



## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

### **Special Meeting Minutes**

April 28, 2021

#### **Meeting held In-Person and virtually via Zoom**

In accordance with Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker's Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, § 20 dated March 12, 2020.

A live stream of the meeting for public viewing also took place on YouTube.

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**MEMBERS PARTICIPATING IN PERSON:** Chair Kevin Queenin, Vice Chair Edward Sullivan, and Trustees Melissa Alvarado, Paul Boudreau, Robert Magovern, Dr. Robert Martin, Thalita Neves, Ali Salehi, and Dr. Gloria Williams

**MEMBERS EXCUSED:** Secretary Lydia Martinez-Alvarez and Trustee Madeline Landrau

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM by Chair Queenin, and a roll call identified the members participating as listed above. It was announced that the meeting is being livestreamed, and, as a result, will be captured as recorded.

Chair Queenin and Trustee Martin thanked the Presidential Search Committee, members of the University community, and all the people who assisted in getting the process to the point of voting today for the next president of the University. Trustee Martin spoke to what was identified as important when the search was started last year and shared some of the Leadership Profile highlights. The Search Committee met after the candidate interviews and compiled a list of strengths and areas of growth for each candidate, which has been shared with the Board. Trustee Martin ended with a quote from Dr. Tom Gardner, who said, "Let's hope for the best and make the best happen for whomever is chosen."

Chair Queenin opened the meeting for input and dialogue on the two presidential candidates being presented, Darrell P. Kruger, Ph.D. and Linda Thompson, DrPH. The following reflect comments made by Trustees:

- We are looking at making a bold change and a different future, leading through societal changes. Dr. Thompson would bring authentic equity, diversity and inclusion. She has lived these experiences and walked in the shoes of many of the students we are trying to attract. Her skill sets are strong in building trust, relationship building, and external community building. She is a wise leader tapping into the knowledge of those assisting her. She is sophisticated, innovative, and an out-of-the-box thinker relating to enrollment and retention. She already understands Massachusetts politics and has extensive fundraising and community relationship experience. She understands discretionary spending.

- The job of a president is extremely difficult requiring extensive skill sets, which will be discussed today. As student trustee, the primary responsibility is to acknowledge the experience and interactions of the students as they are very in-tune with the University and know what it needs. Dr. Kruger is ready to hit the ground running, but his interaction with students was very structured, creating a little bit of a barrier in getting to know him. Dr. Thompson has less experience administratively, but does have experience with unions, state government, and fundraising. Most notable is that she cares about and invests in people and she would be willing to work with students and advocate for creating a better student experience.
- Both candidates have strong strengths in people skills. Dr. Thompson was very inquisitive in a one-on-one setting and is a powerful, listening and intuitive leader, talking more about people and leadership. Dr. Kruger's conversations were different. He listened intently and took time to get to know each one of us. He took the time to listen and ask questions to see where each person was coming from, which seems like he has high emotional intelligence. Both candidates have strong skill sets and would be very successful, having different approaches of getting there.
- Dr. Kruger has done his homework and is detailed and structured, able to start the job with a breadth of knowledge. He understands the mechanics and data. Dr. Kruger interviewed better, but Dr. Thompson had strengths in funding and enrollment. Dr. Thompson's weaknesses will be covered by support personnel. Dr. Thompson would be better interacting with the next governor based on her past political experience, which is a large part of the president's role besides fundraising.
- Each of the candidates will do very well in the position. The next president faces two critical tasks. The first is to continue the process of bringing the University community together and energizing it around a common vision. Based on feedback and personal impressions, either candidate has the skills and temperament to do that by working with individual constituencies. The second is to be the external facing role of the University and is critical in navigating where we are in this society. The president has to help the University see what challenges exist and how to adapt to those challenges in enrollment, financial operations, and external partnerships. With her experience, Dr. Thompson has the stronger skillset. Her perspective on what lies ahead for higher education and Westfield was the most articulated. She approached scenarios at a strategic level. There were some concerns with her lack of higher level experience in higher education and that she was grounded in health care with her responses to the exclusion of a broader picture. She seems to be able to move beyond that to strategic issues. She has a strong commitment to equity and inclusiveness, which is a big plus for the University. Dr. Kruger has a slightly different skillset, but would also be a very effective president.
- This is a challenging choice with two very different candidates that would both do a great job. Dr. Thompson did her homework and has an impressive resume and background. She has good experience in understanding Massachusetts government. She was narrowly focused on nursing, which has been her entire career, but Westfield has many different programs of education. Dr. Kruger has experience in administration, raising enrollment, and working with students. He would challenge the faculty. Dr. Kruger would be better for many of the programs Westfield has. He mingled with both billionaires and other donors and has experience in fundraising. Dr. Kruger would be the choice because of his broader experience with universities.
- Although the Board is the overseer, ultimately it is the faculty, staff, and students who will work with the president. They are the people who will make or break the president so we need to listen to the campus, their comments, and what they suggest to us. I read the recommendations of every comment that was made. We have two strong candidates with different skillsets and backgrounds. We have a man from

South Africa that has lived with apartheid and felt that pain and will give us a different perspective on justice, equity, and inclusion. Dr. Thompson is an African-American DrPH who can give us a different perspective. Dr. Kruger has had much more experience in running a university and a broader set of skills. Dr. Thompson has been very focused on healthcare and has great experiences in fundraising. The interviews and one-on-one conversations seen with students, janitors and ground crews is very important. Very impressed with Dr. Kruger's attention to detail and the investment he made in reading the UEAAC report. He had all the numbers and facts and was questioning some of the facts. Although he is not familiar with the Massachusetts system, with his vast experience, he will be able to lead us into the next chapter in the history of Westfield State. Dr. Kruger has managed hundreds of faculty members in a much larger organization that has seen ups and downs. Dr. Thompson's familiarity with Massachusetts and the education system here is a great plus, but sometimes you need someone to come from outside the area to give you a different perspective. The recommendation is for Dr. Kruger, but can easily live with Dr. Thompson.

- We have two good and entirely different candidates. Our position as Trustees is different than those providing feedback. Dr. Thompson's strength and career surround her health science background. One of her references stated she will require a strong team around her to be very successful. She is a creative thinker in health science and has the ability to connect with the community and understand issues. She has some working knowledge of the UMass budget, which is a strength, but the comment that she would take an accounting class to get up to speed on the financial part of the budget was bothersome. She never said what she would do as president. Dr. Kruger said he had to make tough decisions as president. He was the only candidate who said that. UEAAC embraced Dr. Kruger in his knowledge and his interest in their recommendations. He had some interesting comments about how to increase enrollment without compromising admission standards by looking beyond the SAT and GPA to someone's background. Dr. Kruger has always wanted to be a president; that was his mission in life. It directed him into areas where he had a good understanding of the entire operations of a university. He volunteered for positions and oversaw departments that allowed him to have a full understanding of what a college president does. His overall experience is as significant as his background. His background of diversity and inclusiveness speaks for itself. The student report stated they couldn't connect with certain candidates, but we cannot focus on one aspect – the president needs to oversee the entire University. Westfield is facing some serious challenges and we need someone who would understand that. Westfield would be a good fit for him. He understood the issues.
- We have two excellent candidates, which is a win for Westfield State. Whichever candidate emerges from this meeting, we need to work together to support them. As I researched and developed pros and cons for both candidates, I am in Dr. Thompson's camp. She has a vision for strategic initiatives, which Westfield State needs. She is strong in foundation development and has excellent outreach opportunities for us. There are significant political implications in this job. She understands her weaknesses and can put the right people around her. She fits the role of president in many ways. She is a listener, understands the campus, and has ability to get it done. Dr. Kruger is also a very excellent candidate and don't mean to minimize his strengths, which have already been articulated.

Chair Queenin suggested a straw vote be taken, but Trustee Sullivan suggested putting a motion on the floor instead.

**MOTION** made by Trustee Martin, seconded by Trustee Sullivan, to recommend the appointment of Linda Thompson, Dr.PH as the 21<sup>st</sup> President of Westfield State University.

The Board shall authorize the Chair of the Board of Trustees to negotiate with Dr.

Thompson the terms of appointment.

Dr. Thompson will be forwarded to Commissioner Carlos Santiago and the Board of Higher Education for final approval.

There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE** taken:

Trustee Alvarado	Yes	Trustee Salehi	No
Trustee Boudreau	No	Trustee Sullivan	Yes
Trustee Magovern	No	Trustee Williams	Yes
Trustee Martin	Yes	Trustee Queenin	Yes
Trustee Neves	Yes		

**Motion passed with an affirmative vote of 6 to 3.**

**MOTION** made by Trustee Queenin, seconded by Trustee Sullivan, to allow the president-elect to have the unanimous support of the Board.

There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE** taken:

Trustee Alvarado	Yes	Trustee Salehi	Yes
Trustee Boudreau	No	Trustee Sullivan	Yes
Trustee Magovern	No	Trustee Williams	Yes
Trustee Martin	Yes	Trustee Queenin	Yes
Trustee Neves	Yes		

**Motion passed with an affirmative vote of 7 to 2.**

The paperwork will be sent to the Commissioner of Higher Education for approval. Contract negotiations and a background check will be performed.

There being no further business, **MOTION** made by Trustee Alvarado, seconded by Trustee Sullivan, to adjourn.

There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE** taken:

Trustee Alvarado	Yes	Trustee Salehi	Yes
Trustee Boudreau	Yes	Trustee Sullivan	Yes
Trustee Magovern	Yes	Trustee Williams	Yes
Trustee Martin	Yes	Trustee Queenin	Yes
Trustee Neves	Yes		

**Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 11:35 AM.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a) Presidential Finalist Documents
- b) Motion – Recommending the Appointment of Westfield State University’s 21<sup>st</sup> President