

DANNELLE F. W. WHITESIDE, J.D.

Ms. Julie E. Tea, Partner
Mr. Brian Bustin, Senior Associate
Storbeck Search & Associates

October 9, 2020

Dear Search Committee,

Have you ever known what it feels like to be walking squarely in your purpose, doing the very thing you were uniquely gifted to do? That is how I have felt every day since I took over as interim president at Austin Peay. It is with that spirit that I submit my materials for the position of President at Austin Peay State University. I possess a proven record of significant accomplishments and demonstrated leadership at Austin Peay and throughout my career and am a strong proponent of the transformative value of higher education. I have a history of effective team building, possess leadership integrity, and address opportunities and challenges with authenticity and transparency. Austin Peay's commitment to raising the educational attainment of a diverse population while serving the greater community is a match with my personal mission.

Before I was tapped to serve as APSU's interim Chief Executive Officer, I joined Austin Peay in January 2017 as General Counsel and Secretary to the Board of Trustees, initially attracted to its student-centered mission. In a short time, I was promoted to Vice President for Legal Affairs. Being appointed to serve as the interim president has presented many challenges and opportunities with respect to the times in which we find ourselves. Austin Peay is grappling with the lingering effects of COVID-19, an enrollment decline, and a budget shortfall all within the backdrop of racial, social, and political unrest. Despite these challenges, I have been inspired by how we have come together to provide a quality educational experience for our students. Under my leadership, we have made many difficult decisions to keep us on a progressive path. I have been leading the university through these challenges and would like the opportunity to continue leading us forward. I am pleased to submit a summary of my experiences as expressed in the [Agenda for Presidential Leadership](#), which I believe makes me uniquely qualified to serve as Austin Peay's 11th president.

Capitalize on momentum

The momentum that Austin Peay has experienced in recent years has been remarkable. Since 2017, I have been involved in the strategic direction of the university, provided legal advice and counsel for various strategic initiatives, and was the president's trusted advisor. Continuously, I have been impressed by our expanded degree programs, growth in enrollment, and winning athletics programs. Middle Tennessee is my home and I have developed critical relationships throughout the state with the higher education community, lawmakers, alumni and other key constituents that will help build on that momentum.

I have been a faithful champion of APSU athletics, which was put to the test particularly in light of COVID-19 when I fiercely advocated among the Ohio Valley Conference Board of Presidents to give our football

team a chance to have competition in the fall. As a result, our team gained national attention and was an example of how, when deploying the proper protocols, universities could continue to play sports safely. In 2018, I began drafting a 30-year lease between APSU and Montgomery County to rent space in the proposed Multipurpose Event Center (MPEC). The MPEC will be the future home of men's and women's basketball. After two years of negotiations between county and state officials, I was able to sign that lease to continue the growth and expansion for athletics. These are just a few examples of my ability to continue advancing the development of athletic programs and facilities.

In addition to being hired to serve as the university's chief legal officer, I was also hired as the first-ever secretary to the Board of Trustees. In this role, I was the architect of the entire legal and policy infrastructure of the Board. When the APSU Board of Trustees held their very first meeting, I was right there answering their questions, providing training on their legal obligations, and making sure they had all the information necessary to do their important work. Throughout this time, I have developed solid relationships with each trustee. As I have transitioned into the role of interim president, it was practically seamless because the trustees have always known me to be a trusted advisor.

Looking ahead, I know that Austin Peay is poised for growth and increased reputational significance. Under my leadership, we will be the university of the future, preparing our graduates for the skills and innovations that will emerge. For example, we are working with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee (BCBSTN) to develop the Blue Sky Partnership, which will provide an accelerated degree program with a guarantee of employment within BCBSTN upon graduation. This represents the future of higher education and I am excited to explore more ways we can continue to innovate and evolve.

Finally, I have demonstrated that, in times of uncertainty and unrest, I default to transparency, authenticity, and calm. I have not only kept the university community engaged and informed, but I also sought to encourage and inspire. Because of this, the university has come together to successfully meet the challenges that COVID-19 has brought through innovation and resilience. And I believe that we are poised to harness that collective strength to move forward on a progressive path.

Articulate Austin Peay's identity, mission, and vision

Since I arrived on campus, I have found this to be a family focused on changing the lives of each student we touch, serving those who serve our country, and enriching the community in which the university resides. Our students are quite special—focused, enthusiastic, and mission-minded. They thrive at Austin Peay, despite the fact that many of them come from backgrounds that traditionally may not have had access to a post-secondary degree. Our faculty are world-class scholars, second only to their hearts for serving students. Our staff are extremely dedicated and student-centered. We take pride in meeting the mission of raising the educational attainment of our citizenry and I brag on the Austin Peay community every chance I get. When Tennessee's Speaker of the House recently made an impromptu visit to Austin Peay, I eagerly conveyed the vision and priorities of Austin Peay and advocated for the institution's place in the Governor's budget priorities. I am also adept in articulating that identity internally. For instance, when I began as General Counsel, the Office of Legal Affairs had a reputation of being a roadblock on campus. I articulated to my team the future direction of our office that we would become a partner for those we serve and I set expectations around that vision. Under my leadership, the office became more service-oriented and collaborative. I am regularly chosen to communicate our

vision and values to students. For instance, I was twice selected to be the keynote speaker at Freshman Convocation to get first-year students excited about joining the Austin Peay family, the importance of finding their *PEAYple*, and instilling in them the value of what it means to be a Governor. In the future, I would like to memorialize our cultural identity as an institution by working with the Board of Trustees and other internal stakeholders to establish core values and set a baseline for how members of the Austin Peay family will treat each other.

Foster continued growth and stewardship of the University's financial resources

As the university's Chief Executive Officer, I oversee a \$162 million budget. Realizing that we are currently in a budget shortfall, I am presently working to implement strategies for budget reduction, prioritizing the preservation of the quality educational experience and our talented workforce. Once we are able to reach a positive financial trajectory, I will work with the Chief Financial Officer to build our reserves to the national recommended average and to innovate around financial modeling and infrastructure. With the understanding that in the next several years, national enrollment trends face downward, I will work to prepare our organization for that enrollment cliff. I have found creative solutions to address issues bearing financial implications and I have a track record of success in advocating for more resources and opportunities from a variety of sources. For example, when the university was facing a housing shortage, I worked with the developers of nearby housing complex, *Main 608*, to draft an affiliation agreement that gave APSU students preference in leasing their units.

I have been enthusiastically engaged in the advancement work at Austin Peay and have been actively engaged with our donors to continue cultivating those relationships. Within my first week as interim president, I closed on a two-million-dollar gift to the institution, which will be used to fund programs directly impacting students. Additionally, I successfully presented the case to the Montgomery County Community Health Foundation as to why they should give APSU three million dollars to help fund the proposed Health Professions Building. I have also encouraged the Office of Advancement to consider ways to engage nontraditional donors and engage the university community in our fundraising efforts. Through the Advancement Academy, we will offer targeted training to senior leadership and deans on fundraising strategies and provide an overview of the work of advancement to the general campus community. Finally, and most excitedly, I gave the Office of Advancement the green light to move forward with the APSU Comprehensive Campaign, which is only the 2nd in the university's history. After pausing due to COVID-19, I determined that it was the right move to resume the campaign. The campaign will officially launch in November, we have already raised \$58 million of our \$65 million-dollar goal, and I am confident that we will exceed that goal.

Champion diversity, equity, and inclusion

For nearly three years, I worked at the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights which gave me a firm grasp on an institution's legal obligations to provide an accessible and inclusive environment. However, this moment in history has revealed that effective leadership requires cultural competencies that go far beyond a knowledge of legal obligations. Early retirements and resignations of college and university presidents across the U.S. have confirmed that a leader's success also is now dependent on a demonstrated ability to navigate matters related to all aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion including understanding racism and addressing racial inequity, providing resources for the LGBTQIA+ community, and creating an inclusive environment for persons living with disabilities. These

are critical skills that I bring to the presidency. Most recently, I partnered with the Office of Equity, Access, and Inclusion and the university's Diversity Committee to launch an initiative called "A Place at Our Table" which is designed to foster small group discussions around racial and social injustices. During the summer of 2020, when racial tensions were at their peak, I moderated a town hall discussing issues of race, which was attended by over 400 members of the university community. Last year, I partnered with the Wilbur N. Daniel African American Cultural Center, the Psychological Sciences and Counseling Department, and the Political Science and Public Management Department to create a series of workshops for APSU students to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Women's Suffrage Movement, with a focus on Black women's involvement in the movement.

Moving forward, I am supporting efforts to create a program which will allow students to take interdisciplinary courses that will result in achieving a certification in diversity. I am also working with Academic Affairs to revamp APSU 1000 to focus on civic engagement and civil discourse. Austin Peay has greater work to do when it comes to achieving a balanced diverse faculty to student ratio. Our percentage of diverse faculty is much lower than the national average, which leads to faculty burnout, isolation, and retention issues. To ensure an equitable hiring process, I have supported efforts to place an equity advocate on each search committee. In addition, I was instrumental in reviving the African American Employee Council whose mission is to support and retain black employees at Austin Peay. I am hopeful that more employee resource groups will form to provide support to diverse employees.

Ensure the appropriate infrastructure to support and sustain enrollment growth

The first step to ensuring the appropriate infrastructure is to reverse the trend of enrollment decline and budget shortfall. Austin Peay is presently embracing the workforce evolution resulting from COVID-19 by analyzing our workforce and looking for innovative ways to streamline business practices to create more efficiency and expenditure reduction. For example, our newly-implemented "Trailing Spouse Initiative" turns vacant eligible full-time staff positions into part-time positions. These positions are usually attractive to spouses, many of them military-affiliated, who don't necessarily need health benefits because they are covered by their spouse's insurance. On average, this initiative saves each unit 16% on the employer benefits portion annually. Though the university is in a hiring pause, I have authorized the hiring of key positions, including the Veterans Affairs certifying official and two full time marketing positions-- one to work directly in university admissions and one within the College of Business. This demonstrates that, even when our budget is tight, I will strategically invest in positions that will help us meet our mission and help us to grow. When the university is in a more stable financial position, we will begin adding human capital to support our growth. Finally, we are presently working on an "all hands on deck" marketing and recruitment strategy to increase student enrollment. The College of Business will hire its own dedicated marketing person as a pilot program of college-based marketing. If this proves to be successful, we will proceed with adding dedicated marketing staff assigned to each college to increase enrollment. Ultimately, we will develop a strategic enrollment plan, which will help us to sustain future growth.

Promote high-impact practices around student success

For three years, I taught APSU 1000, which is our first-year experience course and is a widely recognized high impact practice. Because of this experience, I have been able to identify ways that it could be improved. In recent months, I have supported the Office of Human Resources in revamping the student

employment experience, which is also a high-impact practice. Human Resources has begun providing dedicated student employee onboarding where students are taught professionalism, dress code, and interpersonal skills. They have also worked with leaders and managers to provide students thoughtful work and real-world experience so that they can have tangible evidence of preparation for life after graduation.

In June, when we noticed our enrollment trending downward, I proposed “Operation Blitz” to call every enrolled student at Austin Peay. It was a Herculean effort involving many staff and faculty volunteers, but we were able to reverse the steep enrollment decline and ultimately improve retention by nearly five percent. Last year, when challenged by President White to implement a big idea, I created the first advice-only legal clinic. I worked with volunteer attorneys in the community to provide free legal advice to students. I will continue to work with the Office of Legal Affairs to offer this service to students as a powerful retention tool.

Engage and empower the faculty & staff, communicate effectively, & lead with transparency

I regularly embody transparency and consistent communication, especially while serving in time of crisis. Every week, I engage with the campus community through social media, providing weekly updates on COVID-19 cases and general campus updates, which based on testimony has been very well received. In fact, Student Affairs conducted a focus group to assess student morale this semester and to the question of whether they felt the campus communication was adequate, 97% said yes. Many of those responses specifically cited my engagement on social media platforms. I have also implemented “Pop-ins with the Prez” via the Zoom platform where every three weeks, faculty, staff, and students can sign up for 15-minute time slots to speak with me about whatever concerns they have. I have garnered so many ideas and strategies from that engagement. I have been a featured speaker on campus at leadership seminars, peer leader training, and student recognition ceremonies, just to name a few. I have also been invited to tell the Austin Peay story to local rotary clubs, community events, and high schools. I continuously support faculty and staff recognition through the annual staff awards and faculty awards programs. I believe it is important to highlight their contributions not only because they are deserving, but also because it is an effective tool to increase employee engagement and retention. Finally, I have demonstrated a respect for shared governance throughout my time at Austin Peay. I previously served on the university’s policy committee and reviewed every policy coming from the Faculty Senate. I was never heavy-handed with my legal advice; rather I worked with various units to develop legally sound policies that also met the needs of that unit. Since serving in the interim presidency, I have continued in that manner, meeting regularly with the presidents of the Faculty Senate and Staff Senate and attending each body’s meetings to provide updates and answer questions.

Support and enhance deep engagement with military constituencies

Austin Peay is enriched by the relationship we have with our military. As interim president, I have been earnest in meeting with senior officers at Fort Campbell and I look forward to cultivating our relationship. I previously provided strategic support to our efforts at Fort Campbell by reviewing and revising our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). I also worked with General Scott Brower, Military Advisor in Residence, to review the MOU between Austin Peay and Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), which has been instrumental in increasing military student enrollment. I am increasingly excited about

the opening of the Newton Military Family Resource Center and the impact it will have on the success of our military affiliated students. As a member of the senior leadership team, I was supportive of the development of that center and since serving as interim president, I have continued to champion the center's completion by providing final authorization for the furnishing and finishes within the space. I have worked to cultivate a relationship with the center's namesake in a way that will support future advancement opportunities. In the future, I will continue to advance support for our military-affiliated students, particularly as it relates to advocating for creating the Institute for National Security and Military Studies. This is a natural fit for our university and something that I am committed to seeing across the finish line.

I possess: a terminal degree (J.D.) in my discipline; a record of authentic and transparent leadership; a record of administrative experience in higher education and across varying levels of education entities; evidence of the temperament and experience to effectively advocate for Austin Peay to both internal and external stakeholders. I have and knowledge of trends in higher education gained through a variety of relevant work experiences and professional development opportunities such as THEC's Higher Education Innovation and Leadership fellow program and AACSB's Millennium Leadership Initiative, which is a professional development opportunity designed to prepare individuals to assume a university presidency. What my resume cannot document is that I love Austin Peay, I have loved every single day in this role, I have loved serving our students, faculty, and staff, and I have loved living out my dream. A final thing you should know about me-- I come as a package deal which includes my husband Sean and my son Donovan. We have been supporters of Austin Peay since I began in 2017 (before Donovan was even thought of), and we have been engaged as a family since I began serving as interim.

If a leader does her job well, she is actively engaged in grooming the next generation of leaders. I represent that next generation leader and I am excited about the opportunity to lead Austin Peay into the future. I believe that at this pivotal moment in our history, Austin Peay State University would continue on its impressive path of growth and progress under my leadership and I am ready for that challenge. I look forward to discussing my candidacy with the search committee. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of my submitted materials.

Sincerely,



Dannelle F. W. Whiteside