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Dear Members of the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television Dean Search Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit this letter of interest for the position of dean of the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television.

For the past 25 years, I have dedicated myself to developing artists, scholars, art, and audiences for the theater. I have done this as the Associate Producer of New Play Development at Center Theatre Group where I had the privilege of building the Kirk Douglas Theatre and nurturing over 100 new plays for the American theater; as a theater critic for KCRW, Southern California's local NPR affiliate reaching a weekly audience of over 300,000; as Director of Cultural Relations for USC; as a teacher at Los Angeles County High School for the Arts; as a producer, general manager, and managing director for several local theater companies; and at California State University Long Beach where I currently serve as Interim Associate Dean for Student Success and Outreach for the College of the Arts, which serves 4,600 students across 23 nationally recognized, accredited degree programs, with 100 full-time faculty and more than 300 part-time faculty across six schools and departments. Prior to my role as Interim Associate Dean, I served as Chair of CSULB's Theatre Arts Department and program head of the joint MBA/MFA degree in Theatre Management.

In all these engagements, I draw on my profound respect for artists and scholars, creative practice and scholarship across disciplines, the audience, and an appreciation of the broader artistic ecosystem and communities we serve. I believe the arts are not only vital within the university, but also are the essential weavers of the fabric of a just, equitable society.

I am inspired to apply for the position of dean because I believe the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television is uniquely positioned to lead during this historic moment. As part of the nation's premier public university, located in the creative capital of the world, the school holds a diverse student body, faculty, and staff deeply committed to both creation and scholarship in pursuit of a more inclusive future. This aligns closely with my personal values and professional goals. I am confident that my skills, experience, and passion can help the school fulfill its mission and realize its extraordinary potential.

Listening before acting is a cornerstone of my leadership approach, particularly when engaging those who may have been excluded from such conversations in the past. I believe that it is only from this deeply attuned and informed perspective that one can cultivate productive partnerships, develop effective strategies, and successfully connect with and communicate within a community. While I have not yet had the opportunity to hear directly from the faculty, students, staff, and donors who comprise the TFT community, I recognize theirs are the essential voices. As you seek a transformational leader to help the school realize its fullest potential, allow me to share, from an external perspective and without the benefit of those conversations, what my top priorities and questions as an incoming dean would be.

### **Enhancing Scholarship and Creative Practice**

My first priority would be to enhance the impact of and support for the creative practice and scholarship of the school's faculty. As an R1 Land Grant university, the school's strength, value and impact depend on the success, morale, and productivity of its faculty. This includes their contributions in the classroom, their creative practice, research, and scholarship, and their leadership in reimagining our shared disciplines. For me, inclusive excellence is not just an initiative or a priority within this charge—it is a core, foundational imperative that will continue to strengthen and amplify the impact and reach of TFT. It will be through and because of our rich diversity—as scholars, artists, students, and staff—that

TFT will transform the lives of those who teach, learn, and create here, ultimately influencing the broader field and society where the work we produce resides and resonates.

At the heart of this support, there must be an intentional and active cultivation of a culture of belonging and respect for everyone who engages with TFT. In our current historical moment, marked by challenges across all dimensions of society, the spaces where we work, create, study, and learn must be free from fear and toxicity—places where everyone feels safe, supported, and valued. While such conditions may have been assumed on university campuses in the past, today they require deliberate and ongoing effort to articulate and uphold.

Building on this foundation, my second priority would be to extend this culture of respect and support from the school to the broader university community.

### **Strengthening ties between TFT and the University**

In a public university, the success of a school depends on a healthy, collaborative relationship and mutual respect between the school and the university's upper administration. I bring a strong track record of working within another public university and am adept at bridging the gap between the unique needs of the arts and the broader priorities and processes of the university. Often, the complexities and nuances of creative disciplines can be difficult for traditional academic or bureaucratic systems to fully grasp, particularly when it comes to understanding their value and impact.

Throughout my career, I have navigated both the creative and administrative realms—one foot in the rehearsal room or classroom, the other in the board room or institutional leadership. This dual perspective—spanning the creative process and institutional management—has sharpened my skills as a translator, communicator, and advocate who can, for example, clarify and contextualize fiscal realities alongside artistic or scholarly aspirations while ensuring that the integrity of both are preserved. Coupled with a transparent, collaborative, and inclusive leadership style and fiscal responsibility, I have consistently earned the trust and respect of administration, staff, faculty, and students. These qualities have enabled me to serve as an effective and creative advocate for the institutions I have been privileged to serve and to increase their capacity through strategic management and investment.

### **Transformational Philanthropy**

My third priority—and likely the most critical to unlocking TFT's full potential—is actively securing and creating diversified, sustainable revenue streams. This work would begin by ensuring that the school has the necessary infrastructure in place to pursue a transformative naming gift. Achieving this requires a process of strategic engagement (that I will outline further below) to craft a clear, unique, and consistent narrative, or "story", for TFT, supported by meaningful impact metrics. The narrative must articulate how a gift of this magnitude would transform the school: advancing faculty scholarship and practice, shaping the lives and careers of students, and ultimately driving innovation in our fields and meaningful change in society. While this narrative and vision would be shaped through close collaboration with TFT's stakeholders, I will, in my closing, share my own version and the impact that inspires me to apply to be your next dean.

If the lessons of another public university system, namely CSU, offer any lessons, this work must be accompanied by a creative and entrepreneurial approach to developing additional revenue streams for the school. Articulating specific solutions without a deep understanding of TFT's current practices would be premature. However, I believe any solution must avoid compromising the school's core mission or reputation and must consider its full impacts. Given the seismic shifts in state funding and the evolving economics of the arts in universities nationwide, traditional funding models are no longer sufficient.

TFT's success will depend on adaptive, forward-thinking strategies that support its mission while nurturing long-term growth.

## Community and Professional Engagement

Fostering robust development and extending the reach of the school, its faculty, and its students will require deep engagement with civic, philanthropic, and industry partners. Achieving this impact demands a unified and strategic effort aligned with the school's vision. Such engagement must not only support the school's development initiatives but also amplify the reach and influence of faculty scholarship and creative practice, provide transformative learning opportunities for students, create pathways to sustainable careers, and establish the school's rightful stature both on campus and in the broader community.

My work and career have been rooted in theater. As a result, I bring extensive national and local connections in this space that are both broad and deep. Though my work has not required deep involvement with the film and television industry, this is more a matter of context than capability or interest. Over the past 30 years, I have built personal relationships and supported numerous writers and directors in theater whose careers have transitioned successfully into film and television. I welcome the opportunity to expand and deepen these connections in service of the school. More importantly, I have the skills and experience to build and leverage new relationships, aligning them with the school's strategic priorities, mission. By cultivating meaningful and sustainable partnerships, I aim to support the school's growth and enhance its lasting impact.

## Personal and Professional Infrastructure

Hopefully, I've provided a high-level overview of what some of my priorities would be were I fortunate enough to be your next dean. Let me now share some of the procedural infrastructure that guides my work. While the *what* of what I do has varied with different roles and institutions, there has always been a consistent through line in *how* I approach my work.

As I've already emphasized: listen first.

From there: connect, synthesize, translate, communicate. I am a systems thinker with a deep appreciation and belief in the whole. I see connections across organizations or communities and think across systems—whether within a department, an institution, or an artistic ecosystem. I analyze and understand the interdependencies of underlying structures and how their strategic disposition drives particular results. Beyond recognizing and understanding these connections, I excel at making them visible and comprehensible to others, collaborating to design strategies that either reshape structures through new policies and practices or work within them to improve outcomes.

I am also data-driven and prioritize transparent sharing and collaboration when it comes to key operational data be it a budget, enrollment priorities, or a curricular analysis. I find that a culture of shared data fosters healthy collaboration, while the absence of such transparency can create toxicity. Data is often the lingua franca of university administration, particularly in public institutions. While data is not where conversations about the arts should end, it is frequently where they begin.

To counter the limitations of data (as William Bruce Cameron aptly observed “not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”), I pair data with narrative because, often, our impact in the arts defies reduction to an Excel spreadsheet. Our art—our stories—can illuminate dimensions that data alone cannot.

As I mentioned earlier, strategic engagement is at the core of my work. At its best, strategic engagement combines communication, advancement, and community outreach in alignment with an institution's values, culture, and mission. This integrated approach begins with understanding and sharing the stories that highlight an organization's significance and impact. From there, it identifies opportunities to leverage the arts' natural ability to serve as a gateway to community and forge successful and meaningful partnerships. While always protecting the integrity of the art, every engagement should tell the story of excellence and impact.

As a fundraiser, I've been fortunate to have raised in excess of \$27 million across the institutions I've supported, either through direct asks or in collaboration with development colleagues. Of that total, \$18 million was raised as part of the successful capital campaign for the Kirk Douglas Theater at Center Theater Group. This project holds particular meaning for me because it initially faced significant skepticism, with a feasibility study suggesting insufficient donor support. What made that project a reality was as much a shift in internal culture as it was the generosity of any donor or public/private partnership. We were able to remove the obstacles to belief in the project and created a narrative and plan for the project that was realistic and easily understandable. Importantly, we delivered a fiscally responsible on-time, on-budget project with the support of donors who had a clear understanding of the challenges and impacts. This experience reinforced for me that successful campaigns require unwavering integrity, alignment between the project and donor goals, and transparent communication about challenges and impacts. These lessons have served me well and have guided every campaign I've led, ensuring transformative gifts that increased each organization's capacity to fulfill its mission.

Which brings me to the importance of culture of place and the perhaps often-overlooked idea that we should love where we work. All of us—staff, faculty, and administrators—entered academia because we are passionate about what we do. The past few years have been difficult for everyone. I believe it's essential that we find joy in our work and the people with whom we have the privilege to collaborate.

While no dean can remove all obstacles, solve every challenge, or seize every opportunity, I believe they can set a tone for the culture of the institution and an appreciation for everyone who works, creates, and studies there. Alongside the priorities discussed above, I bring to my work a sense of playful joy and gratitude for the opportunity to do what I love.

### Why UCLA? Why TFT? Why now?

UCLA, TFT, and the arts at UCLA more broadly stand at the threshold of an exciting moment. Your new chancellor is profoundly inspiring—his work, engagement, and core beliefs speak not only to the challenges of our time but also to the deeper, systemic issues at the heart of our society. His appreciation for arts and their role in driving change offers a beacon and a call to action. Across UCLA, the arts are entering a moment of renewal and opportunity. Alongside TFT, both the School of the Arts and Architecture and the Herb Alpert School of Music are poised to welcome new deans in the coming years. UCLA's public arts units all have new leaders building on the sturdy shoulders of their predecessors: Zoe Ryan begins her tenure at the Hammer Museum in January, CAP UCLA's Edgar Miramontes is currently enjoying his inaugural season as artistic and executive director, and Silvia Forni, the relative elder, began her tenure as director of the Fowler Museum just two years ago. Even beyond UCLA, but with deep, historic ties to TFT, Tarrell Alvin McCraney is charting a fierce new course at the Geffen Playhouse.

We know in the arts that our success is never a zero-sum game: a rising tide truly lifts all boats. The arts at UCLA are entering a vital new chapter. The potential for transformation and to fulfill the promise and impact of TFT and the arts through scholarship, research, and practice is profound not only on campus but across our communities and industries.

I would have said all of this had I applied a month ago. But in the last month the context in which we teach, create, and live has changed. This change has reinforced and energized my profound belief in art's capacity to reweave the fabric of a just, inclusive society. With the institution of journalism collapsing and the literacy and awareness of our communities challenged, we find ourselves in a world where fact is treated as opinion. Scientific truths and the foundations of public health are being callously dismissed at our collective peril.

Where can we turn as these institutions and shared truths collapse and objectivity seems banished from public discourse?

I would argue we turn to theater, film and television.

The theater, since ancient times, has been the public square where we experientially explore what it means to be human and what it means to be a citizen of a democracy. The ancient Greeks faced a century of discord and coined the term "tyrant" before they entered their golden age of drama. And is there a medium that has had more significant impact on shaping popular culture and discourse than film and television? Or one that still has access and impact on our fellow citizens? Our moment demands the "exceptional humanistic storytellers, trailblazing industry leaders, and insightful scholars." I believe that there is no better place to do this work than within the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television with your remarkable and diverse faculty, staff, and students within the premiere public university. This is the context for the stories and scholarship that will transform our world.

Should you find my materials and background compelling, I would be honored to have the opportunity to discuss my candidacy further.

Thank you for your time and attention,



Anthony Byrnes