

Dear University of Houston Director of PROMES Search Committee,

My name is LaRuth McAfee and I recently saw the posting for your position. I believe that my professional background and interests make me an ideal candidate.

As Director of Student Engagement and Community Building in the BOLD Center, I oversee academic and social support programs for undergraduate students in the CU-Boulder College of Engineering and Applied Science, with a special focus on diversity. Over the past few years, CU Engineering has implemented initiatives that have led to a doubling of our historic average percentages for incoming women and minority students. Similarly, graduation rates have increased so that 56% of minority students in the 2007 entering class graduated within six years with degrees in engineering, up from 34% just four years earlier. I am proud to have played a role in those increases through my strategic leadership in scholarship management (recruiting and selecting students, monitoring renewal requirements, and holding interventions as necessary), and through efforts to build a community of diverse scholars that prospective students will want to join and that will support them academically once here. This includes leading outreach and recruiting efforts, as well as serving as the primary director of a summer bridge program for incoming first-year students.

All of these initiatives are enabled through the use of data, and in this role I have gained significant experience in mining institutional data and monitoring short- and long-term goals through the use of data. While I work closely with our institutional research office to collect and analyze quantitative data, BOLD hosts an annual survey of our student users to gather qualitative information about their experiences and identify opportunities to better support their needs. I also led a team that hosted focus groups to better understand the experiences of various groups of diverse students so that we could develop programs that better meet each population's unique needs.

To support the additional scholarships and services we provide, new funding and knowledge are essential. I regularly meet with sponsors and write proposals to develop funding for additional scholarship opportunities, which has contributed to a tripling of our scholarship pool over the past four years. Learning about best practices is also key, and I am a member of many professional networks aimed at supporting diverse students in engineering and at engineering education in general. These have allowed me to meet people across the country who serve as key resources when I need input on planned efforts or just need new ideas. Further, on the local level I lead the journal club for my center, which serves as a tremendous opportunity for my team to keep up-to-date on the field of engineering education and proven practices to support students. I believe that the skills I have learned and strengthened as part of the BOLD Center will be invaluable to me if selected for this Director position because they will support the goal setting and tracking expectations, as well as communications and structural changes necessary to support students in the Cullen College of Engineering community. Additionally, with my network of engineering educators primarily focused on diversity, maintaining a connection with them will allow PROMES to use those networks for recruiting and retention.

While I have played integral roles in many BOLD Center initiatives, I am also proud of the campus-wide collaborations I have had the pleasure of developing. I am a member of the CU-LEAD Alliance, a network that supports the various diversity-serving offices on campus. Through the Alliance, I have developed collaborations with other discipline-based offices as well as campus-wide offices that have diversity as part of their mission. As concerns about students have arisen, being part of this network has been essential to providing students proper resources and to consulting with people who have greater expertise in areas relevant to the students' situations. I have also used these connections to arrange training sessions as necessary for the BOLD Center team so that we are all aware of resources to best support our students. Additionally, I spearheaded a research symposium, now in its fourth year, for CU-LEAD students so that they can showcase their scholarly endeavors to the campus community.

In addition to being part of the CU-LEAD Alliance, I serve as chair for the CU-Boulder Chancellor's Committee On Race and Ethnicity (CCORE), one of four committees that advise the Chancellor on diversity-related matters. This role allows me to work with people in all corners of the CU-Boulder community, either as fellow committee members or as affiliated units that have missions that overlap CCORE's. Through the information we gather on the experiences of ethnically and racially diverse members of our campus, CCORE makes recommendations on ways our campus can better support members of those groups. We additionally collaborate with the other three advisory committees, which focus on women, GLBT, and accessibility issues, to support intersectional issues that have the potential to affect multiple communities. Being part of CCORE has allowed me to get to know CU-Boulder's resources and policies better, and to develop new partnerships that allow me to better support my students in the BOLD Center. I would similarly take advantage of opportunities to get to know key units at the University of Houston and develop various mutually beneficial partnerships if I were selected for this Director position.

Relevant to the engineering education leadership desired for this position, I was selected as the inaugural Postdoctoral Engineering Education Researcher sponsored by the National Academy of Engineering, and have spent my professional career exploring how to excite students toward engineering and support them through the engineering curriculum. In my postdoctoral research, I focused on experiences of underrepresented graduate students in STEM disciplines, leading to recommendations on ways to better support them and ultimately encourage them into faculty positions. In my previous position at the NSF Science and Technology Center for Layered Polymeric Systems, I oversaw a new pre-college polymer research program and worked with education researchers to study the program and determine how it impacted participants' academic success and aspirations. Most recently I have been exploring ways to minimize stereotype threat through the use of facilitated dialogues and other ways to intentionally communicate the impact of different backgrounds on the engineering student experience. The initial idea for this study came from stereotype threat research by Claude Steele (Stanford) and Joshua Aronson (NYU), and dialogue research by Patricia Gurin (Michigan). Little work has been reported on the use of these types of activities in engineering settings, so I would be interested in continuing similar work if selected for this Director of PROMES position.

In closing, I am very interested in the Director of Program for Mastery in Engineering Studies position at the University of Houston Cullen College of Engineering, and think that my experiences demonstrate that I am an excellent candidate for such a position. I look forward to further discussing with you how this opportunity fits with my background and interests.

Sincerely,

LaRuth C. McAfee