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BREAKING NEWS: New president aims to keep classes, make students graduate on time

By [ELIZABETH PIET](#)

The State News

To loud clapping and a standing ovation Friday, Provost Lou Anna Simon became MSU's 20th president when the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to offer her the position.

The appointment will take effect on Jan. 1 after President M. Peter McPherson's departure.

Simon has served under McPherson as the provost for the 11 years of both their terms, as well as interim president while the latter took an unpaid leave to coordinate the financial reconstruction of Iraq.

"(Thursday) was surreal," Simon said at the meeting. "Waking up (Thursday) morning, I would not have expected this afternoon to be standing here."

Thursday, the trustees interviewed Simon "to explore the possibility of being the successor to President McPherson," Trustee David Porteous said.

He added at the interview trustees listened to Simon's goals for the university, which included making sure students graduate on time and maintaining classes despite budget difficulties.

"It was moving, this vision," Porteous said. "She is, I believe, a perfect choice for Michigan State."

The board's decision came a little more than five weeks after McPherson announced he will leave the university on Jan. 1. Trustees called Simon late Thursday night to inform her of their decision.

Simon's husband, Roy Simon, and her in-laws were in the board room Friday as she accepted a copy of the resolution from Porteous and circled the large table shaking hands and hugging board members.

Simon said she anticipated being considered for the position, but before the phone call, expected trustees to still follow through with a national candidate search. A national search will occur to search for the next provost, she said.

A three-year contract is still in financial negotiations for Simon's first years as president. Though she said most presidents have a starting five-year contract, Simon said hers is "based on the fact we have a running start."

As provost, Simon is working with McPherson on many projects, such as trying to obtain federal funding for the \$1 billion Rare Isotope Accelerator project, moving the majority of the medical school to Grand Rapids and reorganizing MSU's liberal arts programs.

"There's a lot to do here," Trustee Randall Pittman said. "We need to maintain that momentum."

In addition, Pittman said the board was able to "try and buy" with Simon because she had served as interim president when McPherson went to Iraq.

"We know what her abilities are, we've seen them first hand." he said.

This is not the first time Simon has tried for the top executive position at MSU. She was a finalist in the 1993 presidential search, but lost to McPherson.

"Eleven years ago it was the right decision for Michigan State," said Simon, adding she is now confident she will be able to serve the university well as president.

Trustees at the meeting referenced the number of letters and e-mails they had received from faculty, students and staff and the board's efforts to consider those suggestions.

Some faculty thought, however, the fast decision cut them out of the process.

"I think this is a sad day in the university, not because of Simon, but the way the entire search process was circumvented," said Sheila Teahan, associate professor of English. "There has been no search. You need a pool of candidates."

Teahan said the board should have consulted with faculty members

"I think the Board of Trustees is extremely out of touch with the faculty," she said. "It's part of a larger pattern, certainly a pattern of secrecy."

For more on this story, see Monday's edition of The State News.

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