

February 16, 2024

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

It was with enthusiasm and humility that I learned that I was nominated for the position of President of Fitchburg State University. I am very pleased to accept this nomination and apply for this critical position. I am currently in my sixth year as the inaugural Dean and Chief Administrative Officer at the University of Connecticut-Hartford. In this role, I lead and oversee all aspects of UConn's new urban campus, inaugurated in August of 2017. At a time of increased financial, enrollment, and reputational challenges across higher education in the United States, I am energized and inspired by the bold initiatives and growth outlined in Fitchburg State's leadership profile and 2020-2025 strategic plan. Given this pivotal moment for Fitchburg State and the urgent and critical work for its students and communities across the Commonwealth, I believe that not only my background and expertise, but also my love for and deep commitment to this work make me an excellent match for the role as Fitchburg State's next president. I have organized the following text to address the position's interconnected priorities and highlight some of my accomplishments in these areas.

Lead Fitchburg State to a vibrant future

I share Fitchburg State's enthusiastic commitment to graduating students that "will be creative and critical thinkers who integrate and communicate their learning from a variety of disciplines and experiences in ways that enhance their civic, personal and professional lives." I view these mutually supportive dynamics as central to delivering academic excellence and institutional and financial sustainability. Grounded in a rich and path-breaking history of proven educational accomplishments, I believe Fitchburg State is an anchor institution well positioned to build on its success of preparing students to thrive and lead in an ever-evolving workforce and world.

During a time of tightening budgets, decreasing enrollment, and increasing demographic diversity, UConn Hartford has been offering an accessible, affordable, relevant, and high-quality public education. Under my leadership with a proven commitment to collaborative governance, compassion, and respect, the campus has seen a sustained increase in undergraduate enrollment (from 1200 in 2017 to 1650 in 2023), improved time to graduation, new degree and graduate programs, expanded course offerings and research, and has launched its first philanthropic giving program.

Our institution shares a similar mission and composition with Fitchburg State's. UConn Hartford serves 3450 students (1650 undergraduate; 1800 graduate) and 300 full-time faculty and staff, in addition to 100 adjunct faculty. As a federally designated Minority Serving Institution (AANAPISI, emerging HSI), the majority of UConn Hartford undergraduates are first-generation, students of color. They take classes in 36 different departments, and MA, PhD, and certificate programs exist in five different disciplines. With the benefit of small class sizes, liberal arts and professional academic offerings span across seven schools and colleges with definitive strengths in the college of liberal arts and sciences, and the schools of business, social work, education, and public policy, all located at the Hartford campus.

Situated in downtown Hartford, the campus is composed of 10 buildings and sites with off-site residence halls for 17 percent of our students, including a growing number of out-of-state and international students. A highly energetic, visible, and accessible leader --both on campus and in the community-- I work to ensure the effective and efficient management of UConn Hartford, including leading academics, finances, student services, administration, facilities, and public safety, with the aim of creating a vibrant, welcoming, and intellectually rigorous community and learning

environment conducive to a top-ranked public university. In all that work, I strive to build and sustain trust with the university community through empathy and engagement.

I prioritize the success of undergraduate and graduate education at the campus, including recruiting, retaining, and supporting students. I collaborate closely with the system president, vice presidents, provost, deans, and members of the board of trustees in determining the focus, development, staffing, and execution of academic priorities and programs at the campus. That collaborative work is paying off: with growth in first-choice campus applications, creation of new interdisciplinary arts and research initiatives, and establishment of community and corporate partnerships, UConn Hartford has become an anchor institution in the City of Hartford. I would love to bring those experiences and investment in the capital city into practice with Fitchburg State's success in providing a comprehensive, transformative education for its students, the City of Fitchburg, North Central Massachusetts communities, and beyond.

Align resources with strategy while centering shared governance

I am keenly familiar with Fitchburg State's budgetary constraints and the need for university- and system-wide collaboration, including resource sharing. Leading the opening of a new university campus and building sustainable relationships, practices, programs, and systems has been a central and joyous focus of my work at UConn Hartford. The development of a mission and strategic plan for the campus requires collaborative, inclusive, and transparent approaches to co-creating new initiatives with senior leaders, faculty, and staff colleagues and facilitating relationships with community partners. As one of four regional campuses in a larger university system, sharing governance and resources is critical to making change at scale. As an example, under my leadership, UConn Hartford created a new director of academic affairs position with provostial responsibilities and formed a campus faculty council comprised of both tenured/tenure-track and adjunct faculty. As part of regular campus oversight and the strategic planning process, I value and enjoy listening to, learning from, and strategizing with my council colleagues. Development and support of faculty both in and out of the tenure system is critical. I work closely with our faculty and staff unions (95% of UConn employees are covered under a collective bargaining agreement) and pay particular attention to supporting our adjunct faculty that teach the majority of our undergraduate classes.

Throughout this planning process, I ground my decision-making in an analysis of institutional data. Campus leaders collaborate with colleagues across UConn to examine and allocate financial and other resources in the context of regular annual budget rescissions and precarious state funding. Since opening the new campus, my senior team and I have spent significant time reviewing and reassessing our staffing needs, often making difficult budget allocation decisions. Working with unions, we have integrated and streamlined areas such as student services, IT, and public safety while establishing new academic support for our students and expanding the research infrastructure. In addition to strategic new faculty and staff hires, we also reviewed many of our operational processes and adjusted our organizational chart, relocating functions under new supervisors to make their work more effective. I love this work and would be excited to support the implementation and expansion of Fitchburg State's recent strategic plan to produce a unified vision and specific goals that are faithful to institutional culture and priorities.

Prioritize financial management and growing and stewarding new revenue

I have paired staffing efficiencies with budget restructuring and diversification of revenue sources for the campus. With a focus on improved accountability and sustainability, and better mission alignment, our director of finance and operations and I have worked together to establish a new budget model for campus units. Our prominence in the state capital and mission of transformational education for local residents has helped attract first-time philanthropic contributions. With no significant prior UConn Foundation support for the campus before it moved to Hartford, my work with our newly dedicated development team has cultivated exciting opportunities for private, corporate, and foundation-based philanthropic giving. I have devoted significant energy to building relationships and stewarding and growing \$14MM+ awarded in government, private giving, and corporate foundation support. Highlights include two

separate \$1MM gifts for student scholarships from The Mortensen Family Foundation and the Hartford Insurance Company and a \$1.9MM [Department of Education grant](#) for diversity and equity focused student support. Similarly, my roles as the finance committee chair and incoming chair of the board of the [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#) demonstrate my commitment to financial efficiency, transparency, and sustainability as I help leverage the Foundation's \$1.1B endowment into action by addressing disparities and supporting communities in the greater Hartford region.

In addition to serving on several foundation, economic development, academic, arts, and community boards, in 2020 I formed the UConn Hartford Board of Advocates to assist me in furthering the campus's prominence and relevance in Connecticut and beyond. This Board partners with me to promote the campus' achievements, build and strengthen relationships with alumni and community members, and support philanthropic activities. Board members are leaders (presidents and CEOs) in the community and active in projects and philanthropy that support and reinforce the campus vision and mission.

While allocation from the central university is our principal budget driver, we also have furthered public-private partnerships to develop programs that support our students. Examples include working with our board of trustees and state officials to secure a \$5MM bond for campus expansion, creating a fee-based coding boot camp for professionals taught by our engineering faculty, expanding summer and winter course offerings, and generating income through leasing space at our desirable city-center campus. Drawing on my board service with the [MetroHartford Alliance](#), I facilitated their partnership with our Center for Career Development to develop internship and employment opportunities for our students during and after their time at UConn. As a university representative, I have also participated in regional and statewide economic development initiatives. Among other examples, I convened a group of university, regional industry, and economic development leaders for the federal Build Back Better grant in partnership with The Capitol Region Council of Governments.

Leverage academic programs to advance student success and life-transformative education

I share in Fitchburg State's dedication "to integrating high-quality professional programs with strong liberal arts and sciences studies." During my tenure leading UConn Hartford, we have developed innovative programs that deliver high-impact learning opportunities that particularly resonate with our students. Starting with rigorous data collection, analysis, and disaggregation across different cohorts, student success at UConn Hartford has meant connecting a university initiative of Life-Transformative Education for our students with career and academic opportunities in the arts, social services, government, and corporate sectors. Assessing lessons gleaned from the pandemic, UConn Hartford is leading the larger university system in offering place-based, authentic educational experiences in which students apply what they have learned to real world situations. As part of the university's Future of Learning committee, I worked with colleagues to design new hybrid and online structures and curricula to enhance learning options across campuses. We are building on the success of our pre-pandemic overall retention rate that increased from 83% in 2017 to 85% in 2020 for first-year students. Specifically, our collaboration with the [Aurora Foundation](#) to create the Latina Leadership Institute has improved academic outcomes for some of our most underserved students. Similarly, with our Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and supported by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering & Medicine, we are devising [strategies to promote inclusivity, equity, and awareness in STEM](#) classes for historically marginalized students. These strategies have contributed to our recognition as a [top-ranked institution for socioeconomic mobility](#), helping to transform the lives of our students and their families.

While at UConn, I have been deeply committed to improving student outcomes. This has involved strengthening the pipeline between high school and college, establishing new scholarships, and expanding student services, such as the establishment of an Academic Achievement Center, and strengthening our science, math and writing tutoring centers that emphasize peer-to-peer mentoring. Recently, we expanded our culturally diverse mental health and wellness

services to support students most heavily impacted by the pandemic. To support these initiatives, I helped secure \$2.4MM from corporate and government sources across the regional campuses. Furthermore, while we continue to provide students with a broad array of introductory classes, we have expanded and deepened Hartford-relevant curricula, including internships and city-based service-learning courses. Our career services staff are partnering with community members to create more employment opportunities for students on and off campus. Within six months of post-graduation, 82% of students that start at UConn Hartford are employed or have continued their education. Of those students, 93% are employed in Connecticut and 83% are continuing their education at UConn.

Create an environment in which scholarly and creative excellence flourish

Like Fitchburg State's schools, we enhance collaborative, interdisciplinary scholarship across both research and teaching/mentoring. At UConn Hartford, building on a historical emphasis on undergraduate teaching, I have placed civic engagement and research at the center of the campus mission and helped to develop new initiatives such as the [Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy](#) and the interdisciplinary and cross-school [Research on Resilient Cities, Racism, and Equity](#) (RRCRE). With over 90 faculty affiliates from across the university, RRCRE advances scholarship in business, public policy, social work, law, urban and community studies, as well as other Hartford-based units. RRCRE leverages the campus proximity to state and local government, corporate entities, other regional academic institutions, and non-profit and arts organizations to enhance research productivity and serve the wider community. RRCRE has also sponsored research and publications of affiliates on urban-based projects both domestic and global. In one example, the campus and College of Engineering received a \$2.8MM [grant from the Department of Commerce](#) for a community-based research and advocacy project to reduce inequities in access to crucial technology skills and broadband connectivity. In addition, in partnership with the Hartford Public Library, UConn Hartford is developing a new interdisciplinary space (CoLab) that brings together students, faculty, and staff along with members of the greater Hartford community to identify, diagnose and find solutions to societal challenges. The CoLab will serve as a catalyst for research and entrepreneurship for units across UConn Hartford.

I also have been committed to advancing the arts as critical to our educational mission. At the intersection of research, community engagement, and social justice, we have launched a partnership with Hartford's [HartBeat Ensemble](#) to offer an Augusto Boal-inspired theater program on campus. The program centers on the life stories of communities of color, connecting their experiences with broader efforts of mental health and leadership. In partnership with the School of Fine Arts, we expanded our campus space into the neighboring Wadsworth Atheneum Museum to house the university's MFA in Leadership and Cultural Management program.

Champion diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, and belonging

I am deeply aligned with Fitchburg State's focus on "education justice and the importance of being a student-ready campus." I have led UConn Hartford's mission to increase access and academic excellence for a pluralistic and global student body and recognize the holistic work that is necessary to achieve those goals. My commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, and belonging is intentional, ubiquitous, and integrated with UConn Hartford's engagement in and with the wider community. As a Mexican American who grew up as an immigrant on Canada's Asian Pacific Rim and married into a Jewish New York City family, my personal story grounds my appreciation of and dedication to the work of equity and inclusion.

Grounded in the celebration of the resistance, joy, and creativity of people of color, I have joined with UConn's Chief Diversity Officer and faculty and staff experts in this area to build new practices and structures at UConn Hartford to strengthen our work in social justice and antiracist education. To this end we have, for example, increased the percentage of staff of color on campus from 35% to 53%, added diversity and equity portfolios to my senior staff, partnered with relevant organizations in the city, and sponsored training and community dialogues. We have also provided resources for all faculty, staff, and students to design their own diversity and inclusion initiatives, where they now have a home in UConn Hartford's [Office of Advocacy & Community Engagement](#) (OACE). Through

collaborative programming with university and city partners, staff in the OACE have developed a community-based dialog series, voter registration projects, and large-scale clothing drives for city residents experiencing homelessness, as well as launching a student food pantry in partnership with CT Foodshare. Supported by the American Association of Colleges & Universities, we also recently launched the UConn Hartford [Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Innovation Hub](#). In addition, UConn Hartford is a founding partner in a [transnational scholar-practitioner collaborative](#) advancing equity for racially and ethnically minoritized communities in education research, praxis and policy.

Scholarly interests and record

I draw on my scholarly expertise on marginalized and migrant communities to catalyze and promote teaching and research at UConn Hartford. As a historian of Latin America, U.S. Latina/os and global migration, I have dedicated my scholarship to these intersecting fields and endeavored to build intellectual bridges— between historical fields, across the North-South divide, and between the past and the present. In my efforts to engage in scholarly debates and collaborations with academic communities globally, I have published translations of my books and essays, translated and helped [publish works of colleagues in Latin America](#), and served as a visiting professor internationally. I established myself as a historian of Mexico with my first book, [Visions of the Emerald City](#), winner of the New England Council on Latin American Studies Best Book Prize. I completed the volume, [Beyond la Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration](#), while on fellowship as the Peggy Rockefeller Visiting Scholar at Harvard University. My most recent book provides a wider perspective on migration and examines the historical experiences of people from Latin America and the Caribbean in their hemispheric and global diasporas. [Global Latin\(o\) Americanos: Transoceanic Diasporas and Regional Migrations](#) emerges from my work as a Fulbright Scholar examining the history of Peruvian migrants in Chile. Winner of the American Library Association Editor's Choice Award, my comprehensive two volume, [Latino America: State by State](#), addresses the historical significance of the growing Latin(o) American population throughout the United States. As a Latinx scholar with deep roots in the Mexican American community, I use my research as a link between academia and communities of color through public history and knowledge co-creation. As examples in this pursuit, I edited [Latino-American History](#) (revised 2018), a six-volume secondary school textbook and am currently completing work on the Spanish translation of an expanded version of [Beyond la Frontera](#).

Upon reviewing my record as an educational leader, administrator, and community collaborator, I hope you will find an excellent fit between the needs of Fitchburg State University and the range and depth of my experiences and skills. My family and I have lived in New England for almost three decades, and know and love the region. I would be honored to work with members of the Fitchburg State community to support the region's development and advance education across the university as your next president. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Dr. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez
Dean and Chief Administrative Officer
Professor of History and Latinx Studies
University of Connecticut - Hartford