

Dr. David D. Baltensperger
Chair, Ecosystem Science & Management Department Head Search Advisory Committee
Texas A&M University, AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension Service

Dear Dr. David D. Baltensperger:

Please consider this letter and accompanying material (lifetime CV and names of three references) as my letter of application for Professor and Head of the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management (ESSM) at Texas A&M University, AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension Service. I believe that my unique combination of administrative and research experience highly qualifies me for this position. The following information briefly outlines my background, why I am interested in this position, and more importantly why I think I am very qualified. I have organized this letter around the five points emphasized in the job announcement: 1) rationale for seeking the position, 2) qualifications, 3) administrative philosophy, 4) a plan to bring external funds to the Department, and 5) ability to foster research, education and extension programs.

Rationale for seeking the position:

I am applying for this job because it sounds ideal for me. While I am satisfied with my role as Professor and Director of Konza Prairie Biological Station (KPBS) at Kansas State University (KSU), your announcement is unique and compelling. There are very few academic departments in the world committed “*to advancing knowledge of terrestrial ecosystem structure, function, and stewardship, through a combination of discovery and translational research, to inform management recommendations and policy decisions associated with current and emerging environmental challenges.*” I strongly believe that we need to train future scientists in ecosystem management, and the ESSM department at Texas A&M is poised to be a major leader in this endeavor. I truly enjoy leading and directing multi-disciplinary projects and am at a stage in my career where I want to do more than pursue individual grants. I believe multi-disciplinary projects are critical in the field of ecosystem management. More importantly, I am confident that I could contribute to the missions of ESSM and would look forward to interacting with individuals at Texas A&M University, AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension Service to do just that.

Qualifications:

I have had considerable administrative experience vital to this position. I served as Program Officer in Ecology at the National Science Foundation from 1998 to 1999. There, I provided input on a broad range of NSF-funded research in ecology, and I made funding decisions and managed an annual research budget of >3 million dollars. At NSF I was also involved in the Knowledge Distributed Intelligence program and contributed to early planning stages for the National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON). NEON when fully implemented will be the largest funded ecological project ever undertaken in the U.S. After leaving NSF, at Arizona State University (ASU) I served as Department Chair of Plant Biology (33 tenure-track positions, 6 research professor positions and ~10 full-time staff members) from 2002-2003. In addition, I was the founding Director of the Geographic Information System Certificate Program at ASU from 2000 to 2005. This program involved working with six departments across three colleges and two branch campuses at ASU. I served as co-director of the Long Term Ecological

Research (LTER) program at ASU from 2006 to 2007 while Dr. Grimm was on sabbatical. That major research project included over 80 scientists and was the foundation for the new School of Sustainability at ASU. I also was one of the co-directors of the Konza Prairie LTER program at KSU from 1991 to 1998.

In 2008 I was selected to be the first full-time director of KPBS. In my current position, my appointment is 75% administration, 20% research, and 5% teaching. As KPBS director, I am responsible for day-to-day management of over 8400 acres of native tallgrass prairie. Konza is unique as it is jointly owned by The Nature Conservancy and the KSU Foundation. It is managed by the Division of Biology at KSU as a biological research station. The station is dedicated to a three-fold mission of long-term ecological research, education, and prairie conservation. It is a unique outdoor laboratory that provides opportunities for the study of tallgrass prairie ecosystems (especially the impact of fires and grazing) and for basic biological research on a wide range of taxa and processes. I am responsible for ensuring that our burning program is conducted each year safely and efficiently. In an average year, we burn about 4,000 acres in the spring. In addition, I am responsible for the management of the bison herd (approximately 300 head) and leasing over 2,000 acres for cattle grazing, part of a large on-going patch-grazing experiment.

The major part of my job is coordinating research activities on-site. Presently, we have 167 different research projects on-going at KPBS conducted by over 115 different scientists from 5 colleges at KSU and 7 different universities. In addition, there are people from 5 separate government agencies with active research permits. Our operating budget has not increased in over 10 years, and we must rely on site fees from scientists to operate the station. It is my responsibility to collect these fees from those who can afford them while at the same time not discourage research from those who cannot. Since I took over the director of KPBS, I have increased the site fee income and also increased private funding for the station. Private sources will continue to be even more important as state and federal support is unlikely to keep up with ever increasing expenses. Finally, I am also responsible for coordinating the education program at KPBS. We have over 30 graduate students with active research permits. KPBS has also served as the host of a site-based REU program for 16 years. The Konza Environmental Education Program (<http://keep.konza.ksu.edu>) provides educational opportunities for students of all ages, and in a typical year over 2,500 K-12 students visit KPBS.

Administrative philosophy:

While I was at NSF, I participated in various workshops and training programs for administrators. Although the style and format of these programs varied, a common theme was the need for an effective communication plan. To have a functional department, a high-quality department head must have competent people assisting with the day-to-day operation plus constant and reliable communication lines with everyone in the department. These can be as simple as responding in a reasonable time frame to e-mails and phone calls or as complicated as holding large meetings to discuss controversial departmental issues. It is important to try to engage everyone who wants to be involved, and I would do my best to have an "open-door" policy as Department head. A very critical thing I have learned over the years is the need to know when to get involved in an issue and when to stay on the "side-line" and let the issue resolve itself. But it is tough to know when to do this. I admit that I have become involved when I should not have and also let issues go too long before I stepped in. This brings up another

important thing I have learned over the years: let people know when you have made a mistake, take responsibility, and try to learn from it. As a department chair it is critical that all faculty, staff and students know that I want them to be successful. It is not about the department head. This is very important to me, and I at Texas A&M I would try very hard to be extremely honest, fair, and open with everyone.

Plan to bring external funds to the Department:

As either Principal or Co-Investigator, my research grants since 1985 have exceeded **\$22,000,000**. I have received support from EPA, NASA, and NSF, with most from NSF. I know what it takes to pursue extramural funding and how to manage collaborative research. Collaboration among scientists will continue to be essential, and I intend to be involved in collaborative activities at a variety of levels. However, I envision that the head of the Department of ESSM at Texas A&M University, AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension Service will be a time-demanding position and that whoever has that position will have limited time to pursue grants as the lead-PI. Top on the list for a department head in bringing in external funds is to ensure that faculty have the time and resources necessary to pursue and acquire funds for their research and teaching activities. Clearly this is challenging and one needs a different strategy for younger faculty members than senior faculty. It is absolutely essential that younger faculty are properly mentored and trained by senior faculty members who have successfully gotten extra-mural funding. Time and resources must also be available for faculty interested in obtaining large collaborative research grants (especially those reaching across different departments, colleges or universities). These require more resources than a "typical" research application. In addition, I would like to encourage faculty members interested in teaching research/reform to pursue funds to support their programs. Everyone knows the funding climate is changing, and it is important that faculty are very well informed about funding opportunities for their particular research interests. As a department head, I would encourage individuals to serve as program directors for funding agencies when appropriate to obtain first-hand knowledge about future research opportunities. Finally, private donations and gifts need to be an ever-increasing part of a department portfolio. This can range from grants/gifts from commercial and non-profit companies, non-profit organizations, to private individuals. For example, KPBS has a non-profit organization (Friends of Konza Prairie) that is a 501(c)(3). Contributions support KPBS education programs, facilities and trails. In addition, I have actively solicited private individuals who have provided funds for much needed research/education infrastructure at KPBS. I have worked quite closely with the KSU Foundation to pursue private funding. As head of ESSM, I would very much look forward to working with the Texas A&M Foundation to pursue external funds for ESSM.

Ability to foster research, education and extension programs:

As you can tell from my vitae, I have been involved in working with a highly multi-discipline group of scientists at KSU from 1984 to 1998 and at ASU from 1999-2008. This has given me a unique perspective about how to interact with a wide range of people and disciplines. As mentioned above, my main duty as Director of KPBS is to encourage research and education activities at the field station. My ability to communicate and interact with a diverse group of scientists can also be evaluated by looking at the wide range of national and international committees I have been asked to serve on. These include the publication committee of the Ecological Society of America, the editorial board of Landscape Ecology, the

science committee of the Audubon Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch in Southern Arizona, the Scientific Advisory Board member for the MacArthur Agro-Ecology Research Center in Central Florida and various network-level committees within the National LTER program. Currently, I am chair of the Domain Science and Education Coordination Committee for Domain 6 of NEON. As chair, I am responsible for coordinating research and educational activities across the domain that includes KSU and seven different universities.

I have also served on numerous national and international panels evaluating research proposals, various research programs, and have been involved with projects to train foreign scientists. A partial list includes Chair of the external review team for NSF in an evaluation of the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis, member of the Committee of Visitors that reviewed the Division of Biological Infrastructure at NSF, and assisting the Chinese Academy of Science for three years as they established their Long Term Chinese Ecological Research Network (CERN). Thus, I know how to effectively evaluate research projects and have developed the necessary skills to interact with people (and groups) to motivate them to enhance their research efforts. I believe my current experience with KPBS coupled with my extensive research and administrative experience would serve me well as the Professor and Head of the ESSM at Texas A&M University.

I also have considerable experience working with students. While at KSU from 1984 to 1998, I was not able to chair graduate student committees but did co-chair two student committees and serve on three others. At ASU, I graduated three PhD student and two M.S. students (both who went on to earn Ph.D's). Thus I know I can recruit high-quality students and more importantly what it takes to recruit excellent students vital to a high-caliber research program. Although I was not on a regular tenure track at KSU from 1984 to 1998, and therefore not required to teach, I elected to do so. While at KSU, I taught numerous courses (mostly at the graduate level). At ASU, I taught BIO 187 (General Biology for Majors; class size >350), a Junior-Senior level Community Plant Ecology (PLB 421), and numerous graduate student seminar courses. As you can tell from my CV, I have been successful obtaining grants from NSF to advance graduate student education across a variety of disciplines (IGERT and GK-12) - an endeavor that I want to continue in the future. I believe that ESSM offers an excellent opportunity for me to continue my interest in graduate and undergraduate education. Thus, I understand the need for high quality education for undergraduate and graduate students and of course the time that is required for effective teaching.

It is also critical in today's funding climate to have positive interactions and communications with the general public. In most agriculture's departments, one obvious outlet is the extension program. As department head of ESSM, I would work very closely with extension to further develop and improve working relationships with diverse stakeholders. An recent example that illustrates my abilities in this domain is my role as local host and co-organizer of a national conference. The conference, "The America's Grasslands: The Future of Grasslands in a Changing Landscape" was held in Manhattan, KS, and I worked with the National Wildlife Federation to organize the meeting. Over 250 researchers, natural resources professionals, farmers and ranchers, policy experts and conservationists came together to discuss the conservation of North America's grasslands and opportunities and outlook for these vital ecosystems in a changing landscape. This conference especially focused on collaborative interactions between ranchers to conserve grasslands. In order to build relationships with news

organizations, I hosted a "Media Day" at KPBS and invited local and regional news organizations to learn more about KPBS. KPBS faculty and graduate students talked to the media one-on-one about their research. In addition, as KPBS director, my goal is to release one news article a month to KSU media services about research/educational/outreach activities on KPBS. I have developed a good relationship with the media services on campus; this has resulted in many news articles that have been picked up by local, regional and even national news organizations. I have also hosted numerous government officials (staff and elected) at KPBS to discuss what the research program means to the local, state and national economy. I believe all of these activities have increased the visibility of KPBS, and as head of the ESSM, I would incorporate similar appropriate activities into my duties.

I have listed three individuals who can comment on my qualifications for this job. These are: 1) Dr. Scott L. Collins who I worked with at NSF and who can speak to my national and inter-national standing within the scientific community; 2) Dr. Alan K. Knapp who was the Head-PI of the Konza Prairie LTER (KNZ) project since the early 1990's until his move to Colorado State University; he can discuss my ability to interact and collaborate with a variety of scientists; and 3) Dr. John M. Blair, the current Lead-PI of the Konza Prairie LTER program. He can provide input on my effectiveness as the Director of KPBS.

Thank you for considering my application. I surely hope that you carefully consider me for this position. If you have any questions, please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Briggs", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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