



BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Presidential Search Committee

September 30, 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, Dr. Juline Mills, Thalita Neves, Ali Salehi, Thomas Simard, Stephen Taksar, Dr. Gloria Williams, Dr. Jalisa Williams.

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Lydia Martinez-Alvarez

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 4:31 PM. He stated there was a constructive and positive Board of Trustees meeting yesterday with representation from the faculty union, showing a willingness and commitment by both parties to continue to work together. The University Efficiency Analysis Advisory Committee (UEAAC) town hall meeting today also showed engagement, positivity, and collaboration. The task of choosing a president in itself is important, but so is the act of working together. Institutions survive because of those who live and work there.

MOTION made by Ms. Neves, seconded by Mr. Jennings, to approve the minutes of the August 27, 2020 Presidential Search Committee meeting.

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

Melissa Alvarado	Yes
Dr. Claudia Ciano-Boyce	Yes
Junior Delgado	Not yet joined meeting
George Flevotomos	Yes
Dr. Brian Jennings	Yes
Ron'na J'Q Lytle	Yes
Dr. Robert Martin	Yes
Dr. Juline Mills	Yes
Thalita Neves	Yes
Ali Salehi	Yes
Thomas Simard	Yes

Stephen Taksar Yes
Dr. Gloria Williams Not audible

Motion passed unanimously.

Trustee Martin stated that at the first meeting, Drs. Ciano-Boyce and Jennings expressed their wish to move more slowly in the search process to understand more fully what the challenges are at Westfield State. The Search Committee discussed the process and timeline as follows.

- Ms. Leske stated they saw the same sentiment in the listening sessions and surveys. The committee needs to think about the pace of the search, and if there is not agreement in the group, it will create a chaotic situation for a new president.
- Mr. Delgado joined the meeting at 4:41 PM.
- Trustee Martin spoke at the Board of Trustees meeting yesterday of slowing down the process but still completing the search in the academic year.
- Ms. Leske shared that they heard from a community that is anxious about the future for a variety of reasons, but this campus needs to listen to each other more to figure out what it is that led to decisions in the past and how to move forward to prepare for the next president. WittKieffer suggests that the committee spend enough time processing the survey results through a couple of more meetings in October and November. There is a two-to-three month stretch zone to talk through issues, get to a consensus, and then launch the recruitment phase for December through February. This gives the committee plenty of time and still have a president named by next summer.
- Ms. Pendleton shared that feedback was received through ten listening sessions and the survey, which provided a range of responses. The committee needs to discuss how to get past current issues to get the campus on the same page before looking for a president. There has been a lot of unloading of anxiety and we need to work on making sense of this raw material to create a positive plan to engage a candidate.
- It is prudent to listen to the community and the survey and take as much time needed as a group so we are all marching in the same direction. We need to take a step back to listen and understand and then act.
- The student forum had seven participants but a very strong survey response with 141 students responding.
- As a group, we need to take time to figure out how to pull this together. Do we try to fix these issues? The profile needs to state what the campus climate is and we cannot misrepresent ourselves.
- Ms. Leske suggested that everyone on the committee spend time with survey. It is not easy to read and there are some extreme views. Students have expressed themselves as well. Disaggregate the data to have constructive output. After digesting the survey, every committee member come up with their three positive takeaways to create a vision to add where the campus can go as a community. It is not the committee's job to fix the climate, but each member can start working with their constituents by combining the survey results with other data to learn what each group can start to do to change their own behavior to help move the campus toward its goal.
- Different groups on campus need to start talking with each other and there is confidence that can happen in this committee. Although there are different perspectives, we can commit to agree. The challenge is how to take those conversations outside the committee and widen the circle.
- It was discussed what the best way to share the survey results with the campus would be.
- The survey responses are eight percent of the population. How are we balancing the fact that we need to change? Is that the work of the search committee? Should we be talking about the symptoms of the problem and not fix the problem? Do we want to take the feedback received, garner additional feedback, and then double back to create the search profile?
- Ms. Leske said that admitting you have something to fix and starting the fixing process is enough to start a search, asking the new president to help you. The Search Committee's job is to find a president who will come to you as you are and help you get to where you want to be. There is much for the whole campus to do to get ready.
- How do we separate the action needed versus what the committee's role is? There needs to be more dialogue to determine what sort of place we need to be at in order to start the search.

- Ms. Leske stated that the data received captured themes of major challenges and opportunities for a future president. We need to get away from “we are in pain” and use survey data to figure out where the campus wants to be and how to articulate what is wanted in the next president. Once chosen, the whole campus needs to get behind that president. If you don’t make it clear what you want, any new president will not meet your expectations.
- It would be helpful for the Search Committee to have a campus community meeting to find out what they want. A number of committee members suggesting having the conversation at a committee meeting first to have a better sense of terrain and possibilities and then get additional feedback from the campus community. Once a consensus is reached in the committee of what the challenges are, they can be discussed with the campus.
- The change begins with this committee. If the search process cannot reflect what we want (and we will not always agree), then there is a concern about any processes with a new president. Part of what the committee can do for faculty is to help them feel they have influence.
- WittKieffer will send a pdf of the survey data aggregated with comments grouped by constituency.
- This is a complicated issue with many dimensions. Perhaps Dr. Saigo should be engaged to assist us in ways to reach out to the community since he has opened the door to different groups on campus and helped people be honest. Is there a parallel track to go down to help reinforce the work of the committee in a proactive way? We have to consult with our constituents, but part of the problem is we are two silos. The UEAAC model is functioning very well with the entire group working in one way.
- Ms. Leske reminded the committee of a number of operating norms. Everyone on the committee has a voice in every meeting and they want to hear from everyone.
- Our business cards have WE (Westfield Engages. WE make a difference) on the back of them. People want to be heard and have their opinions listened to. That helps break down barriers.
- If there were lessons learned by committee members from the last presidential search that would be helpful for this committee to understand, it would be good to get that feedback.
- The culture needs to be changed, which will take some time. We need a president who has the strengths, capability and knowledge to help strengthen the relationships in the community and include everyone in the team. The survey has exposed deep issues to be worked on. We need to be transparent and determine where we are and what we need.
- The campus as a whole needs to heal. The issues started before the last president. This committee needs to talk to our campus constituents (the whole campus), ask what has been failing, and start the hard work to heal, no matter who comes in as the next president.
- If the results of the survey were expected by members of the committee, we need to find the source of these problems before we try to fix it.
- Dr. Saigo has been part of the healing process so far. He is willing to build bridges and create the opportunity to heal. A future president will have to take this on as unfinished business – that is what leadership is. This is an independent selection process by the committee, but the understanding of how Dr. Saigo is communicating with the groups on campus to initiate healing could be helpful from his perspective as the CEO of this community.
- Starting with the survey, everyone take a deep dive into it, extracting three-to-five positive takeaways (what the community wants the University to be and look like and what the opportunities and challenges are). These decisions cannot take place solely in the committee. A combination of things will work to get broader, honest conversation through a town hall meeting or open forum and committee members talking with their represented groups.
- A lot of work needs to be done on campus and in this committee to obtain buy-in and support from the campus community. We all want the next president to be successful. Many of us need to go back to our constituencies and start a real process to institute changes that need to happen. The campus needs to optimize the use of these next couple of months to be productive and start the changes with ourselves.
- The issues aren’t just in the past, but also in the present. People need to see concrete changes and will believe we are turning a corner when they see evidence of that.

- Part of the challenge is that we want to put stuff in the past but many members want the opportunity to talk about the issues and be heard. The president is not necessarily the fixer. This is the opportunity to fix ourselves and to heal during the process. The conversations in a forum that includes the Board of Trustees and cabinet may help with the healing process. We don't want a president to arrive and be blindsided by the culture and be unable to incorporate their vision because the campus is still stuck in the past. The conversations need to be open to everyone, and we need to be mindful to include those outside the campus as well.
- As part of the work in the next two-to-three months, we should review the core values of the institution. With the next president, we will need to reaffirm, shift or change our core values. What we see in writing and who we are sometimes differ.
- It was suggested that in reviewing the survey results, committee members should determine the three positives and also three of the biggest issues we are facing. Then collectively and at the next meeting, we determine those that need to be addressed and discuss solutions to those issues. Identifying, then discussing, then trying to find solutions to these problems will help identify the core values the president will need to help solve.
- The most important job of the Board of Trustees is to hire, evaluate and fire the president. It is hoped the entire Board of Trustees could be involved in any forums held.
- At the next meeting in two weeks, the committee will discuss the positives and challenges at the institution and then WittKieffer will narrow them down further to discuss at the following meeting.
- Mr. Simard, Mr. Flevotomos and Ms. Lytle volunteered to approach Dr. Saigo and have a conversation with him on how he may be able to help the committee with campus communications in a short period of time.
- Trustee Martin stated that the MSCA Executive Council had the following suggestions for the committee:
 - Moving candidates from one stage to the next should be a 2/3 vote of the committee. Trustee Martin stated he is not interested in moving a candidate from one stage to the next without full committee approval. Ms. Leske said the Open Meeting Law will need to be consulted for that suggestion and WittKieffer will set up a whole meeting agenda where the process with candidates can be discussed.
 - Incorporating conversations between faculty at other institutions familiar with a candidate into our reference checks. In the past, concerns identified from those conversations were not followed up on and it was questioned how to handle those conversations being brought to a committee member.
- Dr. Mills asked if the committee could establish bylaws, stating the need for a process the committee could vote on to address issues with transparency. This would build community trust in the search process so they do not think we are making up the rules as we go. Dr. Mills, with the assistance of Trustee Martin, will propose a document to the committee.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:10 PM.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a. Draft Minutes of August 27, 2020 Meeting
- b. Draft Timeline
- c. Survey Results