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Dear Members of the Louisburg College Board of Trustees and Presidential Search Committee:

It is with much interest and enthusiasm I share this letter and additional documents in support of my application for the Louisburg College Presidency. Having initially reviewed the position announcement on *HigherEdJobs* and visiting the College's website, I believe that Louisburg College is the type of institution where there is a strong synergy between my personal and professional experience and the type of President for whom you may be searching.

I am currently seeking a leadership position with an institution that shares my values as I continue my professional career in higher education. With over three decades of higher education experience, I have come to understand and appreciate the importance of the entire student experience and the notion that educational institutions exist to help enhance lives while adding significant value to the surrounding communities. I strongly believe in affordable access to quality higher education and the role it plays in our society. I chose a career in higher education due to my experience as an undergraduate student and have enjoyed helping students to better their lives and the lives of their families. Having attended a private Catholic College as an undergraduate and working for Mercyhurst University for nearly 28 years, I can truly appreciate and embrace the mission of Louisburg College. Leading an institution that nurtures young men and women, not just intellectually but also culturally, socially, physically and spiritually is the type of institution I would love to lead. The fact that Louisburg College is so very similar to Mercyhurst North East, a campus I called home for nearly twenty years has truly peaked my interest in the position and the College.

I was fortunate to begin my career in higher education at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC), first as a graduate assistant working in an 800 resident student high rise and then full-time immediately after completing my graduate studies in College Student Personnel. While working at SIUC over the next five years (1984-1989) in the Student Affairs Division, I was able to complete my doctoral studies in Higher Education Administration. In 1989, after the birth of our first daughter, my wife and I decided to move closer to New York and our families and I accepted a position at Mercyhurst College.

As outlined in my resume, I worked at Mercyhurst, now a University, for nearly 28 years in a variety of administrative roles. I began as the Residence Life Director, was appointed an Assistant Dean and later an Associate Dean of Student Services. In 1996, I was appointed the first Executive Dean of Mercyhurst North East, a two-year branch campus of Mercyhurst College and was named the Executive Vice President of the campus in 2003. Mercyhurst North East identifies as a career-centered, two-year opportunity college founded to serve a diverse population of both traditional and adult students, many of whom are first generation college students. In 2009, I also served as the University's Vice President for Strategic Finance. Two years later I left the North East Campus and accepted the role of Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer for the entire University. In 2015, I returned full-time to Mercyhurst North East as the Chief Operating Officer under a newly revised, four "College" University academic structure. The campus no longer operates independent from the "Main" campus, as it did for 25 years.

My experience during more than three decades of college and university administration would be a great asset to the Louisburg College constituencies and the surrounding communities. I have nearly two decades of leading a private two-year college, performing many of the same functions of a college president, coupled with several years of leading the finance department of a midsized university. The North East campus is located in an area of Pennsylvania that does not have a two-year college and we provided that opportunity to Erie County and the surrounding region. I was able to move/relocate to a rural community, make friends and raise millions of dollars, all while building and creating a student-centered, career oriented, opportunity-college, with the assistance of a very hard working and dedicated team.

As the Chief Financial Officer of a \$120 million university budget, I was able to strengthen and broaden my insight into not only operational budgets, plant operations and human resources but also my understanding of administrative politics and the true inner workings of the Board of Trustees. Having spent 15 years on a campus with fewer faculty and administrators, I was able to learn and appreciate the value and importance of constant and open communication among the University constituencies and the Board of Trustees as being critical to generating successful outcomes. This is knowledge I believe would be a great asset to Louisburg College. Regular meetings and communications with the entire college and the surrounding communities is a must so that everyone is moving in the same direction. I also have learned to “trust but verify” information given to me by others.

During my four years as CFO, I was able to change the way Mercyhurst created operating budgets and linked the budgeting process to our *2020 Strategic Plan*. We created open budget hearings and the entire budget process was truly transparent. We also created a Trustee Committee on Strategic Finance as a way to approach long term planning, linking the operational budgets with the long term strategic goals of the University. The Finance Department created a multi-year budget as part of this planning process. I quickly learned it is one thing to create a budget and a totally different thing to live within that budget. My approach to budgeting and regularly monitoring budgets was critical to actual year end performance and has instilled in me the importance of staying on top of the budget at all times. I also understand the value of reviewing the strategic plan and parameters on a regular basis and making adjustments as needed. The *Plan* should be a living document and not one only produced for accrediting bodies and placed on a shelf.

I was asked to return to the North East Campus, after a three year absence. After 15 years of significant and steady enrollment growth, both the campus enrollment and the campus reputation began to decline. Enrollment once near 1,100 had dropped to just over 700 students with new student admissions dropping from 700 a year to under 400, our Nursing Program Boards pass rate fell dramatically, student retention was declining and our once great reputation as a quality, very caring and student-centered campus appeared to no longer exist. I eagerly accepted the move back and was happy to return to the community that embraces our campus. After my return, enrollment and retention increased, our reputation of being a student-centered college returned and our Nursing Board rates returned to their previous level.

When first appointed to lead the North East Campus in 1996 there were fewer than 150 students, a plant in need of repair, 12 employees and many acres of grape vineyards. During my initial 15 years (1996-2011) and with the creation of a strong administrative team, we were able to increase our academic offerings, add athletic teams, build and acquire several buildings, renovate the campus, add many laboratories, raise millions of dollars and transform the campus to a \$20 million operational jewel of Mercyhurst with an enrollment of nearly 1,100 students. We created a reputation of being a student-centered, very supportive campus that went above and beyond helping students to be successful. Our philosophy was always “students come first.”

The knowledge and skills I have developed during my time at Mercyhurst should help to serve the leadership team at Louisburg and the surrounding communities. I have been actively engaged in all facets of building a team and leading a campus. From fundraising to the development of new academic programs; from retention programs to creating and supporting athletic programs; from fostering a student-centered environment to hiring quality faculty; from budgeting to community relations; from investing in IT to investing in plant maintenance; from short term planning to strategic planning, I have been extremely fortunate to have experienced the full range of college administration.

My style as a leader has not changed much over the years. I enjoy being present on campus and attending many of the events on evenings and weekends, often with my wife. I like to hold staff meetings with key administrators and begin each by listening to and addressing their issues and needs first. As a leadership team, we worked together to solve all issues, with input from everyone at the table. I believe in delegating responsibility and authority and strongly believe in using the chain of command. As issues arise, my first question is most often “what is best for the students?”

I am very hard working and passionate and truly believe colleges and universities exist for the benefit of the students and the community at large. I am open minded and always willing to listen, yet strong enough to make the hard decisions. I truly support the notion of access to higher education and will fight to do whatever possible to assist students in achieving their educational and personal goals. Students generally do not begin a journey with the idea of not completing it. It is the institution’s role to help them to complete the journey. I strongly believe that an education is and should be more than “text book learning” and very much embrace the education of the whole student. It appears that Louisburg shares these same beliefs. The quality of each student’s educational experience, with a balance of classroom education, and commitment to the education of the entire student is evident at Louisburg.

I very much enjoy meeting and interacting with community leaders and developing positive relationships for the benefit of both the college and the community. In the 18+ years I was a part of the North East campus, I am pleased to say there were not any unresolved issues with the North East Township Supervisors and/or the Borough Council (the campus is in both municipalities), whether it was a student or construction related issue (storm water management, rezoning, parking, building permits, etc.). Most of the support from the community and large donors was due, in large part, to my willingness to move to the community, build a house, join local boards and be out and about in the community and just being involved. Community support comes from being an active and visible part of the community while fostering true friendships. I would do the same at Louisburg to help further the College’s mission and goals.

I believe the most important individuals, the core of the college, are the faculty and the students. It is their positive interactions and relationships that create the reputation for the entire institution. I also believe that everyone working at the college is an educator and critical to the overall mission of educating the entire student. I believe in, and strongly encourage, the involvement of all employees in the campus community and the community at large, both formally and informally. I would encourage, leading by example, such involvement.

Higher education across the country faces many challenges, as enrollment/retention, assessment and fundraising seem to be on the forefront of each institution’s agenda. Accountability and assessment seem to enter all thoughts; especially with accrediting bodies, students, parents and alumni. I hope to learn of your specific challenges and opportunities during the next phase of the selection process. My past experiences would allow me to help guide and contribute in these areas at Louisburg College.

As a senior member of the Mercyhurst administration for many years, the greatest challenge Mercyhurst faced was the uncertainty many of us felt after our President of 25 years (1980-2005) retired. We had

faith and confidence in our new President but we all knew that change would take place in the leadership structure, the power structure and even the organizational structure. Ten years later we were faced with once again hiring a new President. The greatest challenge was accepting the unknown and those changes that were inevitable and would affect each of us as an individual. Louisburg College needs to find a President that excites and unites the entire community and quickly brings a comfort level to all constituencies. I believe I have these skills and would work to make the transition as smooth as possible. I have been fortunate to have worked through several leadership transitions and understand how important they are to the success of the institution. Change is inevitable, yet how those changes are implemented is critical to the stability, reputation and momentum of the institution.

I look forward to the opportunity to share with the Board and the Selection Committee my passion for higher education and the value of students and families investing in a college education. I grew up in a family with seven brothers and sisters. A college education was something that I worked hard to achieve and that has changed my life. As a first generation college graduate myself, I look forward to continuing my career helping others to achieve the same.

My experience as an undergraduate student majoring in Biology was a wonderful introduction to the higher education environment. It helped to shape me as an individual and led me to choose a career helping others, something I have truly enjoyed. There is nothing more rewarding than shaking hands and handing out diplomas at graduation! The past 28 years at Mercyhurst University and with the Sisters of Mercy have helped me to truly appreciate the value of an education and I look forward to helping students at Louisburg experience the same opportunity and quality education I have experienced, both as a student and college administrator.

On a personal side, I have been happily married for 33 years and have two adult daughters ages 26 and 29. The oldest is a graduate of Chatham University in Pittsburgh and the youngest a graduate of Butler University in Indianapolis. I love to golf and do yard work as long as the sun is out. My wife and I enjoy walking our golden retriever every night as a time to catch up and relax. We have enjoyed hosting events at our home, often doing so for faculty, coaches, the admissions department and “friends” of Mercyhurst.

I wish you the best in your search for a new President and look forward to hearing from the Search Committee to learn more about Louisburg College. I welcome the opportunity to share my experience, passion and knowledge with the Search Committee and the Board of Trustees.

Sincerely,

Gary Brown

Gary Brown, Ph.D.