



Regent President Andrew Petersen
Regent Vice President Michael Grebe, Chair of the UW System Presidential Search Committee
Members of the UW System Presidential Search Committee
Regents of the University of Wisconsin System

4 June 2020

Honorable Members of the Board of Regents and Presidential Search Committee,

On behalf of the faculty of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, we find it necessary to protest the nearly complete **lack of transparency in the search process** being used to identify and hire a new UW System President. We find the public record of the work of Jim Johnsen at the University of Alaska to be alarming, not assuring. We can have no confidence in the Search Committee itself without an ability to see further into its deliberations, particularly due to the identification of a single candidate. Increasingly top-down management of the System has fomented greater distrust in recent years. **We ask that the Search Committee extend the public portion of their interview process in order to allow for effective engagement with campus stakeholders**, whether they are campus administrative leaders, faculty, staff, or students. The same courtesy should be extended to stakeholders at other campuses. We will further explain in the next three paragraphs.

The process being used to identify the next UW System President has lacked effective engagement with stakeholders at all campuses since its beginning, with the formation of a Search Committee that includes six Regents and three high-level administrators, but no faculty, staff, students, or independent community members. It is now concluding without an opportunity for meaningful engagement with the single finalist candidate, Jim Johnsen, who was announced this week. We recognize that a closed search process has advantages in many settings, but it has remarkable disadvantages in a setting that requires the new President to build bridges with leadership at all campuses of the System.

Members of the Search Committee may see Jim Johnsen as a remarkable candidate to become the next UW System President. Faculty cannot see this. We can see the public record, which includes very poor relations with faculty, staff, and students in Alaska and accreditation problems for universities under his leadership. These issues are at the heart of university operations, and serious enough to be “disqualifying” to many of us. It is also true that we are required to fail search processes that produce only one candidate for broad, public

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consideration at virtually every level of university operation. We owe Wisconsin taxpayers greater transparency in this process, in addition to the campus stakeholders.

There should be an opportunity for extensive interaction with this candidate, in order to **give Dr. Johnsen an opportunity to dispel concerns and build confidence**. We have been allotted part of the hour and 40-minute videoconference presentation of the candidate on June 9, including questions that will be curated offline or online, but no other interaction. **In the absence of meaningful opportunities to form countering opinions, you are likely to find nearly universal condemnation associated with the process and continuing alarm or skepticism regarding the candidate.** Keep in mind that your stakeholders are generally well-read and intellectually engaged. They expect you to honor that aspect of the university setting by giving them the ability to evaluate effectively, as you expect them to do in their work every day. We need some hours of effective interaction, as was provided in the search that identified President Ray Cross not so many years ago.

Thank you for considering ways to improve the closing stage of this process.

Submitted on behalf of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee of UW-La Crosse



Brad Seebach, Chair
Rebecca LeDocq, Vice Chair
Anne Galbraith, Secretary
Megan Litster, At Large/Articles & By-Laws Member