

ANTHONY BYRNES

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Dear Dean Smith,

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit this letter of interest for the position of Acting Associate Dean of Student Success & Outreach at COTA.

The opportunity to be a part of the COTA leadership team, help advocate and ensure student success, and help the units and departments of COTA better serve our students would be an honor.

It's about the students. It's about the future.

Our students are the future of our fields.

The very viability of our varied respective artistic disciplines depends on them. As the future artists and leaders of Southern California and beyond, our civic fabric and the health and richness of our communities relies on our work as educators. We fulfill not only our mission as a state university, but also our calling as artists by diversifying our fields and extending their promise for the next generation.

I believe that the COTA community is uniquely positioned by the strength of our programs, the talent of our faculty and the commitment of our staff to meet these challenges and ensure that the future of the arts is more diverse and our students more prepared and engaged than any previous generation. The rising awareness of the cost of tuition at private universities and the societal challenges of the student debt burden create an opportunity for COTA to emphasize the access to and quality of our extraordinary arts programs and to provide curriculum and degrees of sustainable value for our students.

We have a once in a generation opportunity.

My 7 years of service at CSULB, including the past three years as chair of Theatre Arts, has clarified both the demands and untapped promise of COTA specifically, and CSULB more broadly. As a respected member of the COTA chairs and directors team, I have both a collegial respect and understanding for the discrete and shared challenges of our students, our departments, and the broader college and university. I see the areas where existing practice is essential and also where we can greatly improve our work, capacity, and impact as a college. I appreciate where we can learn from the success of the work of one department and where we are served by respecting the idiosyncratic needs of our different disciplines.

Connecting our students with the broader ecosystem.

For the past 25 years, I have dedicated myself to developing artists, art, and audiences for Southern California 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 in my recent role as Chair of the Theatre Arts Department at CSULB and program head of the joint MBA/MFA degree in Theatre Management.

In all of these engagements, my leadership draws on my profound respect for artists, creative practice across disciplines, the audience, and an appreciation of the broader artistic ecosystem and

communities we serve. I believe the arts are not only critical within a university, I believe they are the essential weavers of the fabric of a just society.

This experience not only as a teacher and mentor but also as an active member of the artistic ecosystem helps me appreciate the student challenge within the academy and also the road into a successful, sustainable artistic career. To bring my long commitment to mentorship and nurturing the next generation of artists to the broader COTA student body by helping connect them with that ecosystem would be a continuation and expansion of the work I have done for the past 25 years.

The importance of the whole.

Throughout my professional career, an appreciation and understanding of the broader ecosystem or 'whole' has guided my approach. I am able to recognize connections across an organization or community, think across a system—be it a department or an entire institution—and analyze and understand the connections, the dependencies of underlying structures, and how their strategic disposition yields a particular result. Beyond recognizing and understanding these connections, I am able to make them visible and comprehensible to others while collaboratively designing strategies to either change the structure through new policies or practices or work within them to change the outcomes.

As we work together as a college to ensure student success, recruitment, retention, ultimately timely graduations and successful, sustainable careers, our work needs an appreciation of both the macro and the micro. I have an appreciation for and the ability to work within existing systems to understand the data and structures that exist. Within the Theatre Arts department I've worked to develop an understanding of the CSULB curricular processes and how they directing impact our resource allocation and ultimately our student success and opportunity. I would relish the opportunity to extend that work to the college, share that knowledge, and help us collectively make better informed, more equitable, and more transparent decisions.

It's about the students. It's about the future.

I return to the students and the future because we need to constantly ground ourselves in their futures. All the rest of our work, policies, and management need to be focused on fulfilling our obligation to the students.

Just as we teach our students not for the world as we have known it, but for the world that they will create and experience, my work at COTA as Acting Associate Dean would begin with a profound understanding of those core principles and values and an ability to confront the unknown with institutional integrity that places the students at the center of all that we do.

Alongside the qualifications discussed above, I bring to my work a playful joy and appreciation for the opportunity to do what I love.

I would be honored to share that joy and passion with COTA and to support your work as Dean.

Thank you for your time and attention,



Anthony Byrnes