January 24, 2019

Dr. Mary Papazian
President
San Jose State University

Dear President Papazian:

**RE: Vice President, Research and Innovation**

I am interested in leading the San Jose State University (SJSU) research and innovation enterprise because I strongly believe in the great intellectual and economic value public education brings to our society. It is imperative that our public universities deliver quality research to our communities to strengthen America’s global leadership in innovation and entrepreneurship. With the breadth of its comprehensive education program, SJSU is well-positioned to play a leading role in the intellectual, economic, and social development of California, the country, and the world, through deliberate and meaningful research development and technology transfer. I admire your initiative to build and grow SJSU research and innovation enterprise. I want to lead your efforts in taking SJSU through a new phase of sustainable intellectual and economic growth that will have a strong regional impact, as well as establish its position as an innovation leader. My career, experience, and competencies are a perfect fit for what SJSU is seeking in this position.

Over the course of my career, I have provided strong leadership, achieved aggressive success objectives, built effective teams, and successfully crafted and executed business strategies while delivering world-class service and demonstrable value to stakeholders in academic, industry, and government contexts. I have successfully established new organizations and turned around existing ones with inspiring and effective leadership of the entire employee base to achieve the targeted milestones of excellence and growth. I have developed and led successful internal and external programs using proven management processes resulting in a lasting economic impact on the organization, community, and region.

This position undoubtedly comes with strategic and operational challenges. Strategically, the next five-year plan must bring SJSU to the research and innovation arena at the right level of performance and recognition. SJSU must establish itself as a research-focused institution and build the right relationships with government funding agencies, global industry partners, and research scholars. The key to success lies in identifying SJSU’s research areas of strength and distinction and pairing them with strategic intellectual, funding, and commercialization growth opportunities. SJSU will become a leading research and entrepreneurial institution through growth strategies that deliver value to its various stakeholders including its own researchers, industry partners, government funders, communities, and broader society. This will all start with a comprehensive understanding of the needs of all stakeholders to be able to steer SJSU’s research focus on the most rewarding opportunities as opposed to trying to force-fit the university’s research products to the market.

Operationally, with ever-tightening government funding, SJSU will have to give a special focus to modern sources of research funding (e.g. industry research sponsorships and collaborations) while deliberately deepening access to existing ones (i.e. research gifts). For the most efficient operation and the largest impact, the research enterprise needs to focus its efforts on large, long-term funding opportunities that align with the university’s priority research areas. The corporate engagement
organization will need to be fully trained on how best to offer the university to the world through the full spectrum of partnerships on fundamental research, applied research, technology development and licensing. The university’s value proposition to its partners has to be one that fulfills a critical need, which the university is uniquely positioned to deliver. Part of SJSU’s value proposition inherently lies in its intellectual property portfolio; therefore, such a portfolio will have to serve as the basis for entrepreneurial engagements with startup companies sprouting from within the campus community.

With these challenges, San Jose State University needs a research and innovation leader that can navigate complex relationships with stakeholders, put together actionable strategic plans, and lead an operation that fulfills stakeholder needs and addresses organizational goals efficiently and effectively. As the leader of SJSU’s research and innovation enterprise, I would bring a unique mix of qualifications and a strong track record in academic, industry, and nonprofit contexts. Together with the support of my teams, I have successfully led various organizations requiring strong strategic leadership, operational shrewdness, and cultural management finesse.

I have developed several business strategies, all of which have resulted in successful organizations and business ventures; some of these ventures continue to thrive to this day. I have a strong track record of building research and development organizations and turning around others with a strong focus on operational excellence. I have extensive administrative management experience including financial, legal, and human resource responsibilities. I have managed multi-site operations, which, at times, included union-represented staff and employees in countries with complex labor laws, all when I was responsible for the challenging task of workforce integration and reduction. I also have extensive experience in managing healthy and productive relationships with government agencies resulting in sustained funding over the years. With a multi-fold strategy combining targeted lobbying, continuous alignment with funders’ objectives, and ongoing demonstration of measurable success coupled with demonstrable operational efficiencies, strong governance, and exemplary stewardship of the funds, I have been able to succeed in attracting sustainable funding support.

In my current role as Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of California Santa Cruz, I developed the innovation and entrepreneurship strategy and the administrative framework for the campus. I created the strategy and the operational plan for all the technology transfer administration to deliver effective programs in all the areas under my responsibility. Within one year of my hiring, we doubled the annual number of invention disclosures, reduced the associated legal costs by 30%, and secured $2.2 million in state funds to establish new innovation and entrepreneurship support programs. Through strong partnerships with leading angel investment groups and non-profit organizations, I led the development and launch of various successful entrepreneurship support programs, including a business startup accelerator and a wet-lab incubator in Santa Cruz, and another startup incubator in Silicon Valley. Also, my team and I closed several research collaboration, sponsorship and licensing deals around our university research products, with both startup companies and established large corporations. We are successfully connecting our campus with various organizations, business groups, investors, and mentors to help commercialize the university technology through sustainable long-term programs and relationships.

Previously, as TECTERRA’s founding CEO, I built the organization and the programs that supported 200 startup companies across Canada and 25 applied research projects at three large universities in Alberta. Over a period of six years, TECTERRA’s programs generated over $325M in economic growth from a $40M investment. TECTERRA continues to operate to this day as a
flagship innovation support program in Canada with growing economic impact. One notable example of our successful TECTERRA ventures is the $36M exit of Trusted Positioning Inc., a TECTERRA portfolio company that was spun off from the University of Calgary – they were acquired by a leading Silicon Valley company.

In the private sector, I led the negotiation and execution of the $21M acquisition and integration of an Australian company with the Canadian and American operations of Hemisphere GPS. This work involved the integration of two very successful research and development organizations developing and selling state-of-the-art satellite navigation technology for agriculture. Earlier at Magellan, as the Senior Director of the OEM business in North America, I was responsible for the development, negotiation and closing of large partnerships including the $300M-per-year deal with the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the second-term $100M-per-year joint-venture business with the Hertz Rental Car company. Additionally, I personally developed and managed our $4M-per-year research and development program with Universal Avionics Systems Corporation. All these transactions were successful strategic deals that involved the development and commercialization of innovative, state-of-the-art technology in a private sector setting.

As SJSU’s new research and innovation leader, I would spend my first 100 days actively listening to faculty, staff, students, and industry partners to gain a deep understanding of the various stakeholder needs, challenges, and realities. To that end, I will also connect with the municipal government and economic development leaders in the Tucson area. I will connect with industry representatives including large corporations, industry associations, and local entrepreneurship ecosystem leaders to understand their current and potential relationships with SJSU. In addition to conversations with stakeholders, I will work closely with senior administration and student leadership to get a full understanding of the current affairs including financial statements, budget, facilities, fundraising, economic impact, business incubators, public relations, and communications. I will seek to understand the different perspectives on the current operation as well as the required and desired changes to serve as the foundation for our vision for the future of SJSU’s research and innovation enterprise.

Using all the input, I will develop a preliminary analysis of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which will form the basis of my operating plan. Only after conducting this groundwork will I be able to formulate and lead an actionable strategy. I will then engage with all stakeholders to achieve the buy-in we need to successfully implement this strategy to deliver the research and innovation enterprise you are seeking to have.

If you are looking for a top leader that can guide SJSU’s research and innovation toward sustainable long-term value creation through strong, efficient, and effective program development and strong stakeholder engagement, then a discussion is the right next step. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss with you my approach to building long-lasting value for San Jose State University.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mohamed Abousalem