



American Association of University Professors
South Carolina Conference

(Spoken version)

Good afternoon. I bid you greetings from your colleagues in the AAUP, and particularly those members of the South Carolina State Conference. Many thanks to my good friend Dr. Marco Valtorta, the Faculty Senate, President Pastides, Provost Gabel, your administration, and your staff who kindly invited and assisted me for this visit.

Your SC AAUP represents twenty universities and over two hundred faculty members statewide dedicated to: advancing academic freedom and shared governance; defining fundamental professional values and standards for higher education; promoting the economic security of faculty, academic professionals, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and all those engaged in teaching and research in higher education; helping the higher education community organize to make our goals a reality; and ensuring higher education's contribution to the common good.

In order to best represent the faculty of the University of South Carolina at Columbia, I encourage your campus to form a chapter and enroll members without delay. Please contact me for the materials to initiate this process.

In the brief time ahead today I'd like to share thoughts from the AAUP on one of the most significant instances of shared governance in the life of USC, the selection of its 29th President in nearly 220 years. This selection will deeply touch the lives and futures of tens of thousands of students, faculty, staff, and administrators over your eight campuses just as it did in 2008. It will affect also millions of people in the region and the state. The last decade has shown how carefully and wisely that previous presidential search committee performed its duties. Now this crucial task is again at hand, and I'm certain your current search committee will do well.

I'd like to commend you and encourage you on your search process with regard to selecting your search committee, designing your search process, establishing sources of potential candidates, constructing your screening process for candidates, and recommending the best candidate to the Board of Trustees. Most importantly, the inclusion of faculty, students, and the community, at all phases of the search process is

imperative to insuring that USC will continue to fulfill its mission of providing teaching, research, creative activity, and service to all of the citizens of South Carolina.

Your Board of Trustees has done well abiding by its bylaws and facilitating the elections of eleven members whose diverse constituencies include: trustees from various judicial districts around the state, faculty members representing different schools as well as the university system, a student government representative, an alumni representative, and a representative from your foundation. Also among these members are a trustee designated with Affirmative Action oversight and the Chair of the Faculty who represents the AAUP at your university and at the state level. This committee's composition and representation certainly echo AAUP standards of best practices, and they should be prepared to fully undertake their weighty duties.

Your committee recently announced the selection of a national executive search firm from seven candidates, ultimately to help identify a fit successor to President Pastides. I'm certain Parker Executive Search's experience and expertise is of great instruction and aid to the search committee concerning search processes in general and USC's in particular, and I'm hopeful that they will excel in providing a broad pool of qualified and sufficiently vetted candidates. However, for the integrity of your shared governance and academic freedom, it is of great importance that your search firm's role and influence not extend into educational or institutional policies but remain focused on their task at hand. I expect your search committee realized this advice in selecting Parker Executive Search but it is their ongoing duty to be "self-aware" at all times during the process to safeguard this, and all aspects, of USC's autonomy, integrity, and its mission.

It is of note that a description of the position and qualifications have been constructed and published at your Presidential Search website expeditiously, and that your search firm is soliciting applications and nominations to a deadline of March 8, 2019. The qualifications listed certainly require applicants of the highest leadership abilities, and they describe in many ways an ideal AAUP conception of a president. However, I would advocate for an edit to bullet number 7 which states "a strong appreciation for shared governance." I adjure your committee to seek and appoint a president with a strong commitment to the principles and practice of shared governance and academic freedom for your faculties and students. Your next president should *denote* her or his commitment to these AAUP principles rather than *merely implying* a recognition of expecting them in the service of some faculty members.

As you move into the next phase of examining the applicants in your process, it is essential that you establish and maintain transparency, communication, and confidentiality as a best practice. While it is a classic, and legally governed, conflict between the right of individual privacy and the public's right to know (especially at public institutions), the search committee must balance carefully its duties for their candidates and their constituents. Establishing transparency and communication with **all** constituents must be done early in the search and maintained throughout until an appointment is confirmed. I notice from your website your search firm has provided a questionnaire and received over 900 responses. The questionnaire is a start toward reaching out to the USC community and envisioning together what and who the next president may be. Let me speak a bit later with respect to finalists on how I hope the committee will further promote transparency and encourage their constituents to realize a stake in the process.

To insure applications from the very best candidates, confidentiality must be maintained in the early phases and interviews and meetings may be conducted in concert with the search firm to avoid disclosure of candidates prior to announcing a short list. If leaks were to occur, this would likely result in the loss of the best candidates and the potential best leadership for USC. Leaks are to be avoided.

Further on confidentiality and the vetting of candidates; it is crucial that the search committee and the search firm work in concert to solicit, collect, and vet information on candidates, particularly as the process moves toward and establishes a short list. Thorough background and reference checks are vital to the best information toward the assessment of each candidate's strengths and weaknesses. Interviews are essential and may be on or off campus toward preserving the utmost confidentiality. It should be enough to point out that inadequately conducted background checks have led to the recent resignations of public officials (politicians *and* educators) after elections and appointments to service have been validated. The damage to institutions and their constituents is unfathomable if not incalculable or irreparable. So many real and potential benefits can be lost for thousands of people's lives if proper vetting breaks down.

And now a bit more on transparency and communication. Upon selecting the finalists, at this phase it is imperative that campus visits and public forums are scheduled and implemented, with adequate public notice, such that each candidate can/will meet with the various constituencies to engage in dialogue. It is most important that finalists have

dialogues open to all faculty members and students. Forums for the university community, apart from faculty and students, are essential as well. The AAUP strongly supports judicious and open communication with faculty, students and the community because it builds confidence in the university leadership and insures accountability for all university community members.

In the final phase, the best candidate(s) should be recommended to the Board of Trustees who will then appoint the next president effective of a date to be determined by those parties. When a presidential search is required, it must be envisioned, designed, and implemented according carefully constructed legal and community principles that are best representative of *all* constituents (<https://www.aaup.org/issues/governance-colleges-universities/presidential-search>). If done so, a new President can assume her or his duties with new colleagues in the hope of a meaningful and successful future toward fulfilling the university's mission...and without lingering doubts or questions about the presidential search committee's processes or administration.

Thank you very much.

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