



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Presidential Search Committee

August 27, 2020
Minutes

Meeting held 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.

PARTICIPATING REMOTELY: Dr. Robert Martin, Chair, Melissa Alvarado, Vice Chair, Dr. Claudia Ciano-Boyce, Junior Delgado, George Flevotomos (entered the meeting at 3:29 PM), Dr. Brian Jennings, Ron'na J'Q Lytle, Lydia Martinez-Alvarez, Dr. Juline Mills, Thalita Neves, Ali Salehi, Thomas Simard, Stephen Taksar, Dr. Gloria Williams, Dr. Jalisa Williams.

Also participating remotely from the presidential search firm WittKieffer were Lucy Leske, senior partner, Robert Luke, consultant, and Christine Pendleton, senior associate.

The meeting was called to order at 3:01 PM by Trustee Robert Martin, chair of the committee, who stated that the most important task for trustees is to select a new president but that a successful search will represent the whole Westfield State community. Each member of the committee introduced themselves, giving their affiliation with Westfield State, the group they represent, and why they wanted to be on the search committee.

Committee Chair Martin brought forward the Charge to the committee, highlighting the following:

- The success of the search will be judged by the caliber of the person selected and the extent the University community is involved in and owns the process. The Charge mentions community in four different places. The committee is a representation of that community and has a responsibility to engage them.
- Relationships of leaders to constituents has historically been difficult. Conflict can be overcome by having groups come together to work on this search.
- Common goals and understanding are needed in the committee, but each member's thoughts and opinions are valued and should be shared.
- A leadership profile will be constructed with the qualities and qualifications identified by the community. The profile shall also be transparent about the challenges the University has faced but also positively represent and sell the institution, identifying what can make this presidency a rewarding position to have.
- When creating the profile, remember that the Higher Ed landscape will look different in the next five years, given the demographic, financial, and technological pressures being faced.

Mr. Flevotomos entered the meeting at 3:29 PM

The Code of Ethics for the committee was shared and the confidentiality of the preliminary candidates and committee members' remarks was stressed. The final candidates that come to campus for interviews will be public. The committee will give detailed statements of strengths and weaknesses of the final candidates to the Board of Trustees.

Ms. Leske reminded the committee that Trustee Martin will be the communicator about the search and that all conversations about the search, process, and any questions belong in the committee domain and that all written communication is public.

The responsibilities of WittKieffer were shared:

- Have an aggressive national and international search, providing an outstanding pool of candidates.
- Follow a process that all committee members believe in and ensure the community knows the process.
- Provide all tools invented this year during COVID-19 to use technology to make a great experience for the candidates.
- Help grow and position the institution to where Higher Ed will be in five years, providing candidates who have strength, integrity, and qualities and character adaptability as needed.
- The timeline and process were reviewed.
- The MSCA representatives stated concerns about the shortness of the timeline, wondering how success can be measured until it is known how the past presidencies failed. Their fear is that it will be repeated. An assessment of the institution's current status, both fiscally and structurally, has been initiated and will continue through the academic year. That assessment will be valuable to the search committee to stabilize and move the institution forward. A leader is needed with the skillset to manage an institution in crisis. Since we have that now, perhaps the best thing is to extend the time the interim president is with us to stabilize the institution and then hand a stable University to a new president.
- Dr. Mills, the chair of the University Efficiency Analysis Advisory Committee (UEAAC), shared that their assessment is planned to be finished by December 15. It will include:
 - Identifying strategies for reducing the current deficit;
 - Recognizing efficiencies across the institution with possible reorganization;
 - Discovering ways to grow enrollment; and
 - Looking at academic affairs and the core to formulate a basis of being financially viable while improving student qualities.

It was added that it is an aggressive schedule but needs to tie in to the annual budgeting process.

- Ms. Leske acknowledged the valid concern about the speed and sequencing of the search process, noting that many other colleges and universities are facing the same issues and presidential searches this year. It is a daunting process to choose new leadership while in a situation with so many novel problems going on, but Dr. Saigo will get Westfield State a long way between now and July. The Board has charged this committee to find a president. Model a different type of behavior to catalyst better ways to work together, letting the next president join this work in progress. We are not in a position to pause the search or ask Dr. Saigo to stay.
- Both community outreach and work with the Board of Trustee members on the committee will help recognize the differences in how past presidents were viewed. The processes of starting to look for a new president and assessing the challenges the University faces can be concurrent through dialogue this year.
- The community and committee can recommend and give feedback but the Board of Trustees has the final responsibility to hire, evaluate and fire the president. The committee needs to understand and agree that this is the process and know that they are not the final decision makers.
- The constituent input during the listening sessions and survey will inform the leadership profile and advertisement, including what the community wants the new president to accomplish and the qualifications and experiences that person should have.

- WittKieffer’s strength is their referencing process, asking probing questions about the candidate, how frequently they consult others, how they act on it, and how it is communicated back out.
- Work/Zone is a secure website where application materials will be uploaded for committee review.

Dr. Jalisa Williams trained the committee on Affirmative Action, bias, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Guidelines for the Search and Appointment of a President, the Open Meeting Law, and Public Records Law.

- It is important for search committee members to protect the integrity of the search process. This committee is a special committee to the Board of Trustees and part of that public body. Executive sessions will be used in the discussion, screening and interviewing initial applicants and those discussions, actions, and minutes are not public and should not be discussed outside the committee meeting. A vote on a slate of finalists should not be disclosed until it has become public.
- The committee will not be ranking candidates. Strengths and weaknesses of finalists will officially be reported by the committee, but there is a difference between public information and a finalist’s personnel file (all references are not a matter of public record). The committee needs to be very careful on those issues.
- It was suggested to have a documented search process based on the BHE Guidelines.
- The Affirmative Action Officer will work with WittKieffer to ensure diversity statistical information on applicants being reviewed.
- Under Public Records Law, every record received by a public employee is discoverable, with the exception of the materials discussed in executive session, because of the privacy exemption.

The committee was asked what the ideal profile of the next president would include and what the president should address and achieve once they join the campus community. Responses included:

- True partner/ambassador for all constituencies on campus, building community with honest communication. Be present and seen by everyone and respect all governance.
- Someone who has experience with public institutions because of the differences with state funding.
- Private institution experience comes with a different lens of doing things, often more quickly. A combination of both public and private experience may be very helpful. The individual and their openness to learn and be successful in the system may be more beneficial than experience.
- Candidates that are tied to the northeast or region who have stability and a vested interest in this place.
- A collaborator to heal wounds and be the face of the University in fundraising.
- A history of increasing financial stability and retention of students. Outreach beyond Westfield, building relationships with businesses and communities as well as faculty and students. Define “people of color.” Strength of character, trustworthy.
- Someone who can pivot between a strong and humble leader and wants to understand Westfield State and work here.
- Someone who works against and doesn’t foster polarization.
- The ability to collaborate and enable people to share a vision and work collectively toward it. Understanding and respecting the culture they are entering without being completely beholden to it. Using data to understand the environment both outside and inside the institution to engage with others.
- Authentic adaptive leadership with formal authority but not reliance on it to exercise that leadership.
- Seasoned experienced motivator, willing to learn about all aspects of the institution. What is our validation process of their knowledge to help the institution grow? Do they have actual knowledge on presidential leadership? We are entering a critical next phase. How do we get back to happy?
- The survey will be online and announced to the campus community. The committee should encourage all colleagues to participate in the survey and listening sessions. Any edits to the survey should be sent to WittKieffer within one week. The final version will be shared with committee before being released.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:13 PM.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a. Search Committee Charge
- b. Search Committee Code of Ethics
- c. WittKieffer Team Profile
- d. WittKieffer Contact Information
- e. Survey – Draft
- f. Timeline – Draft
- g. BHE Guidelines
- h. Open Meeting Law Guide
- i. Public Records Law Guide
- j. Index of Documents to List on Website