

## Fitchburg State University Presidential Summary AY 23/24

Fitchburg State University commenced the search for their 12th president to succeed Dr. Richard Lapidus, President, shortly after his announcement of anticipated retirement on October 22, 2023 to the Board of Trustees. Following notification to the Commissioner of Higher Education of the initiation of the search, the Board of Trustees through the Vice President of Human Resources Office, issued a request for quotations to vendors on the state approved list of Executive Search firms. Five firms submitted proposals, Academic Search, Witt Kieffer, Spelman Johnson, Issacson Miller and Diversified Search Group. The Board of Trustees vetted each proposal and interviewed the firms in public session on November 14, 2023 and selected Witt Kieffer to aid in the search process.

The University established a separate [webpage](#) for the presidential search. This webpage was designed to create transparency in the search process and was updated frequently. In compliance with the requirements of the Board of Higher Education's (BHE) search and hiring procedures, the Board Chair reached out to solicit representative membership for the search committee from the various campus constituencies. Ultimately, the committee was selected and charged by the Chair to conduct the search, the members included:

- Ms. Lindsay Carpenter-Connors, Director of Career Services and Advising Center, APA Representative
- Dr. Mario Delci, Associate Commissioner for Research & Planning, Department of Higher Education Representative
- Ms. Jennifer L. Flanagan '04, Director of Regulatory Policy at Vicente LLP, Member, Board of Trustees
- Mr. Eric Gregoire '11, Assistant Director of Budget & Planning, University of Massachusetts, Member, Board of Trustees, Chair of Search Committee
- Dr. Margaret Hoey, Professor, Biology/Chemistry, MSCA Representative
- Ms. Carolyn Hughes, Administrative Assistant, Education, AFSCME Representative
- Ms. Adriana Padilla Salgado, Class of 2026, Student Representative
- Ms. Deborah Phillips, Founding Partner/Attorney, Nickless, Phillips & O'Connor, Chairman, Board of Trustees
- Dr. Elisabet Takehana, Professor, English Studies, MSCA Representative
- Mr. Jonathan Thompson, Superintendent, Fitchburg Public Schools, Community Representative
- Mr. David Tiernan '83, Senior Vice President, National Practice Leader, Clerk, Board of Trustees
- Mr. Richard Toomey, Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management, Non-Unit Administrator Representative
- Ms. Allison Turner, Class of 2024, Student Representative
- Ms. Jessica Murdoch '08, '14, Vice President, Human Resources and Payroll Services, AA/EEO, Liaison to the Board of Trustees, *ex officio*

*Administrative assistance to the search committee was provided by Ms. Kelli Lundgren, Human Resources Operations Coordinator.*

Witt Kieffer began a series of “listening sessions” on campus for various constituency groups including student leaders, AFSCME staff, faculty & librarians, managers, executive staff, external constituents, alumni, foundation board and general sessions held on December 6, 2023. The information gathered in the sessions as well as a community survey administered by Witt Kieffer provided the committee with content that informed the creation of the Presidential Profile that was completed and then approved by the committee and BOT for use

in promoting the position on December 15, 2023. Nominations and recommendations were requested and could be shared at the following email: FitchburgStatePresident@wittkieffer.com Advertisement of the position occurred December 21, 2023 through February 28, 2024 with an initial pool being reviewed by the committee through February 28, 2024.

Prior to the committee conducting its candidate review work, they engaged in training on topics relevant to the search and hiring process, confidentiality, BHE Presidential Search Guidelines, public meeting law requirements, public records law unconscious bias and diversity goals related to the candidate search process on December 7, 2023

The Committee commenced their review of the candidates who had applied for the position. Through a consultative process where candidates' strengths and weaknesses were brought forward, the committee ultimately decided upon 10 candidates to be interviewed in person at the Logan Hilton Airport Hotel in Boston. Questions for the interviews were determined and agreed upon and then delegated to committee members to provide a consistent interview experience for each of the candidates. Commissioner Ortega was provided the resumes and letter of interest for the ten semi-finalists for review and approval. The first round Interviews were held on 3/9/2024 – 3/12/2024 with semifinalists at the Logan Hilton Airport Hotel.

At the conclusion of the airport interviews of the semi-finalists, the group reconvened on March 15, 2024 to determine who of the candidates should be advanced to the finalist pool and invited to an on campus extended interview. Through anonymous polling and aided by the search firm, five candidates were noted of strong interest on the part of the committee. Witt Kieffer would conduct reference and background checks for the five candidates prior to an invitation being extended for campus interviews. The reference checks were completed as of March 27, 2024. One of the five candidates accepted a position with another university and withdrew from the search. The references were reviewed in detail; four candidates were invited to participate in on campus interviews. The following four candidates were invited and accepted on campus interviews: Dr. Karim Ismaili, Executive Vice President and Provost, Bridgewater State University; Dr. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, Dean and Chief Administrative Officer, University of Connecticut- Hartford; Dr. Donna Souder Hodge, Vice President Operations and Advancement, Colorado State University Pueblo and Dr. Michael Goddard, Provost, Southeast Missouri State University. Dr. Godard accepted an appointment at another institution and withdrew from the search prior to campus interviews.

The finalist names were forwarded to the Board of Trustees and the Commissioner and Secretary of Education were advised of their candidacy.

The finalists proceeded to on campus interviews beginning on April 10, 2024 through April 23, 2024. Community surveys were posted on the website and emailed to the campus after each interview to enable the campus community members the opportunity to provide feedback to the Board in advance of their meeting to determine a candidate to be recommended for approval by the Board of Higher Education.

On April 30, 2024, the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees convened a special meeting to discuss the three final candidates. Consideration of the feedback from the community surveys as well as the trustees first hand impressions of each of the candidates' skills and their alignment to the skills described in the Presidential Profile were discussed in open session. Dr. Donna Hodge and Dr. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez were nominated to serve in the position, after discussion on the motion, a roll call vote was taken and Dr. Donna Hodge was selected by a majority vote.

Dr. Hodge's selection was communicated to her as well as the Department of Higher Education. Commissioner Ortega authorized Chair Phillips to engage in contract negotiation with Dr. Hodge which was successfully concluded on May 30, 2024.

## **SUMMARY OF PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH PROCESS 2024**

10/22/2023	President Lapidus announces his intent to retire at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year.
10/30/2023	Chair notified Commissioner of President's announcement of retirement and the Board of Trustees' desire to initiate the search for a new president.
11/14/2023	BOT approves search firm and budget.
11/16/2023	BOT met and reviewed the five firms and selected Witt Kieffer to conduct the presidential search; they approved the search budget. The BOT also discussed the composition of the search committee.
12/7/2024	BOT met with Witt Kieffer to discuss the presidential profile and desired qualification and shared opportunities and challenges. The Search Committee Chairperson was named, Mr. Eric Gregoire, Alumni/ BOT Representative.
12/20/2023	Commissioner approves the Presidential Profile
12/6/2024	Search Committee conducts listening sessions for campus community and the public to draft the presidential profile
12/7/2023	First Search Committee meeting, in compliance with open meeting law, to discuss procedure.
12/15/2023	Search Committee meeting, in compliance with open meeting law, discusses list of attributes and priorities for candidates and reviewed and revised profile.
12/21/2023	The approved Presidential profile is complete and sent to publication.
1/22/2024	Search Committee meeting, in compliance with open meeting law discusses activation of application website, reviewed sample questions and discussed refining questions.
2/23/2024	Search Committee meeting, in compliance with open meeting law, to discuss/finalize first round interview questions.
2/28/2024	Poll from Search Committee of their top 8 candidates due to WittKieffer.
3/1/2024	Search Committee meeting, in compliance with open meeting law and executive session procedures, reviews 79 applicants, categorized by "recommended for review", additional

candidates for review” and other candidates. Committee selects 10 candidates for interviews at Logan Hilton scheduled for March.

- 3/2 to 3/4/2024 WittKieffer transitions on 3/2 to 3/4/2024 the semifinalists to Workzone for BOT and Commissioner review for 3/6/2024 BOT meeting. Email sent to the BOT and Commissioner notifying them the semifinalist information was available in advance of the 3/6/meeting.
- 3/5/2024 Search Committee meeting in compliance with open meeting law, to discuss/finalize first round interview questions.
- 3/6/2024 Meeting of the BOT to approve preliminary list of candidates for first round interviews in compliance with open meeting law and executive session procedures. BOT Chair notifies the Commissioner of selection of candidates and approval of the BOT.
- 3/8/2024 Commissioner approves the slate of semifinalists
- 3/9-3/12 2024 WittKieffer invites candidates to interview at Logan Hilton Airport Hotel (first round)
- 3/14 & 3/15 2024 Incompliance with Open Meeting Law and Executive session procedures, Search committee interviews 10 semi-finalists at Boston Logan Hilton and determines 5 finalists to visit campus.
- 3/15/2024 WittKieffer begins reference checks for the five finalists. Once finalized, names may be made public. Checks completed by 3/27
- 3/20/2024 One of the five finalists accepted an offer at another institution and has withdrawn from the search. We will proceed with four finalists.
- 4/2/2024 Search Committee Chair and Board of Trustees Chair announce four finalists to BOT and campus community in compliance with Open Meeting Law once references were completed for the finalists. Press release prepared in advance to be sent out after BOT meeting. *\*\* Search Committee Chair provides in alpha order with a summary of SC recommendation of the four candidates and Strengths and weaknesses via WorkZone*
- 4/2/2024 The BOT Chair notified the Board of Higher Education and the Commissioner the names of the candidates selected as finalists by the search committee. The Board of Trustees transmitted to the Commissioner the resumes and all other relevant application materials for each of the four recommended finalists for interviews with the Commissioner and Secretary of Education in compliance with open meeting law.
- 4/9/2024 One of the four recommended finalists accepted another position and withdrew from the search, they accepted an offer at another institution. We will proceed with the three remaining finalists.
- Mid April The Chair and the Commissioner discuss the essential terms of appointment and an appropriate salary range, so that the chair can ensure that the leading candidates have appropriate expectations prior to the Board of Trustees’ vote to recommend a finalist to the Board of Higher Education.

## Interview Dates

References would be completed by March 27, 2024

- 4/10-4/11** Dr. Karim Ismaili interviews on campus, including Board of Trustees interview, in compliance with open meeting law
- 4/16 – 4/17 Dr. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez interviews on campus, including Board of Trustees interview, in compliance with open meeting law
- 4/22 - 4/23** Dr. Donna Hodge interviews on campus, including Board of Trustees interview, in compliance with open meeting law
- 4/2024 The Board of Higher Education and the Commissioner and Secretary’s comments and general impressions of the candidates was transmitted to the Chair.
- 4/30/2024 Board of Trustees, with a quorum present, meet to deliberate and vote for recommendation of the appointment of the next president, in compliance with open meeting law.
- A motion to recommend the appointment of Dr. Donna Hodge as president, and to authorize the Board Chair to negotiate the terms of such appointment in accordance with the Board of Higher Education’s “Guidelines and Procedures for the Search, Selection, Appointment and Removal of State University and Community College Presidents” (June 2013), and the Massachusetts General Laws was made by David Tiernan, and seconded by Carolyn Stimpson. The Chair called for a roll call vote and the motion carried by a majority vote with the Chair voting last.
- 4/31/2024 Chair notifies the Commissioner in writing with a summary of the search process, including the steps taken to ensure affirmative action and a statistical analysis of the applicant pool at each stage of the process.
- Commissioner shall review the materials submitted by the Board of Trustees in support of the recommended candidate and shall have an opportunity to meet with the presidential candidate recommended by the Board of Trustees. Within 14 days of receiving the Board of Trustees’ submittal, the Commissioner will review the submittal to determine whether it is complete and consistent with the Board of Higher Education guidelines.
- Special Meeting** The Chair of the BHE will call a special meeting of the BHE, if necessary to help avoid undue delays. At the meeting of the Board of Higher Education during which the presidential appointment is to be acted upon, the Commissioner shall be provided an opportunity to comment on the conduct of the search process and to offer his/her recommendation concerning the proposed appointment. The Board of Higher Education shall also be presented with proposed Terms of Appointment, for review and approval, as well as all other supporting documents submitted by the Board of Trustees, and shall interview the local Board of Trustee’s nominee.

Appointment date July 1 or as soon thereafter as can be scheduled for new President, pending a full state police background check.

