neal H. Schwoor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.