

CORTLAN J. WICKLIFF, PH.D., J.D.

Associate Vice Provost of Academic Affairs & Strategic Initiatives
Rice University

January 26, 2026

Mr. Mark Romero, Chair

Presidential Search Committee

Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana System
627 North 4th Street, Suite 2-203 Baton Rouge, LA 70802

RE: Application for President of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette: Cortlan J. Wickliff, PhD, JD

Dear Mr. Romero and Members of the Presidential Search Committee:

I am applying for the Presidency of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette because my career has been built for this specific intersection of leadership: an R1 research executive with the mind of an engineer, the rigor of an attorney, and the heart of a student advocate. While many candidates may fit the traditional administrative mold, I offer a distinct, interdisciplinary background that allows me to personally bridge the gaps between academic innovation, operational compliance, and regional economic growth.

Leading Research & Economic Development with Personal Experience: As a Ph.D. in Engineering who is also a licensed attorney, I do not just oversee research; I understand the technical and legal mechanics required to commercialize it. My track record includes negotiating tax abatements and public-incentive arrangements for a **\$40 million biotech facility expansion**—a direct parallel to the type of leadership required to bring partners like First Solar to Acadiana. Additionally, I have facilitated deals that turned academic research into **eight-figure financial wins** for the institutions I have served. I have led independent engineering research, negotiated complex intellectual property agreements, and facilitated public-private partnerships. I maximize academic expenditures by securing meaningful commitments from government officials, corporate sponsors, foundations, and community partners and establishing lasting collaborations around common goals. I will bring this "deal-making" capacity to the presidency, personally ensuring that our research expenditures translate into tangible economic wins for the region.

Mastering Shared Governance & Faculty Relations: A university president cannot lead by decree; they must lead through consensus. At Rice University, I have thrived in a shared governance model, serving as a **direct liaison to the Student Government, Staff Offices, and the Faculty Senate**. In this capacity, I have regularly represented the interests of the Provost's office, several Vice Presidents, and the President's office, navigating complex academic and administrative priorities to find common ground. Student success is at the core of our academic mission, and they are the best equipped to tell us when we are falling short of our objectives, so we must give them a voice to succeed. Additionally, I understand that the faculty are the heart of the academic enterprise and central to our revenue generation and academic standing, but we need a strong, empowered staff to maximize their efforts. Strong shared governance is how we balance these (sometimes competing) considerations, and strong relationships with stakeholders are how I build strong shared governance. My success in building these relationships is rooted in transparency and a willingness to engage early—ensuring that governance is a partnership rather than an adversary tussle between stakeholders or a hurdle to the success of our individual units.

Empowering and Cultivating Leadership Among Senior Administrators and Staff: My commitment to human capital goes beyond educating students; I am firmly committed to building a pipeline of capable leaders. I have a passion for **training new leaders** and empowering them to stretch their capabilities. Whether they are student workers, staff, junior administrators, or my direct reports, I cultivate an environment that promotes **intelligent risk-taking** and professional development. As President, I will apply this philosophy institution-wide, mentoring a new generation of administrative talent.

A Proven Architect of Student Success: My commitment to student success goes beyond policy; it is personal and practical. I created the "Young and Driven" program and toured the country to speak directly to tens of thousands of students about taking ownership of their academic success and careers. I also developed academic programs that focused on "**High-Impact Learning Experiences**" (HLE)—hands-on practical application of pedagogical practices in the form of internships, undergraduate research, and capstone design projects, and "**Low-Risk Training Environments**" (LRTEs)—incubators where students can gain high-stakes professional experience without the fear of career-ending failure. I have successfully implemented these frameworks to increase student retention, improve graduation rates, and maximize workforce readiness. These programs also included multiple programs directed towards our student athletes, including initiatives to ensure that our student athletes were able to pursue (and graduate from) their first-choice program while still competing at a high level in D1 athletics. As President, I will not just advocate for student success. I will implement these proven models to ensure UL Lafayette graduates are the most "job-ready" in the state, while being an excellent reflection of the Ragin Cajun spirit.

Operational Mastery & Fiscal Integrity: In an era where universities must rely heavily on self-generated revenue, operational tightness is non-negotiable. At Rice University, I have been a hands-on architect of institutional governance, personally **drafting or editing over 18% of Rice's policies**. When tasked with leading a complex federal student/staff visa program, I achieved a **0% non-compliance rate**. I view "stewardship" as an active discipline. I have a history of entering complex organizations, identifying regulatory or fiscal vulnerabilities, and building the relationships necessary to fix them without stalling innovation. I will bring this same level of scrutiny and efficiency to the \$219 million operating budget at UL Lafayette.

Building Consensus & Community Trust: My leadership style is defined by the belief that nobody wins when people are too afraid to communicate across disciplines/focuses. Throughout my career—whether settling employment disputes, managing crisis communications, or navigating faculty governance—I have succeeded by being present and transparent. I have spent years building consensus among diverse stakeholders, from corporate boards to competing political parties to faculty committees. I am eager to bring this relational approach to Lafayette, serving not just as a decision-maker for UL-Lafayette but as a visible, accessible partner to the alumni, legislators, and the local community.

Operational Integrity & Positive Public Visibility: In an era where universities fight for attention and enrollment, a president must be the institution's "Chief Storyteller." I have a proven ability to **draw positive PR attention**, having appeared across national media platforms to advocate for educational and workforce initiatives. I offer UL Lafayette a leader who can manage the rigorous details of daily operation and provide visionary strategic leadership while simultaneously elevating the university's brand on the national stage.

I am prepared to lead on day one. My unique combination of technical expertise, legal acumen, and a proven ability to inspire students makes me the ideal candidate to advance the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's mission.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Cortlan J. Wickliff, Ph.D., J.D.
Associate Vice Provost of Academic Affairs & Strategic Initiatives
Rice University

CORTLAN J. WICKLIFF, PH.D., J.D.

Cortlan J. Wickliff, Ph.D., J.D. is a licensed attorney & certified compliance & ethics professional with a Ph.D. in Engineering and extensive experience leading within academic settings. He comprehensively understands a university administrator's role in fostering a welcoming educational environment that promotes excellence, well-being, and belonging. He also has extensive experience fundraising for and developing supplemental programs/training, allowing students to enter and excel in their careers. Dr. Wickliff has 20+ years of experience demonstrating Excellence With Caring by creating impactful outreach programs that promote academic/career success, especially in STEM and Law.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

RICE UNIVERSITY – <u>Associate Vice Provost of Academic Affairs & Strategic Initiatives</u>	07/18 – Present
<u>Principal Designated School Official and Responsible Officer</u>	07/23 – 05/24
<u>Independent Engineering Researcher</u>	01/09 – 05/09
<i>Significant Accomplishments ("Sig. Acc."): Successfully led multi-million-dollar projects; drafted/edited 17%+ of all university policies; led student/staff visa program with 0% non-compliance rate; established inter-institutional contracts for new student programs, research opportunities, and degree programs; negotiated IP agreements; settled employment disputes; & acquired millions in allocations to support expanded parental benefits program.</i>	
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON – <u>Adjunct Professor of Entrepreneurial Law</u>	06/24 – Present
<i>Sig. Acc.: Developed and taught entrepreneurial, business, IP, & employment law curricula.</i>	
INDEPENDENT LEGAL/BUSINESS CONSULTING – <u>Corporate & IP Counsel</u>	11/13 – Present
<i>Sig. Acc.: Grew a client list totaling \$500MM+ capex; successfully negotiated licensing contracts totaling \$50MM+ in revenue; established compliance systems resulting in 0% failure rates on internal & gov't audits; created & led intern program; negotiated settlements saving \$3MM; & headlined speaking tour.</i>	
LORI GRAY AND ASSOCIATES – <u>Corporate Counsel</u>	03/17 – 10/18
<i>Sig. Acc.: Established corporate practice area; grew corporate client list; and managed staff.</i>	
FUJIFILM HOLDINGS AMERICA CORPORATION (Acquired Kalon) – <u>Legal Counsel</u>	01/15 – 09/15
<i>Sig. Acc.: Established a new subsidiary; established a document management system for subsidiaries; managed compliance for numerous subsidiaries nationally; & trained and managed outside counsel.</i>	
KALON BIOTHERAPEUTICS, LLC (Acquired by Fujifilm) – <u>Assistant General Counsel</u>	09/13 – 01/15
<i>Sig. Acc.: Successfully served as a liaison between Kalon and TAMUS, state government, and county judges; facilitated the sale of the company on an \$80MM+ valuation; negotiated millions in public funds to construct a \$40MM facility; & successfully led the legal department.</i>	
TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY – <u>Teaching Assistant / Guest Lecturer</u>	08/13 – 05/16
<i>Sig. Acc.: Fostered relationship between TAMU Engineering and TAMU's NCTM facility staff & more HIE; secured senior design projects & internship opportunities for students; and developed and taught career training modules for engineers preparing to sign initial employment documents.</i>	
HARVARD LAW CLINICS/ VARIOUS LAW FIRMS – <u>Summer Associate / Legal Counsel</u>	05/11 – 08/12
<i>Harvard Law School Clinics, McKool Smith LLP, Pirkey Barber LLP, and Baker Botts LLP</i>	
BOSTON SCIENTIFIC – <u>Summer Engineer</u>	05/09 – 08/10
<i>Sig. Acc.: Prototyped new testing apparatuses for medical device validation; piloted new pacemaker lead configurations for testing arrhythmias; & programmed a file sorting program for digital files.</i>	
UNIV. OF SOUTH FLORIDA – <u>NSF Summer Researcher</u>	05/08 – 08/08
<i>Sig. Acc.: Performed gov't-sponsored oil & gas research & presented research findings.</i>	
HUSTON-TILLOTSON UNIV. – <u>AusPrep Lead Summer Program Assistant</u>	06/06 – 08/07
<i>Sig. Acc.: Led a team of five other program assistants; & developed & taught curriculum</i>	

EDUCATION

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY	Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Engineering Business Certificate
HARVARD LAW SCHOOL	Juris Doctor Licensed Texas Attorney
RICE UNIVERSITY	B.S. in Bioengineering

EXPERIENCE & CORE SKILLS

HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

- Successfully led interdepartmental committees comprised of offices within and outside of Academic Affairs to accomplish organizational missions, including the offices of Acad. Advising, Athletics, Career Services, Compliance, Dean's Offices, Development, Disability Services, EEOC, Faculty Development, Facilities, Faculty Senate, Finance, General Counsel, Government Relations, Graduate & Professional Students, HR, Inclusion, Innovation, International Students and Scholars, Leadership Development, Multicultural Affairs, Operations, President, Provost, Public Affairs, Research, Research Compliance, Residential Colleges, Risk Management, Student Government, Student Success, Tech Transfer, Title IX, and Undergraduate Studies
- Led strategic initiatives from ideation to execution and continually reviewed effectiveness
- Utilized peer reviews and market research to develop long-term strategic plans
- Implemented and monitored KPIs based on the academic OKR program
- Assisted with the development and implementation of the university-wide vision
- Reviewed and approved faculty hiring, reappointment, and promotion
- Advised the Provost, President, CFO, CRO, and other senior administrators on matters related to compliance, law, public relations, government relations, internal governance, and community outreach
- Developed policies & oversaw processes related to interviewing, hiring, reappointments, promotion, and tenure, and directly approved and rejected appointments for non-tenure track faculty members.
- Provost's liaison to D1 Athletic Program & implemented programs that raised athletes' grades & grad. rates
- Drafted mass communications & press releases on behalf of executive leadership (incl. the President, Provost, several VPs, and deans)
- Served on task forces that successfully led response to emergencies, including pandemics & natural disasters
- Established and managed relationships with institutional partners from both the private and public sectors
- Led organization to improve recruitment, retention, commercialization, IP management, and joint programs
- Developed and managed faculty/staff retention programs that decreased employee turnover by up to 40%
- Negotiated and drafted inter-institutional (incl. with hospitals) and corporate contracts that created new student programs, research opportunities, degree programs, and other High-Impact Experiences (HIE) for students.
- Researched, edited, and implemented strategic plans for the university and specific subunits of the university.
- Created & led student training/HIE programs and supported co-curricular education and student-led initiatives.
- Developed and taught curriculum for engineers, business students, law students, and lawyers
- Served as a liaison between Academic Affairs and student organizations.
- Created and led DEI initiatives that increased employee and student satisfaction as measured by climate surveys
- Developed, planned, and implemented programs that achieved organizational missions
- Managed J-1 & F-1 visa programs and led the organization to a 0% non-compliance rating.
- Established, restructured, and updated compliance programs to ensure compliance with relevant agency standards, corporate standards, and federal, state, and local laws/regulations.
- Represented universities/committees to community groups, public action committees, local, state, & federal officials & agencies, including mayor's offices, county judges, county commissioners, the Governor's Office, the Secretary of State, state legislators, state education agencies, tourism/workforce agencies (including TWC), members of Congress, the U.S. State Department, Homeland Security, and OSHA.
- Negotiated, edited, drafted, and implemented SOPs, subcontracts, corporate governance, and policies to comply with changing best practices and federal & state laws (including those associated with FAR provisions, gov't contracts, and grants); this included drafting/editing 17+% of university-wide policies and conducting peer review analysis to establish best practices for individuals, departments, and organizations.
- Worked with development, faculty, students, alumni, and staff to raise funding for student/faculty initiatives.
- Investigated and adjudicated allegations against employees, management, students, faculty, and staff
- Performed compliance assessments to identify shortcomings in policies and systemic non-compliance
- Investigated and assessed issues of non-compliance and developed and implemented corrective action plans
- Served on academic boards, university-wide committees, crisis management teams, and emergency task forces.
- Represented the university and established relationships with community-based job readiness programs.

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- Successfully managed project finances without going over budget, failed audits, or instances of non-compliance
- Planned, managed, executed, and headlined a 25-city, 4-week speaking tour and led a team of 10+ people to meet aggressive deadlines to deliver 50+ presentations and travel over 5,000 miles.
- Worked with faculty and students to conduct research in various fields, including business management, biomedical engineering, chemical engineering, electrical engineering, energy, law, and oil & gas.

ADDITIONAL LEGAL / COMPLIANCE EXPERIENCE

- Served as legal counsel for organizations with a multibillion-dollar aggregate CapEx in a variety of industries, including the agricultural, biologics/pharmaceutical, biotech, construction, education, energy, engineering, entertainment, liquid-natural-gas, medical, manufacturing, professional services, and retail industries
- Assisted small business owners, early-stage companies, and startups with the successful establishment and expansion of their businesses, which included establishing new entities & new divisions of existing entities, drafting corporate governance, drafting entity formation documents, and drafting initial corporate contracts
- Represented and negotiated with investment groups purchasing IP, property, companies, and other assets
- Prepared material and conducted pitches for companies to raise as much as \$30MM in grants, angel investor, and series A and B funding from individuals, government agencies, corporate, and venture capital investors
- Simultaneously managed legal matters & filings for 20+ subsidiaries located in North & South America with no incidences of non-compliance, fines, or failed internal/external audits
- Filed and managed copyrights and trademarks for clients and represented clients to the USPTO and USCO
- Led a team of lawyers (including external counsel), project managers, and administrative staff to negotiate and close several multimillion-dollar contracts successfully and complete projects under budget
- Assumed leadership of a legal dept. & used limited resources to resolve an 8-month backlog, then created & implemented a contract management system that reduced document review times to less than 72 hours
- Negotiated and drafted numerous types of agreements, including community benefits, publishing (including artist publishing), recording, licensing, leasing, supply chain, vendor, real estate public economic incentive / tax-abatement (over \$3MM), IP, purchase, sale, M&A, severance, and employment agreements
- Developed and conducted training, including training related to Title IX, diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI), sexual harassment, cyber security, conflict of commitment/interest, and intellectual property protection
- Represented clients in legal disputes: Negotiated settlement (saved \$2.9MM in damages); represented clients in IP dispute; argued & won summary judgment motions; successfully engaged in alternative dispute resolution; performed legal research; drafted official correspondences, motions, & court documents; drafted legal briefs & memos; and adjudicated & settled sensitive HR matters to prevent litigation

ADDITIONAL MANAGEMENT, PROJECT MANAGEMENT, & COMMUNITY BUILDING EXPERIENCE

- Led research projects & teams to successfully deliver products, publications, reports, and recommendations in the research areas of bioengineering, compliance, law, leadership, medicine, and systems engineering
- Trained and managed multiple direct reports, which included setting career development plans for employees
- Drafted and published textbooks, manuals, other training materials, and publications
- Provided technical expertise in the areas of leadership development, engineering, education/training, design, transactional/corporate law, and governance to entities in the public and private sectors
- Proposed, determined the scope of, initiated, and led special projects to successfully increase organizations' size, profitability, compliance, and efficacy
- Represented organizations in meetings with stakeholders and other organizations, which has included the company's board of directors, the university's board of regents/trustees, elected local, state & federal officials, strategic partners, vendors, customers, sub-contractors, faculty-researchers, employees, and competitors
- Designed, hosted, and implemented STEM, art, academic success, DEI, and outreach programs
- Planned and implemented community-building initiatives & community outreach programs for 20+ years
- Delivered impactful motivational speeches to professional, academic, and lay audiences for 15+ years
- Mentored at-risk & URM youth and young professionals to succeed in top-tier academic & corporate environments
- Developed, planned, and implemented programs that achieved organizational objectives associated with recruitment, retention, DEI, and institutional responsibility in both the public and private sectors
- Represented community-based organizations in discussions/negotiations with public and private stakeholders
- Served on academic and community advisory boards, including the Texas State Science Fair, the Houston Millennial Board, the Independent Police Oversight Board, and multiple conference planning committees

PRESENTATIONS / SPEECHES

Dr. Wickliff has a 15+ year track record of impactful presentations, consulting, educating, and mentorship. He has inspired youth and young professionals across the country to excel academically in some of the most prestigious universities in the world. He has given them the tools to jump-start their careers. Additionally, Dr. Wickliff's business clients consistently see improvements in their efficiency, teamwork, and compliance.

COMMUNITY-BASED EVENTS

Dr. Wickliff has a history of community service and community engagement that dates back more than two decades. As part of his outreach efforts, he regularly engages with and speaks to community/educational organizations to improve the world around him. Some of these presentations have included:

- Presented at numerous universities, including Harvard Law School, Huston-Tillotson University, Lamar University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Prairie View A & M University, Rice University, St. Philip's College, Texas A & M University, Texas Southern University, Thurgood Marshall School of Law, University of Houston, University of Houston Law Center, University of North Texas, University of Texas, and West Texas A & M
 - Presentations included – Commencement Ceremonies, Orientation/First-year-experience, Academic Success, Career planning, Black History, Engineering Forum, Intersection of Law & STEM, Intersection of Law & STEAM, and Ethics (engineering & legal)
- Presented at numerous high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools
- Presented at numerous churches, corporate, and community events
 - Presentations included – Youth Sundays/Saturdays, Laity Sundays, Men & Boys Retreats, Back to School Events, Community Outreach/Fundraiser Events, Voter Awareness Events, Voter Registration Events, Community Health Drives, Pre-College Information Sessions, Academic Success Workshops, Pre-Engineering Conferences, Fashion Shows, Black History Events, and Community Awareness Events.

HEADLINED SPEAKING TOURS

Dr. Wickliff has headlined a statewide academic tour of Texas, where he spoke to youth and young adults about the steps necessary to plan their future and execute their plans. This tour garnered significant media attention and reached tens of thousands of students around the state. The details were as follows:

- Driven To Succeed - Tour of Texas 2019
 - 25+ Cities/Towns in Texas
 - 15+ Independent School Districts (including Austin ISD, Dallas ISD, El Paso ISD, and Houston ISD)
 - 45+ High School, 2 Colleges, & Several Community Events
 - 50+ speeches and 5,000+ miles in 28 days

GOVERNMENT-RELATED KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

Government entities regularly ask Dr. Wickliff to speak at events pertaining to economic development, education, and civic engagement; some of these events include:

- Tackling Crime In The RedZone Initiative Tour (Partnership with Harris County Judges, Retired NFL Players Associations, and Civic Leadership)
- California Black Student Union Summit
- Hurlburt Field United States Air Force Base – Special Operations Wing
- National Convention for the U.S. Census Bureau
- Purvis School Commencement Ceremony – Ministry of Education, Bermuda
- Texas Interns Unite Statewide Conference
- Texas State Science Fair High School Competition (2014 & 2022)
- Texas State Science Fair Junior Competition (2014 & 2022)
- Texas Workforce Commission Annual Event
- Texas Economic Development Corporation Conference
- Texas Investors' Summit
- YTexas Youth Summit

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KEYNOTE EDUCATIONAL AND LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Dr. Wickliff's extensive experience mentoring and educating youth in school and young adults in the early stages of their careers has made him an ideal choice to present at educational and leadership conferences. Some of his prior presentations include:

- 100% College Prep Program
- Association of Independent Schools in New England, Annual Conference
- Austin Pre-Engineering Program
- Boys and Girls Club – College Success Program
- FreshStart Pre-Engineering Conference
- Jack and Jill Civic Engagement Program
- National Society of Black Engineers Leadership Conference
- Phillip Exeter Academy
- San Francisco Steps to College Group
- Southwest Black (College) Student Leadership Conference
- Stanford & Rice University Joint Pre-College Advising Event

PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES KEYNOTE PRESENTATION & PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Because of Dr. Wickliff's interdisciplinary background in law, engineering, compliance, and business, he is regularly asked to present at professional conferences; some of those conferences include:

- The Association for Capital Projects Engineering & Construction Community Regional Conference
- Hype Magazine NBA All-Star Weekend Event
- Innovation in Academia
- Rice University Global Technology Forum
- Rice University Diversity Summit
- National Black Law Student Association Events
- National Society of Black Engineers Events
- NXP Semiconductors' Black Achievement and Leadership Team's Austin, Texas Event
- Texas Association of Black Personnel in Higher Education Annual Conference
- Texas Investor Summit – NASDAQ Fireside Chat

PUBLICATIONS

PRIOR INTERVIEWS

- Featured in numerous publications, including the Boston Globe, Houston Chronicle, Austin American-Statesman, Austin Villager, Rice Thresher, News at Harvard Law, Hype Magazine, & Education Magazine
- Interviewed on numerous television and radio shows, including Fox News, NBC News, ABC News, CW News, ABC Crossroads, Roland Martin Segment, PBS, ESPN Radio Real Deal with Akil, 95.1 with Kelli O'Neil, and Tom Joyner Morning Show
- Interviewed on numerous podcasts.

PRIOR AUTHORED PUBLICATIONS

- Article: The Constitutional Crisis of Government Officials Ignoring Facts in Policy Creation (2019) [Thurgood Marshall Law Review]
- Book: Young And Driven
- Book: Young And Driven: Overdrive
- Book: Young and Driven: Texas Science and Engineering Fair Edition
- Law School Thesis: Unconstitutionally Drafted Cocaine Related Drug Laws: Proving Legal Injustice with Scientific Analysis
- PhD Dissertation: Study of Feedback Communication in a Technical Organizational Compliance System
- Textbook/Workbook: Problem Solving and Applied Industrial Math
- Textbook/Workbook: RedZone Playbook: Success Guide (in Partnership with NFL)