

Board of Trustees
Special Committee on Presidential Vacancy
May 20, 2020. 11:30am

In accordance with Governor Charles Baker's March 12, 2020 "Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, § 20" and the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office's March 12, 2020 Guidance, please note the following: Notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Massachusetts College of Art and Design Board of Trustees will be held through remote participation via conference call number: +1 646-558-8656; Meeting ID: 974 1237 2764; Password: 492078.

MINUTES

Trustees present: Jan Saragoni (Chair), Elisa Hamilton, John Intoppa, Peter Nessen, Linda Snyder. David Nelson (Ex-Officio)

Trustees absent: none

Participants: Gina Yarbrough (Liaison), Susana Segat (Board Secretary)

Welcome

Chair Saragoni welcomed participants at 11:32am to the founding meeting of the BOT special committee on presidential vacancy planning. She noted that this group would strategize on how and when to launch the presidential search.

Review the charge to special committee

Chair Saragoni read the committee's charge:

This planning committee has been established for the purpose of reviewing the presidential search process requirements and making recommendations to the trustees on the following:

- Timeframe for the initiation of the presidential search, including notification of commissioner;
- Process for selecting an executive search firm;
- Process for selecting the search committee;
- Process for developing a position description and announcement 'presidential profile.'

She asked GC Yarbrough to provide a summary of the planning process.

Summary of the process

GC Yarbrough said that she had distributed the Board of Higher Education's (BHE) guidelines regarding presidential searches as a useful planning tool. She provided a brief summary of these guidelines.

GC Yarbrough told trustees that to initiate the search process, trustees must inform Commissioner Santiago in writing. At that point, the guidelines encourage the development of an assessment of current status and future goals. These guidelines do not require the hiring of an executive search firm, but do note that search firms are helpful in putting together an institutional analysis and a job description (aka presidential profile). The BHE is able to provide a list of possible search firms to consider. Trustees discussed whether a Request for Proposals was necessary in soliciting interest from search firms.

Trustees asked about the current climate for presidential searches in higher education and which other institutions are currently searching for a new president. President Nelson noted that there are other institutions conducting searches and that NECHE may have a running list of current searches in the northeast.

GC Yarbrough described the BHE guidelines for creating a search committee. These guidelines state that trustees appoint the search committee members, which would include a minimum of three trustees and one member from each major campus constituency, and that the commissioner appoints a BHE representative. The search committee is an advisory group to the trustees. The committee should not normally exceed 9-13 voting members and the institution's affirmative action officer should serve as a non-voting member. Trustees would also approve a budget for the search committee.

Trustee Hamilton noted that in the 2015 search, she had served on both the planning committee and the search committee, and that Chief of Staff Segat had served as secretary to both committees also. Trustee Hamilton described how the 2015 planning committee had created the search timeline and search committee structure. She said that the charge of the search committee was to recommend 3-5 finalists to trustees and then disband. The work of the search committee is expected to be confidential. Only once the 3-5 finalist names are recommended to trustees does the search become public. Trustee Hamilton explained that the search firm was charged to ensure that having an internal candidate did not discourage applicants from applying.

Trustees discussed the search timeline and whether it would be possible to extend the interim president's appointment beyond a year. GC Yarbrough said that the commissioner had approved a one-year appointment for an acting president and that it may be difficult to obtain an extension of the appointment using the pandemic as a reason given that there may be at least three other ongoing presidential searches in the state's public higher education system.

Chair Saragoni asked President Nelson to share his reflections from the 2015 search process.

Reflections on the previous search

President Nelson reiterated that it is standard for the final and public phase of the process to have 3-5 candidates attend community forums and interviews with the commissioner and the secretary of education. He said that it was important to warn these final candidates that the identities of finalists would be made public so they would have the option of dropping out if they had expected complete confidentiality.

President Nelson agreed that a search firm provides capacity, the ability to seek out candidates, and can help manage the process and build a profile. He listed several search firms and noted that it was important to get the right staff consultant within the right search firm.

Trustees requested to know the difference between the state-approved search firm list and the BHE's proposed list.

Trustee Hamilton continued to discuss the process. She said that the search committee should be designed to have representation across the campus. President Nelson suggested that the committee might want to get input from the community on the presidential profile.

Trustees agreed that campus interviews should not be scheduled during the final days of a semester. President Nelson said that the interview timing of the 2015 search was challenging and suggested that visits sometime in the early spring might be ideal. Late January, February, and early March is a time in the semester when our community is more accessible.

President Nelson said that it would be important for trustees to be clear about logistics once the search moves to the public phase. He said that when he was offered the position, the need for a quick public announcement caused some stress. Trustees should have clarity about their offer and should make sure that the search firm stays ahead of the game. He noted the importance of the work done by Chief of Staff Segat in straightening out problems at the end of that particular search.

Trustees asked for more details on the issues at that time. President Nelson said that the search firm had not set up the offer correctly: the terms were not made clear, causing unnecessary ambiguity and back and forth for weeks. If Chief of Staff Segat had not fixed it, he said that he didn't know what would have happened.

Trustees discussed the hiring offer process. GC Yarbrough said that the BHE sets the compensation parameters for the BOT to use as a framework.

Trustees asked if President Nelson had anything else to bring to their attention. He said that the rest was minutia of logistics. He said that the Chief of Staff and Executive Director of Marketing/Communications were enormously helpful and recommended appointing a transition team to help with onboarding.

Trustees discussed potential timelines for initiating a search committee and for interviewing finalists. President Nelson noted that in Massachusetts, there are currently presidential searches at two community colleges and at one state university. Trustees discussed the need for more information about current events before setting timelines and considering a profile. They recommended waiting until after the June 9th BOT meeting to meet again.

President Nelson said that trustees would receive updates soon on how COVID-19 was affecting operations. He expected the governor to release his higher education guidelines the following week, at which time trustees would receive budget scenarios based on that guidance. He suggested that there were actions that could be taken regardless of the current unknowns.

Trustees discussed their need for a deeper understanding of the effects of COVID-19 on higher education planning. They suggested moving forward by reviewing the search firms on the pre-approved lists, reading the Requests for Proposals from the other current Massachusetts higher education president searches, and then work toward a timeline and a search committee creation for the fall.

President Nelson said that he had informed the MassArt community that the plan was to have students on campus in the fall, even if through a hybrid model. He noted that Academic Affairs, with the support of Student Development, had an exciting set of plans for using the campus as a resource with fewer people on campus, all contingent on state and local guidance. President Nelson told trustees that they would begin to see some things in writing over the coming weeks. He explained that planning is occurring daily with our neighboring campuses.

President Nelson said that this year's commencement would take place in conjunction with the commencement for the class of 2021, with the addition of special events marking this year's class taking place at the end of next week.

On questions about the role of trustees in planning for the fall, President Nelson said that trustees would see the plans and budgets at the June BOT meeting. He said that since the state would probably be working from 1/12th budgets, the college would probably need to have contingency budgets for a series of months. He noted that the MSCBA was considering four different scenarios for handling bond payments for 2021, which would be an enormous relief.

There was discussion about the committee's charge to make recommendations to the BOT. GC Yarbrough reminded the committee that they had been charged to make recommendations at the June BOT meeting and outlined possible recommendations, including a timeframe for initiating the search and for initiating the notification to the commissioner.

Trustees agreed that they were not prepared to inform the commissioner that the college is launching a search and asked if they were required to inform him right away. GC Yarbrough said that there were no requirements on a timeline for notifying the commissioner that a search was starting.

There was discussion about next steps and continuing the work over the summer, including reviewing executive committee search firms. As it is the authority of the BOT to engage the executive search firm or select the search committee, GC Yarbrough explained that the committee would need a summer delegation of BOT authority.

Trustees asked GC Yarbrough to craft a motion for the committee to submit at the June BOT meeting granting delegation of authority for the planning committee to continue their work in the summer.

On a motion duly made and seconded, by a vote of 5 in favor, none against, and none abstaining,

VOTED: to seek delegation of authority through the summer.

Roll Call: Hamilton, yes; Intoppa, yes; Nessen, yes; Snyder, yes; Saragoni, yes.

Next steps and next meeting

Chair Saragoni asked trustees to set the date for the next planning committee meeting. Trustees agreed to meet on June 15th at 3pm.

Adjournment

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was unanimously

VOTED: to adjourn.