

The University of Southern Mississippi
President Search Listening Session #3, 10-11:30 a.m.
Tuesday, October 4, 2022
FEC Auditorium, Fleming Education Center
Gulf Park Campus – Long Beach, Mississippi

Minutes

Mr. Tommy Duff, co-chair of the Board Search Committee (BSC), gave a formal welcome to all stakeholders and proceeded with opening introductory remarks. Mr. Duff's remarks included the following:

*Explained the intent of the listening sessions--to be transparent with a goal to "work on what's best for USM and its students." Provided reassurance that the BSC was here to listen.

*Discussed the formation of the Campus Advisory Constituency (15 members) to gather the feedback provided and develop a profile of the next president. Addressed the hiring of a search consultant, Academic Search—a firm that counsels and tutors university presidents, and noted that Dr. L. Jay Lemons from Academic Search would work with the Campus Advisory Constituency and IHL in helping to identify the next USM president.

*Recognized dignitaries in attendance, including Justice David M. Ishee of Gulfport, Mayor Billy Hewes of Gulfport, and Hattiesburg Councilman Jeffrey George.

*Reflected on the prior day's listening sessions held in Hattiesburg and remarked on a common theme of focusing on the future.

*Noted the BSC's recognition of a lack of focus and untapped potential of the Gulf Park campus, and his desire to see that corrected with the new president.

*Further explained the application process to begin after the listening sessions. Mentioned that stakeholders' comments would be recorded and on the internet for further review, and that an opportunity would also be available online to submit feedback.

*Explained procedures for speakers to verbally provide input at the listening sessions; noted microphones at both corners of the stage to make comments; also noted that while there was no set time limit for comments, 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:

*Faculty – Thanked the panel. Encouraged looking into diversity, not only in faculty and administration but in all aspects. Wants more focus on diversity in race, authenticity, and particularly those with different backgrounds, experiences (teaching track), cultures, and institutions (to enrich). Wants a president who respects and recognizes all levels of faculty (teaching and tenure track) and staff. Wants a president to continue to actively broaden Coast opportunities and mentions efforts with the School of Leadership, Gulf Blue, etc.

*Student - Loves Southern Miss and its offerings. Would like a president to prioritize student safety at Gulf Park with more stairwell cameras and up-to-date elevator inspections.

*Alumna – Past president of the Alumni Association. Hopes of cloning Dr. Joe Paul and being done with the conversation [*joke*]. Believes the next president should be able to energize the campus and the constituents. USM needs someone to bring stability to all campuses by uniting faculty, staff, students, and alumni with a common vision to strive for excellence. Needs someone to be present in our community at large. No time to waste to make sure that our alumni know that they matter, and we need someone that's both present in both internal and external affairs. This person needs to be able to implement ideas and shared vision shares by hitting the ground running and with pride and stability. Wants them to make sure student recruitment is at the top of their agenda. Wants them to be loyal to the University and to create a place that cultivates lifelong loyalty to USM. Communicates great appreciation to the panel for allowing the listening sessions at both campuses.

*Alumna – Family attended USM all the way back to her grandmother. Important to have a president who is an actively involved alumnus/a with love and devotion for the school. Dr. Aubrey K. Lucas had a love and devotion for the school and inspired that in students. The Coast campus is a wonderful asset to the University as a whole and the state. Need a president who appreciates this asset and utilizes the Coast campus for its best. Need a president that's not just a professional businessperson but also actively fundraises.

*Alumnus - Retired public educator for 38 years. Observes that USM is losing excellent students who are not strongly considering Southern Miss and attending other schools, included South Alabama. Need a leader to reverse that trend. Need someone to understand history and culture but not afraid to make changes. Need a president with a vision and the ability to energize students, faculty, staff, alumni, and supporters. Need someone like Dr. Joe Paul. Hopes the BSC will strongly consider removing the “interim” tag; Dr. Paul inspires what he believes is important at this particular point in our history.

*Faculty - Works closely with high school students on the Coast. She has observed disengagement resulting from COVID because they are unable to truly experience high school. Need a president who can make a place and emphasize tradition. Need a president to teach students how to belong in a physical space on both campuses. USM will get students who have lacked exposure to belonging and placemaking skills due to digital teaching during the pandemic.

*Alumnus, Former Adjunct Faculty Member, Donor - 1985 graduate, 3rd generation Southern Miss alumnus. Late father, Roger Ishee, was one of five on the committee who organized started the Gulf Park campus. Recently created a scholarship in their honor, which will benefit a Gulf Coast student. The Coast is our greatest untapped resource. States he has heard from people did not know this campus existed; including public officials. Wants a president who is a skilled fundraiser and recruiter. A president who looks at the practical side of what is being taught to students. Need someone who loves the university, who does not view USM as a stepping stone.

*Student - First generation international student from the Bahamas. Wants a president that really cares about Southern Mississippi. The president should love USM and the students, especially the underserved students – international, etc. Says Southern Miss has changed his life forever. Need a President who is going to continue to change the lives of students. Need someone to

recognize the lack of funding and support for, and will advocate for, international students. Need a president who is enthusiastic and cares about leadership and student involvement, and will listen to those needs and wants.

*Alumnus – The Gulf Park campus, and the region, is poised to be the next great research and development center and marine research in the world. We need an “all-in” (committed) president. There is a lot of passion here. He is appreciative of the sincerity of the panel. A consensus of attributes we want from yesterday and today are striking, as many past figures were referenced in the comments. He also notes this is rare to have such a consensus from students, faculty, alumni, and staff. So as alums, we have great passion and great concerns at this crossroads. We are not marketing enough for USM. “We want somebody who lives each and breathes Southern Miss.”

*Staff, Alumna – First generation student, two-time graduate). Need a president who is excited, willing, and responsible for making investments across Coastal Operations. Interested in a president who focuses on staff initiatives and developing career pathways. Looking forward to moving forward, to bringing in new life, and to bringing new possibilities in supporting what we are already doing.

*Staff, Alumna, Faculty - Appreciates a president who gives effort, time, and resources. Need to make sure that Coastal Operations continue to be seen and supported. Restructuring and reorganization were something the previous administration got right. Need to leverage this to move forward on this endeavor. Wants to see a president who supports DEI initiatives and implements them.

*Faculty - Need a leader who really understands the context and the needs of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. USM is resilient but needs include expansive mental health services. Wants Southern Miss, and particularly the Gulf Park campus, to take the lead in training and reinvigorating the workforce. Says student support services are more critical and are needed more than ever. Need positive, great energy through recruitment.

*Alumnus – 1999 graduate. Need a leader that understands the Gulf Coast’s resources and makes it part of the University’s future. Looking for a CEO. Need a leader, not just a great resume. Need heart and passion. Need a president who is here for the well-being of the university, not for their career. Need to fundraiser and recruiter. Need a person that brings campuses together.

*Alumnus - Recommends IHL spend time on campus to hear what people think, beyond during a presidential search. Hopes the new president will do that as well. Need to determine what the mission is for Southern Miss. Says the University needs to focus not only on teaching but services it provides to students, businesses, and facilities on the Coast. Says USM has untapped potential—that Southern Miss needs to be a centerpiece of a strong partnership between our students, businesses, and institutions that reside here. Wants students to be involved in internships and business to look to Southern Miss students as employees of choice. Wants flexible degree programs. Need a leader with drive and energy, a good communicator, and a problem solver.

*Alumnus - USM made a big impact on his career. Believes we are missing an engagement opportunity with the Air Force. Need an individual who is engaged and known. The president

should know the students and faculty/staff. Everyone is very important.

*Faculty – Remarks that the University is a bit dysfunctional, but things are improving. Notes that when he first came to USM, he noticed the tension between the Hattiesburg and Gulf Park campuses; however, competition has diminished, except in some instances. Need to offer viable programs at the Gulf Park campus, in addition to those in Hattiesburg. Says that USM is one university with various sites; USM's campus is all of South Mississippi.

Closing Remarks:

Mr. Duff - Thanked crowd for attendance, participation and comments. Mentioned the approval of the Physician's Assistant Program and its location at the Gulf Park campus. Indicated the importance of the decision and BSC's commitment to identifying the best candidate for the university.