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To  
*the Deep Springs College Hiring Chair and  
Committee*

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Dear Deep Springs College Hiring Committee,

I am writing to express my strong interest in the opening for the Herbert Reich Chair of Natural Science. I first learned about your institution back in 2010 when I was working with the Ridgecrest Bureau of Land Management conducting monitoring with Glenn Harris and the late Shelly Ellis, both of whom spoke highly of the school. When touring the facilities at the end of our monitoring work, I was immediately impressed and enchanted by not only the school itself and its location, but its high standard of academic excellence. Ever since my first introduction to Deep Springs College in 2010, I have been looking for a chance to join your faculty, as the school's structure and rigor are all but tailor made for my strengths as an educator.

My degree is in Integrative Biology from UC Berkeley and the primary thrust of my thesis was on integrating plant systematics and plant anatomy/morphology to yield evolutionary and taxonomic insights. During my dissertation, I was also heavily involved in classroom education: I taught all but three semesters as a graduate student instructor, totaling seven semesters of teaching experience. The classes i taught ranged from large general bio courses, to smaller, more intimate majors botany courses.

Post-graduation, I was hired as an adjunct faculty member at the Santa Rosa Junior College for Spring of 2025, where I was responsible for a double section of their introductory biology class. While the experience at the JC was rewarding and helped me develop my teaching skills further, I found myself yearning for the smaller, more intimate and focused classes such as Plant Systematics or California Plants. In those classes, I had a greater opportunity to help my students learn and to get to know what helped them develop as scholars. This preference for small class sizes is one of the many appealing aspects of Deep Springs College, as it is the exact environment that I feel that I can perform the best, and provide the most to my students.

My own values as a teacher align strongly with both the mission statement and the three pillars of Deep Springs college. Particularly, I find the distraction-free and intimate nature of the school appealing. My visit to Deep Springs impressed me because of its rigor, emphasis on hard work, and sense of community. Every student felt like they wanted to be there, and saw the intensity of the school as something to relish in preparation for success in life by building a strong work ethic. In our modern, high speed world where distractions are more common than ever, such distance from all of the noise is rare, precious and priceless.

Of the three pillars of Deep Springs college, the most appealing aspect of the academic pillar for me is the small, intimate setting. As an instructor I find that I thrive in small classroom settings. Indeed, the emphasis on a seminar-style setting is very appealing to me. In my experience as a student, seminars and round-table style classes were the ones in which I found myself the most engaged. This type of class is especially effective when I want to engage with

my students to help them to develop critical thinking and an understanding the scientific method. Both critical thinking and scientific literacy are growing ever more and more important as we move into an age of AI. There are already signs that AI is dramatically decreasing people's ability to think for themselves, or question what they are told by the algorithm. But those who know how to engage with science, even if not pursuing the sciences, are going to be those that are best prepared to be leaders in the future. Thinking critically is so important to young thinkers because it leads to the development of healthy skepticism of what is presented, and the knowledge of how to recognize when one's own knowledge of a subject is limited. And as leaders and decision makers, they will need to understand how science works, what it is, and what it isn't, if they are going to make good decisions and policies based on sound scientific results rather than pseudo-scientific rhetoric. And finally, after working in the Mojave and Sierra Nevada I know that both can provide exceptional natural classrooms to observe biodiversity, evolutionary adaptation, ecology and natural processes, which I fully intend to integrate into my classes. For example, both regions have many ecosystems that can be used to demonstrate the process of natural selection, highlight biodiversity, and serve as a crucible for questions about natural history.

The labor pillar is also very appealing to me, because it aligns with one of my most deeply held values: that if one is to understand and value something, they should work for it. We, as a society, have become removed from where things originate, to the point that we do not understand the source of and/or take basic necessities like food and water for granted. But when you work for something and are a part of the process from start to finish, you gain a priceless understanding of what it took to make that thing, and you are more likely to value the effort needed to produce it, be it by your own hand or by that of another. We, alone, are capable of a great many things, but together, we are capable of so much more. The labor pillar of Deep Springs College provides these lessons by putting the students directly into the process of running the ranch, and letting them see and feel the results of their, and their peers', efforts. If possible, I would like to participate with the labor pillar as well, as I have knowledge of several different food preparation methods, including lacto-fermentation of vegetables and bread making, among a few others.

Finally, the self-governance pillar offers a valuable lesson about leadership and governance: effective governance takes time and effort, and leadership requires a willingness to debate your peers in good faith and to be able and willing to compromise. By placing the students into leadership positions, the College provides them the opportunity to develop both an understanding of what it takes to be a leader, and an appreciation for the costs and consequences of their decisions.

Thank you for your time. I am very excited about the possibility of teaching at Deep Springs, and I hope to hear back from you soon.

Regards,

**Dr. Forrest Freund**