

U. of I. closer to choosing president

Decision could be made by next month; finalists' names will stay private

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University of Illinois trustees are on track to choose the university's next president by the end of the semester, possibly as early as next month.

The 19-member presidential search committee plans to meet Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday at hotels near O'Hare International Airport, a signal that it has narrowed the pool of candidates and will be conducting interviews.

Search co-chair Douglas Beck, a physics professor at the Urbana-Champaign campus, said the committee is "narrowing the field" from about 200 and "having quite a number of discussions with various prospective candidates to see whether it is a good fit." The committee includes trustees, faculty, students and community members.

"It has been a hard sell," Beck said. "We have had to go out and talk to lots and lots of people to try to interest very successful people in this opportunity."

Beck said the goal is to name the new president "later this semester" and said the

end of November is a "reasonable estimate" for when that would happen.

The president oversees the university system's three campuses at Urbana-Champaign, Chicago and Springfield, as well as the university's hospital and health sciences system in Chicago. The campus chancellors report to the president. U. of I. has more than 78,000 students, nearly 6,000 faculty and a \$5.6 billion operating budget.

Beck said the job is complex, and some would-be candidates are more interested in directing a single campus as a chancellor. The job also comes with some baggage, as two recent presidents left amid scandals, and the public university is constantly grappling with budget concerns.

The university has been under fire among academics for deciding not to hire a professor after he made anti-Israel comments on social media, including some that were profane and inflammatory.

"One of the things that is really important to us is that we have a good fit for all three of our campuses," Beck said.

The job description intentionally emphasizes the external responsibilities of the president, including fundraising, working with state and federal lawmakers, and engaging with business and civil groups. The description aims to make clear that the chancellors are responsible for campus operations, a nod to complaints that former

President Michael Hogan tried to micromanage the Urbana-Champaign campus.

"The new job description makes it more clear that the president is the external face and advocate for the university," said Nicholas Burbules, an education professor at the Urbana-Champaign campus and member of the search committee. "That shift from an internal micromanager to an external manager is a productive change. It will avoid future conflicts between the president and chancellors."

Beck declined to comment on how many candidates remain under consideration, citing a confidentiality clause. The university does not plan to make public the names of finalists.

Search committee members and other university officials signed a pledge to not reveal candidate names and "maintain the absolute confidentiality of all prospects and candidates." The ethics code also states that committee members will not include candidate names in email or any other communications, including to each other.

The committee's job is to recommend candidates to the full board of trustees. Beck said he doesn't know how many candidates the committee will forward to the board.

The next president will be the university's 20th, replacing Robert Easter, a longtime U. of I. professor and administrator who took over in 2012 after Hogan

abruptly resigned amid a faculty mutiny and a scandal involving his chief of staff.

Easter plans to retire June 30. The goal is to pick a new president soon so that person has input in choosing the next chancellor at UIC, as Chancellor Paula Allen-Meares' contract expires in January. A search is underway for her replacement.

The upcoming months also could see other changes in university leadership. The terms of all three members of the board's executive committee — chair Christopher Kennedy, and trustees Pamela Strobel and Edward McMillan — expire in January. Board members are appointed by the governor, and whether these executive officers remain on the board could depend on whether Gov. Pat Quinn is re-elected.

Strobel is the co-chair of the presidential search committee.

The U. of I. has been trying to prepare the public for the possibility that the next president could get a higher salary than past presidents. Hogan's salary was \$651,000 plus a retention bonus. Easter's current salary is \$478,558, and he received a \$90,000 bonus payment last year.

Parker Executive Search, which the university hired to help with the presidential selection, is being paid \$196,000 in fees and expenses for its work.

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