

February 1, 2021

Dr. Robert A. Martin
Chair, Presidential Search Committee
Westfield State University
577 Western Avenue
Westfield, MA 01086

Dear Dr. Martin:

It is my honor to submit materials for consideration for the President of Westfield State University. Westfield State is seeking an inspiring, collaborative, and innovative leader to build upon its successes and leverage its strengths to facilitate a shared vision for the future. My skills, experiences, and values are closely aligned with Westfield State's vision for its next President.

I would bring to this role decades of experience spanning several sectors of higher education, including a public comprehensive university very similar to Westfield State, a high research university, a multi-campus institution, two community colleges, institutions with diverse student populations, and urban, suburban, small town, and rural campuses.

I am drawn to the compelling legacy of Westfield State. I was a first-generation college student, the youngest of six children in a family that values education. My mother held a high school diploma and my father earned his GED after returning from Korea, serving in the Army. The mission of providing educational opportunities to all students, regardless of gender, race, or economic status speaks directly to my journey as a student and as a higher education administrator. Westfield State is an institution of opportunity, a mission about which I am passionate and have had the privilege of serving institutions with that same calling.

Westfield State's next President will be faced with the challenge of providing leadership while steering out of the pandemic and engaging faculty, staff, and students to strategically chart their collective future. The next President will be charged with "engaging and energizing the community around shared vision, goals, and identity," as outlined in the Leadership Profile. As Executive Vice President at Hawkeye Community College, I lead the college's COVID-19 response and serve as a member of the core strategic plan leadership team, balancing strategic vision with planning through crisis. We have been intentional in the convergence of these two processes, identifying opportunities for the college, our students, and the greater community.

At Bloomsburg University, where I served as Vice President for Student Affairs, the vice presidents' role was to oversee the plan, *Impact 2015*, assess progress, and create the extension of the strategic plan, *Impact 2017*. We revised the plan in light of our new context, including factors related to our comprehensive campaign, regional accreditation, and enrollment management, maintaining the integrity of the original plan and creating momentum to move the revised plan to completion.

I provided leadership to create Student Affairs' first strategic plan using an inclusive, division-wide process where we listened and asked questions through multiple discussions and meetings. The result was a strategic plan that nested within the plan of the university, and served to modernize functions, facilities, and programs, create a sense of energy and pride, and overall enhance the student experience. I believe our success was due to the collective ownership of our shared vision.

“Achieving financial and enrollment sustainability,” is another opportunity for Westfield State’s next President, as outlined in the Leadership Profile. At Bloomsburg I partnered with the Provost to create the university’s first Division of Strategic Enrollment Management, an advancement necessary for the university’s long-term success, particularly the interrelatedness between enrollment and revenue. Among our successes are enrolling the largest class of first-time full-time freshmen in institutional history, improving transfer recruitment and enrollment, creating relevant articulation agreements with community colleges, launching off-site programs, redesigning our early start program for economically disadvantaged students, and leveraging Athletics as an enrollment initiative. Notably, Bloomsburg increased the first to second year retention rate for the first time in several years and continued an emphasis on student success. I also served on the institutional leadership team that transformed the honors program to an honors college.

Additionally, I was part of the institutional leadership during a branding campaign at Bloomsburg. Its enrollment strength was due to a solid reputation but it needed a more comprehensive branding effort to be competitive for the future as an institution of choice. While promoting activities, professional involvement, best practices, and services enhance an institution’s reputation, sometimes a more direct branding effort is required, particularly as it relates to enrollment goals. I believe this experience directly relates to Westfield State’s expectation for the President to lead efforts to raise the “visibility of the institution,” as mentioned in the Leadership Profile.

At Hawkeye this summer, fall enrollment was lagging severely behind the previous year - more than 20%. Proudly, we turned this trajectory around. To address our enrollment challenge, I created and provide leadership for our Enrollment Management Team, a multi-disciplinary group that continues to meet weekly that strategizes and implements improvements and initiatives for our enrollment. Notable efforts included integrating various marketing strategies, yield enhancement initiatives, as well as outreach to targeted populations.

Some of my enrollment experience includes opportunities to work on workforce development initiatives. For example, when I served at Lorain County Community College as Director of Enrollment Services, I provided leadership as part of a team that opened outreach centers throughout the service district, largely aimed at increasing access for working adults. We analyzed our curriculum to assure relevant offerings and redesigned the calendar to create options in addition to the traditional semester.

During that time, we also saw the closing of some large manufacturing facilities. We deployed teams to work with businesses to provide direct assistance to displaced workers. At Lorain, I was also responsible for articulation and transfer. One major enrollment initiative was our University Partnership program, where regional universities offered bachelor’s and master’s degrees on Lorain’s campus and through remote means. I successfully managed our articulation agreements and the creation of several others. I provided leadership for advising and transfer initiatives. I assisted our college president in drafting statewide transfer policy, as he was co-chair of the state Articulation and Transfer Council.

Westfield State’s next President is also expected to have an “understanding of financial concepts, financial planning, and the economic model of colleges and universities,” as stated in the Leadership Profile. At Bloomsburg, I was responsible for an enterprise of more than \$82 million, inclusive of operations, personnel, and reserves. Under my leadership, I continued strong financial management, engaging our team for calculated strategic expenditures. As a sound fiscal manager, I understand the larger institutional, regional, and state context, yet also understand when expenditures may be a strategic investment in the institution’s future. Prior to beginning the

construction on Bloomsburg's newest residence hall, we weighed the project as privatized or institutional, impact to the cost to students, cost of education, institutional debt load, bond considerations, and other factors, and balanced those with student needs, institutional needs, and the strategic investment revitalized student housing means in the future of the university, particularly student demand and enrollment planning. I have also had experience in looking strategically and understanding the larger institutional budget picture, and making changes in order for the institution to be in a better position.

Throughout my career, I've engaged in efforts to help expand funding sources through fundraising, including serving on the institutional leadership team during Bloomsburg University's largest comprehensive campaign, *It's Personal*. The campaign exceeded its \$50 million goal, raising more than \$62 million. It was rewarding to serve on the institutional leadership team while helping develop and align strategy and the engagement of alumni and other donors to provide support for the university. I understand what is needed for the chief fundraiser of the institution and I have been deliberately involved in several aspects, such as strategy development, crafting the case, identifying and cultivating donors, meeting with donors, soliciting gifts, and stewardship. My involvement with development has prepared me for the President's role leading fundraising efforts, and to "advance, and participate materially in all efforts to raise awareness and build substantial philanthropic support," as outlined in the Leadership Profile.

Among our proudest accomplishments during the campaign were for our Athletics program. We named three facilities, provided improvements to two facilities, and added significantly to scholarships for men's and women's sports. Since the campaign, we've received two subsequent gifts in which I was involved, including a \$500,000 multimedia scoreboard and a \$10 million donation to name the athletics complex. These gifts will benefit Athletics long term.

The opportunity to "further diversity, equity, and inclusion broadly across the community," is also outlined in the Leadership Profile. At Hawkeye, I serve as the team leader for the following strategic plan priority: "Hawkeye Community College is committed to creating a culture where everyone is respected, appreciated, and valued." One of the initiatives stemming from that is a Strategic Plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, with some groundwork was completed this summer. Seeing the national and local context regarding racial injustice, I provided leadership for the college to release statements re-affirming values as appropriate. I also created and chaired the Inclusion and Civility Task Force. We created an educational program, reviewed policies related to inclusion and campus protest, and created a set of longer-term institutional recommendations, including a bias response team, a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan, and an Inclusion Center, all in progress.

Because of our work, the college is in a better position. One of the most important contributions has been starting to create a culture where staff and faculty can discuss issues related to race and inclusion, and dissolving siloes, creating teams of colleagues to address emerging issues. For example, this fall, there was a Black Lives Matter march on campus. Due to our preparation, we reached out to the organizers to work collaboratively. The college president and other campus leaders participated in the event, creating a meaningful and symbolic moment for the greater community. We are also in a better position to address concerns, having already gathered resources and discussed strategies.

At Bloomsburg, I provided leadership to create the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. The Multicultural Center was already well established on campus, but our efforts for LGBTQA, women, military affiliated, and international students were neither robust nor well defined. I provided leadership to create the Center, allowing us to enhance these functions and it resulted in increased

learning opportunities and support for our campus community. The Center supported student government's creation of an event designed to break down barriers and eliminate stereotypes between students of color and town residents. Collaborations were fostered between students and the social equity organizations in the community and high school.

Relationship building, external advocacy, and partnering with the community are expectations of the new President at Westfield State. While at Iowa State University as Dean of Students, I served on two Commissions for the City Council for Ames, Iowa. The first was the Student Affairs Commission. The second was the newly created Police Community Relations Advisory Committee, created to address concerns related to rapidly increasing diversity in Ames, particularly the relationship between new residents of color and established white residents.

At Bloomsburg, I was a liaison to our community and served on the Community Advisory Board of our local hospital, engaging in partnerships of mutual interest. Elected officials had a presence on our campus and some even volunteered to help students move in each fall. As part of a leadership experience, I met with some of our Congressmen and their staffs in Washington, D.C., with me sharing information about Title IX and those offices later offering assistance during a weather emergency.

One example of a meaningful community partnership was between the university, town of Bloomsburg, and student government association. Students sought to improve safety along a road that many students cross regularly. As a result of the concern, a safety project was envisioned as part of the Campus Master Planning process. The new intersection, pedestrian bridge, and campus gateway were all completed. The new gateway created a much more defined main entrance to campus, with signage, parking, and proximity to a new building housing admissions. This innovative project created solutions and advancements for multiple institutional priorities. This partnership also helped facilitate a stronger relationship with the town of Bloomsburg as well as engaged other regional and state entities. A particular point of pride with this project was the advantages for enrollment services. I provided leadership for several assessment projects for admissions, including "secret shopper" studies and administering the Admitted Student Questionnaire. Wayfinding for prospective students and their families was one of the concerns that this project alleviates.

Another important link with the external community was through the Center for Leadership and Engagement. The Center was integral in Bloomsburg earning the distinction for Carnegie Community Engagement. We created the Center with the motto "To Lead is to Serve," and the curriculum is based on the social justice model, helping students understand that leadership is linked with their role in their communities and their responsibilities as citizens. Service learning and community service are integral to the Center's programming and leadership certification program. Thousands of students participated in programs, earned leadership certifications, and committed hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours in the community. In spring 2015, we celebrated the inaugural award of the alumni honor entitled, *Legacy of Leadership* and awarded the first scholarship under the Center. The scholarship was made possible by completing an endowment fund named for a deceased Vice President for Student Affairs. It was rewarding to work with the family to assure that their scholarship met their vision.

Having served in university systems, I have a first-hand understanding of the benefits a system provides. I served as a key participant in initiatives at the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). I served on two task forces for PASSHE to revise policies; one regarding program review (academic and non-academic) and another regarding student health centers and

student wellness. In both instances, it was important for me to not only advocate for the needs of my own institution, but the others in PASSHE to help create policies that effectively represent us all.

Like institutions under the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, PASSHE institutions are highly unionized. PASSHE Labor Relations, asked me to co-chair a Committee reviewing Duties and Hours of Work of Athletic Directors. I provided leadership with faculty and managers from throughout PASSHE to create recommendations for the entire State System. I also served as the management representative on the negotiation team for the coaches' collective bargaining agreement.

I was asked to serve as PASSHE's designee on the Advisory Committee for the Joint State Government Commission for Student Suicide in Higher Education. The completed report included policy recommendations for all of colleges and universities in Pennsylvania. The report led to the creation of Act 110 of 2018, Suicide Prevention in Institutions of Higher Education.

I have also engaged with Trustees throughout my career. At Hawkeye and Bloomsburg, I am involved with the institution's trustees. At Bloomsburg, I also was responsible for leading two committees of the Trustees – Student Affairs and Athletics. Beyond simply seeking approval for fees and major projects, I actively engaged the Trustees in strategic partnership.

The first opportunity outlined in the Leadership Profile for Westfield State's next President is to build trust, model "collaboration, transparency, stakeholder engagement, and shared governance in decision making." The examples throughout my materials demonstrate my commitment to accessibility and partnership throughout the institution. In addition to those, I have provided leadership for initiatives with faculty, helping demonstrate my commitment to student-centered academic excellence, high impact learning experiences, and faculty scholarship and professional development. At Bloomsburg, I was a proponent of expanding the undergraduate research program to provide opportunities for applied learning and lead to stronger student success outcomes. I have supported faculty research, most notably in areas of student wellness and mental health, and through supporting student athlete participation in the Institute for Concussion Research and Services. I have provided leadership for a successful interdisciplinary grant team and supported other faculty grants. I have supported travel and conference presentations. I worked with the honors program director in determining a new program format and the director stated that they were adopting the curriculum map that we developed in Student Affairs. I provided leadership for a new position to complement faculty directors of learning communities to provide consistency to these experiences university-wide. At Lorain County Community College, I served on accreditation committees, academic program review committees as well as promotion and tenure board. I believe that these efforts facilitate university-wide synergy for student learning and exemplifies how curriculum transcends into the entire university.

This perspective was reflected in Bloomsburg's Self-Study for the Middle States regional accreditation process. Our theme was *Student Success*, and understanding that student success is a university-wide priority, our Self-Study team was representative of the whole university, aligning with our vision. I served on the leadership team along with the Provost. The Steering Committee and each of the Working Groups for our Standards for Accreditation were co-chaired by both Academic and Student Affairs as we demonstrated in our Middle States Self-Study the university-wide synergy of our efforts. We received accolades from our site visit team for assessment efforts in Student Affairs. The result of the process was a successful reaffirmation of accreditation, without recommendations or monitoring, the first in two decades.

Another initiative that demonstrates this university-wide synergy is Co-curricular Learning Experiences. Bloomsburg's core curriculum allows for Co-curricular Learning Experiences that apply to a student's graduation requirements. These experiences have learning outcomes and must be approved through the same mechanism as traditional classes through the faculty curriculum committee for General Education, then the faculty Curriculum Committee.

During the 2017 – 2018 academic year, we more than doubled the number of Co-Curricular Learning Experiences available, expanding transcribed experiential learning opportunities for students. These experiences allow students to meet their graduation requirements while tailoring their educational experiences to their career and personal interests without adding to the cost of education. In just a few years, hundreds of students have enrolled in Co-Curricular Learning Experiences. Our progress is the result of innovative, visionary, and collaborative leadership.

In addition to partnership, I have also helped provide leadership to Academic Affairs. At Hawkeye, the Provost left for another position and the President decided to leave it unfilled and immediately begin the search. I worked with the President to provide leadership in the absence of a Provost. I worked with the deans and faculty leadership to create and implement our path forward through the pandemic, including issues related to clinical sites and our partnerships with business and industry. We also revised the college's Pass/Not Pass policy, policy on Incompletes, initial placement requirements, and helped facilitate a temporary attendance policy. Like every accomplishment throughout my career, these were made possible through an inclusive, team approach. This was affirmed through a compliment I received last spring. The president of the faculty union wrote in an email to the college president the following: "(Dione) has added a lot of value through her competence. I see people are encouraged by her - to be better and do better, and think outside the norms. Their trust in her was easily earned, and very warranted."

Serving as Executive Vice President has been an honor for me. It has allowed me an opportunity to have a role in the leadership and direction of the institution, more than what I experienced as a Vice President. I believe that this experience has contributed further to my preparation for serving as President of Westfield State University.

It would be an honor for me to champion Westfield State as its next President. Westfield State is mission-driven, intentional about serving all students, contributing to their success and preparing them for meaningful lives after graduation. I would bring my experience and values with me in service to Westfield State.

With this letter, please find my resume for additional experiences and accomplishments. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide further information or respond to any questions. I can be reached at [REDACTED]. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Dione D. Somerville, Ed.D.