**Transcript from the Presidential Search Forum on February 19, 2020**

The hosts for this forum were Lou Von Thaer, a trustee of The Ohio State University and chair of the Presidential Search Committee, and Susan Olesik, a professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry and co-chair of the University Advisory Subcommittee.

**Lou Von Thaer:** Well good afternoon, everyone. First, we would like to thank everyone for coming today. What a great crowd! It is very nice to know, even though it has been decades since I’ve been on campus, the first few rows are still sacred and we all still avoid them. I am Lou Von Thaer and I am a member of the Board of Trustees, and I am chairing the Presidential Search Committee. I’m here with Dr. Susan Olesik today. We want to thank you. This is really an information session where we are trying to draw from the community what we feel is the trustee’s most important job — selecting our next leader for the university. And how do we take the great work that has been done under Dr. Drake and take it to the next level in the many years to come? With that, we have organized a search and this is the third [public forum]. Actually, it’s the second — we got snowed out on [the first] information session. We have organized our search committee into two groups. There is a group called the PSS — Presidential Selection Subcommittee — and that is a group of our trustees. Those are the folks who have been challenged and given the task of reviewing candidates and bringing recommended candidates back to the Board of Trustees. Then, there is the University Advisory Subcommittee that Susan is co-chairing, and that group will have the responsibility of writing the job description and gathering the inputs. I really commend Susan and that group. There are about 15 of you?

**Susan Olesik:** Twenty.

**Lou Von Thaer:** Twenty. They have been a very active team. They have been all over campus, all over the city, the regional campuses, and gathering people, listening and learning. From that will come the job description and it will help us build criteria from which we will select the next candidate. This team will also help make our new president successful by helping with the transition as they come in. It is not only important that we pick a great president, we want to make sure we have a great environment, from everything with how the trustees are organized and the guidance that we give the new president, to how the university is set up to accept the new president. With that, Susan?

**Susan Olesik:** Thank you, everyone. As Lou mentioned, I am Susan Olesik and I am the co-chair of the University Advisory Subcommittee. The other co-chair is David Frantz, who is an emeritus faculty member from the Department of English. I want to remind you of a couple of things regarding the format of this hour-long discussion — we are live streaming and this is a listening session. As we have questions across the group, please wait until the microphone comes, because the people who are listening by live steam will not be able to hear you otherwise. I would like to emphasize that this is listening, so Lou and I are going to be as quiet as we possibly can because we want to hear from you about what the attributes are that you desire of our next president. And we will record absolutely all of this, so don’t worry about us not taking notes, because we are recording everything. With that, let’s get started. Our first question to the audience is this: What are your hopes for the next president? What do you think the next president should be able to accomplish in three to five years? How do you judge whether or not that individual has accomplished the goals you have in mind? Thoughts?

**Lou Von Thaer**: We’re the ones listening today. It’s your turn to talk today.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Patty Hill-Callahan. I oversee fundraising for the medical center and the health sciences colleges. One of the things that I am really hopeful for the next president is the integration of the medical center more closely with the university in terms of interdisciplinary ideas and research. I believe we will know we have done that in five years when we are receiving grants, big grants, and gifts for that type of work.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Chris Yates. I’m the Chief Advancement Officer in the College of Engineering. I would like to follow along with what Patty said. We launched a multi-billion dollar campaign last October and I think about how much impact a leadership role, like the president, can have on a campaign. So I am hopeful that, as you are out there looking at candidates, that you are looking at candidates that have demonstrated that they can appropriately lead a campaign in terms of promoting the vision and making connections and building relationships with our most important donors. I think that it is important and a great opportunity for us.

**Susan Olesik:** Absolutely, and I do understand how we will measure that.

**Audience Member:** My name is Olivia Hoppe. My pronouns are she/her/hers. I am a history of political science major here at the university. I would like to see a more student-focused president. I think all the things that you guys have been discussing, in the brief two comments that we just heard, are really important, but I haven’t seen as much as I would like to have seen with President Drake in being a student-focused president. I could list off many things that I would like to see, like increased mental health resources, and definitely I would see that by having more funding go to counseling and consultation resources, because they are very overwhelmed. I know there’s a focus on diversity and inclusion, but I don’t know if you guys are aware of the recent USG issue that has been going on. One of my friends … brought up the fact that we like to focus on the picture, but we don’t want to deal with the real picture. Another thing that I can think of is a $15 minimum wage that was offered to the staff, but not students. I didn’t think that was very appropriate.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Laura Podalsky, chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. I think it is very important in this larger context, not just at the university but outside the university, to have a public-facing president. Of course, presidents always need to be public-facing, but not only to react and respond to larger discourses in society about, “Well, the university of today is too expensive,” which may be true, but to argue aggressively about what we are here to do. And that may be to prepare our students professionally, which I think is true. But if we are a whole university and not a bunch of professional schools — which is, again, completely legitimate — but if we are here to do other things, if we are a liberal arts institution in part, I would like the president to be an advocate, aggressively and joyously talking about what we can do at OSU in all these realms, not only professionally, but helping students reflect on their role as educated, public, engaged citizens. That takes a lot of training and thought across all of our colleges here.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Jay Delaney, I work on our Donor Experience team here in Advancement. I grew up in southern Ohio, down around Portsmouth, and for me it’s really important that our next president appreciates and understands how important and essential our land-grant mission is and appreciates the opportunities and responsibilities that come with it statewide, and our opportunity to really be a leader as an institution across the entire state of Ohio. And related to that, someone who really can engage and bring people in, so bring in donors and alumni, and really bring people together and connect with the community in meaningful ways.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Samara Preisler, Senior Director of Development for the College of Arts and Sciences. Going off of what Jay said, one of the questions was “How will you know in the next three to five years if the correct person was hired?” I would say it’s that this person is still here and this person isn’t necessarily using this as a stepping stone to get somewhere else, but is here and is truly committed to us, to our entire university and to our land-grant mission.

**Lou Von Thaer:** I will comment on that. I know we are here to listen, but I just want to say that OSU is way too good and has way too much promise to be used as a stepping stone. We completely agree.

**Audience Member:** I’m Henry Griffy and I work in the Office of Distance Education and eLearning. I am a medievalist by training. I got into distance education because in studying literacy and its history, I came to believe that we are in a particular moment in the history of technology and the internet. We’ve seen it sweep across industries across society. And I believe that the university, as an information-based institution, is particularly vulnerable to changes resulting from the internet and other technology and I really hope that the president understands technology not as shiny things or superficial slight changes that we can deal with, but as a historical phenomenon that is a particular threat to the university, and can help us navigate it and deploy our strengths and survive the internet and not get swept away. It intersects with other risks, including economic risks and so forth. I would like to make a strong request that we have someone who really gets it.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Stacy Rastauskas and I am Vice President for Government Affairs. I particularly want to echo Jay’s comments of staying true to our land-grant mission, but also looking towards our future. As we are celebrating our sesquicentennial, I think it is a time we are all doing that, whether we want to or not, just because of the year. But I also think about not only how we are going to be successful in the next three to five years, but also how we will be successful in the next 150 years. I think that’s a very great point to know that the things that we are doing, just in our short time here, and with this next president, is a stepping stone, kind of cake building, layering that cake. And I’d also say, and this was a comment that was said by someone else and I just want to amplify – being in the room where policies are happening with respect to workforce and higher education and research – we are so comprehensive that we have the platform to do that. We need to make strategic decisions of which ones to be in, both at the national level and in our backyard as well. I feel that if we can’t do it here and in the state of Ohio, we can’t do it at the national level. This is important to be engaged in.

**Audience Member:** Hello, my name is Marisa. I am a staff member in Student Life and Off-Campus and Commuter Student Services. I would love to see a president who is committed to increasing access to underrepresented students even more than we already have. For instance, commuter students really represent the diversity of central Ohio and they are being retained at a much lower rate than the rest of the student population. There are a lot of ways we can improve services and increase support for those students. Someone who is really committed to increasing access to those students would be really important to me and my team in Student Life.

**Susan Olesik:** Let’s go to our next question. I’d like you to think about what the issues, challenges and opportunities might be for our next president.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Sue Frost, I’m with Development. One of the issues is, how are we really making sure we are being accessible for all students and increasing the number of Pell Grant students and not just decreasing the cost of tuition but the whole cost of education? Moving from quality to equity and how are we making that possible for our entire campus? Side bar, but slightly related – I think our regional campuses are such a rich area of where things are happening. How can we better integrate them and really be part of our thinking on main campus, not just as a regional campus, but to further our mission when it comes to our land grant?

**Audience Member:** Hello, my name is Matt Swift and I’m currently the Program Coordinator for the interdisciplinary Film Studies Program under Arts and Sciences here at OSU. I think one of the key issues or challenges, as we can see right here in this room, is to have a president who will be able to handle the onslaught of automation that everyone is talking about and coming to terms with. Not only at the university and for our workforce that’s here, but how do we prepare our students for that? For example, I am in the Film Studies Program and there’s a brand new major called Movie-Imaging Production, and yet we see three cameras in this room with no one standing next to them. How do we conquer that? That’s a big issue across the sciences and business, and if the president could address this issue it would be very important.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Carolyn Chapman from Arts and Sciences Advancement. Following up on the land-grant theme, I think we have a real opportunity to better integrate ourselves into some of the biggest problems facing our state, region and nation. It could be things such as income inequality to sustainable transportation systems or the opioid crisis, and I think being seen as a leader in that and bringing solutions to the table, as well as listening where we need to, would be really, really useful.

**Audience Member:** Hi I’m Erin Neal and I’m a fundraiser for the College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. I’m passing along a concern from an alumnus and very generous donor to our university. He would like to see a strong protection for freedom of speech and the free exchange of ideas on the campus on both ends of the political spectrum – even some ideas that are politically unpopular. But allowing to us to be a place with a free exchange of ideas.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Brian Perera from Government Affairs. I’m also a graduate and have two students here as well. One of the things I think is going to be very challenging for the next president and our sector in general is the continued drumbeat nationally for what the relevance is for a four-year or professional/advanced degree in this economy. Many people we speak to about that will point out – correctly – that there are other options, such as trade schools, military, two-year institutions, other choices, but almost all of them uniformly point out for themselves that they think it is really important to have the kind of opportunities that are available at flagship universities. So I think our next president is going to have the challenge of defending the fact that we are the storehouse and producer of new knowledge. We are the reason why new generations don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Getting that message out there is so important. Most people understand it but cannot articulate it and it will be very important in the future.

**Audience Member:** Hi, my name is Claire Verschraegen and I am the Division Chief for Medical Oncology in the medical center. I couldn’t make it to the last session, I was sick, and apologize for that. A challenge I can see is how can we go up in the ranking when we compare ourselves to other universities nationwide? This is a puzzle to me because this is, from what I can see, I’ve only been here three years – it’s a wonderful university with a lot of depth in its science and collaboration between the medical center and undergraduate campus. I don’t understand why we are so low in the rankings. We aren’t that low, but we could be much higher and we need to focus on that now. The other thing, being a physician, I think that we need to focus on a healthier lifestyle and better diet in the cafeteria and exercise. I wanted to give an RPAC membership to all my faculty, but they told me that that was a no-no, which doesn’t seem right because we all need to exercise. So, some challenges I think, but if we could all be healthier, you wouldn’t have to come see me.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m Nicole Kraft, a faculty member in communications. I think one of the biggest challenges is going to be meeting the students that are coming to us where they are, as opposed to asking them to fit into the spaces that we have created so far. We have students that are having experiences in the K-12 level that we are not duplicating here in terms of active learning, and different ways of thinking, and different ways to approach education. If we keep siphoning them into the roles that we think they should be fitting here, as opposed to allowing us to learn from the opportunities that they are bringing us, I think we are going to limit them. I, too, have a freshman that is transferring here because he is not getting what he needs somewhere else and I am really proud that he is coming here. I do want there to be recognition for teaching as well, certainly from a tenure standpoint. Right now we are not really acknowledging the level of importance of that, although Dr. Drake made strides in that area, but the ability for us to recognize the importance of teaching and the importance of meeting students where they are and where they want to go is going to be key for the next leader.

**Susan Olesik:** Other challenges or opportunities?

**Audience Member:** Speaking of opportunities, I know Ohio State does really well in engineering and STEM-focused areas, but I also think that the humanities and arts are also really important to this university and I don’t think there has been as large of a focus on them in the past couple of years. Opportunities definitely would be collaboration between the two. I would love to see that in the next president.

**Audience Member:** I think our reputation really rests on the excellence of our faculty – the tenure-track in particular. I feel like it is really important to have a president who recognizes the importance of having nationally respected and recognized faculty who can raise the overall visibility of the university and really drive everything else. Again, I think our reputation really rests on that. And I think we really need someone who understands that relationship, someone who is also an academic that has that reputation themselves and that will be able to, again, drive the university forward, particularly in being a national player and in this expanding knowledge-based mindset, and other things will follow.

**Susan Olesik:** The last formal question we have is, what are the professional and personal attributes that you would like to see in our next president?

**Audience Member:** I think we need a leader who has experience in leading complex organizations. We say that, but then I think deeply about how complex this is, compared to other universities, compared to other health systems and athletic enterprises. When you put us all together, I think it’s both our greatest asset and greatest challenge, and I think you hear that in some of the comments today. A person who has experience leading something similar, if there is one, and certainly demonstrated leadership and success in leading an organization that is as complex as this.

**Audience Member:** Hi, Michelle McLaughlin, I work in the Wexner Medical Center on the health sciences Advancement team. I think it would be extremely advantageous to take the comment that was just made and ensure that our next president understands the medical world and what an academic medical center is and how it is a crucial part of the whole university. Experience in that realm and understanding of it will be important for our faculty and staff, as well as our donors.

**Audience Member:** I have the experience of being here through several presidents. From Dr. Gee’s first term all the way through, and actually my son is at West Virginia with Dr. Gee now, and I have seen Dr. Gee a lot in his first year there. I know that Dr. Gee is a unique personality that you either appreciate or not, but that is not the issue here. I do think that, as a parent, it was reassuring to me to see the president on the day my son went to college. When I have concerns and I call the office, I talk to Dr. Gee. I think that accessibility doesn’t have to be quite to that extreme, but it would be really helpful, and I have met with several parents that have been to other universities that have met with the university president and they have not had that opportunity at Ohio State. I don’t think we can minimize the importance of our students having a personal relationship with their president, or on the parents who have a more vested interest than they have in the past, having an experience with their president. I would like to see someone who embraces that experience.

**Audience Member:** Hi, Jay Delaney. To me, it is really important that the next president be someone who is a visionary and can really articulate that vison and inspire others to really climb aboard in pursuit of that vision. At a minimum, someone who has experience surrounding himself or herself with visionaries, someone who can really facilitate that connection to the vison.

**Audience Member:** Josh Maher, University Compliance and Integrity. I just want to acknowledge the fact that I would like a president who is understanding of the impact that this university has not only on central Ohio, but on the state as a whole. Going back to the vison piece that was just mentioned – being able to create a vison for central Ohio and the greater state as a whole to push us forward into the future.

**Audience Member:** I agree with what Stacy said about a complex organization and someone who can manage that. One thing unique about higher education is the shared governance. That needs to start at the top. Dr. Drake has done that. In fact, I think that is one of the strengths of Ohio State – the shared governance structure that we have. I think a qualification that I would like is one that understands that model of governance and would uphold it and support it.

**Audience Member:** I am from the Heart and Vascular Center. I think a president with a solutions mindset would be very advantageous for Ohio State, to present the university as the solution to any problem we have – whether it is a social or economic problem, Ohio State is the answer. And to be able to defend the enterprise – Ohio state is worth it, higher education is worth it, and Ohio State is part of that solution in showing the social and economic mobility of a four-year degree when there are so many options, but that four-year degree is still very relevant to the economy.

**Audience Member:** Hi, it’s Patty again. I want to follow up on a few conversations about the vision in central Ohio and the state – but I would also say nationally and internationally. I think one of the best kept secrets is the impact of the university and the medical center, and I hope that we are able to raise our profile.

**Audience Member:** Hi, Pam Doseck in the Office of Human Resources. I think that the president is going to have to have the ability to make difficult decisions in running an organization of the size and complexity of ours. This certainly requires some unpopular decisions at times, but it also requires the fortitude to stand behind and be able to move forward with those decisions that he or she makes.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m with Advancement. I would like to follow up on Patty’s comment. There have been a lot of comments about the responsibility as a land-grant institution and to the state, but I think we need to reemphasize the national reputation because that is when many of my donors say to me that they get all the bad news, or the athletic news. But how do we get the stories out there about the academic strengths that we have? I think that will cascade into building our reputation.

**Audience Member:** I would like to follow up on that with having a president who would understand the value of research in whatever form it may take, like someone exploring a new style of painting as being a form of research, and how can we leverage that to help fund our arts programs? Those are the stories, outside of athletics, that we can push out there as a form of research.

**Susan Olesik:** Anything else?

**Audience Member:** I would just like to put an exclamation point on that last point. The importance of research in lots of ways and the commitment to research in everything from graduate students to post docs to state-of-the-art facilities, faculty time and retention of faculty – all of those things drive excellence in research.

**Audience Member:** Hi, Emily Schriver from the Office of Legal Affairs and an alumna of the university. I think it would be great for the president to recognize the passion that people have for the university. Whether it is the individuals that work here, the students that go here, or the alums, or the local community. People who are attached to Ohio State are very passionate about it, so to listen to those individuals who feel deeply about the university and the places it can go will be instructive to that future president.

**Lou Von Thaer:** That came up at our last session and I made the comment that I have only been here a few years now, but I learned very quickly that there’s no such thing as being “kind of” a buckeye. It is a great commitment.

**Audience Member:** I would also like to pick up on the importance of research, the importance of knowledge generally and the importance of getting knowledge out there. Picking up on what Nicole said, the importance that the teaching mission is a lot of how society sees Ohio State, and so a president who appreciates how important it is and the also the full range of people who teach. In my job, I have met a few hundred instructors across all of Ohio State and the full range of staff, faculty, researchers and everybody who gets into the classroom. So someone who understands the diversity of how things get done around Ohio State and wants to include everybody that it takes, up and down, across all statuses, and can bring everybody together with the enthusiasm and coach them – we have the skills, we have the abilities, get everybody firing on all cylinders.

**Audience Member:** Hi, Chris Yates, again. Two things that came to mind in terms of personal attributes. One is so obvious, but integrity. Personal integrity. I think when you think about the failures in leadership that we see around us today, it is a lack of integrity. The other thing is when you think about all the things we are asking of this person, I hope they have a sense of humor.

**Susan Olesik:** Good point. Anything else? Okay, the last part of this is to open it up for general comments. We had the three rather broad questions, but there is likely other feedback that you would like to provide that was not covered in those questions. We would like to open it up to general comments that you would like us to hear and if it is not a comment, but rather a question for us, that is also completely fair game. So, have at it.

**Audience Member:** Probably a harebrained question, but I like to ask it – there is probably no one person that can answer to everything that has been said in this room, so has there been consideration given to more than one person in this role?

**Lou Von Thaer:** I don’t believe so. Now that said, a good leader is self-aware. Good leaders build teams around them that complement the areas where they are not as strong. Hopefully we will see that. Obviously, we have a strong staff today, but we will see a leader come in and, with any luck, assess what their strengths and weaknesses are and bring people in so that the team can fill out all the many things that are needed here. You very quickly get that this is a very complex job, but it is also a fabulous job. If you think about it, it is about a $7 billion job. We talk about all the pieces, whether it is athletics, a billion-dollar real estate enterprise, the university and teaching, the graduate students and research, the hospital, which will be about 60 percent of the revenues of the entire university in the next few years – so, all very important components and a pretty broad breadth that we are asking someone to be able to fill. So it is probably unreasonable for someone to come in and fill all of these criteria in a single individual. But rounding up a team, hopefully we can establish that.

**Audience Member:** Kim Gray with Wexner Medical Center Health Sciences College Advancement. Just a comment that I would encourage – these sessions are phenomenal. If you can continue to provide this open line of communication as much as you’re able to during this process, it helps us be an advocate for you with our donors, with our alumni, at a regular pace and to help keep them engaged. In a time with transitions like this, it can be a little worrisome for some individuals. And so, anything you’re able to do to keep that line of communication open at an appropriate level is really helpful.

**Lou Von Thaer:** Thank you and we really appreciate that. The trustees understand that with times of change also come times of uncertainty and people get nervous. So, we will continue – we’ve got a website set up – so we’ll continue, with the help of lawyers and others, to grab the pieces that we can and put out the things we’re thinking about, the types of things we’re looking at. The one piece that we will protect very carefully is the candidates. Because as we get to that point in screening candidates, I think we can all understand that if you were looking at an opportunity somewhere and that was to be announced to your boss and a newspaper, you might be reluctant in attracting the best candidates and it would be very difficult. So, we will be very careful in protecting those, but everywhere else we can be pretty open about what we’re trying to do and the job description. Susan and her team are working on that. And we will publish other items as it comes appropriate and try to keep people up to speed.

**Audience Member:** I just have a question. The three- to five-year idea was very fascinating to me because I think that’s, well, maybe a long period of time, it’s the end of our campaign. Obviously as an Advancement professional, I’d look at have we met our goals? Have we got that 1 million donor goal? But I would like to step back and ask this candidate, as you’re going through this process, what they need to onboard. I think all of us get really excited about bringing on a new leader, but I don’t know that we onboard them as well as we could. So having us be involved at that point, as Kim mentioned, and help us to move faster in terms of accomplishing some goals.

**Lou Von Thaer:** Perfect. And that’s a best practice, as we’ve researched and looked to set this up, and that’s why we set the UAS up, not only to see what kind of president we want but to be there with that catcher’s mitt. To also have our view of what that person needs to know and understand first, and help them navigate the city that is all in with the university. But also, to find their needs and help them through that. And I can tell you, after moving here a few years ago, this is a very welcoming city and a welcoming place. That part I’m sure will go very well.

**Audience Member:** A question that I have is, of course, a job description has a vision. And we’re all talking about what we’d like. But that job description is already going to set a series of priorities, and behind that are the conversations of the Board of Trustees. So, we can provide insight, but you guys are in control of what goes out on the end. So, what’s the vision? The president has a vision, but that is constrained by a lot of other things. And so, what are some of the issues that would be helpful for us to know?

**Lou Von Thaer:** Yes, we are trying to focus on the broad “what’s” and not the specific “how’s” because we really want the new leader to come in and set that. But things like we’ve talked about today, like what is the vision and the place in the world for a modern land-grant university? You know, when you can go out and pay $5,000 to get a software certification and get a job paying $70,000, how do you continue to make sure the experience, the interaction, the cross-discipline nature, all the things that come with a four-year on-campus degree, are part of what continues to be that value proposition? Strong leadership – and you can’t just pick one of these things to be good at – you have to be able to make hard decisions, you have to be able to work with a team. I think someone who has strong leadership skills and has empathy and is able to build a strong team and work together is one of the most important things we can have. Because strong teams will adjust and adapt over time as they need to. As situations change, as societal norms change, we’ll always be in a good place. If the leader can’t build that kind of a team, those are the areas we’ll be in trouble. So, I would think more along the lines of – what the trustees are trying to set with the inputs that we’re getting is that broad vision: that we want to be a strong research university, we want to be able to manage across this entire university, and we want a strong leader. But we really want someone to come in and bring their vison for the future, for a future land-grant university. That will be one of the criteria we use. Who’s got the most compelling vision and who has demonstrated the ability to execute a vison like that in their past roles or current? Not only for who’s got the prettiest smile or the best dancers, but actually what have they done in their careers so far that makes them qualified to become part of Ohio State?

**Audience Member:** I hope this is not a silly question, but would it be possible to circulate the vision of the two or three finalists to the faculty so we can read it and comment on it?

**Lou Von Thaer:** Probably not, just to be practical.

**Audience Member:** Not like a public comment, like we do when we have a new law? The federal government publishes it and we can comment.

**Lou Von Thaer:** I would just stop to think about how effective and efficient our legislature is in doing those laws and do we want to apply those practices to picking our next president?

**Audience Member:** But I think that that would reassure me of what people are thinking.

**Lou Von Thaer:** I think it is a very legitimate question and we understand the desire. But we’ve spent a lot of time talking about this, and we’ve talked with other people around the country that are doing searches or have done searches about where they’ve been successful and where they’ve had challenges. Some universities have built one big search team and they get 900 pages of comments back and then they have 45-page job descriptions and it’s very difficult for them to arrive at decisions. I think the biggest challenge for us is going to be that we want to attract world-class talent, not someone who is coming here as a stepping stone, but someone who will continue this university’s track to make this the best university in the country as it should be. But to do that, that person is going to have to feel this is a safe environment to go through this process. Things could be very uncertain until the end, whether they will be the nominee or not and actually come in for final interviews with the board. And when that person is nervous about things leaking out, things getting tied to them or recruiters searching, they are going to withhold their name. I’m not an academic. I’ve done this on the other side and I’m the CEO across the street right now, and if I would have thought that my current employer got wind that I was looking at that job and was seriously considering it, I would withdraw from that opportunity. I think that we will see that in a lot of the best candidates here as well. We don’t know for sure, but we could guess. I’d be willing to bet a steak dinner on the fact that the candidate we want is very happy where they are today, they’re doing a fabulous job in their current job, and that’s why we would want them. And we’re going to have to convince them to come out and we need to make it a safe environment for them to go through this process – that if they are not the end person, it doesn’t blow their cover. And so, because of that, we want to be very cautious and that’s really a best practice. That is the advice we’ve gotten from others and that is where our heads are with the board. Even though we understand the desire that everybody would like to be a part of this and weigh in on the selection and give their opinions. If there is a way to do it, we’ll think about it, but those things can get personal. She asked about anonymously, but at that point, with the specificity of the details we’re going to try to get to make a selection, there won’t be a lot of other people that could fit that mold. And the people in the business of academia would probably be able to figure that out pretty quickly.

**Audience Member:** Along those lines, is there any chance that the co-chairs of the advisory committee could be voting on some of the possibilities?

**Lou Von Thaer:** There will be places that we will bring those co-chairs in.

**Audience member:** What’s the timeline for the search?

**Lou Von Thaer:** So we put a general search timeline up on the website. President Drake will leave in June, so our hope is that this summer we will name the new president. We are running hard. This is my part-time job. But we’re going as fast as we can. I have every confidence that we will go through a search of the known candidates and some others. We will go through interviews and we will be prepared to make a decision. However, we have also all agreed that we will not compromise on someone that we think is not the right person. And if for some reason this needs to go longer, the trustees will make a decision and continue to search for someone best for the university. But I think this is too important, this is the most import decision we will make as trustees, and we don’t want to compromise. We want to get someone who will hopefully delight as many people as possible in this room and around the community, and be able to come in and set an environment up for them so they can just thrive here. And I think this is a university that is ready to take off. There are so many good things and so many metrics that are getting better. But, when you look at our ratings, they have been flat for two years. I think with the right vision, there is a lot of underlying goodness that, with the right leadership and vision, could really make a difference in the next five to 10 years.

**Audience Member:** Hi, John Schriver from Legal Affairs. I certainly thank you for the opportunity for the open forum today and I would echo the sentiments of a lot of my colleagues and the students that spoke here as well today. I think for me, one of the most important points that was already made was the longevity comment. Certainly there is hope that this is somebody who will be here longer perhaps than three- to five-years and I appreciate your comments to that as well. The other point that I just want to make is Ohio State has also trained a lot of fantastic leaders and I would hope that we don’t overlook the fact that it could be someone that is already here. Or perhaps someone that gets to come back – who we trained and we grew and didn’t have an opportunity in the past.

**Lou Von Thaer:** Yes, I would just comment on that. We have an internal list. Dr. Drake has given us some people that he thought would be appropriate. I’ve talked with a couple people. And what we’re doing right now is there is a place you can nominate people on the website. You can send me a name, you can send Susan a name, and we’re all doing the same thing, we’re sending them all right to the recruiting firm. And as we put the filters together, we’re going to put them through and we’ll make sure that our internal candidates, quite frankly, if it’s close to even, an internal candidate wins every time. They have already committed to the university.

**Audience Member:** Olivia again, I’m a student. How much are students in general or students’ opinions being involved in this process?

**Susan Olesik:** Students are very involved in this process. We’ve had listening sessions at university student groups and various subgroups. We also have both undergraduates and graduates on our committee. And what we are doing as far as functioning as a committee is the various subgroups go to listening sessions like this, and with the exception of the ones we’re taping, we are generating white papers that the entire committee reviews to generate the job description. So, I would say that the undergrads and grads are very active participants in this effort. Thank you for coming today!

**Lou Von Thaer:** I would also say thank you for coming today as a student. We really appreciate you taking the time out. I would also add that we have two trustees, one a graduate the other an undergraduate, who are actually trustees in the university in rotating positions. And they will obviously weigh into this. I’ve actually also already gathered inputs from them. I believe I am also scheduled to talk to the student senate also to hear from them directly, from the government.

**Audience Member:** Hi, I’m from the biological engineering department. Two things: Listening to everyone, nobody brought up the fact that we really want someone who understands academia. I hope that if someone is a famous governor some place or politician or businessman – I don’t think that Jeff Bezos would make and outstanding president of this university if he had not been involved with academia. That should be, I think, the No. 1 criteria for your group. If they have not experienced academia and the classroom, that person is not for us. No. 2, a question I have is, since the Board of Trustees is going to be the deciders, we talked about shared governance and things like that, but do we have any faculty or several serving on the Board of Trustees who would really bring up the faculty or staff? You mentioned two students, but do we have any faculty or former faculty serving on the Board of Trustees? And the vision of the Board of Trustees will decide who is going to be the president of this university, so knowing the vison of the Board of Trustees of this university, at some point, someone mentioned public record perhaps. I mean, I would like to know what their vision is and how the person they’re going to get is going to align with the Board of Trustee’s vision.

**Lou Von Thaer:** So I can comment a little on that. One is that the trustees are nominated by the governor, they’re set up by state law and given this task as part of that state law. So that is kind of how this is set up and done that way for all of the public universities in the state. The reason we’re doing these sessions, the reason we have UAS, is to gather as many inputs as we can and as we solidify some of these visons and things, and the lawyers give us the sign-off, those are the things we put on the website. And talking about these things, we’re looking for and getting a leader who can take that and make that their own and take it to the next level. So understand those things and as trustees we take this very, very seriously. And you know, I’ve got a pretty busy day job, and when they asked me to do this I agreed pretty quickly because I thought it was so important and worth the effort and the time. And for me, the job isn’t to pick the president. The job is to have the committee bring back the right candidates, the right people, based upon all of the things we’re hearing in these sessions and based upon those experiences. We’ll do our best.

**Audience Member:** On the same line of thought, I think it would be important to involve the Faculty Senate in the search. Maybe they should also have an opportunity to talk to the candidates.

**Lou Von Thaer:** Again, we will probably not do that. Only because academic environments are not the best place in the world to keep a secret and if the name gets out, we will have a blown search and then we won’t have someone. We will struggle to fill this job with a candidate of the caliber were looking for. We will, however, bring them in for all of the inputs, all the pieces, and when we do get to the final candidate, we will bring that person on campus for interviews with key administration officials – some deans, some key teachers, some students.

**Susan Olesik:** Thank you so much for coming. This listening session has been spectacular. Lou and I both really appreciate you taking the time to do this.

**Lou Von Thaer:** Yes, thank you. This has been very helpful for us.