

The University of Southern Mississippi
President Search Listening Session #4, 1-2:30 p.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 on the State Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) committee members. Mr. Duff continued his address by explaining the intent of the listening sessions to be transparent with a goal to work on what's best for USM and its students. He also provided reassurance that, the BSC is here to listen. Mr Duff's opening remarks also included the following:

*Discussed the assemblance 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. Dr. L. Jay Lemons will work with the Campus Advisory Constituency and IHL Board in helping to identify the next USM president.

*Recognized Campus Advisory Constituency members in attendance, including Mayor Billy Hewes of Gulfport and Hattiesburg Councilman Jeffrey George. He 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, which he would like to see that corrected with the new president.

*Further explained the application process to begin after the listening sessions.

*Mentioned the stakeholders' comments will be recorded and on the internet for further review, and an opportunity will also be available online to submit feedback as well.

*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 – Gulf Coast native, her family came in with Iberville and have made an investment in the area. First-generation high school and college graduate. Worked at Southern Miss twice, and earned a Ph.D. from USM. Returned to work at USM at the Gulf Park campus in January 2017 after a former colleague inquired about her interest in returning to the area. Noted USM is the 3rd largest state university but the only one to have a Gulf Coast campus. Continues to note, USM is

the only state university south of I-20 except for satellite sites. Cited data that the Gulf Coast region is growing fast, especially after recovering from past hurricanes. Remarked K-12 schools are also growing with the increasing population and has a need for the University. Said USM needs to be present. The president needs to be from or knowledgeable of the Gulf Coast to see how the region plays into the university. The president needs to be invested in USM, and develop partnerships with child development centers and secondary.

*Alumnus and Former Student-Athlete - Continued his education after USM with a law degree. Been practicing law for over 20 years and returned to the beautiful Gulf Coast because it is home. We need to find someone as president who understands business relationships. Remarked if you look at successful colleges, they have an “almost-CEO” running the institution. They're establishing and maintaining relationships in the business and government world, and they're trying to find avenues for their school to be successful through those businesses. Continues that the ultimate goal was to educate kids to find an occupation and establish their livelihood. He believes that's where we have fallen short and need to take advantage of bridging gaps between the business and academic world. He thinks there's “a jewel here on the Coast” that probably could be more utilized.

*Faculty - Lecturer in math for 7 years, native of Gulfport. She and her husband are both graduates of South Alabama. Although a native of the area, she did not realize in her youth, that there was a Gulf Park campus. She believes the president needs see the importance of marketing the unique programs offered as well as the campus location. Further remarks how students maybe cannot attend USM in Hattiesburg and that they aren't choosing between the Hattiesburg or Gulf Park campuses. She expressed that we need a president who is supportive and sees the growth potential of the Gulf Coast location. The next president should actively form relationships with faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders of this region.

*Faculty - School of Ocean Science and Engineering, located at the Gulf Coast Research Lab. Originally from the Netherlands and joined USM less than two years ago. Stresses emphasis on the institution's status and international reputation through research activity and output. Recommends the next president to be supportive and show interest in future research efforts.

*Alumnus - Season ticket holder, Eagle Club member, Alumni Association member, 3rd generation USM alumnus, and engaged to USM alumna. Shows appreciation for installing Dr. Paul as interim during this pivotal time. Feels like Dr. Paul has brought new life to the university and its student body. In his opinion, Dr. Paul would be an ideal candidate moving forward as our future president should embody the same attitude and love toward USM Dr. Paul shows day in, day out. Expects a candidate to match Dr. Paul's work ethic and enthusiasm. The next president should be an advocate for the university and preferably an alumnus that has stayed actively connected with the school. Looking for someone who understands how to market and raise funds within the community and businesses to execute these ideals and enhance the student experience. Does not think a terminal degree is required of the next president. Requests IHL members to patiently make this decision without settling for a candidate and just checking a box.

*Alumna, Parent, Student, and Staff Member - An engaged alumni base and engaged community is necessary to have donors. Our next president needs to be visible in the community. Marketing does not seem to be reaching everyone. Our next president needs to be able to show the value of the University's Gulf Coast locations to the region, the university, and the state. This location is a gem. The engagement and genuine nature of the president are needed to attain those dollars.

She is a huge proponent of Dr. Paul. Hopes the greater, bigger picture is actually in the best interest here.

*Faculty - Stresses the need for someone to recognize past achievements and support moving forward to achieving goals with the reorganization. Notes reorganization at Gulf Park has led to two new Schools and new programming development. The next president needs to understand reorganization efforts and the time for implementation as well as be supportive of ultimate goals.

*Alumnus – Served as first ever student member of Dr. Bennett’s executive cabinet. Attended all four listening sessions making notes and pointed out a few repetitive remarks he hopes the Board and consultants will take into consideration for the next president. States we are at a crossroads and a critical point in our history. The landscape of higher education is changing, and our next leader needs to rally everyone behind a shared vision. We must have a president who sees the great things we have to offer and is willing to go out to preach our goals to the world. Not only recruitment but retention of students is critical. Our next president needs to actively recruit others through school visits, and see the importance of creating a campus environment students want to stay in and be successful. Statistics show involved students get a degree and come back to be engaged alumni. The president should place a priority on the student experience and be an advocate for our campuses, all student types, and faculty/staff. Someone who listens and believes in shared governance through involvement is so important to the institution’s success. The president needs to promote Coastal Operations and the Gulf Park campus. There is so much potential in South Mississippi. Have a president with a proven track record of leading from the front. They need to be the first one to attend and last one to leave, to work as hard as possible to preach the gospel of Southern Miss. Personally thinks we need a Southern Miss alum in this role, but, if not someone who is a donor to their institution. We expect a president to do this. Keywords that he has pulled from the listening sessions include energy, determination, and “winsomely passionate.” Someone who sees Southern Miss as a destination and who wants to be here.

*Faculty - Joined USM last year and is happy about facilities. We need a president to see this location as an integral part of the University, more than just a small satellite. We don’t see students much on campus without having dorms here and limited places to eat. They do not see it truly as a campus. Not enough presence on campus or driving along Coast to promote this campus. We want someone to promote the campus and the great facilities.

*Alumnus – A “Golden Eagle-holic.” Originally from Long Beach, Mississippi and has a business not far from this beautiful campus. Recently rejoined Alumni Association. He thinks we have laid a good foundation within Southern Miss history, especially in the Hattiesburg area, but he really thinks someone with business contacts can raise some money. He’s not so sure if USM has tapped into available funds properly. Increasing engagement is vital, and we need to lean on the resources available to us. Look for someone to invest in the university and receive investment from the community as well. We have a good foundation in place to truly be great. We need to tap into this hidden gem of the Gulf Park Campus.

*Faculty - Would like to see a president with administrative experience in an R1 University. We need someone with experience growing a vibrant research enterprise with a focus on the sciences and social sciences critical to the global economy. We need someone who is focused on marketing the university in recruitment. With internationally recognized programs, we need to branch out our recruitment efforts and look at the whole country, not just our region.

*Faculty - Wanted to add that he is curious about the university's policies on environmental issues as they are trying to promote the Blue Economy on the Coast. Feels no steps have been taken yet on environmental issues or introducing USM as a green university. Believes many student organizations have an active interest but have no higher management connections or voice. Wants a focus on recycling efforts and facility options to improve the carbon footprint of the university.

*Faculty - Points out that USM calls itself the most diverse university in the state of Mississippi and has shown a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The new president needs to continue and build upon this initiative to incorporate ideas of all different communities that are local to here. We benefit from all those perspectives and expertise that other people can bring.

*Faculty - We need a president who is a good communicator and includes faculty and staff in the loop of what they are doing. USM officials need to communicate their presence and vision.

*Student - Questions funding of campuses. Personally feels that IHL does not care about this campus and lacks representation from the Coast. Believes we need to focus recruitment more on local areas (Long Beach High School) rather than Mobile or New Orleans. Raises concerns about discrepancies in funding.

- Mr. Duff responds by saying there is no discrepancy in funding between Gulf Park and Hattiesburg. He agrees that the Gulf Coast has been ignored and apologizes as this region does offer many opportunities and resources to promote. Mr. Duff references the Physician's Assistant Program to be offered solely on the Coast. He continues to elaborate on the improvements being made to the current programs at the Gulf Park campus as well.
- Board Search Co-Chair Gee Ogletree clarifies a misconception of IHL Board responsibilities—the president will decide what resources are being used and where. Says the students' concerns, and those like his, will be brought to the attention of the new president.

*Alumnus - Lifetime Alumni Association member, Eagle Club member, season ticket holder. We need to make a solid decision. We need someone who understands the university and the challenges we face. He wishes the football stadium was located on the Gulf Coast. Promotes Dr. Joe Paul and his efforts for recruitment. We need someone who can bring the university back together to move forward. States that Dr. Joe Paul can do the job and can do it for five years.

*Student - Wants the next president to consider Gulf Park as a full campus with recreational facilities and not an extension campus. When performing recruitment tours, she feels limited in providing interest and highlighting the campus experience as it is mostly buildings for certain classes. Hopes the next president will make time to support the recreational advances on the Gulf Park campus.

Closing Remarks:

Mr. Duff - We look forward to formulating this profile. We look forward to beginning to search and pledge to do our best. This is an important decision. We understand that; it will be handled that way. We want you to be aware that we will do everything we can because it is so important

that this university moves forward, and it is at a pivotal time. We recognize that, and it has such a bright future ahead.