



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM

Elizabeth City State University Chancellor Search Charge to the Search Advisory Committee UNC System President Peter Hans January 9, 2025

Strong, effective leadership makes an enormous difference to our public universities and the people they serve. These institutions are centers of culture, innovation, and economic opportunity across our state, and they deserve a capable and confident chancellor at the helm. Selecting university leaders well-matched to their institution and their moment is among the most important responsibilities of the UNC System president, and I approach this work with a deep appreciation of the public trust that a chancellorship represents.

Elizabeth City State University has a long and distinguished history of service to Northeastern North Carolina and an outsized impact on the lives of its students, faculty, and staff. This institution was created for the simple and vital purpose of providing teachers for Black North Carolinians, and through more than 130 years of growth and change, that foundational focus on educational uplift has never wavered. ECSU stands for access, for extending higher education to all those with the drive to learn and achieve.

Over the last several years, we have seen how that commitment — backed by the right policies and a well-executed strategic vision — can lead to success even amid deep challenges. We have seen how much North Carolinians treasure this place, with sustained investment from state lawmakers helping to make Elizabeth City State one of the best values in all of higher education. And we've seen just how much work it takes to sustain enrollment and momentum in the face of demographic changes and a region with long-term economic needs.

Karrie Dixon has been a model of thoughtful, effective leadership, and I am absolutely thrilled that she has chosen to keep her talents within the UNC System. Our role is not to find a replacement for Chancellor Dixon, but to build on the sound foundation she has established here so that ECSU remains a beacon of opportunity and economic impact in a place that needs — and deserves — both.

Our task is to find a leader with a love of ECSU's mission and clear-eyed optimism about how this university can best serve the needs of Northeastern North Carolina and a rising generation of students seeking a quality education. The way we approach this work and the sense of devotion we bring to it will help lay the groundwork for a successful chancellorship.

I'm excited to work alongside you, since I know we all share a bone-deep belief that ECSU is a university on the rise. I appreciate all of you committing your time, expertise, and cooperative spirit to this search. And I'd like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Stephanie Johnson, who has served this institution faithfully

for many years and will ensure that this search is a moment of pride and celebration for Viking Nation. I would also like to thank and recognize Dr. Ivy Taylor, who serves as a senior advisor to me at the UNC System Office. I have asked Dr. Taylor to serve as my designee and representative on this committee. She has my full faith and confidence to represent and speak for me in this committee's important task.

The purpose of my charge to this committee is to give us all a shared understanding of our goals and the steps we will follow to achieve them. There are three general areas I'd like to consider today.

First, our responsibilities as members of the search advisory committee.

Second, the traits I believe most crucial for Elizabeth City State's next chancellor.

And third, the process we will abide by in order to conduct a thorough, professional search and attract the finest possible slate of candidates for the job.

Role of search committee members

Every member of this committee was selected for a reason. You all bring experience, insight, and professional expertise that will help inform our work and help ensure the next chancellor of ECSU is positioned for success. Most importantly, you all have shown real devotion to this university and its historic purpose.

You are not here to represent the views or concerns of any particular constituency. Under the UNC Policy on Chancellor Searches and Election, our duty as members of the search advisory committee is to operate as a coherent team with a single shared objective: to recruit and recommend the strongest possible candidates to lead ECSU into its next chapter. That will, of course, mean tapping your own expertise and soliciting input from a broad range of people who care about Elizabeth City State and have a stake in its success. But you are not acting as delegates of any specific group.

We will listen to the Viking community; craft a leadership statement that highlights the background and qualifications we find most crucial for leading ECSU into a new era; assess candidates and conduct interviews; and ultimately put forward to the ECSU Board of Trustees an unranked slate of at least three individuals we believe are capable of taking this great institution to even greater heights.

From there, the Board will nominate at least three unranked candidates to me, and I will nominate one individual for election by the UNC Board of Governors. It's a process designed to ensure broad input and a high degree of alignment among the many stakeholders who must effectively support a new leader.

Your full participation is crucial to this effort. I ask all of you to commit to participating in search committee meetings and all candidate interviews. It helps us work well together as a committee with a singular focus on our shared goal, and it communicates the depth of our commitment to the ECSU community and to potential candidates.

It's also important that we remain open-minded and curious about the candidates we'll be meeting, giving each individual the benefit of a fair and thorough hearing about their experiences, their approach to leadership, and their vision for where ECSU can go next. I do not believe there is a single, rigid model for a successful chancellorship, and our role as a committee is to weigh our candidates and their ideas in good faith.

It is also our responsibility to maintain strict standards of confidentiality throughout the search process. Not only does state law and university policy require confidentiality, but just as importantly, protecting the integrity of this search matters for the reputation of ECSU and for the quality of candidates we are able to attract — both now and in the future. People are placing their relationships and professional prospects in our hands, and we must honor that trust carefully. Please keep our discussions private so that we can all bring our full and honest commitment to this work.

Finally, I ask that we give Dr. Johnson our respect and defer to her leadership role in addressing all outside inquiries about the search. Chair Johnson will be the sole spokesperson for the search advisory committee and the arbiter of all internal questions about the search process. This helps maintain the integrity of the committee and ensure we remain aligned with state law, university policy, and our committee charge. For legal advice, Dr. Johnson will call on Regina Rudisill who will serve as legal counsel to this committee.

Traits of a strong leader for Elizabeth City State

Elizabeth City State is a unique place, and this institution plays a distinctive role within our state and the region. Leadership of a public HBCU is also a special kind of public trust, a promise to both shepherd the legacy of ECSU and strengthen it for a changing world. That is a demanding balance, but I am absolutely confident that we will attract a range of candidates who are up to the task.

As I think about the kind of person who can lead the Vikings in the years ahead, here are a few of the things I'm eager for us to consider:

- A devotional heart and a willingness to build community. Elizabeth City State is a mission-driven university in the deepest sense, committed to welcoming students from a wide range of backgrounds and giving them the encouragement and support they need to achieve their dreams. That means nurturing an environment of genuine care in every part of this campus, a sensibility that must begin at the top.
- A love of teaching and mentorship. ECSU has an extraordinary faculty and staff who relish working directly with students, and a chancellor should share that commitment to quality instruction and close student support.
- Unwavering focus on student success. Educating our students is our primary mission as a university. A chancellor must be laser-focused on ensuring our students get the high-quality

education and opportunity for upward social and economic mobility that they look to us to provide.

- A clear-eyed, ambitious vision for ECSU's distinctive place in the higher education landscape. Institutions with a strong sense of identity, smartly differentiated from their peers, are positioned to thrive in an era of increasing competition for enrollment. ECSU's next chancellor should clearly articulate a vision that sets the campus apart while addressing its core mission of service to North Carolina.
- An appreciation for the UNC System's governance and strategic goals. Our public university leaders must understand and support the value of a well-coordinated state system, be wholly committed to furthering the shared goals of the UNC System's strategic plan, and see how their institution contributes to the overall health of the educational landscape in North Carolina.
- An eagerness to be a part of Elizabeth City's cultural and civic life. This campus is an anchor institution for the city and for the wider region, and a chancellor should be an enthusiastic ambassador to the wider community, eager to throw open the doors and contribute to the flourishing of the whole region.
- Reverence for ECSU's history and a deep comfort with the diverse state that we serve. North Carolina is a big place, varied in its demographics, its politics, its geography, and its ideas about the future. An effective leader must welcome and serve all, while proudly celebrating ECSU's historic role as a beacon of achievement for Black North Carolinians.
- Operational excellence and fiscal stewardship as guiding principles. The resources of a public university are precious and must be handled with exacting professionalism. From parking to budgeting, an effective chancellor must ensure the university's processes are honed in service to the mission and its resources are used wisely.
- Enthusiasm for cultivating support from alumni, donors, state leaders, and philanthropic foundations in support of ECSU's mission and vision.
- An appreciation for academic freedom and free expression, and an enthusiastic willingness to engage students, faculty, staff, and alumni of differing opinions and worldviews.
- And finally, unimpeachable personal integrity. Chancellors must exercise their authority in an environment of earned trust and goodwill, something that's only possible when their personal conduct is above reproach.

That's an ambitious list, and no candidate will demonstrate perfection across all of those areas. But chancellorships are demanding jobs, and I am confident we'll bring in candidates with compelling visions for Elizabeth City State University. Our aim is to look broadly, across the landscape of American higher education and among those with other leadership experience that lends itself well to the challenges of a public institution. As I said before, there is no single model for an effective chancellor, and our job is to remain open to a range of strong possibilities for ECSU's next leader.

Search process

Under Dr. Johnson's leadership, our committee will oversee a search that follows state law, university policy, and well-established procedures for getting us to a successful outcome. This includes adhering to the North Carolina Open Meetings Law and relevant provisions of the University Code. Ms. Rudisill will give us some additional guidance on those requirements during today's meeting.

We'll be aided in our work by our System Office team headed by Bradley Ballou, vice president for executive leadership and management, and Lynn Duffy, senior associate vice president for leadership and talent development. Lynn and her team have extensive backgrounds in executive searches, including 16 successful chancellor searches within our System. Bradley brings over 15 years' experience with the UNC System, including almost nine years as the chief of staff at UNC Wilmington where he worked as the lead campus staff on the most recent chancellor search.

We will enthusiastically gather ideas and input from across the Viking community, making sure that everyone who cares about the future of this proud university is heard with respect and appreciation. That will include listening forums, an online comment form, and any other formats we think helpful in reaching a wide range of constituents. I never forget that these universities belong to the people of North Carolina, and I welcome the opportunity to hear direct public input on their future.

If all goes well, I hope to conclude our work by the summer. We owe it to the entire Viking community to run a smooth and efficient search so that the next permanent leader of this institution can get off to a strong start. I'm truly excited to serve alongside all of you, to get to know many of you better, and to think deeply about the good work ahead for Elizabeth City State University. It's a joyful responsibility, and I'm glad we'll get to share it.