

November 24, 2018

Dear Search Committee Members,

I write to apply for the position of Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities. My years of experience as an innovative English Professor, campus citizen, and above all, Department Head of a multi-discipline department have prepared me well to serve colleagues and students at Central Washington University.

My administrative experience has given me many opportunities to guide and direct a complex organization. First as an Assistant Department Head for three years, then since 2011 as Department Head of Languages, Literature, and Mass Communication, I have worked with a large department that includes English, Mass Communication, Liberal Arts, Philosophy, and every foreign language we offer. My department offers six majors and six minors. I supervise over 60 full and part-time faculty, and I have been responsible for faculty development, evaluations, program development and review, student and program assessment, faculty recruiting and hiring, a \$3m budget, and department and campus service, among other duties. I am comfortable handling common student and faculty concerns, as well as rare events like a sudden death of a colleague or highly unethical behavior like sexting. CMU does not have deans, but I function like one. As a member of Academic Council who reports directly to the Vice President of Academic Affairs, I collaborate with every department on campus, campus support services, and several community partners. These relationships are especially important because of our student population: 30% non-traditional, 25% non-white, and a large number of first-generation students. I recognize that our students deal with complex situations that often create obstacles to learning, and we need an array of strategies to help them succeed.

To be more specific, I am a champion of faculty in their efforts to mentor students, and I helped craft a teacher-scholar model that combines a passion for excellent teaching with an enthusiasm for scholarly and creative endeavors. To help my colleagues improve their teaching and scholarship, I either designed or contributed to the following projects:

- To supplement campus-wide professional development funds, I created an extra “field-research” fund for faculty who need to visit libraries, specific locations, or events to complete (or even begin) their research.
- I helped design an annual faculty evaluation system that focuses on process and innovation. Faculty craft a plan with an eye on specific student performance goals, pedagogical techniques, and assessment tools, then reflect on their effectiveness a year later.
- I observe all my faculty, and I redesigned the observation process so that it provides constructive peer-to-peer feedback.
- We recently completed a process connecting Student Learning Objectives and student assessment, and I supervise efforts to find more effective ways to evaluate student achievement.
- I supervise program reviews, and more importantly, I collaborate with faculty to implement changes. For example, I recently helped our Spanish and Mass Communication programs develop a more coherent and rigorous curriculum, and I was a driver and participant in the creation of a Graduate Studies Certificate and a Certificate in Editing and Technical Communication for the English program.
- I created a guest-speaker program that invites regional creative writers and scholars to campus where they present their work and teach our students. Students benefit from new voices, and faculty collaborate with new colleagues.
- I oversee Composition Conversations, a monthly gathering created by our Composition Director. These informal meetings encourage faculty to share problems and solutions, all in an effort to produce thoughtful and rigorous teachers.

I form partnerships with the community that benefit students and local institutions. I am fond of the idea that a university is a source of intellectual growth for the community and region. A university, particularly in a small town like Ellensburg, should frequently invite the community to campus so citizens can encounter inspiring and engaging art, speakers, and innovative ideas. Likewise, a university should reach outward, and I am involved in several projects that encourage that kind of community building. For example, I collaborate with Rocky Mountain PBS to create a partnership that allows students to produce media content for RMPBS. On a more personal level, for years I have worked with secondary school teachers. I have taught countless lessons on writing, film, literature, and research for our school district. I am currently collaborating with a local middle-school teacher who is piloting a composition program I designed. Finally, I work with local high schools because we have a number of concurrent enrollment programs I supervise, and these arrangements often bring me into contact with teachers and administrators.

Discussing my relationship with the community brings to mind my efforts to work with other disciplines. My home program of English, for example, collaborates with education, engineering, environmental science, and biology. I am forming productive relationships as we build writing courses that complement their curriculum. I have tried to blur the boundary between English and Mass Communication so that English students acquire tangible tech skills, and Mass Com students improve their critical thinking and writing. I was the primary architect of an innovative honors program that redesigned general education requirements by asking students to take a number of interdisciplinary courses. While my university chose another path, the seed of my idea lives on in our Maverick Milestone course which is an interdisciplinary, team-taught course required of all sophomores. Given my experience, I'm confident I can cultivate interdisciplinary scholarship and programs at CWU.

I am also experienced working with other campus organizations. For example, I frequently discuss plans with Student Affairs because my faculty supervise media productions like our radio station, TV station, newspaper, and literary publications. I confer with the Vice-President of Student Affairs because our students, of course, sometimes need extra support. I consult as well with advising, the registrar, and academic support services. I am often on committees that require team work, from grade appeals to recruiting events. After serving as chair of a campus-wide search committee, I received a memorable compliment from a colleague via our president who shared the following with me: "Barry Laga ... has been an even keel leader on the committee, an efficient coordinator, an effective consensus builder, a collegial host, an inclusive decision maker and a detail-oriented facilitator of the hiring process."

My colleagues and supervisors value my leadership style. In fact, during a recent 360 review, my highest scores include "Promotes an environment of ethical behavior," "Treats others with respect," "Maintains positive relationships with external constituents to the department and/or the institution," and "Makes it clear that faculty suggestions for departmental improvements are welcome." I do not micro-manage my colleagues because I assume they are professional and competent. Admittedly, I need to intervene from time to time, but my colleagues appreciate the fact that I trust them. I am also an experienced problem solver. From complaints about sexual imagery in poetry, profanity in the classroom, or attendance policies gone awry, to sick colleagues, helicopter parents, and grouchy alums, I have dealt with a wide range of vexing situations. My ability to work with others will serve me well in a collective bargaining and shared governance environment.

A dean should be an effective teacher-scholar as well as an administrator, and I am proud of what I have accomplished in the classroom and for my discipline. Before serving in administrative roles where my teaching load was reduced to 2/2, I was responsible for a 4/4 load. I have taught a wide variety of literature, literary theory, writing, film, and cultural studies courses. My students have consistently awarded me high marks on student evaluations, and my colleagues have recognized my efforts by awarding me a Distinguished Faculty Award (for excellence in teaching, scholarship, service, and advising), and nominating me several more times. I have a reputation for rigor, but I allow all my students to rewrite much of their written work to meet my standards. This recursive process is particularly important because, as Steven Tepper points out in "The Creative Campus," "creativity requires an environment that tolerates and even encourages failure." By allowing students to review and rewrite their

assignments, I provide students with opportunities to experiment, try unconventional approaches, and take risks. Thanks to two Fulbright Awards, I have taught in Antwerp, Belgium, and Leipzig, Germany. I have also been a busy scholar. Given my eclectic cultural studies approach, I have published articles and reviews on literature, art, film, religious historical sites, and graphic novels. I have presented my scholarship at conferences every year I have taught at CMU. I recently published *Using Key Passages to Understand Theory, Literature, and Criticism* (Routledge) for students new to literary theory, and I'm currently drafting an article on Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*, among other scholarly projects. I have recently turned my attention to creative non-fiction as well.

Finally, I am conversant with contemporary issues in higher education. From discussions about accreditation, current-enrollment initiatives, and student debt, to debates about trigger warnings, the value of the liberal arts, and the vocationalization of higher education, I can weigh in on the conversations. Admittedly, these are moving targets, and I will forever be a student when it comes to the issues that face higher education. I passionately defend academic freedom and the value of a liberal arts education. Critical thinking, numerical literacy, close reading, and strong writing should be the core of any university curriculum.

I am enthusiastic about the possibility of serving as Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at Central Washington University, and I welcome an interview at your convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration of my application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Laga". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "B." and the last name "Laga" clearly legible.

Dr. Barry Laga

Department Head: Languages, Literature, and Mass Communication  
Professor of English