

**The University of Southern Mississippi
President Search Listening Session #1, 10-11:30 a.m.
Monday, October 3, 2022
Joe Paul Student Theater, Thad Cochran Center
Hattiesburg, Mississippi**

Minutes

Mr. Tommy Duff, co-chair of the search committee for President of The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), gave opening remarks that included introduction of fellow committee members and purpose of the listening sessions. Mr. Duff's remarks included the following:

*Welcomed those in attendance; recognized dignitaries in attendance, including Hattiesburg Mayor Toby Barker and State Representative Missy McGee, both USM alumni.

*Indicated a desire to have input from all university stakeholders in the selection of USM's next president.

*Addressed portrayals of Board of Trustees of the State Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) and the USM president, indicating that the university is a great institution and that the search committee and board wants and needs to make the right choice for its next president; said the listening sessions are evidence of committee and board's care and concern about making the right choice for the university's next leader and its valuing of input from its stakeholders.

*Noted the board's engagement with Academic Search for its assistance in helping identify the next USM president.

*Expressed commitment to making the search as transparent as possible, while recognizing that maintaining applicants' anonymity is important as some may currently hold positions at other institutions of higher learning or in other organizations.

*Established a goal to narrow the candidate pool before making decision.

*Noted that for those unable to attend or who preferred not to speak at the session can provide input in the president search process online at www.mississippi.edu.

*Stated information about how to verbally provide input at the listening sessions; noted microphones at both corners of stage to make comments; also noted that while there was no set time limit for comments, that those making comments should be mindful and courteous of others waiting to make comments within the overall time limit of the session (90 minutes in length).

Comments from listening session attendees (identified by category of affiliation) include the following:

*Alumnus – Ability to recruit, have passion for university; ability to recruit and connect with business community; someone like current interim president Dr. Joe Paul; terminal degree not important; understand what USM “is all about.”

*Staff/Administrator – Would like to see diversity in next president's cabinet.

*Faculty – We need a president to work with faculty members across all disciplines, to consider the faculty as his or her “brain trust,” work in partnership with faculty in decision-making processes, having the best minds involved in decision-making processes, and be committed to academic freedom; next president should view himself not as a manager but a collaborator in working with faculty, and work to provide resources to faculty to help them be successful. Notes that current president Joe Paul describes the relationship between president and faculty as a “dance” regarding the working relationship between leader of the university and its faculty; would like to see the next leader as one who did not seek the position for its prominence, but in service to the university; expressed hope that the committee would seek faculty input in making decision on who will be next president.

*Student – USM needs a president who is an advocate for the university, has its best interests at heart, focused on funding and recruitment, is passionate and visionary, and not focused on just one student group but all groups. The USM presidency should be considered a destination job, not a layover or steppingstone to the next job.

*Alumna/elected official – I ran for office so I could serve as an advocate for USM. I appreciate all of you (committee members) for being here. This is a critical decision as USM is at a crossroads; next president needs to have and maintain good and positive relationship with state government leaders who make funding decisions for the university; should realize and value the important relationship between the city of Hattiesburg and the university because they need each other, and the search committee should seek input of city officials in selection of the next president. USM has always had to work harder for what it gets, and we need next president to love us, despite our challenges (funding, etc.). The job is a 24/7 grind but when you love something it doesn't matter; need someone who seeks it (the presidency of USM) not for prestige or money, but a commitment to us. Should show evidence of their own personal commitment to giving at university or institution where they currently/previously worked (if applicable). Fundraising ability is critical for this job.

*Alumnus – We (USM) have a good story to tell, just need a good storyteller to tell it. USM baseball program can be a model for success for the overall university with regard to its consistency at winning. College should be fun for its students. USM athletes should try to be involved in other student groups outside of sports as much as possible for diversity of experience during their time as a student. USM needs business community plugged in, create job opportunities for graduates to stay and make Hattiesburg area their home after graduation so they don't have to leave for other cities and states to find work. We have the premier business school in the South. Greek Life on campus is important to the university and deserves the support of our next president. We need a proven fundraiser as our next president.

*Faculty member – Next president should value diversity and faculty/staff morale and listen to the students' concerns. Without listening to students, you can know what's going on. Build sense of community within the university; value and pursue shared governance with faculty. The president can't do everything, hopefully next president will have a diverse “dream team” (cabinet) to assist him or her.

*Elected official and alumnus – Noted past and current cynicism about presidential search processes by the IHL; said that the committee's presence on campus and holding the sessions means a lot. Said USM means a lot to those in attendance; it helped mold and shape us; expressed hope that committee/board would not make a safe choice, as this is a consequential

choice for the university and it's important who represents the university at the state and national level; noted importance of relationship between mayor and university president; next president needs to have USM in their soul, unite the USM family around a shared vision, lead with passion, go the extra mile. Now is not the time for a status quo choice. Dr. Paul is the model for what a USM president should be.

*Faculty member – Three important things about the next president should be that he or she have a vision, a shared vision with faculty; not just be a fundraiser, but have a vision that raises funds (inspires giving to the university); second, a commitment to faculty; many of our faculty have opportunities to go work at other places for more money/prestige, but choose to work here, are committed to being here, and want a president with same commitment and preferably someone with experience as a faculty member; third, we are a public university and need to reinforce the mission of a public university.

*Alumnus/elected official – Noted that both of his parents graduated from USM when it was Mississippi Southern College; shared his gratitude for the mentorship of former USM President Dr. Aubrey Lucas while he was a student; expressed disappointment in past bias against USM by the IHL Board, both in terms of funding and overall support, as well as disappointment that Dr. Paul was not chosen as president by the board during the last search for USM's leader. Said USM needs an advocate that bleeds its school colors like (Robert) Khayat at Ole Miss and (Mark) Keenum at Mississippi State; has suffered from a recent revolving door of presidents. Says USM needs to do a better job of recruiting the "low-hanging" fruit – the children of USM alumni – as its next students; further noted that recruitment is the life blood of the university. Expressed sympathy to the committee that the politics of presidential searches is worse than anything at the [state] capitol.

*Alumna – A 2016 USM graduate, noted both parents attended USM and mother works at USM; I am a chapter advisor to my sorority, Delta Delta Delta; expressed importance of the Greek Life community to USM in terms of student development and philanthropy. USM needs a cheerleader and an advocate; president's door should be the most accessible door on campus; next president needs to get out on campus and speak with students; encourage committee to go out on campus and speak to students, as some may not be brave enough to come here (to listening session) and speak.

*Alumnus – Encouraged people to comment at the listening session, say what's on their mind about what they want in the next president; sees himself as an investor in the university and that this presidential search process is not unlike picking a CEO for a business; next leader needs to recognize that public funding doesn't make up all the university's funding, that external funding is critical; said he would photocopy current president Joe Paul as the description for who the university wanted as its next president; it's up to the university community to maintain the next excitement on campus that Joe Paul has brought back; university needs student recruiters out in Texas like other universities do. Jokingly testifies to Joe Paul's fundraising ability, "can't get him out of my back pocket."

*Administrator and faculty member – Would like to see new president be supportive of the arts at USM, which has been a signature of the university's academic profile for many years; hopes next president values the arts not just in terms of dollars and cents, but for the calling card it has been for the university for so long.

*Alumnus and former administrator – Been associated with university since my youth and bleed black and gold, will be in attendance at USM football games if we're 12-0 or 0-12. Recruitment should be top item on next USM president's priority list, not just for the president but anyone associated with the university. I'm a businessperson, and if you don't have customers (students) you don't have a business. We need a blend of Aubrey Lucas and Joe Paul for our next president.

*Alumna, former administrator – Would like to see someone with academic standing as next president, who understands that universities are places where knowledge is created, and that teaching and research are the core of the university; further noted USM's Carnegie R1 status. Would like to see an advocate for the Greek Life community at the university; students who are involved in the Greek Life system tend to have lifelong commitments to their university. Would also like to see a president with charisma like Aubrey Lucas and Joe Paul, who know how to effectively reach out to USM constituencies; but a USM alum as president is not necessary, points to USM football coach Will Hall, who is not a USM alumnus but she says bleeds black and gold nonetheless. We need a charismatic, loud, proud leader who is unapologetic for who we are.

*Alumna and administrator – Last couple of years have been difficult in fighting for support at the State Capitol (legislature) for funding, so it's incredibly important to have a leader (next president) who supports us. I would like to see the next USM president be an advocate, be fearless, and stand up for what's important, and someone who understands service.

*Student, daughter of USM graduates – Hope the next president will appreciate and value international students, in particularly those enrolled in USM music programs, and to reach out to niche student groups at the university.

*Alumnus – Dr. Aubrey Lucas is a gold standard for leadership, and we are still benefitting from his leadership at USM; others who exemplify excellent leadership qualities in USM's history include Dr. Joe Paul, Dr. Eddie Holloway; at Ole Miss, Dr. Khayat fit that example as well and Ole Miss still reaping benefits of his leadership there. Someone who has institutional knowledge and is supportive of Greek Life at USM would be desirable. Plead with the committee and the IHL to be patient in the process of looking for someone who is the right fit. "We have a pitcher (Joe Paul) pitching a great game, don't pull him out too soon."

*Student – We need not only a leader, but a person who develops leaders, and an advocate for inclusion.

*Graduate student – I have the perspective of being economically disadvantage, lower socio-economic group, at one time lived in Pinehaven family campus housing, had to take job as janitor to keep receiving free tuition benefit to continue pursuing my degree. Would like to see someone who is vulnerable, transparent, brave and who sees everyone regardless of their status, who believes in justice, equity, and has a vision.

*Student – USM means a lot to me and my family. Member of Delta Delta Delta sorority, and would like to see fraternity and sorority life get more support from the next leader of the university. Greek Life system has positive impact on student retention and in future support of the university.

*Leader in USM capital campaign – USM has been transformed in a short period of time through Joe Paul's leadership, a degree of energy and enthusiasm not seen in a long time at the

university; what I have seen in the last three months has been remarkable. Someone just like him would be ideal as next president.

*Staff member, alumnus and current grad student – Mother of a current student at the university, noted that recruiting not only good students but good faculty and staff is vitally important at the university; has seen a lot of pride and enthusiasm at the university since Joe Paul took over. USM faculty, staff and students and university have a profound impact on local and state economy, athletics events contribute to that, and students involved in philanthropy, including those charities supported by fraternities and sororities, are also important in the life of the university and the educational experience of its students. Would like a president who is an advocate for all employees. Grateful for job but indicated things could be better. Looks forward to our black and gold future.

END OF SESSION