



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

BOARD MEETING ■ DECEMBER 15, 2021 5:00 P.M. ■ REMOTE & ALUMNI ROOM, MCCARTHY CENTER

In Attendance: Hope Lozano Bielat*, Nancy Budwig*, Beth Casavant, Kevin Foley, Mike Grilli, Brian Herr, Anthony Hubbard, Hillary Nna*, Claire Ramsbottom*, Robert Richards*

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

Chair Kevin Foley began the meeting with an introduction and review of the intent of the meeting which is to hold a discussion of the presidential candidates, and to forward a recommendation to the Board of Higher Education for approval.

In his opening remarks Chair Foley recognized the Trustee's dedication and investment of time for the presidential search, and expressed his gratitude for all of their efforts.

Kevin also acknowledge and reflected on the commitment and leadership of Richard (Dick) Logan, who passed away on December 11. He cited Dick's connection to FSU and work as a Trustee, adding that Dick was a "quintessential alum" and embodied the Framingham State University motto, "Live to the Truth".

Chair Foley asked that the group proceed with a discussion on how each of the candidates' qualities and qualifications align with the Presidential Profile, focusing on the strengths of each candidate.

Candidates will be discussed in the order that they were interviewed by the Board of Trustees.

I. Dr. Roxanne Gonzales-Walker

Comments included the following:

- Dr. Gonzales-Walker is an excellent candidate. She aligns well with the Presidential Profile. She has a lot of energy and enthusiasm for the work.
- Especially liked her connection to being a first-generation student and her understanding of higher education and individuals' access to higher education being transformative. She demonstrated a strong approach to listening to people and stakeholders at a university level.
- She did a nice job at speaking of FSU as an anchor in the community, had an understanding of Framingham but also distinctive ways in which one could partner with MetroWest.
- She understands the changes facing higher education, and knows how to promote online learning opportunities to students. As online learning is an important part of the future of higher education, she has solid experience in that regard.

* Notates remote attendance.

- Impressed by her passion to removing barriers to higher education for underrepresented populations. She had a presidential presence and an energy that she brought to the room that was unique.
- She seemed to be able to grasp the challenge and had well received ideas on how to address declining enrollment.
- She demonstrated knowledge and ability, had a lot of ideas about potential changes to support retention and enrollment concerns.

II. Dr. Nancy Niemi

Comments included the following:

- She was very articulate; her answers were well thought out. She did her homework on FSU. She's an excellent candidate, engaging and a great listener.
- Liked the breadth of her experience having worked in various types of institutions of higher education. Thought her take on the purpose of a strategic plan being to look at programs and ensuring that they connect to the overall vision of the University and how we market ourselves was a positive. She had a good understanding of the MetroWest area and the need to be an anchor in the community. She has a strong commitment to equity, and could see her being in the role of President and being successful.
- Addressing retention of students, Dr. Niemi had good ideas that she implemented that (the Trustee) had not heard of before. She noted the relationships that she would develop with all the communities within the University, and that all may not agree with her, but that all would understand where she stood and what her intentions were; that their working relationship and resolution would move forward in a positive way.
- Enjoyed meeting this candidate, thought she hit high on a number of dimensions. Not only was the breadth of her experience at various institutions impressive, she's been successful at very different types of institutions. Her ideas spoke to a deep understanding of the culture of FSU and would be able to communicate in a way that would make her a successful leader, that would show collaboration and deep listening, all of which was demonstrated in her experience at other institutions.
- Liked that she talked about higher education as a means to social equity. Dr. Niemi had a clear vision for FSU, and spoke of a commitment to the community without lowering standards. Specific ideas and a strong track record of increasing enrollment at her current position. The faculty responded well to her in the surveys.
- She conveyed a presidential sense. She honed in on the liberal arts, which is at the core of FSU, and spoke of ways to capitalize on our history rooted in Education. She had clearly done her homework on FSU and Framingham as a community. Felt positive about the ideas she brought and lessons she would bring from her prior institutions.
- Saw strong positive reactions from the faculty. She would present well with donors, the community, and with the legislature.
- She fit the vibe of campus administrators. She speaks to the history of the school, and her work with BIPOC faculty at her current institution, was impressive. She had lots of good ideas, but spoke about them as passion projects.
- She brings a strong presence. She was unambiguous about wanting to become the President of FSU.

III. Dr. Allia Carter

Comments included the following:

- Impressed with this candidate, would bring a lot of energy to the position. She has a lot of experience that would help her in the role. Found her communication style to be effective. Met a lot of the profile objectives.
- Found her interview to be engaging. Impressed with her speaking about financial forgiveness for past due charges for those that demonstrated academic success and other models of affordability for retaining students resonated. Her retelling of the challenges posed by the of a death of a student showed connection with students.
- Ideas about retention of students would have a positive impact. She has a clear understanding of the broad aspects of running a university. She also was a tenured professor, so it seems she worked well with the academic affairs administrators at her institution. She has strong presence and ability to work with the community. Impressed with her demonstrated successful fundraising efforts.
- She has a nuanced understanding of strategic enrollment.
- This is a candidate with ambition. She tried to make her previous institution a vanguard institution and succeeded. She would bring that ambition to FSU and could see her wanting to make FSU a vanguard institution in Massachusetts. She brings a blend of business and social justice, which is unique. She's very capable.
- She is very clear on vision and her approach. Though it would be a different approach, it would be data oriented with metrics. Higher education needs new approaches. She would bring a sense of energy to the campus.
- She will bring a lot of change. Appreciated that she didn't come with a bunch of answers and quick fixes to the enrollment issues and questions posed, before learning what is happening at the University and what would be best.

Chair Foley commented that we have very strong candidates in the pool of finalists. He added that he had a conversation with Commissioner Santiago who communicated that, both he and Secretary Peyser agreed that the pool is comprised of very qualified candidates. He continued by asking the Trustees which of the candidates resonated the most with them and why.

Trustee Herr asked for clarification on the goal for the meeting. Chair Foley responded that the goal is to select a presidential candidate. He continued by stating from an order point of view, an individual would be nominated, and if the nomination is seconded, a conversation would take place. Then the Trustees would be asked for other nominations.

Trustee Herr moved a motion in accordance with all requirements of the Guidelines and Procedures for the Search, Selection, Appointment and Removal of State University and Community College Presidents issued by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, that the Board recommend the appointment of Dr. Nancy Niemi with the delegation of the responsibility to the Chairperson of this Board to negotiate the terms of the appointment with Dr. Niemi.

Trustee Grilli, seconded the motion.

Trustee Herr asked that before the board deliberate the nomination, that the Trustees be asked if there are any other nominations.

Chair Foley agreed, and asked the Trustees if they would like to make any other nominations. Trustee Casavant brought forth Roxanne Gonzales-Walker for consideration as a nominee.

Trustee Herr presented the reasons why he made the motion to nominate Dr. Niemi.

- Of the three excellent candidates, Dr. Niemi brings the right amount of experience and different type of experience to the position.
- She has an understanding of the New England higher education environment, and her energy and enthusiasm in preparing for the interview was impressive.
- She's a well-balanced candidate, and this is what we need to move us forward, while bringing in new energy and ideas.
- She would do an excellent job at representing the University on Beacon Hill.

The Trustees discussed reasons to support the motion.

- Dr. Niemi brings the qualities that FSU needs in a president at this time. She brings a sense of calm competence with vision and leadership.
- The particulars that she spoke of and the passion and deep understanding of the institution and of the higher education field resonated strongly. When Dr. Niemi spoke about the double pandemic, that was a very FSU kind of comment, that indicated that she could hit the ground running in terms of understanding the culture and bringing new ideas in.
- The breadth of feedback from the community is a distinguishing factor. She had a good connection with a broad range of members of the community who provided input.
- Dr. Niemi seems to embody what community means at FSU, what fRAMily means.
- Dr. Niemi seems up to the challenge of making tough decisions and would bring a fresh voice and new vision to FSU that can be helpful.

Lastly, Chair Foley spoke of his support of Dr. Niemi's nomination. He noted that while all three candidates were excellent, and will make good presidents, that Dr. Niemi brought in more of the qualities sought after in a president for FSU. In review of the community surveys, she resonated across all groups. He noted that he valued the feedback from faculty, as well as student and administrators in their responses to the survey. Dr. Niemi's values and skills aligned with those that are important to the FSU community, which made her a stronger candidate.

After hearing the feedback from her colleagues, Trustee Casavant withdrew her initial recommendation to discuss an additional candidate.

The motion to advance the candidacy of Dr. Nancy Niemi was passed by a unanimous roll call vote.

The meeting ended at: 5:56 p.m.