

**COMMITTEE ON FACULTY GOVERNANCE
REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON PRESIDENTIAL SEARCHES
with implications for searches for all senior administrative positions**

May 19, 1999

INTRODUCTION.

During the latter stages of the presidential search in the fall of 1998, the Committee on Faculty Governance considered the propriety of preparing a document that would contain the lessons learned from the search process. Members of CFG shared this idea with faculty members of the search committee, and there seemed to be general agreement on the desirability of preparing such a document. At the November 6, 1998 Faculty Meeting, President David Porter spoke at length about the presidential search:

Given where we are in the process, the President indicated his feeling that further conversation about the candidate herself during the faculty meeting would not be appropriate and might, indeed, be very damaging to the

Palamountain presidency had participated in the search that had brought him to Skidmore in 1964. In preparation for a presidential search for his successor, the Board of Trustees at its May 2-4, 1985 meeting created a trustee nucleus for the search committee: Judith Eissner as chair, James McCabe, Inez Scribner, Penny Kaniclides, and Myles Cane. On May 9, 1985, the Chair of the Board, George Colton, informed the faculty by a letter that the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board had held discussions with CAPTS (predecessor to CAPT) about the impending presidential transition. He noted,

... the Board is well aware that the best operation of a college such as ours can be a fragile thing requiring the sense of trust which I believe now exists among the various parts of our community. Each part has a special and vital role to play in the operation of the whole, and the Board is committed to making sure that each is fully respected in playing its proper role.

Faculty Council (the predecessor to CFG) reported to the May 22, 1985 Faculty Meeting, the final meeting for the academic year, that it had sent a letter to the Board of Trustees recommending that "faculty representatives on the committee should be elected."

By the fall of 1985 the intended good will expressed by the Board had given B(c)1(e)1 /H4 <<8amo a(
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- 1. that it deplors the failure of timely and genuine consultation in the determination of the procedures for selecting its representatives; and**
- 2. that it considers its lack of equal representation on the committee discouraging in light of Trustee profession of faith in the faculty and expressions of a determination to share responsibility with them**

The Meeting narrowly defeated a resolution proposed by three faculty members, stating

That this Faculty requests the Board of Trustees to enlarge the Presidential Search Committee by two faculty members. These members will join the presently operating Search Committee after being chosen by the faculty at large in an election to be held immediately by Faculty Council. If the Board declines, the Faculty requests that a representative of the Board appear at a convocation of the full Faculty to explain the Board's unwillingness to permit the kind of faculty representation described in the AAUP guidelines for Presidential Search Committees.

The Meeting passed a second resolution proposed by the three faculty members:

That the Faculty strongly urges that the Presidential search Committee bring at least the final three candidates for the position of President of Skidmore College to the campus for extensive meetings with the faculty and that the Search Committee gather faculty sentiment on these candidates in the form of written and oral communications. By "extensive meetings" the Faculty means at least one meeting with CAPTS, departmental chairs, and the directors of Asian Studies, Classical Studies, and Women's Studies (the interdepartmental programs then in existence); and at least one other meeting with the Faculty at large in a format to be determined by Faculty Council.

Prior to the November 6, 1985 Faculty Meeting, the board met in executive session with CAPTS to discuss the resolutions adopted by the faculty. Penny Kaniclides stated that "Our sensitivities have been mutually heightened, and we look forward to ongoing dialogue during this time of transition." President Palamountain reported to the November Faculty Meeting on behalf of Judith Eissner, Chair of the Search Committee, that the members had already met twice and had hired a search consultant, Ray Klemmer. In addition, the committee had appointed Louise B. Wise, alumna and former Director of Admissions, to serve in the important role of secretary.

The Search Committee proceeded through December, January, and February of 1986 to meet with various campus groups and to solicit letters to provide information to determine the specifications for the job of president and to prepare the text for an advertisement announcing the opening. The committee agreed with campus sentiment that the search consultant should provide support, help recruit candidates, conduct reference checks, and assist in the arrangements of interviews, but that he would not screen the applicant pool.

In the spring a subcommittee of the Search Committee, composed of trustee James McCabe and the three faculty members reviewed all applications, nominations, and inquiries for the

position. The subcommittee and the whole committee conducted preliminary interviews, starting in August. James McCabe circulated a progress report to the community on September 4th, 1986. ([See Appendix A4](#)) The committee conducted series of interviews throughout the rest of September, and by mid October had a short list of candidates. Our search consultant did background checks with references. In the latter part of the month, the Search Committee conducted second interviews with the top candidates. The Committee kept open the option of bringing more than one candidate to the campus, until late October by which time committee members agreed unanimously and enthusiastically that one candidate stood clearly above the rest.

On October 22nd, 1986 the Search Committee met with CAPTS to share the news. On the 23rd, the trustee members of the committee met with the Board of Trustees to report on the selection of a candidate of choice. On October 28, 1986 the three faculty representatives on the Search Committee met with CAPTS to answer questions. Two days later, James McCabe distributed a Progress Report that provided information about the short list of candidates--a report that in retrospect appears to have been remarkably revealing. ([See Appendix A5](#))

Well aware that in deciding to bring one candidate to campus, the Search Committee had chosen not to follow the request contained in the Faculty resolution of October 1985, the Search Committee presented to CAPTS the credentials of all the candidates whom the committee had placed on the short list. The Search Committee could not share all information about those candidates--results of confidential interviews and background checks. It could not replicate the face to face interviews that the committee had with these candidates.

On November 3rd the faculty representatives reported to a special Faculty Meeting called for 4.00 and 5.00 p.m. to provide information about the process (choice of consultant, position specifications, advertisement, national organizations contacted, the use of the subcommittee to screen candidates, the interviews, the reference checks, and the short list); explain the pros and cons of bringing one candidate; announce the decision to bring David Porter as the candidate of choice to the campus; and answer questions. The faculty asked their representatives to justify the selection of one candidate, wondered if the selection was a fait accompli, and questioned whether the Search Committee had done enough to keep them informed. The representatives had an opportunity to respond to these concerns then and there, prior to the campus visit by the candidate. Without this meeting, the candidate would have arrived on campus at a time when many faculty would have been puzzled and, perhaps, angry.

On the 5th Judith Eissner and the subcommittee reported to the administration and then met with

expected would occur with David's second visit. The first visit gave the candidate a chance to get better acquainted with campus constituencies and for members of the faculty, administration, and student body to get an initial reading of the candidate.

David Porter came back to Skidmore later in the month, November 20-22. He spoke before the Faculty Meeting on Friday and then fielded questions from the floor. The Search Committee requested faculty members convey their assessment of his candidacy to the faculty representatives by noon on Monday. Leo Geoffrion set up a special computer address so that those faculty who were properly hooked up could electronically transmit their responses. ([See Appendix A6](#)) The turnover time--Friday to Monday--appears, in retrospect, to have been extremely short, especially in the days before widespread use of email, but the Search Committee members were very concerned with the extensive period for public review that they had already permitted. They sought to keep the rest of the candidates from withdrawing from the search. After all, some, perhaps all, of them would know that they had not been the first choice. Realizing that there was a possibility that the community would not support the appointment of the candidate of choice or that he would refuse the appointment once offered, the committee wanted to preserve the pool of candidates. ([Return to the beginning of the Report](#))

III. THE PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH 1997-98 ([See Appendix B1](#))

This presidential search, in contrast to the previous one, began very auspiciously. On August 26th, 1997 the Nominating Committee of the Board of Trustees met in New York City with the chairpersons of CAPT and CFG, the president of SGA, President David H. Porter, and others to discuss the formation of a presidential search committee. The group recalled that the search committee of 1985-87 had consisted of three faculty, two students, and five trustees. Believing that the new search committee should include one representative of the administration, the Nominating Committee decided that faculty representation should increase to four. Noting that a committee with four faculty, two students, and an administrative staff person came to a total of seven persons and believing that the board members should comprise at least half of the membership, as they had in 1985-87, the trustees prescribed seven trustee positions on the committee. The trustees also agreed with the faculty present that they would leave the selection process for faculty representatives of the search committee in the hands of the faculty (they allowed the same discretionary authority to the SGA for the selection of student members). Although they expressed a desire to have the various constituencies make their appointments in a timely manner, they did not set an absolute deadline. The trustees also named Myles Cane, a member of the previous search committee, to serve ex officio on the new search committee.

direct vote in choosing their representatives and to ensure that the four faculty chosen reflected a

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

At the start, the CFG acknowledges these points:

- 1. The legal responsibility of the Board to appoint the President.**
- 2. The principles of shared governance by which the trustees respect the role of the faculty in informing decision-making at the College.**
- 3. The unique and unforeseen features of each search that make it difficult to prescribe detailed procedures and deadlines and place a premium on the selection of capable representatives for search committees.**
- 4. The need for a search committee to do everything possible not only to appoint a worthy person to be President but to create the environment in which that person can be a successful President. Faculty support for the process as well as the appointment plays a crucial role in setting that environment.**

- f* **CAPT is thus reduced to a "rubber stamp" role when it sees the credentials of only one candidate. In theory, CAPT could say that the candidate is unacceptable and unilaterally bring a halt to the entire process. In practice, CAPT will pretty much be reduced to saying that the candidate is acceptable.**
- f* **CAPT represents th**

