Executive Director, Online Worldwide

POSITION SPECIFICATION

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THE OPPORTUNITY

The University of Nebraska is the state’s only public university and is home to a diverse student body of almost 50,000 and a talented workforce of more than 13,000. It is comprised of a central administration office, four campuses, and a statewide network of research, outreach and service facilities. In order to fulfill its mission to serve the people of Nebraska and to realize its potential across the nation and the globe, the university has created Online Worldwide, gathering under one overarching administrative structure and marketing umbrella the distance education offerings of its four campuses, which include 80 degree, certificate and endorsement programs. To continue the development of this successful initiative, the university seeks an executive director.

Reporting to Executive Vice President and Provost Linda Ray Pratt and serving as a member of her leadership team and the cabinet of President James B. Milliken, the executive director is responsible for overall leadership in achieving the goals of University of Nebraska Online Worldwide: to serve the people of the state and beyond through expanded online education opportunities; to grow enrollment nationally and internationally by developing a leadership position in online education; to enhance revenue to the university through its online programs; and to leverage collaboration among the university’s four campuses in the development, administration, and marketing of distance education degree and certificate programs and courses. The executive director will identify the policies, personnel, systems, and resources needed to increase access and enrollment. To accomplish these ends, the executive director is responsible for the development and implementation of plans and the assessment of outcomes.

Succeeding in this ambitious and highly visible task will require a leader of considerable skill with outstanding relationship-building qualities. Demonstrated success within a shared governance environment is essential, as is experience working in collaboration across a politically complex organization. Candidates with direct experience with successful, productive online or distance education at the graduate and undergraduate level will be significantly advantaged. The ideal candidate will possess a sophisticated understanding of the tenets of marketing and demonstrated success creating and executing business, strategic, and operating plans, including an understanding of the global nature of the distance education marketplace and strategies for being competitive in this market. An entrepreneurial spirit is wanted – a person dedicated to building an enterprise and willing to assess and to accept reasonable risks in order to do so. An earned terminal degree in the candidate’s academic or professional discipline is highly desirable but not required.

While much progress has been made during the tenure of the current, retiring head of University of Nebraska Online Worldwide, the program is still in its genesis. The new executive director, therefore, will be in a position to have a profound, personal impact on a growing program with the potential to extend the impact and reputation of the university locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

For information regarding how to express a candidacy or to make a nomination for this position, please see the section entitled “Procedure for Candidacy” near the end of this document.
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA: AN OVERVIEW

The University of Nebraska exists to serve Nebraskans through quality teaching, research, and engagement. An institution highly valued by the people of Nebraska—academically, culturally and economically—the university strives to help build and sustain a state that offers educational and economic opportunities and an excellent quality of life. The university’s goal is to be the best public university in the country as measured by the impact it has on the people of the state it serves, and through them, the world. At the same time, the University of Nebraska is well-positioned to have a global impact in a number of key areas, including agriculture and natural resources, early childhood education and cancer research. The Online Worldwide initiative is yet one additional opportunity to leverage those strengths in the international arena.

Institutional History

The University of Nebraska was founded in Lincoln on February 15, 1869, less than two years after Nebraska became the nation’s 37th state. In 1903, it became the first institution west of the Mississippi River to offer graduate education, and joined the prestigious American Association of Universities in 1909. The university added a medical college in Omaha beginning in 1902. In 1968 the Nebraska Legislature approved the addition of the University of Nebraska at Omaha (formerly the municipal University of Omaha) and designated the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska Medical Center as separate campuses. In 1991, the University of Nebraska at Kearney (formerly Kearney State College) became a campus of the university. The university also includes research, extension, and service facilities across the state.

The four campuses have distinct, complementary roles and missions. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a Land-Grant institution, AAU member, and one of the nation’s top 50 public universities. Next July, UNL will join the Big Ten conference and will have the benefit of academic and research collaborations through its Committee on Institutional Cooperation. The University of Nebraska Medical Center, located in Omaha, is a leader in health sciences education, biomedical research and patient care. It has colleges of medicine, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry and public health, as well as a school of allied health professions. The University of Nebraska at Omaha is a metropolitan university with signature, highly regarded programs in information science and technology, public administration, criminal justice and social work. The University of Nebraska at Kearney offers a residential, undergraduate-focused environment in central Nebraska, highlighting a large percentage of international students, undergraduate research opportunities, and a smaller campus and community environment.

The University of Nebraska is governed by an elected Board of Regents, and its operations are overseen by a central administration office. The president is the chief executive officer of the university and reports directly to the board. The campus chancellors report to the president. The president is principally responsible for implementing the board’s policies and exercises such executive powers as necessary for the proper administration and operation of the university.

The Board of Regents has directed that, where appropriate, the resources of the four campuses should be linked in cooperative efforts and that the university should realize economies that may accrue from scale of operations whenever possible.
The president and university administration staff provide a single focus and voice for the university as a state-wide institution, and insure its accountability to the public. The president is the principal spokesperson for the university in the legislature and with other political bodies.

**University of Nebraska Online Worldwide**

Online Worldwide is the University of Nebraska’s university-wide distance education program serving the needs of Nebraskans and students throughout the world. With more than 80 online degree, certificate, and endorsement programs, Online Worldwide continues the University of Nebraska’s long history of providing high quality, flexible distance education programs designed to meet the needs of a diverse set of learners.

Online Worldwide provides students the opportunity to be taught by the same expert faculty who teach at the four University of Nebraska campuses. Their online courses are challenging, current and relevant. Online Worldwide attracts highly qualified, strongly motivated, undergraduate, graduate and professional students who are serious about their education. University of Nebraska online students receive the same degrees as those of on-campus students. Transcripts and diplomas are issued by the University of Nebraska and do not contain any reference to “online.”

**Accreditation**

All Online Worldwide degree, certificate and endorsement programs are accredited by the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges. Many of the campuses’ schools and colleges are also accredited by highly respected, discipline-specific agencies.

**Mission**

The mission of Online Worldwide is to help individuals transform their lives through quality education by broadening access to the University of Nebraska’s academic programs, faculty and student support services for Nebraskans and students throughout the world.

**Business, strategic, and operating plans**

A wealth of information concerning the genesis, plans and operations of University of Nebraska Online Worldwide is available on the university’s website. Specifically, the administrative site for Online Worldwide may be found at [http://www.nebraska.edu/administration/online-worldwide.html](http://www.nebraska.edu/administration/online-worldwide.html). The public site may be found at [http://www.nebraska.edu/online](http://www.nebraska.edu/online).

The University of Nebraska established this integrated university-wide distance education program in January 2009 to serve the educational needs of Nebraskans and to provide access to students who may otherwise not be able to enroll in the university’s degree programs. This initiative is intended to encourage collaboration among the four campuses and strengthen the ability of individual academic units to extend key programs to a wider audience of students throughout Nebraska and beyond.
Through its branding and marketing of Online Worldwide, the University of Nebraska will enhance its presence throughout the world. The financial model assumes that campuses will recover campus expenses and that consolidating some functions will reduce campus costs, thus enhancing net revenue at the campus level and providing new resources for investment in expansion of existing programs or development of new programs.

A university-wide marketing program and support structure are projected to generate new enrollments that will support the Online Worldwide initiative and produce new campus revenue. To maximize the potential for successful development and offering of distance education courses and the success of the university-wide online education market, tuition for online programs is separate from on-campus programs and is based on program cost, entrepreneurial opportunities, and market factors. This integrated academic enterprise approach requires organizational and business practices that will ensure that distance education innovations are sustainable and move into the mainstream of the university’s academic and administrative structure.

The process of creating University of Nebraska Online Worldwide began with the Distance Education Coordinating Council, which included representatives of all four campuses’ distance education programs. The council had an analysis of the university’s circumstances and potential conducted by an external consultant, Educational Marketing Group, Inc. Their report, which can be viewed at http://www.nebraska.edu/docs/online-worldwide/NUSituationalAnalysis.pdf, provides the conceptual framework for the university’s subsequent efforts to brand its various online programs under a single umbrella.

Following the external analysis, the university undertook the creation of and approved a business plan for the enterprise – http://www.nebraska.edu/docs/online-worldwide/InitiativeDistanceEducation.pdf – which was followed in due course by a strategic plan that continues to provide the roadmap for the program right up to the present. That strategic plan may be viewed at http://www.nebraska.edu/docs/online-worldwide/3YearStratPlan.pdf.

These three documents, along with an integrated marketing plan and additional material available at http://www.nebraska.edu/administration/online-worldwide/documents.html, provide a critically important perspective on the continuum of the program from its genesis through the present and into the future and should be reviewed carefully by any serious candidate.

**Staff**

In addition to the executive director, the Online Worldwide staff includes a program specialist who works with the campuses on program development and support services, and an administrative assistant. In addition, the associate vice president for marketing and communications, who is part of the university administrative staff, serves as the chief marketing officer for Online Worldwide. Responsibilities for academic program development, delivery, advising and admissions remain with the campuses.
Steering Committee

The Online Worldwide Steering Committee, appointed by the president in consultation with the chancellors, includes the distance education director at each campus and representatives of key stakeholder organizations within the university. The steering committee provides advice on budgeting and strategic planning and may recommend changes in distance education fees and financial protocols and other policies. On operational issues, the steering committee functions in an advisory capacity. When addressing policy and procedure issues, especially on new policies or revisions to existing policies, the steering committee will vote and their approval will be used to send the policy up to a higher administrative level as needed.

A listing of the membership of the steering committee, marketing committee, and communities of practice may be found at http://www.nebraska.edu/administration/online-worldwide/governance-structure.html. The external advisory board has not been appointed yet. An organization chart showing the relationship of the various committees and staff may be found in the appendix to this document.

The Community and Region

The executive director of Online Worldwide will work from the university administration office in Lincoln, Nebraska’s state capital. A city of nearly 250,000 people, Lincoln offers the ambiance of a friendly small town and the amenities, attractions, and entertainment opportunities of a larger metropolitan area. Lincoln’s stable economy, moderate cost of living, low crime rates, growing diversity, world-class health care facilities, outstanding public and parochial schools, and commitment to community are the Midwestern ideal.

Lincoln boasts the most parkland per capita in the nation as well as an extensive (and growing) bike trail network. Median real estate prices are below the national average, and homes are available in all types and sizes. Rental properties also are plentiful and affordable, and there is never a long commute in heavy traffic. The municipal airport is located 10 minutes from downtown, with a much larger airport located in Omaha, just 50 miles away.

Omaha is Nebraska’s largest city with a metro area population of more than 800,000 including 450,000 within the city limits. It is home to five Fortune 500 companies including Union Pacific, ConAgra, Mutual of Omaha, Peter Kiewit Sons’ Inc. and Berkshire Hathaway, and has an enviable record for philanthropy, a thriving independent music scene, and a rich array of cultural opportunities. Like Lincoln, Omaha offers highly competitive cost of living and real estate prices. A number of university employees commute between the two cities.


More information on the University of Nebraska may be found at its website: http://www.nebraska.edu/.
THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Primary Responsibilities

The executive director serves as the chief executive of the University of Nebraska’s system-wide distance education initiative, reporting to the executive vice president and provost and serving as a member of the academic affairs leadership team and the president’s cabinet. The executive director is responsible for overall leadership in achieving goals of University of Nebraska Online Worldwide: to serve the people of the state through expanded online education opportunities; to grow enrollment nationally and internationally and to develop a leadership position in online education; to enhance revenue to the university through its online programs; and to leverage collaboration among the university’s four campuses in the development, administration, and marketing of distance education degree and certificate programs and courses. The executive director will identify the policies, personnel, systems, and resources that are needed to increase access and enrollment, including fundamental changes in the infrastructure of the university’s distance education programs. The executive director is responsible for development and implementation of the strategic plan and assessing outcomes. In FY2011, the budget for the operation is $1.3 million, $650,000 of which is dedicated to marketing.

Additional Responsibilities

The executive director chairs the Online Worldwide Executive and Steering Committees, each of which has representation from the four University of Nebraska campuses. It is anticipated that an external advisory board will be appointed as well. The executive director provides strategic direction and oversight for each of the communities of practice and facilitates open communication on distance education-related issues and new initiatives with each of the campuses to include faculty, academic administrators, and staff. In consultation with each campus, the executive director develops and recommends distance education tuition rates for all programs and develops the Online Worldwide budget. The executive director is responsible for semester/term and annual revenue, enrollment, student credit hour, and other related distance education standard reports.

The executive director will accept and execute other duties as assigned.

OPPORTUNITIES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

The new executive director of University of Nebraska Online Worldwide will be charged with one over-riding goal: Execute the strategic plan. The goals and aspirations of University of Nebraska Online Worldwide are enumerated directly and succinctly in that plan, which may be viewed in its entirety at http://www.nebraska.edu/docs/online-worldwide/3YearStratPlan.pdf.
The key objectives of the plan are:

- **Strategic Goal I**: Reengineer Financial Distribution;
- **Strategic Goal II**: Develop Greater Consistency in Program Pricing Within and Among Each Campus;
- **Strategic Goal III**: Create a Strong Core University of Nebraska Distance Education Brand That Will Create Regional, National and International Awareness and Generate Distance Education Student Only Leads for Each of the Campuses;
- **Strategic Goal IV**: Program Development;
- **Strategic Goal V**: Obtain Better Student Data Information to Effectively Target Distance Education Target Markets and Direct Educational Resources;
- **Strategic Goal VI**: Dedicated Student Support Services;
- **Strategic Goal VII**: Academic/Faculty Support; and
- **Strategic Goal VIII**: Infrastructure and Systems.

While progress has been made on several fronts since this plan was approved in January 2010, much remains to be accomplished. The following sections describe some of the initial opportunities the new executive director will inherit along with some of the challenges that he or she will face in addressing those opportunities. Progress on these initiatives will be critical to the new executive director’s success and are presented here in no particular order of priority.

**Build the brand internally**

University of Nebraska Online Worldwide is an initiative being developed at the system level with the strong support of President James B. Milliken and campus leadership. It is intended to harness the power of online educational programs developed at all four of the university’s campuses and to present them to the public under a single umbrella. While tremendous progress has been made in making this vision a reality, several barriers remain. The greatest of these is a long history of competition among the university’s campuses, especially among the three primarily undergraduate campuses.

Each campus has its own unique identity and mission and its own history with the development of distance education programs. The University of Nebraska at Kearney, for example, has worked intently on the development of its online programs, and successfully offers them under a single “eCampus” brand within the UNK web site. The University of Nebraska at Omaha has made similar progress, but offers its programs in a more decentralized manner from individual departments and colleges. The Lincoln campus has a 100-year+ history of “extended” education but has been somewhat slower to develop online programs and offerings, which are primarily marketed through the “Extended Education and Outreach” department, but also by individual colleges. The Medical Center has made a good start but has significant capacity to grow in its online offerings. In every case, however, it has been difficult for Online Worldwide to overcome the traditional and historical barriers and rivalries that typify relationships between the campuses to develop an overarching structure and brand.
The president, the chancellors, and the chief academic officers of each campus have expressed their support for the Online Worldwide vision, which also enjoys significant support of the Board of Regents. It will now be a primary responsibility of the campuses’ administrative infrastructures and leadership to make the system-wide program a reality. This will not be accomplished by presidential or even board fiat. It will require the diligent building of trusting relationships and the development of mutually-beneficial financial and other incentives, all of which must be accomplished in a highly collegial environment.

**Build the brand externally**

The executive director must also build brand awareness within the prospective online student marketplace. In this exercise, the extraordinarily high level of recognition and reputation for excellence of the university as a whole is the executive director’s most important tool. The key metric for measuring success will be increased generation of distance education-only qualified leads resulting in enrollments, with undergraduate and non-resident enrollment numbers of particular import given their scalability and, as inevitably follows, profitability.

The target audiences for Online Worldwide form several concentric circles. Right now, more than 70% of undergraduate students taking courses online from the University of Nebraska are its own matriculated students. While this is an excellent index of the quality and convenience of the online classes, it does not enhance the university’s revenue. To accomplish that critical strategic goal, the size of the pie must be increased. The first circle of potential new online students is the citizens of Nebraska who are not current students at any of the four campuses. For example, Census data shows that there are more than 250,000 residents of Nebraska who have earned some college credit but do not possess a degree. These “degree completers” are not only a natural audience to address in terms of familiarity with the University of Nebraska brand, assisting them in earning a degree fulfills the economic development mission of the state’s public university system.

The second circle is regional. The University of Nebraska is the most renowned and highly ranked institution in a very large region of the upper Midwest, including the large and less densely populated states of North and South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. Residents of contiguous states of Iowa, Colorado, Missouri and Kansas are also strong markets. Degree completers, undergraduate degree holders interested in pursuing graduate study, and even traditional-aged undergraduate students who are place-bound throughout this region represent a significant target audience for Online Worldwide. In addition, large populations of former Nebraskans can be found in Kansas City, Denver, Minneapolis and Chicago and these regional metropolitan areas represent a strong market for degree completion and advanced degree seekers.

Finally, the University of Nebraska brand is national and international, and so should be its Online Worldwide program, as is befitting its name. A number of programs currently offered already attract students from throughout the U.S. and abroad, and several others have strong potential in a larger marketplace. The University’s impressive network of alumni all over the world is another potential market for advanced degrees. Another target audience within this widest circle of potential students is American military personnel and their dependents across the country and around the world. The University of Nebraska has enthusiastically embraced the
“Yellow Ribbon” and other post-military educational initiatives; expanding Online Worldwide within this context is a natural extension of the university’s research and educational program already in place with the United States Strategic Command and the Department of Defense. In addition, the University desires to extend its programs to the rapidly growing market of more traditional international students who prefer an online course of study.

**Build the program to keep the brand promise**

The University of Nebraska Online Worldwide brand promise is “A University of Nebraska education wherever you are.” The drivers of that promise are:

- the same expert faculty who teach on NU campuses;
- challenging courses that are current, fresh and relevant;
- faculty and staff who are extraordinarily responsive to student needs; and
- a community of learners who encourage and value collaboration.

In order to keep that promise, the academic programs and courses that comprise Online Worldwide must be comprehensive, substantive and current. This is very much a work in progress. As had been noted, some campuses are more highly evolved in this regard than others. Within campuses and in some cases even within academic units there are those who are more and those who are less engaged with and enthusiastic about online offerings. The new executive director must be an evangelist for this emerging delivery methodology, leveraging the support of those who have already embraced online education, engaging with the reluctant to advocate their involvement and overcoming objections – including especially both fear of change and doubts about educational quality – to the development of online programming. As with the business arrangements of the program, the development of intellectual content cannot be legislated from the administration; it must emerge from the faculty and the academic leadership of the various programs. Among the executive director’s responsibilities, however, is the administration of competitive grants for new academic programs, with preference given to those that involve inter-campus collaboration.

**Continue to develop program infrastructure**

As with most entrepreneurial endeavors, the devil for University of Nebraska Online Worldwide is in the details. Significant progress has been made, for example, in creating a differential pricing structure to optimize revenue by pricing the program’s offerings at the national market standard rather than by analogizing it to traditional, on-campus tuition rates. Revenue sharing paradigms have been developed and implemented. Technical platforms have been enhanced, and a governance structure for the program has been formalized and fleshed out.
Still, a great deal remains to be accomplished. For the objectives above to be met, the marketing power of the overarching brand must be proven. Metrics must be developed to measure the progress of the effort and data gathered for analysis in keeping with those metrics. A new website is currently under development (screen shot below), built on a powerful content management system that will allow for significantly more data collection and measurement of success.

![Screen shot of new website under development](image)

Revenue will, of course, be the most obvious of those metrics, and both the sharing of revenues and the percentage re-invested in the development of the program will be indices by which the individual campuses and the system judge its success. At present, 5% of marginal revenue generated by the program is retained centrally to provide budgetary support for Online Worldwide. The remainder of the revenue flows to the campuses, each of which exercises independent control over its distribution. For the individual and collective programs to grow to fulfill their potential, additional investments must be made at the academic programmatic level, an issue that is difficult and vexing in these uncertain economic times.

These and many more aspects of the program itself – both anticipated by the current strategic plan and not – will emerge during the new executive director’s tenure. As a result, the constant updating and tweaking of the business, strategic, and operating plans of University of Nebraska Online Worldwide – accompanied by superior communication and collaboration with both its governance structure and partners across the NU campuses – and successful execution of those plans will be a constant and major focus of the new executive director.
QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

No aspect of the new executive director’s qualifications for the position will be more important than leadership ability and, in particular, the ability to influence based on personal and relationship-building qualities. While the president of the university has put the resources of his position and office behind this enterprise and the chancellors and chief academic officers of the various campuses have indicated their support, actually reaching the program’s goals and realizing its considerable promise will require a leader capable of building trusting, mutually beneficial relationships and turning those relationships into action. Respect for and demonstrated success at program building and execution within a shared governance environment is therefore essential to success, as is evidence of experience working in successful collaboration both within a campus and across multiple campuses.

A working knowledge of and demonstrated success working within the administrative structure in a highly complex institutional environment is critical, with extensive experience dealing with academic administration at the individual faculty, departmental, collegiate, and university levels highly preferred. At least five years of successful leadership and/or managerial experience within higher education (or, in an exceptional case, a similarly complex, shared governance environment) is required, and candidates with direct experience with successful, productive online or distance education at the graduate and undergraduate level will certainly be significantly advantaged.

The ideal candidate will possess a sophisticated understanding of the tenets of marketing and demonstrated success creating and executing business, strategic, and operating plans. While not essential, experience in higher education marketing would be advantageous. An entrepreneurial spirit is wanted – a person dedicated to building an enterprise and willing to assess and to accept reasonable risks in order to do so. The ability to deal with multiple stakeholders in a highly decentralized environment while concurrently adhering to the core objectives of service provision and revenue enhancement will be of central import. The new executive director, therefore, will be both responsive internally and competitive externally.

Absolutely required are excellent communication and motivational skills with a demonstrated ability to work with a variety of stakeholders, to make decisions, and to build consensus and support for those decisions and the resultant actions. Also required are demonstrated experience and skills in program planning and budget development and management; to the extent that those experiences have been gained in an academic environment that includes distance education and online learning, they will be weighed heavily in the candidate’s favor. *Sine qua non* are the qualities of leadership necessary for success in the role described, including integrity, trustworthiness, vision, diplomacy, political savvy, patience, creativity, common sense, executive presence, tolerance for ambiguity, and a sense of humor.

Credibility within the faculty and across all campuses will be critical to the new executive director’s success. To that end, an earned terminal degree in the candidate’s academic or professional discipline is highly desirable. In some cases, exceptionally successful, compelling professional experience will be considered in place of this qualification.
PROCEDURE FOR CANDIDACY

For fullest consideration, please make all materials available before November 15, 2010; recruitment will continue until the position is filled. Nominations, expressions of interest, and applications (including a cover letter and resume) should be submitted via email to NUDirOW@wittkieffer.com.

Material that cannot be emailed may be sent to:

Executive Director
University of Nebraska Online Worldwide
c/o Witt/Kieffer
Attention: Dennis M. Barden/Elizabeth K. Bohan
2015 Spring Road, Suite 510
Oak Brook, IL  60523

Confidential inquiries and questions concerning this search may be directed to Dennis M. Barden at (630) 575-6167 or to Elizabeth K. Bohan at (630) 575-6161.

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The material presented in this position specification should be relied on for informational purposes only. This material has been copied, compiled, or quoted in part from University of Nebraska documents and personal interviews and is believed to be reliable. Naturally, while every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and factual situations govern.
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