

BUSAC's Presidential Qualities Staff Survey Report – May-June 2025

Overview & Purpose

In May 2025, in response to a request by Interim President Arthur Levine, BUSAC launched a brief, anonymous survey to find out what qualities Brandeis staff would like to see in a new Brandeis President.

The responses to this survey – outlined in this brief – are intended for Interim President Levine and the Brandeis Presidential Search Committee to consider in the search for the new Brandeis President.

The search committee work, in partnership with a Search Firm, is scheduled to launch in July 2025.

Survey Methodology & Timing

BUSAC received Presidential Qualities Survey responses to the [Google Form](#) from 129 staff members or about 11% of staff surveyed.

The survey was first distributed in a monthly BUSAC newsletter by BUSAC Representatives to their districts on or soon after Tuesday, May 13th (email subject: "May 2025 BUSAC Updates & Staff Survey").

The survey was completed anonymously, though the survey did include the required question, "Are you a Brandeis staff member?" to prompt respondents to confirm their role as a staff person.

Otherwise, the first substantive question was required: "Which characteristics, background, experience, strengths or values would you like to see in the new incoming Brandeis President?"

The other two prompts were optional: "Are there characteristics, background, experience, strengths or values would you like to AVOID in the selection of the new incoming Brandeis President?" and "Do you have any recommendations for, or examples of, the leadership style you'd like to see in the new incoming Brandeis President?"

BUSAC distributed the link again in a stand-alone email message to the entire BUSAC Distribution list (1,125 email address bcc'd, plus bcc'd Interim President Arthur Levine) on Thursday, May 15th from the BUSAC@brandeis.edu email address. BUSAC requested Brandeis staff to complete the anonymous survey by Friday, May 30th. BUSAC also distributed a reminder message to staff on Wednesday, May 28th. We closed the survey on Tuesday, June 3rd.

Survey Snapshot

1. Qualities Staff Hope to See in the New Brandeis President

Staff are looking for a president who is open, approachable, and truly engaged with the Brandeis community. They want someone who:

- Values transparency, communicates openly, and avoids hidden agendas
 - Builds strong relationships across staff, faculty, students, and alumni
 - Brings fresh ideas, embraces change, and understands how to lead a university that's both forward-looking and true to its heritage
 - Is an experienced fundraiser and understands the unique role Brandeis plays in higher education
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2. Qualities Staff Hope to Avoid in the New Brandeis President

People were just as clear about traits they don't want to see:

- No micromanagers or leaders with controlling, top-down styles
 - No egotistical or arrogant personalities
 - No one who doesn't understand or respect Brandeis' mission, culture, and heritage
 - No leaders who shy away from collaboration, reject feedback, or try to centralize too much decision-making
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3. Leadership Styles Most Valued for a New Brandeis President

The ideal Brandeis president would be:

- A collaborative and approachable listener
- A transformational and purpose-driven leader, someone dedicated to empowering others and putting the institution and its people first

- An adaptive thinker who can navigate change and lead Brandeis into the future. Staff would like to see the new President be open minded and excited to try new things
- Someone who inspires trust, builds connections across campus, and knows how to motivate the whole Brandeis community behind shared goals and visions

Survey Summary

BUSAC's recent presidential qualities survey shows how deeply staff care about the future of the university and our next president. The responses reflect a strong desire for a leader who is approachable, trustworthy, and genuinely invested in Brandeis and its people.

Throughout the responses, staff spoke about the need for a president who is present and engaged across the university. We want someone who spends time getting to know students, staff, faculty, and alumni alike, and who is open to listening and learning from staff in particular. Transparency came up repeatedly as an important quality. Brandeis staff want a president who operates openly, explains their decisions, and welcomes questions and feedback. In short, the new president should lead by building trust and making staff feel heard and valued.

The ideal candidate should understand and respect Brandeis' heritage and its long-standing commitment to academic excellence and social justice. At the same time, staff want a president who can help Brandeis adapt to the challenges and opportunities that higher education faces today. We seek someone who can balance a deep respect for the university's traditions with a bold and hopeful vision for its future. Experience in fundraising, building connections with donors and alumni, and making a strong case for Brandeis in the wider world came up often as well.

The survey also made it clear what staff hope to avoid. Staff do not want a president who micromanages or operates with an authoritarian or ego-driven style. Staff spoke openly about their concern with leaders who isolate themselves from the community, ignore feedback, or fail to respect Brandeis' mission and heritage. What the Brandeis community is looking for is someone who leads with humility, treats others as equals, and embraces collaboration.

Respondents also expressed a strong preference for a president who can unite and uplift Brandeis. Staff spoke about a collaborative approach to leadership; someone who works closely with staff and treats their input with genuine respect. Responses also show that staff value a transformational, service-oriented style president who puts the needs of the institution and its people first, inspires trust, and encourages

belonging. We want a president who can adapt to change, make hard decisions when needed, and guide Brandeis with integrity, resilience, and compassion.

The third survey question asked for recommendations, or examples of, the leadership style staff would like to see the incoming president have. Again, honesty, empathy, and communication were repeatedly mentioned here as well. However, some respondents gave specific names and examples of leaders they would like the incoming president to embody.

The responses reflect a clear desire for a Brandeis president who is present, approachable, and genuinely connected to the campus community. Many people mentioned President Arthur Levine by name and praised his leadership style. They appreciate that he makes time for students and staff, that he's visible around campus, and that he communicates clearly and directly. His fireside chats, openness to feedback, and willingness to be part of day-to-day life at Brandeis were all mentioned as qualities people would like to see continue in the next president.

Beyond President Levine, several respondents pointed to other current and former college and university leaders as examples of strong leadership. David Harris at Union College was mentioned as someone who leads with integrity and thoughtfulness. Michael Roth at Wesleyan came up multiple times as a president who speaks honestly and isn't afraid to take a stand, especially in difficult moments. Ed Wingenbach at Hampshire College was recognized for his ability to manage a tough situation with care. Joseph Aoun at Northeastern was praised for his role in growing the university, fundraising successfully, and staying engaged with students and faculty. Others mentioned included Kent Fuchs at the University of Florida, Paul LeBlanc from Southern New Hampshire University. Some also admired the leadership of Sarah Willie-LeBreton at Smith, Kelli J. Armstrong at Salve Regina, and Stephanie Cosner at Simmons University.

There were also references to leaders outside of higher education. Several people said they admired leaders like Barack Obama and Bill Clinton for their communication skills and ability to inspire. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Elizabeth Warren, and Janet Mills were also mentioned as political leaders who show the kind of boldness and listening skills staff want to see in the new university president. One person brought up Kamala Harris, describing her as someone who thoroughly understands the topics she addresses, which they felt should be a standard for a president at an academic institution. Richard Branson and Steve Jobs were named as examples of creative, forward-thinking leadership.

Several campus figures were named as local examples of strong leadership, including Lori Tenser and Gilbert Hinga, both praised for their thoughtful, collaborative approaches. Another suggestion was Bob Bordone at Harvard Law

School, who is known for conflict resolution work and strong interpersonal skills. A few people also pointed to individuals such as Simon Sinek and Marshall Goldsmith for their ideas on leadership and organizational development, suggesting that Brandeis could benefit from a leader who shares the same ideas.

Overall, this survey captures the deep hope the Brandeis community has for our next chapter. It shows how much people value a president who understands the heart and soul of this university, who values staff and our opinions, and who can help build a brighter, stronger future. The Brandeis community is ready to support a president who will listen, unite, and lead with sincerity while carrying the university forward in a way that makes everyone proud.