

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

After Easter?

Trustees already planning
to seek more faculty input
in search for next president

By **JULIE WURTH**
jwirth@news-gazette.com
and **CHRISTINE des GARENNES**
cgarenne@news-gazette.com

CHICAGO — University of Illinois President Bob Easter's retirement is still more than a year away, but trustees are already thinking about the search for his successor.

They will likely rely more on faculty input and less on an outside search firm than they did when Michael Hogan was hired in 2010, board Chairman Chris Kennedy said Thursday.

"Time is on our side now, so I think we can be very inclusive and we'll reach out to the entire university community to ensure that thoughts about what qualities we want in a president are part of the process," he told The News-Gazette on Thursday.

The university is gearing up for two major administrative searches, with Easter retiring in June 2015 and Chicago Chancellor Paula Allen Meares stepping down in January 2015.

Both searches are likely to get underway this year, with the chancellor's search beginning fairly soon, spokesman Tom Hardy said.

A timeline for those searches, and guidelines for the use of search firms for those positions, will be discussed at the Feb. 18 meeting of the board's governance, personnel and ethics committee, said Trustee Pamela Strobel, who chairs that panel. The two searches will likely overlap, she said.

Kennedy said senior faculty will play an active role in creating a job description and identifying and recruiting candidates for the next UI president. The board will still hire a search firm to help with the process, he said.

Some faculty worry that outside consultants diminish the faculty voice in choosing new academic leaders. And some criticized the process used to hire Hogan as being too secretive. He resigned under fire in March 2012 after a controversy involving his chief of staff.

"I think we learned a great lesson with the search that ended with Chancellor (Phyllis) Wise that we had better results identifying candidates operating through the faculty and their friends and colleagues on other campuses," Kennedy said. "The outcome was radically different.



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"We can't outsource that function to a search firm."

Search firms can't approach people they've recently placed in jobs at other universities, "so merely by hiring that search firm we were precluded from going after their high-quality past clients," Kennedy said. "By using the faculty, we can do that."

The news was welcomed by the chairman of the Urbana campus Senate Executive Committee, Professor Roy Campbell. He said more collaboration would ease faculty apprehension about who will replace the popular Easter.

"Succession is clearly something that concerns everybody, and they would like that succession to take our university to the best possible levels in terms of national leadership," Campbell said.

In the Hogan search, the consulting firm of Isaacson, Miller of Boston had the responsibility for generating the initial list of candidates. Strobel chaired the search committee and dealt directly with the lead consultant from Isaacson, Miller.

The faculty vice chairwoman, UI Professor May Berenbaum, had no direct contact with the firm. Search committee members weren't given any paper copies of candidates' bios and were instructed not to even download the infor-

mation, to protect candidates' identities. Berenbaum felt it hampered the panel's ability to vet applicants for the job.

The faculty search committee that led to Wise's hiring had a much stronger role in those initial stages, though Isaacson, Miller assisted with the search.

Kennedy at the time defended the use of search firms as "critical" in recruiting candidates for senior administrative posts. They can contact candidates more discreetly than university officials, and "they know where the talent is," he said then.

A 2012 News-Gazette analysis found that the university had spent almost \$6 million on nearly two dozen search consultants over nine years. The UI spent \$303,000 on the search for Hogan, including \$160,000 paid to Isaacson, Miller. The Wise search cost about \$155,173.

Easter said the next presidential search will be a fairly long process to ensure adequate input. A strategic planning retreat next July will focus on "where we are going as an overarching university" and the role of the president, he said.

"It's critical there be clear understanding of the job and the goals of the position and the authorities of the position and the expectations," Easter said recently.

Easter said he spends a substantial amount of time engaged with legislators and others outside the universi-

ty. The next president should be willing to be "the leading spokesperson on education in Illinois."

"I've thoroughly enjoyed being in this role," Easter said. "It's a rare opportunity. I think we need to make it as attractive as possible and recruit aggressively."

Kennedy said the decision to hire Easter after Hogan's resignation in 2012 was fairly quick because trustees had drawn up "succession management" plans back in 2009, when the board was reconstituted following the resignations of the previous UI president, chancellor and most trustees in the Category I admissions scandal.

"Even when we were bringing on Mike Hogan, we were wrestling with issues around what would occur if suddenly the president isn't available," he said. "When the time came, we were prepared with a candidate in the wings. Our belief as a board is that hiring a president is our most important task, and we need to be prepared."

Easter said earlier this month that he'd like to have a search committee in place by March 1 for the UI Chicago chancellor's job, so that members develop a position description and other goals before the summer. He said the university would likely hire a search firm to assist with that process.

He plans to meet with campus senate leaders in Chicago on Monday to discuss the search.