



HLC Accreditation 2020-2021

## Evidence Document

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A Temp with Experience:  
**Andy Tompkins is WSU's bridge to  
next president**

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**Additional information:** Republished in WSU Today, June 17, 2019 from the Wichita Business Journal (**June 14, 2019**)

## A temp with experience

Daniel McCoy, Wichita Business Journal

Wichita Business Journal reporter Daniel McCoy recently interviewed WSU Interim President Andy Tompkins and reported the following:

Under the leadership of John Bardo, Wichita State University by all accounts embarked on a new era.

WSU changed dramatically under Bardo, who died in March. Strengthening the university's ties to the business community.

Spearheading the massive investment into the school's sprawling Innovation Campus. Bringing a focus on inter-disciplinary collaboration and applied learning.

In taking over the helm of the city's flagship university, Andy Tompkins says his mandate is to keep the school's momentum going and prepare it for the next leader.

"You're not supposed to be coming into this to totally turn the ship another direction," he says. "You're supposed to help it keep moving in the direction it was going."

A lifelong educator and a former CEO of the Kansas Board of Regents, Tompkins was named interim president at WSU following Bardo's death.

Tompkins was part of the search committee that brought Bardo to the university in 2012, and says he already knew the former president's



vision for what WSU could be, while controversial at times, was paying big dividends.

And Tompkins — whose lean frame and genial nature feel indicative of a man who was admittedly happy in retirement — says he knew he had to answer the call when asked to keep that momentum going.

“My goal has been to try and keep (the university) moving in a good direction and then make sure we’re ready for that next person,” he says.

### **Listening to learn**

Tompkins has held down the fort, so to speak, before.

He served as interim president at Fort Hays State University from December 2016 to November 2017.

Michael Barnett, vice president for administration and finance at the school, says Tompkins played a crucial role in helping the university during a difficult time after former president Mirta Martin resigned for personal reasons.

Barnett, who served a short stint as interim president before Tompkins, says he was the right fit.

“Andy was great to work with,” he says. “His personality and style brought a really calming influence to campus.”

Tompkins’ focus never strayed from students and keeping the university moving forward, Bennett says, though he had to make some difficult decisions.

“He did what needed to be done,” Barnett says.

Tompkins says one of the biggest lessons he learned, that he now brings to WSU, is to ask the right questions and listen for the right answers. It helps the next president.

Barnett says Tompkins did that at Fort Hays, helping the transition to new president Tisa Mason.

At WSU, Tompkins says, there is a strategic plan in place. While he moves it forward, his ultimate goal is another successful handoff to his successor.

“My goal is to listen a lot while I’m here,” he says.

### **Presidential search**

Wichita developer Steve Clark is heading the advisory committee tasked with finding the next president, the same role he held for the committee that ultimately landed on Bardo.

Unlike that search, this will be a closed process.

The idea behind it, he says, is that it makes for the strongest pool of candidates for the Board of Regents to make their eventual appointment. He says candidates don’t have to worry about their interest becoming public.

Clark likes the closed approach, though he says he understands both arguments. He says the last search produced a weak pool of candidates and that WSU was lucky to have found Bardo.

“We had to kiss a lot of frogs to find the handsome prince,” he says.

Clark said the first meeting of the 20-person committee was largely organizational. The next significant meeting is in early September, where it will meet in closed session to discuss potential candidates.

Alabama-based Wheless Partners, a search consultant, was in Wichita last week meeting with university and community stakeholders to begin forming the job profile that will be presented to potential candidates.

Meanwhile, Clark says Tompkins — as he was at Fort Hays State — is the right interim leader.

His knowledge of the education system and “all the moving parts,” Clark says, make Tompkins uniquely qualified to keep WSU’s momentum going as the search progresses.

“He is a tremendous person and we could not have anyone better than Andy at the helm out there,” says Clark, a WSU graduate and former Regent.

Tompkins is not a candidate, though he’ll stay in the role until the Regents have the next president. He thinks that could stretch into 2020 by the time the new president is in office.

The successor, Clark says, will be stepping into a critical time at WSU, where the imperative will be to continue the momentum that Bardo began.

“We are looking for Superman or Superwoman,” Clark says.

### **Student-focused**

For his part, Tompkins says WSU has so much going for it that he expects the school to draw an impressive list of candidates.

From its mission and ties to the community, to new offshoots such as WSU Tech and even its recent realignment into the American Athletic Conference, Tompkins says administrators will be attracted to the school’s growing profile.

That includes growing momentum and a thriving community around it that makes Wichita a destination that can attract top faculty, something he says any potential president would have high on their list.

And then, of course, there are the students.

At 71, Tompkins maintains an undeniable energy. But his excitement for his work is most apparent when he talks about students.

And being on campus in Wichita, he says, has only deepened his appreciation for the work Bardo did to bind the university to the business and broader community and put a new emphasis on applied learning.

It was all designed, Tompkins says, to give students the best education possible and follow it with opportunities to remain and work in Wichita after graduation.

“This is a pretty powerful vision for an institution,” he says. “I think it has brought a lot of energy to campus.”