



A Union of Professionals

AFT-Wisconsin

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# Higher Education Council

## AFT-Wisconsin Higher Education Council Statement on UW System President Search

January 20, 2022

On January 14, 2022, the UW System Board of Regents announced two finalists for the position of UW System President: Jay O. Rothman and James C. Schmidt. In any search, it is important to consider both the process and the outcome.

The 2019–2020 search under the previous Board of Regents leadership failed because of a deeply flawed process that excluded faculty, staff, and students (except for one student regent) from the search committee and provided no opportunities for their meaningful input. In contrast, the 2021–2022 search process under new Board leadership has been much more inclusive and with far greater respect for shared governance. These improvements are the direct result of the successful mobilization of faculty, staff, students, and alumni by AFT-Wisconsin and other organizations in the previous search to oppose a single finalist who was clearly unfit to lead the UW System.

We welcome the generally improved search process under new Board leadership. However, we are disappointed that the Board is not holding public sessions with either of the two current finalists. This decision is contrary to the open and transparent spirit of good governance that our state has historically embraced, and it deprives faculty, staff, and students of the opportunity to get to know the finalists who seek to make decisions about our working and learning conditions. We therefore join the Wisconsin Conference of the American Association of University Professors in calling on the Board to rectify this mistake.

Relatedly, in terms of the outcome of this search, we believe that any finalist for any leadership position in our great state's university system must clearly and publicly demonstrate:

1. expertise in our core system mission of searching for the truth which also means; a. they demonstrate significant experience teaching in a specific academic discipline and b. they have a public record of successful scholarly endeavor in an academic discipline.
2. a significant and publicly available track record of supporting academic freedom, shared governance, and due process at the higher education level.
3. a public track record of supporting the Wisconsin Idea.
4. a public track record of support for Transparency in Government and Wisconsin's open meetings laws including specifically supporting full transparency and the holding of open meetings in the search and screen for UW system president.

Also, in terms of our beliefs about necessary outcomes of this or any comparable leadership search, we believe to the utmost degree possible it should result in as diverse and inclusive a final candidate pool as possible to select from.

We have deep concerns that the current search to date for UW system president has not produced a final candidate pool that satisfies a number of the aforementioned desired outcomes. We might be able to overcome these reservations if the finalists were given the opportunity to address them in public sessions. Without public sessions, we are left with deep concerns about both candidates.