



February 3, 2023

Steve Bahls, CIC senior advisor and president emeritus of Augustana College
Titilayo Ufomata, CIC senior vice president for academic programs
CIC Presidential Vocation and Institutional Mission program

Dear Drs., Bahls and Ufomata

I write to nominate Dr. Jason Pierce for the CIC Presidential Vocation and Institutional Mission program. Dr. Pierce has served in senior administrative positions for more than ten years. He is completing his fifth year as Provost at Young Harris College and has developed into a worthy Presidential candidate.

To assist Dr. Pierce in his efforts to gain presidential experience, I have assigned admissions and student development as well as academic programs and services as part of his responsibilities. He has risen to the occasion and has demonstrated the ability to lead these areas. As a result of his experiential knowledge, Dr. Pierce has been approached by several search firms to apply for presidential searches.

I first believed that Dr. Pierce had the potential to be a president when he approached me to seek executive coaching to develop his leadership abilities to assume a presidency. Dr. Pierce was a leader in our strategic planning process and worked closely with members of the Board of Trustees in developing our most recent plan. During this process, I observed that Dr. Pierce was prepared to engage in frank and open discussions about setting an institutional vision.

Dr. Pierce demonstrates open mindedness needed to lead the diverse populations engaged with the College. As mentioned, he works well with members of the Board; in addition, I have observed his interactions with alumni, donors, and community organizations. Dr. Pierce was also a vital player in identifying and setting our DEI Initiatives. In all, Dr. Pierce has the social, political and presentation skills needed in a college president.

I have served as a college president for seventeen years and an executive coach for ten years. Of all of the professionals with whom I have worked, Jason Pierce has proven to have the greatest potential to succeed as a college president. I feel that Dr. Pierce would benefit from the CIC

Presidential Vocation and Institutional Mission program as well as being an asset to his fellow participants. Please let me know if I can answer any additional questions regarding Dr. Pierce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Drew L. Van Horn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Drew L. Van Horn, Ph.D.
President

REFLECTIVE STATEMENT

Jason A. Pierce

(A) SENSE OF PERSONAL VOCATION

Prior to a decade ago, I cannot say that I could have articulated my sense of personal vocation *per se*. I loved many things that I did or had done, from developing websites to teaching literature surveys to supporting honors programs. Today, parts of me still miss, at times quite desperately, those modest but meaningful opportunities to effect change in peoples' lives. But it was not until I moved into administration full time that I began to recognize opportunities to effect change more broadly.

I had thought my path led through the academic ranks, a couple of years bearing the yoke of department chair, perhaps serving as division dean later in my career. I had never thought of full-time administration, couldn't even imagine how one would end up in such a position. But I was one of those faculty members who was always volunteering for the next job that needed doing, and at small institutions there always seem to be more jobs to do than people to do them. About ten years into my stint as a faculty member, when my college began preparing for reaffirmation, I volunteered to lead the compliance audit. Perhaps the worried looks I got from more senior colleagues should have warned me off. After all, the college had no institutional effectiveness officer, institutional research was a part-time role for a psychology professor, and I had no prior experience with accreditation. What I did have was a recognition of the task's importance and a willingness to learn. And learn I did. Never has the "drinking from the firehose" cliché been more apt. It was both overwhelming and exhilarating, poring over board minutes, dredging through audits, organizing faculty credentials, building and leading a team that helped the college achieve reaffirmation.

At the time I thought my calling might be in accreditation, but I eventually realized that what had most engaged me most was not demonstrating compliance with the standards but understanding how those disparate parts of the college operated, interacted, and, most importantly, might be changed and improved. What surprised me was the widespread and seemingly constant pushback to the idea that change was needed. For all the errant critiques of postsecondary institutions as hotbeds of progressive indoctrination, we are, in my experience, quite conservative by nature. Perhaps this is more common among the small, private colleges where I have worked, where modest resources can result in insulation from evolutions in the industry and boards are stocked with alums whose primary lens is the past and not the future. But I suspect that most institutions, regardless of size and sector, prefer stability and staying the course to volatility and change, even when change is the only means of ensuring future stability.

My vocation, then, has been to articulate how changes to established practices are not only necessary for institutional sustainability but beneficial even for those members of the community most averse to change. I've been successful thus at three small colleges, working primarily with faculty, arguably the most change-averse constituency, and I believe that I can continue that success in working with trustees, alumni, and broader communities.

(B) THE ROLE OF MISSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A mission is to a college as a vocation is to an individual. It is what the college is called to do. But, as with one's sense of vocation, a college's mission can and should change over time. That change should not be drastic but intentional and measured. Whom and how we serve today is not whom and how we served when we were founded, particularly for those independent colleges with long histories.

(C) ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

In my experience, the greatest benefit of CIC-sponsored programs is not the subject itself – though I have always learned plenty when I attend CIC institutes and workshops – but the opportunity to share thoughts and learn from the experiences of peers. It is much like the small college classroom, a place where the instructor's assignment is important, but the best learning occurs when the students wrangle over material together, deepening their understanding by incorporating the understandings of others. This would be the greatest benefit for both myself and my wife, to discuss ideas with others who feel called to serve as college leaders and to understand the potential impact on our lives. As for where what sorts of institutions we might serve, our careers have been in liberal arts colleges in Appalachia, and though neither of us is native to the region, I believe we understand the unique needs and challenges and can be of service, particularly to those institutions that serve first-generation and low-income students, as most small privates in Appalachia do. (Aside: My wife recently took early retirement as a division dean at another institution and is enjoying retirement in a way I find most exasperating. She has no desire to return to full-time work.)

(D) DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT, EXPERIENCE, OR PERSON

I was a first-generation college student and Pell recipient who played football and received no financial support from family (though I was fortunate to receive unstinting moral support and love). As such, I believe my lived experience was not unlike that of many students who struggle to attend and stay in college.

JASON A. PIERCE, PH.D.

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., English, University of South Carolina, 1999

M.A., English, University of Maine, 1995

M.Litt., Scottish Literature, University of Saint Andrews, 1995

B.A. *with highest distinction*, English, University of Maine, 1993

SENIOR LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Provost, Young Harris College, Young Harris, GA, 2018-present

- Responsible for all areas of Academic Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Student Development
- Achieved record student enrollment of 1,511 in fall 2022 by improving persistence (largest ever FTIC returning cohort), expanding undergraduate recruitment, building graduate programs, and enhancing dual enrollment
- Grant-writer for proposal that secured \$2 million from Lettie Pate Evans Foundation for experimental reimaging of institutional work-study program
- Led development of YHC's first two graduate programs (Teaching, Leadership/Supervision), including SACSCOC substantive change (level II to III) and creation of first off-campus micro-campus
- Proposed and secured revision of Appalachian College Association bylaws to include eligible Georgia schools, and led process of gaining membership for YHC as first new ACA member in 15 years
- Restructured department-division structure and led annual review of program offerings, including elimination of undersubscribed and addition of in-demand degrees
- Reconceptualized general education program and led faculty in its development and implementation
- Reinstated faculty sabbaticals and created faculty fellowship program for pre-tenure faculty
- Led compensation enhancement initiatives for all faculty and staff, including creation of first published procedure for regular non-promotion-based salary increases
- Contributed to YHC informational & promotional videos [2020](#) (ROAR Orientation/COVID), [2020](#) (Course Schedules/COVID), [2021](#) (promo), 2022 (promo, in post-production)
- Member of Pandemic Recovery Task Force and primary author of all pandemic-related temporary policies and procedures
- Served as primary staff liaison to trustees' Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management Committees and as secondary staff liaison to all other committees

Vice President of Academic Affairs, Tusculum College/University, Greeneville, TN, 2017-2018

- Responsible for all areas of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Student Support/Success
- Reorganized academic calendar, replacing modified block model with traditional semesters to improve persistence and reduce challenges related to federal aid distribution
- Rewrote faculty handbook and all published academic policies in preparation for SACSCOC reaffirmation

- As SACSCOC liaison, led two substantive change initiatives, including level change (III to V) and development of a new graduate program in Sports Administration, and successfully concluded fifth-year interim review
- As Title IX Coordinator, revised all policies and procedures related to sexual discrimination, harassment, and violence in line with federal guidance and ATIXA-promulgated best practices
- Led grant proposal team soliciting funding from the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women to expand on-campus and develop in-community education programs
- Served as senior staff member and only senior administrator on the 2017 Presidential Search Committee

Assistant/Associate/Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs, Mars Hill College/University, Mars Hill, NC, 2010-2016

- Responsible for all areas of Academic Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Information Technology
- Led development of evidence-based student persistence incentivization program, with results presented at regional and national conferences
- Partnered with leading textbook services company to develop region’s first books-in-tuition model to lower access barriers for low-income and first-generation students
- Restructured honor scholarships program into new Honors Program along best practices principles of National Collegiate Honors Council
- Member of grant-writing team that secured \$2 million Title III Part A grant to enhance network infrastructure, invest in faculty development, and build out an honors program
- As SACSCOC Liaison, led institution through successful reaffirmation and six substantive changes including level change (II to III); also coordinated programmatic accreditations through CAATE, CAEP, CCNE, CSWE, NASM, and NAST
- As Title IX Coordinator, completely revised investigation procedures in light of new federal guidance, expanded investigator pool and improved training

ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Lead Faculty, Appalachian College Association Teaching & Learning Institute, Leadership Development Track, Emory & Henry College, Emory, VA, 2018

Director, Assessment Workshop & SACSCOC Compliance Audit, Union College, Barbourville, KY, 2014

Director, Title III “Strengthening Institutions” Grant, Mars Hill College/University, Mars Hill, NC, 2010-2013

Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Mars Hill College/University, Mars Hill, NC, 2009-2016

Director, Honors Program, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, NC, 2009-2012

Chair, Division of Humanities, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, NC, 2007-2011

Associate Professor of English, Mars Hill College/University, Mars Hill, NC, 2006-2016

Chair, Department of English, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, NC, 2005-2007

Webmaster, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, NC, 2001-2003

Assistant Professor of English, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, NC, 1999-2006

Web Consultant, Department of Rare Books & Special Collections, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 1999-2001

SELECT PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS

- “The Long Trail: Thru-Hiking Compliance Certification,” Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Annual Meeting, Atlanta, December 2022 (with Keith DeFoor)
- “Standard by Standard: More Instructions for Writing for SACSCOC,” Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Annual Meeting, Nashville, December 2020 (with Keith DeFoor)
- “Standard by Standard: Some Instructions for Writing for SACSCOC,” Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Annual Meeting, Houston, December 2019 (with Keith DeFoor)
- “Compliance Heatmaps: Dynamic Audits for Prioritization and Progress,” Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commissions on Colleges (SACSCOC) Annual Meeting, New Orleans, 10 December 2018 (with Tricia Hunsader)
- “Incentivizing ‘Belonging’ for all First-Year Students,” Annual Conference on the First Year Experience, Atlanta, 14 February 2017 (with Ryan Bell, Suzanne Klonis, Amy Carraux Price, & Lisa Wachtman)
- “Enhancing Students’ Success by Improved Access to Course Materials,” Council of Independent Colleges’ Institute for Chief Academic Officers, New Orleans, 7 November 2016 (with Charlie McCormick & Catherine O’Connell)
- “A New Program to Support First-Year Student Persistence: Preliminary Results,” North Carolina Association for Institution Research Conference, Wilmington, 15 April 2016 (with Suzanne Klonis)
- “Retain Low-Income, First-Generation Students by Making Good Habits Mandatory,” Interview in *Dean & Provost: Practical Advice and Strategies for Academic Leaders* 17.7 (2016): 1-7; also published in *Enrollment Management Report* 20.1 (2016): 1-5
- Student Success & Books-in-Tuition Panel Discussion, Rafter Student Success Workshop, Baltimore, 5 November 2015 (with Charlie McCormick & Liz Tobin)
- “From Haves-&-Have-Nots to Have-It-Alls: Overcoming Invisible Barriers,” Rafter Student Success Workshop, Napa, CA, 1 October 2015 & Baltimore, 5 November 2015 (with G. Grainger Caudle)
- “Affordable Books and Innovative First-Year Programs,” *eCampus News* 8.8 (October/November 2015): 9-10
- “Developing a New Program to Support First-Year Student Persistence,” North Carolina Association for Institutional Research Conference, Asheville, 14 April 2015 (with Suzanne Klonis)
- “IE & the ACA: Opportunities for Collaboration,” Appalachian College Association Summit XV, Knoxville, 11 October 2012
- “LEAP Outcomes & Honors: Developing Mars Hill’s Program,” National Collegiate Honors Council Assessment & Evaluation Institute, Atlanta, 10 July 2010
- “Models for Honors Programs,” Appalachian College Association Summit XII, Abingdon, VA, 15 October 2009 (with Virginia Bower)
- “Incorporating Service-Learning Opportunities into the Honors Classroom,” Appalachian College Association Honors Program Conference, Greeneville, TN, 17 April 2009 (with Virginia Bower)
- “Old Methods, New Tools: An Evolutionary Approach to Using Technology in (not instead of) the Classroom,” Appalachian College Association Summit XI, Abingdon, VA, 16 October 2008

“Enhancing the Appalachian College Association International Studies Program: A Proposal for Improving Berger Funds Distribution,” Salzburg Seminar ISP 15: Colleges and Universities as Sites of Global Citizenship, Salzburg, Austria, 2 August 2006

Full list of presentations & publications available upon request

SELECT PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) — Annual Meetings 2008-2022; Committee Chair Orientation Workshop 2019; Small College Initiative 2010, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019; Leadership Team Orientation 2009, 2017, 2018; Substantive Change Workshop 2009, 2017; Summer Institute on Quality Enhancement & Accreditation 2010, 2015, 2016

Appalachian College Association (ACA) — Annual/Technology Summit 2000-2002, 2007-2009, 2012-2014, 2016-2018, 2022; Deans/Chief Academic Officers Council 2016, 2017, 2022; Annual Meeting 2017, 2018, 2022; Teaching & Learning Institute 2000, 2018; Honors Program Conference 2008, 2009; Teaching with Technology Workshop 2001

Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) — Institute for Chief Academic Officers 2012-2021; Securing America’s Future Workshop 2017; Department & Division Chairs Workshop 2008

Georgia Independent Colleges Association (GICA) — Chief Academic Officers Meeting 2018-2022; Executive Committee & Board Training 2018

Tennessee Independent Colleges & Universities Association (TICUA) — Annual Meeting 2018

National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition — Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience 2017; National Conference on Students in Transition 2013, 2014

North Carolina Independent Colleges & Universities (NCICU) — Chief Academic Officers Workshop 2012, 2016; Assessment Workshop 2012, 2014; Technology in the College English Classroom: Literature, Culture, Pedagogy 2002; English Faculty Workshop 2000

North Carolina Association for Institutional Research (NCAIR) — Annual Conference 2015, 2016

Stetson University College of Law — Annual National Conference on Law and Higher Education 2016

Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) — Annual Meeting 2016; Network for Academic Renewal Conference: General Education and Assessment 2011, 2013, 2014; Institute on General Education 2007

Legal Issues in Higher Education — Annual Conference 2013, 2015

Association of Title IX Administrators (ATIXA) — ATIXA/SCOPE Annual Joint National Conference 2015; Civil Rights Investigator Training & Certification 2014

National Association of Independent Colleges & Universities (NAICU) — Annual Meeting & Advocacy Day 2015

International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) — Annual Conference 2014

Bonner Foundation — Bonner High Impact Institute 2014

Society for Ethics Across the Curriculum (SEAC) — International Conference 2011

Center for Applied Research, Central Piedmont Community College — Institute on Best Practices in Institutional Effectiveness 2007, 2011

U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education — Title III/V Project Directors Meeting 2011

National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) — Annual Meeting 2008-2010; Assessment & Evaluation Institute 2010

Salzburg Global Seminar — International Study Program 2006

Wharton School of Business/Institute for Research on Higher Education (IRHE) — Executive Education Workshop 2002

Full list of professional engagement & development experiences available upon request

SELECT PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Appalachian College Association (ACA) — ACA Executive Committee, 2023-present; Teaching, Learning, & Leadership Institute Committee, 2022-present (chair 2023-present); Ledford Scholarship Review Committee, 2017-2018; Annual/Technology Summit Steering Committee 2000-2001, 2017-2018; Institutional Effectiveness Working Group Co-Chair 2012-2014 (with Ginger Bishop); Honors Program Working Group Co-Chair 2008-2010 (with Nancy Thomas); Web Developer/Technology Consultant, “Feminism for Everyone: An Introduction to Women’s Studies” collaborative online course (Mars Hill, Warren Wilson, Wheeling Jesuit), 2001-2002; *Nantahala Review* Development Committee, 2000

Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) — Off-Site Reaffirmation Committees, 2016, 2019 (x2); On-Site Reaffirmation Committees, 2014, 2018; College Delegate Assembly, 2017

Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) — Institute for Chief Academic Officers Session Chair, 2017, 2018

National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition — Annual Conference on the First Year Experience Proposal Reviewer, 2015, 2017, 2018

Textbook Reviewer — *Compose, Design, Advocate 2/e* by Anne Frances Wysocki & Dennis A. Lynch (New York: Longman/Pearson, 2008); *Rhetorical Visions: Reading and Writing in a Visual Culture* by Wendy S. Hesford & Brenda Brueggemann (New York: Allyn & Bacon/Pearson, 2005); *Convergences: Message, Method, Medium* by Robert Atwan (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002)

AWARDS

Mars Hill University Student Government Association Recognition for Outstanding Service, 2016

Mars Hill College Outstanding Teacher Award, 2011

Appalachian College Association Faculty Fellowship 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009

Mars Hill College Title III Technology Grants 2007, 2009

Mars Hill College Faculty Enrichment & Renewal Grants 1999, 2000, 2002, 2006, 2009

Salzburg Global Seminar Fellowship 2006

State of Arkansas “Arkansas Traveler” awarded by Arkansas State Legislature & Gov. Mike Huckabee, 2000