This listening session took place on April 7, 2020 at 2:40. It was the fifth of five listening sessions and was hosted using web conferencing platform WebEx.

Regent Karen Walsh opened the listening session which focused primarily on receiving feedback from the students of University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and their vision for what to look for in the next chancellor. Regent Walsh asked Regent Olivia Woodmansee to open the discussion with a question to the group. Regent Woodmansee asked the attendees what qualities, attributes and characteristics the committee should look for in the next chancellor of UW-Stevens Point. Will, a UW-Stevens Point student, would like to see a transparent chancellor that would work with the governance bodies on campus. Regent Walsh asked how the new chancellor could use communication channels to work with students. Will clarified that the student government association on campus is currently successfully working with the chancellor to ensure that students and administration are working together. Regent Walsh asked for input from Molly, a student attendee. Molly’s focus as a student is on sustainability, and would like to see a chancellor that is able to strive for sustainability, listen to multiple viewpoints, and will be a change-leader for the campus; specifically, Molly would like to see a focus on reducing the campus’ carbon footprint. Will and another student participant, Mark, echoed the suggestions made by Molly. A faculty member, Jennifer, emphasized that she would like to see a chancellor that comes from academia, rather than the private sector. Jennifer also agreed that with Will that the next chancellor should be willing to work collaboratively with the stakeholders on campus and listen to the concerns of those on campus.

Regent Walsh asked what the campus can take away as it relates to the sudden change to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mark stated that this shows the campus is resilient and can adapt to difficult times. Mark would like to see this same type of response when it comes to the climate crisis. Regent Walsh asked Molly for her perspective on the change to online learning. Molly confirmed that the environment on campus is very supportive; she also hopes that the University uses this as a time to plan for other potential challenges that could disrupt traditional learning. Committee member Dr. Julie Tharp hopes that UW-Stevens Point can continue to be a leader in the fight against climate change and asked the students for their feedback. Will stated that UW-Stevens Point is able to take on this challenge and suggested that a younger chancellor might be better prepared for this challenge. Mark agreed with Will in that a younger chancellor may be more willing to take on the climate action that is currently needed. Molly added that she took part of a campus survey on climate change that found that 86% of respondents were concerned about climate change, Molly suggested that the next chancellor should take these concerns into consideration.

Regent Walsh solicited another student participant, AJ for his thoughts. AJ referenced a new campus group called “The UW Divestment Coalition” which focuses on uniting student associations across the UW System to take on the challenge of moving beyond fossil fuels. Prior students in similar roles had noted that the relationship with chancellors in the past have been antagonistic with chancellors seemingly dismissive of the group’s concerns. Tony, the Student Council President University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point at Wausau, advised that the new chancellor should focus on developing the relationships with and between the branch campuses. Tony acknowledged that work around branch campus integration has been successful, but Tony would like to see the relationships strengthened so that the University is seen as a single entity rather than three separate campuses.

Regent Walsh asked for feedback from Peter, a new participant. Peter identified himself as an employee with the UW-Stevens Point Foundation. Peter shared his feedback from the Foundation’s perspective; Peter suggested that the Foundation would like to see a chancellor that can balance the needs of the da-to-day operations of the university, but can also engage in community relations and raising revenue.

Regent Walsh asked specifically about the student perspective on the Point Forward campaign, a restructuring program that was designed to locate and potentially eliminate academic programs on campus (the conclusion of this program saw no academic programs cut from the UW-Stevens Point curricula). Will advised that the student government is working to see that something similar doesn’t happen again and that any restructuring plans should be taken on with the input of students and other stakeholders. Mark noted that he had several friends leave campus to continue their studies in programs that might have been eliminated by Point Forward. Jennifer stated that the students she taught felt betrayed by the proposal.

Committee member Dr. Nisha Fernando mentioned previous sessions where it was discussed that the next chancellor could come from the private sector. Dr. Fernando asked for feedback about a potential CEO-like chancellor that has executive experience in the area of business. Mark suggested that private sector enterprise is focused purely on profit motives. The next chancellor should have an educational background and strive for the best interests of students and faculty. Will agreed with Mark and suggested that an academic background is vital. Will recognizes that money is a factor for the university, but that the legislature should address these concerns, not a chancellor. Jennifer stated that someone coming into the role of chancellor should be an advocate for higher education and recognize that a higher education institution should serve the public, not just those that can afford an education. Tony also advised the next chancellor should focus on the branch campuses as a way of defraying education costs of students since the branch campuses are less expensive than the comprehensive institutions.

Regent Walsh asked the students what they would change to improve the student experience on campus. Molly advised that dining services have been an issue at the university. There are limitations and access issues on the food that is available on meal plans and changes come rapidly. Will concurred with Molly on the dining issue and advised that a recent food service project would require $1.4M in revenue each year to meet the demands of the project even though the service had never made over $750,000 in a year when the plan was developed. Tony shared that the next chancellor should focus on communication between the branch campuses and the comprehensive campus. Tony referenced an issue with transferring credits on a class he had already taken; he feels that this could have been avoided with better communication. AJ advised that the next chancellor needs to be accessible and transparent.

AJ circled back to the discussion of a private sector candidate as opposed to one that comes from higher education and shared that students would likely be more trusting in decisions coming from the chancellor’s office if the chancellor has a background in higher education and is making decisions based on that background. AJ feels a reverence for faculty members he sees every day, and it might be hard to have that connection with someone from the administrative office without a background in education. AJ added that word sustainability is in the mission of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, the new chancellor should recognize that and work to achieve sustainability. Will agreed with AJ but advised that the next chancellor should work to develop a long-range plan so that the mission statement is something that drives the university’s growth. Mark raised concerns about the Schmeeckle Reserve, a conservancy area on campus; Mark sees this as a priority for the University as the reserve keeps shrinking. Dr. Fernando agreed with Mark and noted that it is also an important research station (not just a reserve).

Committee member, Dyllan Griepentrog, added that student mental health should be a focus of the next chancellor. Jennifer agreed that the mental health office doesn’t have enough counselors and would hope that this would be a primary focus. Jennifer added that the next chancellor should be aware of and committed to diversity on campus and should work with various groups to commit to making the campus more diverse. Molly suggested that university has done a good job of making the campus diverse even in a largely white area of Wisconsin, but inclusivity should remain a focus under the next chancellor.

Dr. Mary Bowman asked for any final thoughts from the group. Will shared that the next chancellor should respect shared governance and work with student government and other stakeholders so that the chancellor is working towards an inclusive agenda.

Heather Kennedy, a representative with the University of Wisconsin System Administration, asked the group to sell her on the position of the chancellor. Jennifer shared that Stevens Point is not near metropolitan areas which can be unappealing for some, but Jennifer also thinks that this makes for a strong and closer community. Jennifer also stated that the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is very committed to the students, learning, and the community. Will agreed with Jennifer and shared that he feels at home on campus. Will also shared that the UW-Stevens Point is a destination for students that are the first in their families to attend college. This presents a unique opportunity for a chancellor to make a lasting impression. Molly echoed the perspectives of Will and Jennifer and shared that she hopes that the next chancellor appreciates the university as much as she does.

Dr. Bowman thanked the group for their perspective and closed the session.