



BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Presidential Search Committee

October 14, 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.

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, and Dr. Gloria Williams

MEMBERS EXCUSED: 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 4:34 PM. There was discussion on the type of minutes to create for the committee and it was agreed to present a more condensed version.

MOTION made by Trustee Martin, seconded by Dr. Jennings, to approve the minutes of the September 30, 2020 Presidential Search Committee meeting.

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

Melissa Alvarado	Yes	Lydia Martinez-Alvarez	Abstained
Dr. Claudia Ciano-Boyce	Yes	Dr. Juline Mills	Yes
Junior Delgado	Yes	Thalita Neves	Yes
George Flevotomos	Yes	Ali Salehi	Yes
Dr. Brian Jennings	Yes	Thomas Simard	Yes
Ron'na J'Q Lytle	Yes	Stephen Taksar	Yes
Dr. Robert Martin	Yes	Dr. Gloria Williams	Yes

Motion passed with one abstention.

Trustee Martin emphasized that the operating norm for the committee is that everyone will have the opportunity to speak, different perspectives will be heard, and the committee will proceed with consensus. Committee members should inform him of items they think should be included in the

meeting agendas. Before moving candidates forward, there will be a committee discussion on operating procedures.

Trustee Martin stated that for current presidential searches, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education instituted a waiver for interim presidents to be considered as candidates for permanent positions. Board Chair Queenin discussed this opportunity with President Saigo, who made it clear that he would not be a candidate for the permanent position. It was questioned why President Saigo would be asked instead of waiting to see if he would apply. Mr. Simard stated that if President Saigo wanted to be considered under this waiver, it could alter the current interim presidency as well as the range of interest of potential permanent candidates. Asking his intentions was procedural and a courtesy to both him and potential candidates. The DHE put the waiver in place, it is applicable to the Westfield State process, and the interim president was clear with his answer, allowing the committee to move forward knowing his intentions. It was mentioned that how President Saigo was asked may have put him at a disadvantage and that there should have been a conversation of how that should have proceeded. Trustee Martin will report back to the committee with information on how the conversation took place since he does not want there to be concern or hesitation surrounding this in the committee.

Survey responses - reactions and thoughts. The committee's takeaways from the survey results were as follows:

Positive results:

- Importance of campus climate and integrity (almost unanimous in surveys).
- Largest assets and strengths are the students, facilities and faculty.
- One of the strongest strengths is the University's potential, which has not been utilized fully. To leverage all the bright, smart people to think as a unified culture will generate the greatest achievements and be attractive to a new president.
- People are passionate about their University's core values of caring for and treating each other as human beings, helping with what they need to do their jobs better.

Negative results:

- Mistrust that exists between the Board of Trustees and some other constituencies. Take the survey results, heal wounds now, and set the criteria for a new president with long-term financial stability and enrollment/retention goals.
- What has kept the institution from realizing the common goals listed in the survey are those items that have not been dealt with, leading to mistrust.
- We have not put in the right structures for diversity, which needs to be a priority in all areas of the campus.
- Westfield has lacked a leader who has kept everyone on the same page with shared core values.

What is needed:

- Process goes a long way to heal mistrust. Determine what the role of the president is, what the president does, and what we are looking for.
- Everyone has a different understanding of leadership. Review the Ron Heifetz adaptive leadership model which shows that adaptive leadership is the work needed to close the gap between reality and aspiration in a way that involves integrity and an assessment of values, behaviors and beliefs which results in strengthening the organization.
- Change ourselves and fix our problems before bringing a president in the door so we can be ready when the new president arrives. Look at the strengths of those surrounding the president and how they can help. The president cannot be held accountable for all issues.

- Searches are iterative, creating a journey and a developed understanding of the presidential role. This committee empowers groups of people to solve problems together, listen, build trust and transparency, and show collaborative work that can be modeled for the rest of campus.
- The survey is a referendum of what people are unhappy about with the last administration. Is the campus community in a place to vision what they want going forward? Trying to evaluate the survey is not slowing things down. Create details of the process by which the committee will operate and inform the campus. This committee needs more time to research and figure out individually what the role of a president is in an institution like Westfield State compared to a different type of institution.
- WittKieffer shared that by slowing down the timeline, two months have been built into the process to have these conversations while still meeting the needs of the campus for a new president by next summer. They will share resources on different approaches in the role of the president and how current presidents are adapting with new challenges. This is the time in the process to review these materials and work on an understanding of the presidency before the next meeting.
- Everything in the survey that we are lacking is listed in the mission statement – that is what we need to work on. We are in the year of change where everyone agrees that continuous dialogue and shared commitment and values are needed to move forward and be productive.
- The committee needs to balance doing the work needed on campus first and creating the right criteria for a president, but not taking too much time to lose out on the best candidate. Beginning to make progress on campus culture is enough to attract the right candidate.
- With a history of failed leadership because of various personal or leadership qualities, it is important to spend time understanding the process, what we want, and re-engage the entire campus in the search. We may have to go back in the past in order for people to let things go, and look at why there was disagreement on how successful past presidents were.
- The timetable was set by the Board of Trustees to include a one-year interim position in conjunction with the search committee's role. We need to think more broadly about slowing the process down, asking if what needs to be done and what is best for the institution can be accomplished in a year. Once we agree on the process, that can dictate the timeline.
- There is uncertainly going forward, but the University needs stable leadership going into next year. External forces, state appropriations, and the Higher Education environment is unclear.
- It was questioned if Dr. Saigo could be asked about staying longer than his agreed interim term. The faculty would be in favor, and it was suggested to take a vote in the committee for supporting that conversation taking place.

Desired qualities of a president:

- A change agent who can view all perspectives and understand and address the campus.
- Overseeing, suggesting, and helping to expand the vision to get to the next level. The next president cannot fix our problems alone.
- Good at recognizing talent, empathizing with people, problem solving, and collaboration in bringing different views to work together.
- Emotional intelligence, integrity, and the ability to lead others.
- Adaptive leadership skills to step in at whatever point we are in the process after we have been honest of where the University is and what the strengths and challenges are.
- The mission is about changing students' lives and we need a leader that supports individuals with the tools they need to shape students' lives.
- A focus on integrity, enrollment and communication.

Operating norms

- WittKieffer will add information into the placeholders in the draft Presidential Search Guide offered by Dean Mills.
- It was suggested to set up Microsoft Teams to collaborate on documents and track the committee process, which would benefit the campus. A concern was voiced about deliberations being made by making edits to documents on Microsoft Teams in between meetings. It was stated that no voting on the document would take place on that platform.

Leadership profile and institutional background – next steps

- Review the articles to be provided by WittKieffer and continue the conversation at the next meeting about presidential leadership, specifically what we want in the next president and what we want to look like as an institution.
- Review the revised Presidential Search Guide to be provided and begin to think about questions or revisions to that document.
- The committee will create the desired characteristics of a president and the challenges of the institution for the presidential leadership profile. The third section will consist of the institutional background and descriptive material. The communications staff has created a draft document with embedded hyperlinks which will be sent to the committee to review for accuracy and appropriateness.

Dates for future meetings are October 28, 2020 from 4:30-6:00 pm and November 18, 2020 from 4:30-6:00 pm.

There being no further business, Trustee Martin adjourned the meeting at 6:26 PM.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a. Draft Minutes of September 30, 2020
- b. Mission, Vision and Values of Westfield State University