



Board of Trustees

Executive Committee

Minutes

President's Boardroom, The Horace Mann Center

November 26, 2019

MEMBERS PRESENT: Committee Chair Kevin Queenin, Vice Chair Edward Sullivan, and Trustee James Hagan, past Chair

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Secretary Lydia Martinez-Alvarez

TRUSTEE GUESTS PRESENT: Trustees Melissa Alvarado, Madeline Landrau, Robert Martin and Thalita Neves

The meeting was called to order at 3:01 PM by Chair Queenin, who welcomed the union representatives and visitors to the meeting.

Chair Queenin stated the following:

- A more comprehensive assessment for the presidential evaluation was done this year to align with the Board of Higher Education (BHE) guidelines.
- Trustees Martin and Martinez-Alvarez drafted the evaluation per the Executive Committee's request and Trustee Martin will give an overview of the draft, highlighting the areas in the report, and explain the process taken.
- The committee may suggest any changes and approve a final draft to be presented to the full Board at their next meeting.

MOTION made by Trustee Sullivan, seconded by Trustee Hagan, to approve the minutes of the August 19, 2019 meeting. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Trustee Martin outlined the evaluation process and findings section by section:

- The BHE guidelines specify that every five years, and three years after an initial hire, the Board of Trustees should do a more comprehensive evaluation of their president.
- Being mindful of the difficult spring semester on campus resulting in a vote of no confidence, it seemed propitious to do a fuller evaluation this year.
- Because of concerns involved, it seemed wise to have an independent person solicit feedback from the campus at large.
- The American Association of State Colleges and Universities' (AASCU) Penson Center for Professional Development is an independent affiliated organization consisting largely of former presidents that offer consultation to universities on many issues such as strategic plans and presidential evaluations.

- The Penson Center connected the Board with Dr. John Anderson, former president of Millersville University (PA) and Alfred State College (NY), to be an independent assessor. He would not take on the Board's responsibility for doing the evaluation, but would be the Board's ears in obtaining information from a large selection of the campus.
- Both Dr. Anderson and President Torrecilha disclaimed any professional or personal relationship with each other. President Torrecilha has had no responsibility for the governance of the Penson Center. Commissioner Santiago and the Ethics Commission were consulted about using someone referred by the Penson Center.
- Dr. Anderson followed a protocol standard from the Penson Center in doing his assessment, which describes people to be interviewed either by their position or chosen randomly. Names to be interviewed were chosen per Penson protocol.
- Dr. Anderson was instructed by Trustee Martin to reflect in his report the diversity of opinions given to him.

Next, Trustee Martin summarized the Dr. Anderson report, which will be an appendix to the Board evaluation.

- Dr. Anderson's report was not evaluative, but stated "what he heard." One highlight is that it seems there are at least two audiences at the University (external and internal) expressing opinions about President Torrecilha.
- The external audience made comments such as:
 - Thoughtful in approach, visionary and innovative, willingness to develop partnerships, knows where Higher Ed is going; and
 - Not a warm and fuzzy, not a lot of collaboration. That echoes, but with less intensity, the comments of internal audience members, which are a serious concern.
- The internal audience is decidedly mixed to negative. Stylistic issues reflect the same concerns as external:
 - His way or no way, overly direct, punitive climate, personality variable, messaged rather than genuine, message to change not perceived as genuine. Some stated that the President was trying to change.
- Respondents identified concerns:
 - Issues of style;
 - Whether the President had respect for shared governance; and
 - No explanation of senior administration bonuses, lack of transparency on the budget, and the Westfield Experience.
- Trustee Martin summarized that the President is striving to balance internal and external needs and in large part is doing what a president is expected to do and what we as a Board expect him to do. At the same time, there is a sense that the internal environment is not cohesive, there are forces pulling the institution apart, and that tension needs to get resolved. The conclusion is that the President is being very successful externally, is making changes internally which the Board has supported and continues to support, yet at the same time needs to focus on pulling together the internal institution.

The next part of the evaluation focuses on the President's performance pertaining to goals and objectives. Data is largely based on the President's self-evaluation of goals and objectives as well as data Trustee Martin gathered and verified.

- The Strategic Plan was demonstrably well received by the BHE. The process for creating the Plan was inclusive and transparent and hopefully yields a broad University-wide commitment to pursue the goals and objectives of it. The Strategic Plan identifies action items, metrics, and individuals responsible for achieving those things.

- Demographic challenges with decreased housing, enrollment and retention are being focused on.
- In connection with the equity agenda, the enrollment of Latinx and African American students was viewed. Trend lines are positive, moving in the right direction at the same rate as our sister institutions. Gaps in retention and graduation of Latinx and African American students are still large and need to be focused on.
- The University was successful in getting a \$21 million award from the state for the Parenzo Hall renovation. No other university except the University of Massachusetts received near that amount. The President excelled strategically, politically and communicatively in making the case to representatives in Boston, the BHE and the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) to receive those funds. A case was also made to the partners who signed on to the project with us, so in the Board's judgment the renovation funds are particularly reflective of the President's successes in driving a strategic agenda. The proposal itself was largely administrator-driven. Since the acceptance of the proposal, there has been much input, transparency and involvement on behalf of the broader University as plans for the renovation proceed.
- The college structure came to fruition this last year. The initial process to put the structure in place was initially a very open and inclusive process. An Advisory Committee on Academic Planning (ACAP) delivered a unanimous recommendation to the President for a four- to five-college structure. After open forums, the President ultimately adopted a three-college structure, along with the College of Continuing and Graduate Education. Support for the college structure is not yet where it needs to be. There was an exchange between Trustee Martin and guests about how many colleges were recommended in the ACAP report. Trustee Martin stated that the lack of shared understanding of the ACAP document is demonstrative of the tensions on campus.
- The Westfield State Experience does not have sufficient buy-in for the program to sustain itself. It requires more involvement of faculty and staff.
- The President has done exceedingly well with fiscal and financial stewardship as follows:
 - Working to diversify revenue streams;
 - Success in Institutional Advancement;
 - A change in how the University uses and handles its investments;
 - The initiative to study the organization of the office of grants has not yet been done, but will assist to diversify and improve revenue; and
 - Efforts to share more information about the budgetary process with the University community have increased. That needs to continue, together with more members of the campus in the process.

By many external measures and according to what the Board has expected him to do, the President is doing very well. At the same time, this evaluation recognizes that there are signs of considerable discord on campus. The President has been careful to follow shared governance process specified in collective bargaining agreements, but more consideration needs to be given to how support can be built for different initiatives.

The last section of the evaluation focuses on the BHE Equity Agenda of accessibility, student completion and fiscal stewardship. Relative to our sister institutions and national peer group, the University does very well. Still, we need to keep working on these areas.

- Relative to fiscal stewardship, the BHE had some data on their Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS) on fiscal stewardship, showing how many instructional dollars each university commits relative to institutional support dollars. For the last reporting year of 2017, Westfield State contributed \$6.22 of instructional and student support for every dollar of institutional support. No other state university is close to that figure. The average is \$4.30 among Massachusetts state universities. The level of our student indebtedness is among the lowest in state universities.

- In the US News & World Report rankings, Westfield State University was 86th among regional universities in the north, a positive change of 30 places in the University's ranking. These rankings are based on many different data points.

Chair Queenin asked if there were any questions. There being none, he stated there would be a vote to approve the evaluation and then it would be brought to the full board at the December meeting and then forwarded to Commissioner Santiago at the Department of Higher Ed. Chair Queenin continued that during the comprehensive review, the Board tried to be sensitive to all constituents on campus. The Board is working with the President and cabinet and all are listening to campus concerns.

MOTION made by Trustee Queenin, seconded by Trustee Sullivan, to approve the presidential evaluation for the 2018-2019 academic year as presented to the Executive Committee on the above date and the submission of said evaluation to the Commissioner of the Department of Higher Education.

Discussion: Trustee Sullivan stated this was a tremendous job. He questioned the statement on page 6 regarding the college structure that the University has grown in faculty and students. Trustee Martin clarified that in the last couple of years, the numbers have gone down, but five-to-ten years ago it was much larger. The high point was three-to-four years ago. The classes now graduating are large, but the classes coming in are much smaller.

It was requested by a faculty guest in attendance that Trustee Martin check the ACAP report on the college structure and suggested that it be noted that not all members of the campus are willing to meet with the President. Trustee Martin stated he understood and would take that into consideration.

Motion passed to approve the evaluation as amended and with those two points taken.

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

Meeting adjourned at 3:56 PM.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a. Draft Minutes of August 19, 2019 meeting
- b. 2018-2019 Self-Evaluation of President Ramon S. Torrecilha, Ph.D.
- c. Report of John M. Anderson, Ph.D., October 2019
- d. Distributed at meeting: Draft Presidential Evaluation for 2018-2019 Academic Year
- e. Motion to Approve and Submit Presidential Evaluation for 2018-2019 Academic Year