

FINAL REPORT OF AD HOC COMMITTEE ON PROCESS, CRITERIA, AND TIMING OF A PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH

INTRODUCTION

University Senate Chair Dr. Willie Larkin appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Process, Criteria, and Timing of a Presidential Search to report back to the University Senate with recommendations concerning the search that will at some point in the future take place for President of Auburn University.

Given recent controversies about the conduct of governance at Auburn University, the selection of a new president, which even in the best of times is a critical decision for any university, may well determine the fate of Auburn University for decades to come.

The Board of Trustees has the power and legal authority to make the final selection of the next president. In fact, the selection of a president is the most important decision any governing board of a university makes. However, a wise board will recognize that the process of selecting a president should be utilized to build consensus and to reinforce the common purpose of the various constituencies of the institution. A search handled unilaterally or guided by hidden agendas can leave lasting scars that will take many years to heal and make it virtually impossible for a new president to be effective. On the other hand, a search process that provides for meaningful faculty involvement and for input from students, staff, administrative and professional personnel, and alumni can strengthen the institution and make the job of a new president much easier. It is particularly important that the faculty, which has the primary responsibility for carrying out the teaching, research, and service mission of the University, be centrally involved in any search.

No one model has gained acceptance throughout higher education regarding the precise procedures that ought to be followed in a presidential search. Our ad hoc committee, however, has reviewed the search procedures adopted by a number of peer institutions in recent years and has developed the following recommendations to serve as suggested guidelines for a search process that might help build consensus in the selection of a new president.

In order to attract the best possible pool of candidates, it will be important even before a search is formally initiated for Auburn University to take proactive steps to demonstrate its commitment to the principles of shared governance and to promoting diversity. Such actions will be necessary to convince prospective applicants that Auburn University is serious about moving forward in an inclusive and collegial spirit.

SEARCH COMMITTEE COMPOSITION & RESPONSIBILITIES

COMPOSITION

We recommend that the Board of Trustees empower a broadly representative Presidential Search Committee (PSC) to identify the best possible candidates for the position of president. In an effort to build consensus in the conduct of the search, the PSC should be broadly representative of the University's various constituencies. We believe faculty representation on the PSC ought to be substantially greater than that of any other single constituency, due to the essential role of the faculty in carrying out the mission of the university. We support active involvement by representatives of the Board of Trustees as a means of building consensus, but recognize that the Board's principal role is selecting one individual from among the finalists identified by the PSC. We suggest the following composition of the PSC (18 total members):

- 3 Trustees
- 7 Faculty (2 coming from AUM)
- 1 Administrator (dean level or below)
- 3 Alumni (1 coming from AUM)
- 2 Students (1 coming from AUM)

1 Staff Member
1 A & P Member

In order to enhance the faith of the University community in the legitimacy of the search process, it is crucial that the individuals serving on the PSC be chosen by the groups they represent and not be appointed by the Board, the President, or an individual selected by the Board as PSC chair. Search committee members should not act as special interest advocates, but to avoid questions about the integrity of the PSC, it is important that they be selected by their peers. We suggest that the administrator on the committee not be above the level of dean and that this individual might appropriately be selected by the deans acting collectively.

In the selection of the faculty members of the PSC, we suggest that the entire University faculty be asked to submit nominations to the University Senate Rules Committee, which could then make appointments, being sensitive to the need to assure diversity in the academic disciplines represented, and in the gender and race of the faculty members serving on the PSC. It is our hope that other groups with multiple representatives on the PSC would also consider diversity in their selection of representatives.

We favor the establishment of a co-chair system for the PSC, with one co-chair being a Trustee member of the committee, and the other being a faculty member. The co-chairs should be selected by the entire PSC in a secret ballot election.

RESPONSIBILITIES

While the Board of Trustees must retain the authority to consider finalists and to make the ultimate selection of a new president, we recommend that the PSC be responsible for deciding on issues relating to the conduct of the search, including selection of a search consultant, the wording of the job advertisement, and the means of checking references and screening applicants.

Only candidates who have been screened by the PSC should be considered by the Board of Trustees. It is impossible to know now how many applicants will emerge in a search who are qualified for the position and who would be able to win the enthusiastic support of the search committee. Therefore, we believe that it would be inappropriate to designate in advance the minimum number of candidates the PSC be required to send to the Board of Trustees for consideration as finalists. However, in recognition of the need for the Board to exercise its own judgment in the search process, the PSC should send forward multiple names of applicants it deems the best match for Auburn.

RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES & POSSIBLE USE OF CONSULTANTS

Given Auburn's recent history, it may be difficult to develop a strong pool of applicants if we do not take active steps to recruit good candidates. In order to convince good candidates to apply, we believe it is necessary for the University to demonstrate through specific actions its commitment to academic excellence, diversity, and shared governance, and for the PSC to engage in proactive efforts to find ways of highlighting the strengths of Auburn University as an academic institution.

It would also be helpful in attracting candidates if the current interim president reaffirms what he said at the time of his appointment that he has no intention of becoming a candidate in the search for a permanent president. It is widely recognized that it is harder to attract outside candidates if a person currently holding a position on an interim basis is thought to be part of the applicant pool.

We believe that hiring a professional search consultant is also necessary to attract the widest possible pool of good candidates. We recommend that the PSC make the selection of the search consultant to be used, but that it consider only search firms that can assign to Auburn individual consultants who have had extensive experience in higher education and that have a proven track record of being involved in presidential searches resulting in the hiring of women and minorities. Moreover, to avoid even the appearance of any possible conflict of interest, we

believe that any search firm retained have no ongoing fiduciary or personnel connection to Auburn University. It is also important that the search consultant who is retained not supplant the PSC as the body in control of the search process. A consultant should function solely as an aid to the PSC in whatever way the PSC deems useful.

CONFIDENTIALITY/SECRECY

In order to attract the best possible pool of applicants, it may well be necessary to maintain confidentiality as to the names of applicants (to the extent allowed by the state's sunshine laws) until the final stage of the search process. We believe, however, that a search is more likely to produce a consensus and enhance the investment of the University's on-campus constituencies (faculty, students, staff, and A & P) in the ultimate outcome of the search if the individuals designated as finalists by the PSC be invited to come to campus to present their vision for Auburn's future and to have open meetings with these groups. Candidates unwilling at the last stage of the search to meet openly with campus groups should be excluded from further consideration.

PRESIDENTIAL CRITERIA

A search for a president offers a unique opportunity for a university to define its vision for the future and to enhance understanding of the institution's mission. Although the Board of Trustees holds ultimate responsibility for determining the University's mission and selecting a new president, it is highly desirable to develop the widest possible agreement among the University's various constituencies, including most importantly the faculty, on the characteristics and experience a new president ought to possess to insure the greatest chance of that person's success in office.

In order to further that goal, our committee, before bringing a final set of recommendations to the Senate, obtained input from the faculty and from the A & P group of employees regarding what they consider the most important requirements or qualifications for a new president (see appendix).

This Committee accepts that the most important element in the selection of the next President of Auburn University will be the Presidential Selection Advisory Committee. If the Selection Committee is composed of trustworthy individuals who make the well-being of the entire university their top priority and are freely chosen by the appropriate interested parties, then it will undoubtedly choose proper criteria for selecting our next President, and will exercise clear judgment in administering those criteria. In a word, it is critical that the Selection Committee be formed in a manner that engenders trust by all constituencies. The importance of the University faculty identifying a set of specific criteria for the next President is inversely related to the entire University community's trust in that Committee. With that caveat, we offer the following observations on desired characteristics of our next Auburn University President.

The Survey responses of faculty as well as administrative and professional personnel clearly indicated a strong preference for a President who possesses the specific required characteristic of having university experience. Such required experiences include an earned doctorate, a record of scholarly achievement, high-level administrative experience, a proven leadership record, and an appreciation for the importance of shared governance. Additionally, faculty also had a strong preference for a President who has a commitment to fostering intellectual diversity and inquiry, and for someone who has a proven record of fostering racial, ethnic, and gender diversity.

Responses also emphasized the value of experience at a comprehensive research university and an understanding of the role of land-grant universities. Although the responses suggested that experience at a land-grant university was very desirable, the ranking of this criterion was not so high as to warrant its being made a requirement.

While our Committee was in general agreement with the survey responses, there was also a strong sentiment that a broader view of prior experience was acceptable and perhaps even advantageous. In other words, room should be allowed for non-traditional candidates who have unique qualities. The over-arching criteria for the

President of Auburn University, regardless of her/his experience in academia, should be a record of leadership and administrative experience with clear evidence of curiosity, a history of seeking and considering diverse opinions, and above all, respect for all persons. A candidate with these characteristics, regardless of specific experience, would foster racial, ethnic and gender diversity; nurture intellectual diversity and inquiry; practice shared governance; and encourage a truly global perspective for the University.

TIMING OF SEARCH

The ad hoc committee unanimously agreed with the suggestion of the SACS Special Investigating Committee that visited campus in September 2004 that a search for a new president should begin expeditiously. We believe that we should establish the goal of having a new president in place by January 2006, but no later than July 2006 as suggested by the SACS Committee. Having a new president assume office by January 2006 would fit the timetable originally mentioned by Dr. Richardson when he accepted appointment as interim president in January 2004. Speaking to a special meeting of the University Faculty, Dr. Richardson explained that in his discussions with Governor Riley about the possibility of his becoming interim president, he informed him that it was my intention to retire within two years, and that I would be willing to serve under those conditions. By January 2006 Auburn University will have gone five years without having conducted a national search for a president, and we believe at this point that the University's best interests will be served by going ahead with such a search as quickly as possible.

Submitted by Ad Hoc Committee on Process, Criteria, and Timing of a Presidential Search

Larry Gerber, History [Chair]
Jim Bradley, Biological Sciences
Cindy Brunner, Pathobiology
Kathryn Flynn, Forestry
Wayne Flynt, History
Bruce Gladden, Health & Human Performance
Kimberly King, Educational Foundations, Leadership & Technology
Sridhar Krishnamurti, Communication Disorder
Renee Middleton, College of Education
Virginia O'Leary, Psychology
Donna Sollie, Human Development & Family Studies
Charlotte Sutton, Management

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