

Report of the Evaluation Consultant
On the Performance
Of Dr. David Ashley, President
University of Nevada at Las Vegas

To the

Nevada Board of Regents

By

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REPORT OF THE EVALUATION CONSULTANT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF DR. DAVID ASHLEY, PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA AT LAS VEGAS

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BACKGROUND

A review of the Presidential performance of Dr. David Ashley was conducted consistent with the policy outlined in Chapter 2 of the Nevada System of Higher Education Procedures and Guidelines Manual. This report represents the Consultant's report as identified in the Policy. The consultant was provided with a self-evaluation by President Ashley and the results of a survey completed by the Faculty Senate Campus Affairs Committee prior to visiting the campus on April 30 and May 1, 2009. During the campus visit, the evaluation consultant met with 59 students, faculty, administrators and community members to discuss President Ashley's performance. Participants were thoughtful and candid in their responses. One additional letter was reviewed from a campus administrator who was unable to attend an interview. Some follow-up calls were made to those interviewed to verify information. In addition, I spoke with Chancellor Jim Rogers by phone.

The University of Nevada at Las Vegas is an institution that has achieved phenomenal growth in just over fifty years. The institution continues to be in a period of dramatic change. It has the potential to become an exceptional urban research University recognized for serving the region in which it is located. To achieve this potential will require creative and effective leadership and sufficient resources.

President Ashley is serving in his first presidency after a number of years as an academic administrator and a member of the faculty at other institutions. He has had a very solid beginning and has the opportunity to make a major difference at UNLV despite the incredible fiscal pressures faced by the institution as a result of the economy and waning state support. He appears to have support within the University community and members of the larger community with whom I talked. Members of the University community want him to succeed and they recognize that he has just begun his work. There were a few individuals who expressed some concerns which are identified later in the report.

The Policy calls for the performance review to be based upon eight performance criteria for leadership. I shall comment on each of the eight criteria below. In addition, as part of the review process, President Ashley submitted a very thorough self-evaluation. As a result of the interviews undertaken as part of this evaluation review process, it appears that President Ashley's self-evaluation was fairly accurate.

BUDGETARY MATTERS AND FISCAL MANGEMENT

President Ashley thoroughly described the extreme budgetary pressures faced by the institution in his self-evaluation. Those who took place in the evaluation process indicated he has managed the budgetary crisis very well. During the interviews he was praised for his leadership in addressing this issue. He has used town hall meetings to communicate with the University community regarding the fiscal situation and these meetings have been very effective. He was also praised for his transparency regarding budgetary issues and for his advocacy with the legislature.

Based upon the self-evaluation, it was evident that he carefully considered alternatives and used data effectively to reach decisions concerning the budget. Many who were interviewed

acknowledged that the institution will continue to face severe budgetary constraints, which will make it difficult to achieve the aspirations identified in the strategic plan promptly.

ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION AND ACADEMIC PLANNING

President Ashley led the development of a plan for the University, which is entitled *Focus 50 to 100*, that many individuals noted was strong and insightful. Various constituents on campus acknowledged that he successfully involved the University community in the development of this plan. During the interviews, there was some skepticism related to the ability of the University to implement the plan given the current fiscal environment. It does appear, even given the fiscal constraints, that the University has initiated curricular change consistent with student and societal needs. There also appears to be procedures in place to continue to respond to needed changes in the coming years.

President Ashley hired an Executive Vice President and Provost who was identified as an individual who is exceptionally able to provide leadership for the academic area of the University. In addition, there was a great deal of optimism about the academic development of the campus in the coming years.

During the interviews, President Ashley was recognized for his reorganization of the University's senior leadership and it was specifically noted that he had delegated responsibility to senior leaders for their areas. For the most part, there was a strong belief that senior leaders were providing strong leadership and were focused on implementing the plan for the University. It was apparent during the evaluation review that expectations have been established for academic deans and that they feel empowered to provide leadership for their colleges.

Members of the University community communicated an understanding that a focus has been placed upon improving research. Despite the fiscal pressures, campus community members believe that support is being provided to advance research. However, they also indicated they believe increased resources will be necessary to achieve the goals outlined in *Focus 50 to 100*.

STUDENT AFFAIRS

The progress made in this area was detailed in President Ashley's self-evaluation. The establishment of the Academic Success Center was noted to be an excellent step to improve retention and it appears that those interviewed believe this center can make a significant difference in the coming years.

Student leaders interviewed were very positive about their access to President Ashley. They viewed him as interested in their issues and as being caring and supportive. Students also expressed a desire to become more involved in University policy issues.

President Ashley was praised by many for his commitment to diversity. Students expressed the need for continued attention to this issue on campus. They indicated they do believe that there is a positive environment for diverse students to interact and that the President was responsive to issues that arise in this area.

PERSONNEL MANGEMENT

As indicated above, it was acknowledged that President Ashley had assembled a strong senior leadership team and has delegated responsibility to the individuals. It was also noted that he has placed a high level of trust in his senior team and has set expectations for their performance. For the most part, it was noted by those interviewed that senior leaders have accepted this responsibility and are providing leadership in their respective areas. There was discussion by some about the controversy that has arisen with regard to the "Proposed Policy on Bias Incidents and Hate Crimes" and whether there was a lack of a clear process and communication in the

development of this proposal. However, there were other numerous examples provided by interviewees that demonstrated that many other critical issues have been addressed and effectively resolved by President Ashley.

In reviewing the evaluation materials provided as well as through interviews, it was noted that President Ashley established a President's Advisory Council that appears to be working effectively. According to campus community members, this Council allows for participation by several University constituencies in policy consultation while also serving as an effective communications vehicle.

In the course of my review, I became aware that a few staff members had expressed concern about communications they had received from Mrs. Bonnie Ashley. Some staff reported feeling threatened by these communications and these issues were reported to President Ashley. Rather than intervening, he advised staff to work the issues out with Mrs. Ashley. It does not appear as though these issues have been resolved.

DECISION MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Many of those interviewed stated President Ashley exhibited strong decision making skills, and further, he had established an expectation that decision-making was to be a thoughtful, systematic and data driven process. As was noted above, it was widely acknowledged that he has delegated responsibility for decisions to the appropriate senior leadership of the institution. There were a few instances identified by some of the individuals interviewed where subordinates stated they would have preferred to have a little more feedback on decisions that they had made.

Based upon data submitted and reviewed, as well as through interviews conducted, it appears that the decision making process is understood by senior administrators and that they accept responsibility for making appropriate decisions.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND FUND RAISING

President Ashley's self-report appears to have accurately described the status of the "Invent the Future Campaign", which has been extended for one year. There exists a high degree of optimism that the stretch goal established for the campaign will be achieved. It was stated by many that President Ashley has been actively engaged in this campaign and has raised over \$125 million since assuming the presidency. He was described as a "very effective closer."

The area of external relations places enormous pressure upon a President to be highly visible on campus and in the community. There was a concern expressed about the President's lack of visibility by some who were interviewed. It is inevitable that comparisons are often made with previous presidents. It appears that President Ashley is less visible in the community than his predecessors. Some interpret this as the President doesn't care. However, a number of community leaders expressed the belief that he has been engaged very effectively in the community in areas that are important.

President Ashley's interaction between colleague Presidents appears to be professional. It was noted by some of the interviewees that a tension exists between UNLV and the University of Nevada, Reno, which pre-dates President Ashley's appointment. It was also recognized that competition for scarce resources is always a difficult issue within a system. Through the data collected during this evaluation review process, it appears that President Ashley is committed to the system and that he recognizes that his primary responsibility is to advocate for UNLV.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE BOARD

Based upon interviews and interaction with Board members on the evaluation committee, President Ashley appears to have a good relationship with the Board and receives support from

Board members. It will be important for the Board to continue this support as he faces extraordinary financial challenges.

Board members involved in this process indicated that they believed President Ashley was candid in working with the Board. He was praised for his responsiveness to Board members and those interviewed indicated he is trusted. Board members believe that he is direct in his interactions and candid. It was also indicated by Board members involved that they feel he has a very good understanding of the role of the Board and their importance to achieving the system's goals. Some Board members did raise the issue of visibility in the community and engagement with alumni as concerns to be addressed.

PROGRESS TOWARD MASTER PLAN AND OTHER PERFORMANCE GOALS

President Ashley's self-evaluation included details on the progress made to date on major University goals. The report points out progress that has been made on retention and graduation rates and specifically noted that the Success Center has been developed to further support this improvement.

According to the self study and subsequent interviews, the University has undertaken studies to determine how processes can be more efficient and effective. It appears the systematic approach to this area has led to some early successes. President Ashley's commitment to sustainability was commended by those interviewed, which they believe will have long term benefits to the University.

It was also noted during the review process that President Ashley has placed a high priority on addressing issues of diversity on the campus. There appears to be good progress in meeting the goals set related to diversity and President Ashley has indicated he sees this area as an opportunity to further strengthen the University's commitment to a culture that supports and encourages diversity.

OTHER FINDINGS

The descriptions most often used by those interviewed when describing President Ashley were: brilliant, honest, supportive, personable, and thoughtful; a problem solver, a data driven decision maker, a quiet leader, a collaborator, an engineer, and a calm leader.

As part of the interviews, individuals were asked to identify the single most important achievement to date of President Ashley's presidency. Sixty percent of those interviewed indicated that President Ashley's appointment of senior leaders of the University was the most important achievement. Twenty percent indicated that his support for diversity was the most important achievement and sixteen percent identified his emphasis on and support for research.

The faculty survey that was conducted identified achievements in diversity, promotion of research and scholarly activity, support for faculty governance and the handling of the budget crisis all as significant achievements, which was consistent with the interviews conducted on campus.

Those interviewed were asked to identify the single area where improvement could be made in the future. Fifty-one percent identified improved visibility; thirty percent identified improved communication [with the exception of communication around budget issues] and fourteen percent believed that less delegation of authority would be important.

The faculty survey identified the need for improved visibility and communication with faculty as the two areas where there could be improvement.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the review of materials and interviews conducted, there is agreement that President Ashley is a brilliant, quiet leader. While there were concerns expressed about his visibility, it appears that many people are not aware of the strong work he has done with legislators or the fact that he does attend many community events and specifically, that he participates in many fund-raising events. This perception may be overcome by publicizing many of these activities to campus constituents. In addition, when attending events it is recommended that he seeks to interact with as many people as possible. It also appears that President Ashley should identify the methods in which he is most comfortable in communicating with people. The town hall meeting format is one example of an approach which has been very effective. It will be important for him to continue to work on the appropriate visibility and his role in the community. There must be a balance between visibility and the effective use of the President's time, and addressing this balance will be important in the coming months. Finally, it is important to address the issue of the role of the presidential spouse and what is the appropriate interaction with the President's staff.

After reviewing the data from the self-study, survey results and the campus interviews, I believe that president Ashley is off to a good start under incredibly trying circumstances. He enjoys support within the University to move towards the goal of UNLV becoming a top-notch urban, research University. President Ashley's leadership will be a significant part of UNLV achieving its aspirations and potential.