

COLLEGE SEARCHES

Secrets aren't for everyone

Open vs. Closed:
Recent public university presidential searches

Completed searches



Ohio State
Cal-Irvine
chancel-
lor Michael
Drake starts
June 30.
*No finalists
announced*



Michigan
Mark
Schlissel,
Brown's pro-
vost, starts
July 1.
*No finalists
announced*



Penn State
Eric Barron,
ex-president
of Florida
State, started
last month.
*No finalists
announced*



Wisconsin
Ray Cross
succeeded
Kevin Reilly
earlier this
year.
*3 finalists
named*

Current searches



Illinois
Bob Easter
to retire on
June 30,
2015; search
underway.
*No finalists
will be
announced*



E. Illinois
William
Perry to
retire in
June of
2015.
*Finalists
will be
announced*

Mum's the word at Illinois, but others take open approach

By **CHRISTINE DES GARENNES**
christine@news-gazette.com

CHARLESTON — In early 2007, when Eastern Illinois University was looking for a new president, the search committee narrowed its list of candidates to three.

The university set up final interviews with the search committee and the board of trustees and then not only announced the names of the three candidates, but also planned public interviews with the finalists, inviting everyone on campus to attend. Plus, those who attended the open interviews could submit written evaluations.

Over 500 people did.

"Those weren't considered votes, but their input was appreciated," said Kristopher Goetz, chair of Eastern's board of trustees.

As Eastern prepares to launch its search for the next president — William Perry plans to retire at the end of June 2015 — the university is gearing up to take the same, open approach, including disclosure of its finalists and inviting them to campus for public sessions.

"It's a very open process. I'm not sure if it's unique to us, but it's certainly consistent with our culture, which is built around shared governance and engagement, where involvement is not only welcome, but expected," said Joe Dively, an EIU trustee who is chairing the presidential search committee.

Please see SEARCHES, A-8

SEARCHES

Continued from A-1

It's also a strategy fewer public universities, including the University of Illinois, have adopted in their recent searches for top leaders. Several recent Big Ten university searches for presidents have been "closed" throughout the entire process, meaning finalists were never identified — only the board's ultimate pick was disclosed.

Earlier this year, the University of Michigan tapped Brown University Provost Mark Schlissel to replace Mary Sue Coleman without public interviews. Penn State chose Eric Barron from Florida State behind closed doors. Ohio State followed a similar process, picking University of California-Irvine chancellor Michael Drake without revealing any final candidates or conducting open interviews.

At the UI, which launched its search for Bob Easter's replacement earlier this spring, the search is "closed all the way to the end," said UI professor Doug Beck, who co-chairs the presidential search committee. "That's a decision that the charging body makes, the board (of trustees) in our case," he said.

That's how the UI handled its previous presidential searches. Both presidencies — those of Michael Hogan and B. Joseph White — ended in their resignations under scrutiny, White because of an admissions scandal and Hogan because of faculty opposition to his centralization efforts and a university investigation into his chief of staff posing as a member of a faculty governance group.

"I think it's very important that it be closed. The reasoning is simple. We're looking for people who already have great jobs and we can only hire one such person. ... It's really a simple matter of not trying to harm the people in their current position," Beck said.

But not all universities have followed this closed approach.

At the University of Wisconsin, an 18-member presidential search commit-

tee announced three finalists. Earlier this year, those candidates participated in statewide public forums via videoconference, offering opportunities for faculty, staff, students and others to essentially screen the candidates themselves.

Résumés, academic contributions, background checks ... those are all important, Eastern Illinois officials said. But so is finding the right personality and cultural fit for the university.

"Dr. Perry is a wonderful academician, with a list of accolades on paper. But what strikes me about Bill is his personality, his relatedness. After talking with him for 10 minutes, you feel like you've known him for a number of years," Goetz said.

Stuff like that can shine through during open, on-campus meetings with a variety of people in attendance.

"What I most appreciate about higher education and Eastern in particular is the sense of shared governance. While we have a search committee steering the process ... it's not only the committee that has input, but the community at large. It's a testament to Eastern's commitment to transparency," he added.

EIU's search committee has only recently formed, and Dively said he doesn't expect their work to begin until classes resume this fall. But like the 2007 search, he expects to solicit written evaluations from those who attend the open interviews.

"Their input is definitely wanted," Dively said.

Dively stressed that early on in the search process, the committee has a "hyper focus" on confidentiality. Names on the initial lists are guarded by the search committee and the search firm. But once the three to five finalists are chosen, it is "with their understanding and blessing" that their names will be released publicly. Finalists will be invited to campus to meet with the board and search committee, and they will attend sessions with faculty and students.

"Our view is it's a public institution, therefore we're looking for public input," Dively said. If members of the search committee or board ever felt

like or received counsel that they were limiting their candidates as a result of disclosing the finalists, they would reconsider their approach, he said. But that hasn't happened.

Taxpayers and other public constituents can "have all the say in world," according to attorney Raymond D. Cotton. They can nominate candidates, for example. And they are represented by the board members appointed or elected to serve the university, he said.

Cotton, a partner in the Washington, D.C., law firm of Mintz, Levin, has represented presidential candidates and advises university boards to maintain confidentiality throughout the entire process.

"One, people who are afraid of what might happen won't join the search to begin with. And two, it does open up candidates to arm twisting back on their home campuses," Cotton said.

Some candidates have told him that their superior officer at their current university, once he or she found out they were involved in a search, came to them and either directly or indirectly told them to either withdraw or risk being fired.

If the candidate's home institution knew he or she was interested in the job or their name became public, it could compromise the administrator's effectiveness at his or her home school, the UI's Beck said. It would not reflect well that the administrator is interested in moving elsewhere, he added.

If the UI's search involved disclosing finalists' names, Beck believes fewer candidates in whom the university is interested would apply.

"I know that from experience with the chancellor's search," he said. Beck chaired the search for the Urbana chancellor that led to the hiring of Phyllis Wise in 2011. That search was also considered a "closed" search. No finalists were named.

During that search, some candidates said they would have no interest in participating if their names were leaked out, he said.

"We have to be very careful,"

Beck said.

The UI Board of Trustees kicked off the presidential search in March, appointing a 19-member committee that includes three trustees, eight faculty members, three students, a representative from the UI Alumni Association and one from the UI Foundation, an administrator, an academic professional and a civil-service representative. They developed a job description and will identify and interview candidates. The search committee will recommend finalists to the board. Easter's successor is expected to be named by late fall 2014. Easter is expected to retire June 30, 2015.

"We're in the information-gathering phase of the search at this point. We're talking to lots of people on the campuses, trying to add information to our picture of the current state of the three campuses and the university, where we want to go in the future ... the particular qualities people think is important in the next president," Beck said.

Several town-hall meetings are planned on all three campuses this month. At those events, faculty, staff and students or community members can share their opinions. Members of the committees will attend those forums. The forum in Urbana will be at 1 p.m. June 25 in the Beckman Auditorium, 405 N. Mathews Ave., U.

Those forums should alleviate any concerns among the UI community that the process is not as public as some would like, said Jorge Villegas, professor at the UI Springfield's campus and member of the presidential search committee.

Villegas also said concerns about confidentiality can be alleviated by the fact that the search committee includes "stakeholders" from across campus. He and his fellow search-committee members will attend the forums and will take seriously all the comments given, he said.

The UI presidential search committee next meets July 11.

Beck said he encourages people to nominate individuals they think would be suitable through the website, bot.uillinois.edu/presidentialsearch.