

Committee begins search for 17th president

The recently named presidential search committee met for the first time last Saturday — first in an open morning session in the Kellogg Center and then in a closed afternoon session in the Manly Miles Building for a “dry run” of the candidate screening process.

Trustee committee chair Malcolm Dade divided the 13-member committee into two subcommittees. Subcommittee A is composed of Trustees Peter Fletcher, Carole Lick, Thomas Reed and Barbara Sawyer; Patricia Barnes-McConnell, director of the Bean-Cowpea Collaborative Research Support Program; Charles Krupka, student board chair of Associated Students of MSU; and Richard Lewis, dean of the College of Business. Subcommittee B includes Trustees Bobby Crim, Malcolm Dade, Blanche Martin and Patrick Wilson; G. J. Karabatsos, chair of the Department of Chemistry; and Janet M. Topolsky, special assistant to the director of the Michigan Department of Commerce and a 1976 alumna of MSU.

Named as executive director of the search committee was Lawrence Sommers, professor of geography and chair of Academic Council's Steering Committee for the past four years.

“He's the glue that binds us together — the principal staff person, a voice without vote, who'll see that calendar

deadlines are adhered to,” said Dade. The committee also gave Sommers the authority to hire a secretary.

Sommers will coordinate the next phase of the search — sending nomination-request letters to such sources as heads of major foundations, state and federal education agencies, national associations of colleges and universities, AAU and Big Ten universities, other land-grant universities, recipients of honorary degrees from MSU, key members of the state Legislature, key alumni, and past presidents of MSU.

“Every university, even a Harvard, should make an aggressive search and tap every possible source of names,” said consultant Frederic W. Ness of Presidential Search and Assessment Service of Washington, D.C. An ad in the Chronicle of Higher Education might produce 150 applications, he told the committee, but perhaps not the one of the next president of MSU.

“The more serious people won't answer an advertisement often,” the consultant said. “They'll get others to nominate them.”

Letters should go out this week, the committee agreed, and follow-up phone calls to nomination sources should continue until early August.

already made nominations. However, the committee is convinced that many of the best potential candidates are currently holding responsible positions in Michigan and throughout the country and need urging to become a candidate at MSU. Your help in identifying such individuals will be greatly appreciated.

The search committee recognizes that one of the most knowledgeable sources of information about existing and potential high caliber administrators in higher education is the faculty of this University through

“By Aug. 15, each subcommittee should have come up with 10 people it's fairly convinced should be among the final 20 candidates,” Ness said. At that point, reference checks should begin, he said.

By Nov. 15, the full committee should recommend three candidates to the Board of Trustees for final selection.

Trustee Peter Fletcher asked Ness if the University has “an unusual inventory” of positives and negatives.

“Your positives vastly outweigh your negatives,” Ness responded. “But if you try to disguise the negatives, you're going to raise suspicion.” He acknowledged Michigan's financial problems might discourage some candidates.

The committee also adopted a policy Saturday that statements to the media be handled through Dade or his designate. Terry Denbow, MSU director of public relations, has been named media liaison for the search.

In a briefing before the morning session, Dade told media representatives that the right of candidates to confidentiality precludes much comment but that the committee would keep the community apprised of its progress.

“(The media) share a unique seat at this table,” Dade said. “We recognize

they have a job to do; we hope most of it will be positive.”

Fletcher asked University General Counsel Lee Carr if the search committee was bound by the same rules for open meetings as the Board of Trustees since all eight members of the board sit on the search group.

Carr responded that the Legislature, under Section 8F of the Open Meetings Act, guaranteed confidentiality to those requesting it. The act has no meaning, he said, if a quorum of trustees can cancel it by virtue of their assembling.

“Any time you've got five trustees in session, you're supposed to give notice to the press unless the Legislature says there's a reason not to do it. They did say that,” Carr said.

But if candidates do not request confidentiality, no more than four trustees can review their applications, he explained. When those applications become part of the public record, they must be reviewed in public, he said.

In other business, the committee named Trustee Barbara Sawyer vice chair.

A firm meeting schedule was not decided, but Dade suggested the possibility of a full committee session in July and in August. The subcommittees will decide their own meeting schedules.

Open letter to the MSU community

The Presidential Search Committee is now officially in place and held its initial meeting on Saturday, June 11, 1984. The first major task of the committee is to identify and screen the best possible candidates for the position of president of Michigan State University. The committee is deeply committed to the importance of this task but continues to need the assistance of the University community in identifying highly qualified candidates.

We realize that many of you have

their Michigan, national and international scholarly networks. Thus, we particularly urge that faculty give this matter priority attention.

Nominations may be sent to me at: MSU Presidential Search, P.O. Box 75, East Lansing, MI 48824.

You may be assured that each suggestion will receive prompt attention.

Malcolm G. Dade, Jr.
Chair
Presidential Search Committee

MSU The News-Bulletin

(USPS 205-420)

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Associate Editor: Millicent Reynolds

Photo Editor: Bill Mitcham

Calendar Editor: Jackie Arman

Editorial Offices: Rooms 103 and 104, Linton Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824. Phone: 353-5302.

Published weekly during the academic year and bi-weekly during the summer term by the Division of University Relations. Second-class postage paid at East Lansing, Michigan 48823.

Postmaster: Please send form 3579 to MSU News-Bulletin, 103 Linton Hall, in care of the MSU Messenger Service, East Lansing, Michigan 48824.