



BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Presidential Search Committee

January 29, 2021
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.

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING REMOTELY: Dr. Robert Martin, Chair, Melissa Alvarado, Vice Chair, Dr. Claudia Ciano-Boyce, Junior Delgado, George Flevotomos, 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, and 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.

Trustee Robert Martin, chair of the committee, called the meeting to order at 2:31 PM and announced all committee members participating remotely as listed above. It was announced the meeting was being live streamed. An overview of the meeting agenda was shared.

MOTION made by Ali Salehi, seconded by Thalita Neves, to approve the minutes of the December 2, 2020 Presidential Search Committee meeting.

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

Melissa Alvarado	Yes	Lydia Martinez-Alvarez	Yes
Dr. Claudia Ciano-Boyce	Yes	Dr. Juline Mills	Yes
Junior Delgado	Yes	Thalita Neves	Yes
George Flevotomos	Yes	Ali Salehi	Yes
Dr. Brian Jennings	Abstain	Thomas Simard	Yes
Ron'na J'Q Lytle	Yes	Stephen Taksar	Yes
Dr. Robert Martin	Not Voting	Dr. Gloria Williams	Yes

Motion passed with one abstention.

Update on Recruitment. WittKieffer has actively been recruiting and advertising throughout December and January. To date, there have been 31 applications, 52 expressions of interest, 67 nominations, and 133 declines, and they have received more positive than negative feedback. The candidates have a clear sense of what Westfield State is. WittKieffer has been fielding questions about news that candidates have read in the press as well as how the campus is dealing with budget issues and the pandemic. Individuals in leadership at other Massachusetts public universities and colleges have been saying very positive things about Westfield State. Four of the nominees listed above are also included in the application number. Some of the applicants disclose their

demography and some are known to WittKieffer. Others are not known. Of the 83 candidates who are interested or have applied, one-fourth are non-majority. At least four women and eight diverse candidates have applied. Of the 31 applications, there are sitting presidents, CEO or executive leadership backgrounds. A very healthy representation is in the pool being targeted, and it looks very promising. WittKieffer received 60 to 100 applications in the last few searches they conducted. Applications will continue to be submitted until the date materials will start being reviewed. For those expressing interest but choosing not to apply, most reasons are the compensation range, timing, and not wanting to relocate in the pandemic.

Voting Process. The initial stage of screening will identify the candidates for semifinal interviews. Consensus and informal straw polling will identify 10-12 candidates. When a vote is taken, there must be a three-fourths affirmative vote of those committee members voting. It needs to be decided whether the committee will vote for individuals or an entire slate. WittKieffer recommended the process of them sending the committee an informal poll the day before the meeting to discuss candidates. Each committee member would then list the initials of eight people in the pool that they wanted to discuss. The data would be collated to show which candidates there is most interest in discussing. After discussion of all candidates that committee members have an interest in, a vote will be taken to identify those candidates the committee wants to interview. To avoid having individual committee members vote for individual candidates early in the process it was recommended that the entire committee vote with a three-fourths majority to interview a slate of candidates. If those candidates do not produce finalists, return to executive session to approve another slate to interview. There was a comment that some committee members may want to talk about all candidates and learn about each one during the meetings. WittKieffer responded that discussion will take place about every candidate that the committee wishes to discuss, even if only one member requests it.

There was a question on the security of the information. WittKieffer responded that confidentiality is sustained within the process of their secure website and procedures and with the candidates with their expectations. This committee will also be trusted to maintain confidentiality. Trustee Martin stated that he had spoken with counsel at the Department of Higher Education (DHE) to understand what the constraints were in operating the search committee. Executive sessions can be used through most of the screening process because the privacy of the candidates prevail until identifying candidates to come to campus. At that point, if they want to stay in the search, their names will become public. WittKieffer added that some candidates are sitting presidents and not willing to participate in a public process. A committee member added that discussions of semifinalists needed to be in executive sessions due to possible ramifications in the candidate's career. The members of this search committee were informed from day one about the need for the utmost confidentiality between each other and outside these meetings.

Under the Board of Higher Education (BHE) Guidelines, WittKieffer will place candidate names in a "does not meet minimum requirements" folder or a "meets minimum requirements" folder for committee review.

It was requested to review the process for determining semifinalists again. WittKieffer outlined a suggested process based upon their experience:

- The committee will receive an email in a few days with instructions to access the materials.
- To prepare for the meeting on February 24, review as many candidates as possible in order to fill out the informal poll the day before the meeting indicating which candidates you would like to discuss at the meeting.
- It is not limiting discussion, but a way to focus and organize it by starting with those candidates that are most wanted to talk about. The committee drives the conversation of candidate review, using two days for these discussions, voting on the second day for a slate of candidates to interview.

Discussion of this process followed, with some comments as follows.

- Some committee members are used to reviewing all candidates collated on a spreadsheet, allowing them to see everyone else's recommendations, which may change views.
- The committee chair said there is a commitment to discuss any candidate in whom a committee member has an interest, even if only one member is interested. An efficient, productive discussion is desired. There will be some subset of applications that will become quickly apparent there is no interest, which can still be discussed. His preference would be for the system the committee decides.
- Other members suggested that discussion should be held on all candidates, not just those that are wished to be discussed, which will help with transparency and lines up with the operation and culture of the institution. WittKieffer asked if this meant everybody on the committee would make a ranking of every applicant.
- The recommended process does not feel as comfortable. The committee is a cohesive group with similar values. In a time when we are trying to gain healing, discussing each candidate seems more transparent.
- With 80 candidates, we can agree there will be some with no discussion needed, even with a group of 20 diverse mindsets. Would defer to WittKieffer's expertise.
- WittKieffer shared that there are two days scheduled and the process could be that the committee review all applicants the first day and then dive deeper the second day.
- A faculty member stated that would represent the faculty union best as they do not want to rush through the process.
- An alternative is doing the ranking and view the highest ranked on the first day and spend the second day on the lower ranked individuals.
- WittKieffer stated that the candidates to spend the most time on is not the C or A groups, but the middle group. There will be a small number of candidates a majority of the committee will agree to spend little time on, which will narrow the pool.
- The pool of candidates that do not meet minimum requirements will not have to be considered. All candidates presented will be viable candidates who have applied and meet minimum requirements. All applications will be available to the committee, but sorted into does/does not meet minimum requirements.
- The committee chair stated that several committee members prefer, and he believes the other committee members would agree, to discuss each candidate in the meetings, so he suggested not doing the informal poll ahead of time. The exact order of discussion will be discussed with WittKieffer and revisited in public session before going into executive session. After discussion of all candidates over the next two meetings, the committee can then vote (3/4 vote) on the slate of 8-10 candidates to be interviewed. The committee expressed consensus with this approach.

Trustee Martin clarified the role of the Commissioner of Higher Education and the role of the campus Board of Trustees at this stage in the process. BHE Guidelines allow for each of those entities to play a role. The Commissioner has the right to review the pool of potential candidates, and to request that the committee add candidates to increase diversity. The Board of Trustees is afforded the same opportunity to review the adequacy of the pool. Neither of these entities can remove a proposed candidate. The purpose of this review is to ensure a representative group of candidates.

Diversity Discussion and Bias Mitigation. Dr. Jalisa Williams discussed biases to be aware of when interviewing candidates and how to recognize and reduce bias in the hiring process. In dialogue with candidates, engage with them about their ability to perform the duties as described. WittKieffer will be sharing demographic data on the candidates with Human Resources.

Interpretation of Rubric Criteria. The rubric was constructed from the Presidential Profile and is a tool designed to be helpful as candidate review takes place. There was discussion on whether the rubric, or any created notes, need to be saved and turned in to the University. Dr. Jalisa Williams stated that any documents created or printed by committee members need to be turned in at the end of the search.

Next Steps. In order to make sure there was additional time for the next stage in the process, the timeline has been revised to set aside two dates for the committee to discuss candidates. In order to have every committee member participate, we are trying to accommodate everyone's schedules.

Community Information Session. The information session will be scheduled in the next few weeks. Committee members are needed to assist in presenting the topics at the session. It was noted that in scheduling the session, be sure to give plenty of notice to the campus. Trustee Martin will draft a letter to the community with the assistance of Dr. Jennings.

Dr. Juline Mills left the meeting at 4:11 p.m. and Mr. Ali Salehi left the meeting at 4:12 p.m.

There being no further business, **MOTION** made by Dr. Gloria Williams, seconded by Lydia Martinez-Alvarez, to adjourn.

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

Melissa Alvarado	Yes	Lydia Martinez-Alvarez	Yes
Dr. Claudia Ciano-Boyce	Yes	Dr. Juline Mills	Left meeting
Junior Delgado	Yes	Thalita Neves	Yes
George Flevotomos	Yes	Ali Salehi	Left meeting
Dr. Brian Jennings	Yes	Thomas Simard	Yes
Ron'na J'Q Lytle	Yes	Stephen Taksar	Yes
Dr. Robert Martin	Not Voting	Dr. Gloria Williams	Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 4:14 PM.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a. Minutes of December 2, 2020
- b. Application Review Rubric
- c. Diversity & Bias Presentation
- d. Bias Training Resource Packet