

University of St. Francis searches for new leadership to steer growth and academic excellence  
By: Scarlett LaBuda, Editor in Chief

The University of St. Francis has begun searching for their next Presidential candidate after the announcement that Dr. Arvid Johnson stepped down last spring. Dr. Johnson had been leading the university for well over a decade when he announced he was stepping down.

Last semester a board of faculty and staff were chosen to begin finalizing the candidate selection that would become our university finalists. These candidates were then invited to the university for a campus visit in mid January consisting of multiple sessions for staff and students as well as a campus tour. The final three candidates being Dr. Ryan Hendrickson, Dr. Adam Weyhaupt and Dr. Christopher Whitt.

Dr. Ryan Hendrickson comes from a background in political science and has served as the Provost at Eastern Illinois University (EIU) since July 2023. In addition to his role as the Provost, Dr. Hendrickson earned the title of Vice President of Academic Affairs in February 2024. Dr. Hendrickson has served EIU since 1999, beginning his time there as a faculty member and began holding titles at EIU in 2015 as the L.M. Hamand Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Sponsored Research.

Throughout his tenure at EIU Dr. Hendrickson achieved an exponential amount of growth for the university. Dr. Hendrickson helped sustain growth in their graduate student enrollment and grew the program by 52% in roughly 10 years. Additionally during his time, Dr. Hendrickson experienced an all-time record graduate enrollment and international student enrollment in Fall 2023.

The second candidate, Dr. Adam Weyhaupt, comes from a background in mathematics and has served as the Provost of Fontbonne University since June 2022. Dr. Weyhaupt is also the Executive Vice President of Fontbonne University since September 2023. Dr. Weyhaupt has been with Fontbonne University since July 2016, originally serving as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. In addition to his time and experience at Fontbonne University, Dr. Weyhaupt has served as an Executive Fellow and Scholar-in-Residence at Quincy University since August 2024. Prior to his experience at Fontbonne University and Quincy University, Dr. Weyhaupt served as a Professor and Department Chair at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville from August 2006 to June 2016.

Dr. Weyhaupt along with a team of leaders recently had to make the decision to close Fontbonne University after the evaluation of the school's viability. His responsibilities included planning the closure announcement and ensuring Fontbonne was able to fully operate through its planned closure date. While this was a hard decision to make, Dr. Weyhaupt has openly talked about

supporting his faculty and staff as Fontbonne University has started to dwindle down to a skeleton crew for the remainder of the school year.

The final candidate the University of St. Francis welcomed to campus was Dr. Christopher Whitt, who has a background in political science and has been serving as the Vice Chancellor at the University of Denver since April 2021. Prior to his work at the University of Denver, Dr. Whitt served as the Vice Provost at Creighton University from April 2018 to March 2021. Dr. Whitt was also Founding Director of the Center for Inclusive Leadership and Equity at Augustana College from January 2016 to February 2018. Concurrent to his role as the Founding Director Dr. Whitt served as the Department Chair for the Department of Political Science from April 2015 to February 2018. Prior to this Dr. Whitt was a Professor at Augustana College from 2007 to 2013.

Dr. Whitt has an extensive list of awards, honors and accolades with his most recent being the 2023 Inaugural Outstanding Alumnus Award that was given to Dr. Whitt to recognize his work and achievements as a professional. Dr. Whitt also has a scholarship that is given in his honor since 2018 in Rock Island County by the NAACP recognizing his contributions to the Quad Cities community to help college-bound students.

All of these candidates come from decorated educational backgrounds and all have attributions that can be beneficial to our community here at the University of St. Francis. The Board of Trustees will move forward and choose the final candidate that will become our next President taking into consideration all of the individual's strengths and weaknesses. Students that attended the discussion panels were asked to fill out forms outlining their perception of the candidate as well as a brief analysis of their abilities and needed areas of improvement.