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Selection process mirrors 1993 pick

By [CARL LINDQUIST](#)

The State News

When MSU President M. Peter McPherson was named president in 1993, some faculty felt betrayed by both the closed-door selection process and his lack of academic administrative experience.

Eleven years later, some faculty feel the same betrayal and frustration over closed doors in Provost Lou Anna Simon's selection.

Simon was named MSU's 20th president Friday without a national search, five weeks after McPherson announced he would be leaving the university on Jan. 1.

"I'm surprised they didn't spend more time on the search," micro and molecular genetics Professor Wendy Champness said.

"In the best of all worlds, one would want to see a national search."

But Champness, who was an associate professor at MSU when McPherson was named president, is excited about MSU's future under Simon.

"I'm enthusiastic about it. I appreciate having an academic as a president," Champness said.

In Simon's case, the quick choice avoided undue stress on the university, said former trustee Barbara Sawyer-Koch, who participated in five presidential searches during her 16-year term - including the 1993 appointment.

"It takes months to do a national search and typically hundreds of thousands of dollars," Sawyer-Koch said.

"The university has avoided the dilemmas we've faced in previous searches."

She said one of those dilemmas is pushing MSU into the national spotlight, as was the case in the 1993 search when candidate Dale Lick, then president of Florida State University, came under fire for alleged racist remarks he made while speaking to the University of Maine's student senate.

In that election, 190 candidates were whittled down to 16, then to four. Eventually, three, including Lick, pulled out of the race, leaving then-interim Provost Simon as the sole remaining candidate.

However, with a 4-4 vote, the board could not name her president.

In the end, according to MSU Trustee Joel Ferguson, who was the board's chairman during the 1993 search, trustees compromised on McPherson, who was one of the 14 candidates not chosen as part of the final four.

The decision prompted uproar in the MSU community - less than 14 hours passed between the original 4-4 vote and the 6-2 confirmation of McPherson as university president.

A public interview was never conducted, which might have presented the opportunity for faculty to discuss their concerns, including that McPherson had no academic experience.

The election process for Simon was similar to the 1993 election, in that it did not feature an open interview of Simon.

In the days after Friday's decision, some faculty are speculating that a more extensive search might have resulted in Simon not becoming the next president.

"She probably would have left the university," biochemistry and molecular biology Professor Zachary Burton said. "That was probably how the decision was reached."

Though, it's expected that a national search for MSU's next provost will be conducted before the university names Simon's successor.