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State University of New York

Memorandum to Presidents

Date: January 30, 1992

Vol. 92 No. 2

From: Office of the Chancellor

Subject: Revised Guidelines for the Selection of
State-operated Campus Presidents

To: Presidents, State-operated Campuses

The Board of Trustees approved on December 12, 1991 a revision of the 1972 "Guidelines for the Selection of a President When a Vacancy Occurs at a State-operated Campus of the State University of New York." While recent presidential searches have ended positively, there has been growing evidence of a need to remove procedural ambiguities that have resulted in occasional confusion and misunderstanding and to bring the substantive requirements of the guidelines into accord with current search practices.


The revised guidelines (copy attached) maintain and continue the fundamental authority and responsibility of the Board of Trustees under the Education Law to appoint the president of a State-operated campus and preserve the traditional and statutory authority of the campus council to select the members of a presidential search committee and the final candidate for consideration by the Trustees. The revised guidelines clarify and specify the customary role of the Chancellor in providing cooperative liaison with the ongoing work of the search committee and forming a recommendation to the Trustees prior to their final action on a nominee.

A major change in the revised guidelines is provision for a single search committee composed of campus council members and constituency representatives rather than the separate constituent advisory procedure called for by the earlier guidelines. Members of campus constituencies, including faculty, administration, students, and alumni, would select their representatives and recommend them to the chair of the council for committee service. There is also explicit recognition of the predominant role of the faculty in the deliberations of the search committee. Of course, the members of the campus council maintain their right to select the nominee to be recommended to the Chancellor and the Trustees.

Other significant features of the revised guidelines include recognition of the need for confidentiality, a statement of the Trustees' expectations regarding affirmative action, clarification of the appropriate role of retained executive search consultants in relation to the responsibilities of the search committee, specification of the procedures and timing leading to the Chancellor's recommendation for Trustee action on a nominee, and a statement of qualities expected in a presidential candidate.

The revised guidelines have been extensively reviewed by the Board of Trustees, Council of Presidents, Association of Council Members and College Trustees and the University Faculty Senate. Formal rule making procedures will be commenced to revise the language of Article IX of the Policies of the Board of Trustees to bring that policy into accord with the language of the guidelines.

Thank you for your assistance in developing the new guidelines.


D. Bruce Johnstone

Attachment

Copy: Chairs, Campus Councils and
Board of Trustees, College of Environmental Science and Forestry

This memorandum for information to:

Presidents, Community Colleges
Deans, Statutory Colleges
President Coll
Provost Nesheim

**Guidelines for the Selection of a President When a Vacancy
Occurs at a State-operated Campus of the
State University of New York**

A. Legal Authority for Nomination and for Appointment

The legal authority to appoint the president or chief administrative officer of a State-operated institution of the State University is vested in the University Board of Trustees by Section 355(2)(g) and Section 6004(c) of the Education Law. The council of each such institution is given responsibility for recommending a candidate or candidates to the Board by Section 356(3)(a) (Section 6004(c) for the Trustees of the College of Environmental Science and Forestry). The Board of Trustees may also appoint in the event that no council recommendation is made or where a council recommendation fails to comply with the Trustees' standards and procedures.

B. Procedures for Search and Nomination

The procedures below are intended to assist the councils of State-operated campuses in the search for, and nomination of, individuals to fill the position of president. It should be noted that the term "council" in the following is intended to refer equally to the Board of Trustees of the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

1. As soon as is practical after it is known that a presidential vacancy will occur, the council chair shall consult with the Chancellor for advice in planning for the search and selection of a new president. Important initial actions include:
 - (a) deciding upon the composition of a search committee, to include council members and representatives of principal campus constituencies;
 - (b) initiating the process of constituency recommendations for positions on the committee;
 - (c) appointing a chair; and
 - (d) establishing an expected timetable for the search and nomination process. The council must have a significant and continuing involvement throughout the search activities.
2. The Chancellor shall immediately designate a liaison representative to serve as a nonvoting member of the presidential search committee. That representative shall have full access to files of the committee, and shall be

responsible for reporting to the Chancellor and the Trustees regarding the progress of the search and the work of the committee.

3. **The council shall specify the number of its members to serve on the search committee and the number of other representatives as well as the constituencies from which they will come: e.g., faculty, professional employees, administration (management confidential), students, and alumni. Reflecting the predominant role that faculty are expected to play in academic governance, the faculty should predominate among the non-council constituencies on the search committee. The constituency representatives, selected by their members, shall be recommended to the chair of the council for appointment to the search committee.**
4. **At the first presidential search committee meeting, the chairperson of that committee, along with the Chancellor's representative, should acquaint the committee members with search procedures in general and any specific instructions from the council. The search committee should be advised of the number of nominees desired, and whether or not they should be ranked. The Chancellor, or a designee, shall be afforded an early opportunity to meet with the search committee to discuss the procedures and qualifications which are desirable in a president.**
5. **The council should take advantage of the presidential vacancy and the representative wisdom available within the search committee to consider the special leadership needs of its campus at that particular moment of history. A written expression of desired qualifications and invitations to suggest candidates should be developed by the council and the search committee. Both should be widely distributed on campus and to the wider academic community.**
6. **A good search must actively seek qualified candidates, and not confine its work to the screening of applications and nominations. Telephone calls, for example, should go to those in key national network positions. Top prospects may have to be convinced to become declared candidates. In many cases, a spouse may also have to be attracted, and assistance, including information about the campus and the surrounding community, should be provided. It is particularly important that the search, in the spirit of affirmative action, reflect good faith efforts to generate a substantial and diverse pool of applicants. Some campuses may utilize the services of a nationwide search firm to, e.g., present additional candidates, conduct reference checks, and collect background information on the finalists. The selection and rejection of all applicants and nominees must be accomplished through and by the search committee.**
7. **Confidentiality is most important, and anyone agreeing to serve on a search**

committee must respect this principle. In the early stages, external contacts and the solicitation of personal opinions about any candidates must be limited to sources agreed upon and approved by the individual candidates. Later in the search, and generally before any actual interviews, candidates should be willing to have inquiries about them collected from a broader set of sources than their designated references. At the very end of the search, when the finalists number two to four, it is generally best to invite the candidates openly to the campuses and expose them to many constituencies. Thus, the names of final candidates may be known and confirmed, although what is said about any candidate in the search committee or the council should remain forever confidential.

8. In the final stages of the search, all of the members of the council should actively participate in final interviews and in the deliberations of the search committee. The recommendation of a single candidate to the Chancellor and Trustees for the presidency is the prerogative of the council alone. The view of the search committee, however, should have great weight. Consensus or near consensus, both within the council and between the council and the search committee, should be sought and expected. Serious disagreement about the final candidate or candidates, particularly any disagreements that clearly follow major constituency lines, suggests a potentially serious problem and may call for a reexamination of the final candidates or, in extreme cases, a reopening of the search.
9. Before a final vote of the council, when the finalists number two to four, the Chancellor must be given the opportunity to meet with them, to study their written dossiers, and to discuss the names with the Trustees in executive session. If any of the finalists appear to be unacceptable, such that a positive recommendation for appointment could not be conveyed from the Chancellor to the Trustees, or such that Trustee appointment would be for any reason problematic, the Chancellor shall so inform the council chair and, if requested, meet with the full council to discuss reasons for the unacceptability.
10. The final nomination of the council shall be communicated to the Chancellor who shall transmit it, with a positive or negative recommendation, to the Trustees for action at the earliest possible date. The Trustees or a committee thereof will expect to meet with the nominee in executive session before a final presentation and vote. The timing of these events -- final council action to recommend, and trustee appointment -- should be as proximate in time as possible. If the time between the council action and anticipated Trustee confirmation is short and confidentiality has been maintained, it would be well to attempt to maintain confidentiality through the Trustee action. If the time is too great to provide a reasonable assurance that confidentiality can be held, or if the confidentiality of the council vote is unlikely to be

sustainable, an announcement may be made by the campus of that individual whom the council has chosen to be presented to the SUNY Trustees for action and confirmation. Any such announcement must make it clear that final confirmation requires Trustee action.

11. Notwithstanding the procedures followed or the qualifications of the candidate, the Board of Trustees, by law, reserves the right, in its judgment, to reject any nominee.

C. Qualities to be Sought

Although a list of qualities to be sought should not be viewed as absolute requirements, and while the qualities most appropriate will vary by campus and historical moment, the following qualities are generally expected for the presidency of a State-operated campus of the State University of New York:

- academic credentials and accomplishments supportive of the professorial status that, by Trustees' Policies, accompanies the presidential appointment;
- successful administrative experience appropriate to the requirements of the presidency;
- qualities of educational leadership and ability to maintain effective relationships with faculty, students, administrative staff, alumni, and others;
- commitment to the mission of public higher education, generally, and to the specific mission of the campus for which the candidate is being considered;
- evidence or distinct promise of the ability to build productive relationships with community leaders and groups, elected officials and agencies at all levels of government, and other important constituencies;
- evidence or distinct promise of the ability to generate external support;
- commitment to the principles of diversity and equal opportunity; and
- personal traits necessary for the most exacting of executive responsibilities, among which are strength of character, intelligence, integrity, humor, fortitude, judgment, flexibility and openness to new ideas, sensitivity to human values, and a capacity for hard work.

Revised December 12, 1991