

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

President search narrowed

Panel's co-chairman says long list has become small pool

By JULIE WURTH

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The list of candidates for the next University of Illinois president started with 200 names, but the search committee has zeroed

in on a smaller pool, the panel's co-chairman said.

UI physics Professor Doug Beck declined to say how many people are still under consideration to replace President Bob Easter, who plans to retire June 30.

But it appears the search committee may be ready for in-person interviews. The UI announced Friday that the panel will meet in closed session Wednesday and

Thursday at a hotel near Chicago.

Presidential search committees in the past have scheduled interviews at hotels near O'Hare International Airport to make it convenient for candidates who have to travel — and to keep prying eyes away.

Beck earlier this week declined to provide any details about a possible interview schedule.

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The committee plans to recommend multiple candidates to the UI Board of Trustees, he said.

The search is scheduled to wrap up by Thanksgiving, though there's a chance it could extend a bit longer, Beck said.

"We're on track. What that means is that we're expecting to name a new president sometime later in the semester," Beck said Wednesday. "University presidencies are increasingly challenging positions these days.

"What dominates at this stage, and what has been uppermost in our mind, is to make the right choice," not keep to a preordained schedule, he said. "As it gets farther along, it depends more and more on individual schedules, individual constraints, individual characteristics. So therefore, it becomes more difficult to predict."

Beck chaired the search committee that

recruited Chancellor Phyllis Wise to campus in 2011.

The presidential search committee met for four hours on Monday to continue evaluating presidential prospects. The panel has had "multiple conversations" with candidates to find out if they're the right fit, he said.

"We have to find out if it's right for us and if it's right for them. In our case, we have to find somebody with a good fit to all three campuses" who will recognize their distinct missions, Beck said.

The expectation is that the new president would take office by July 1, Beck said, but an exact start date will depend on the candidate, the board and Easter.

Trustees had originally said they wanted the new president chosen by Jan. 1 so he or she would have plenty of time to transition into the job before Easter leaves. Officials said they accelerated the timeline so the next president could participate in the selection of a new Chicago chancellor to replace Paula Meares, who plans to step down in January.