

Proposed Procedures for
Faculty and Student Participation
in the Selection of the President

March 28, 2023



Background

Section 3.2.4.7. of the *Bylaws for Academic Governance* reads, “The University Council shall propose procedures to the Board of Trustees for the participation of faculty and students in the selection of the President.”

Samuel L. Stanley Jr., M.D. announced he intended to resign as president of Michigan State University on October 13, 2022, and his resignation took effect on November 4. The Board of Trustees unanimously appointed Teresa K. Woodruff, Ph.D. interim president on October 31.

Dr. Rema Vassar, chairperson of the Board of Trustees, appointed four trustees to serve on the search committee for the next president of the university, including Trustees Dennis Denno, Renee Knake Jefferson, Brianna Scott, and Kelly Tebay. Trustee Denno was appointed chairperson of the search committee, and Trustee Scott was appointed vice chairperson.

The University Council instructed the Steering Committee to begin developing proposed procedures at its January 31, 2023 meeting. The Steering Committee discussed possible compositions of the next search committee at its February 7 and March 14 meetings and received input from the University Council on February 28.

This document constitutes the University Council’s proposed procedures for the participation of faculty and students in the selection of the university’s next president.

Past Search Committee Compositions (Post-John Hannah)

Search	Faculty	Academic Administrators	Undergraduate Students	Graduate Students	Staff	Trustees	Alumni	Total
Wharton	7	1	2	1	0	0	1	12
Mackey 1	9	1	3	1	1	2	1	18
Mackey 2	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	6
DiBiaggio	2	1	1	0	0	8	1	13
McPherson 1	3	1	2	1	1	8	1	17
McPherson 2	3	1	2	1	1	4	1	13
Simon	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8
Stanley 1	6	3	1	1	1	4	3	19
Stanley 2	5	3	1	1	1	4	3	18

See Appendix 1 for a table containing details about the committees’ compositions. Note that in some cases described above as two separate search committees, search committees were dissolved with replacement committees established, while in others members simply left and were replaced; the table makes no distinction between the two.



Proposed Composition and Selection

Faculty	8
Deans	2
Undergraduate Students	4
Graduate Students	1
Staff	1-2
Trustees	4 (non-voting)
Alumni	1-2
Total	21-23 (17-19 voting)

Faculty

The University Council proposes that there be **eight faculty representatives** on the search committee.

We propose that the Office of Academic Governance solicit volunteers by distributing an application to all faculty and academic staff via Qualtrics. The application would be developed by a subcommittee of the Steering Committee. Once applications are received, the faculty on the Steering Committee would review the applications and nominate a slate of eight faculty. In developing the slate of nominees, the faculty on the Steering Committee would take care to consider the demographic diversity of the nominees and to make the slate as representative of the faculty's diverse constituencies (e.g., tenure system faculty, fixed-term faculty, teaching faculty, specialists, librarians, MSU Extension) as possible.

After the Office of Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs reviews the slate of nominees and verifies that none have any incidents of serious discipline in their personnel files, the slate of nominees and their applications would be sent to the Faculty Senate for review. The Faculty Senate would then vote on whether to approve the slate of nominees via a yes-or-no Qualtrics poll. If the Faculty Senate approves the slate, the Board of Trustees will be notified of the Faculty Senate's decision, and the nominees would be seated as members of the search committee. If the Faculty Senate does not approve the slate, the faculty members of the Steering Committee would solicit input from the Faculty Senate as to why the slate was not acceptable, develop a new slate of nominees, submit it to the Faculty Senate, and repeat this process until a slate is approved.

Note that this process is very similar to the one currently used in academic governance for selecting the at-large members of the Steering Committee and faculty representatives on bodies like the Athletic Council.



Students

The University Council proposes that there be **four undergraduate student representatives**, as detailed below, and **one graduate/professional student representative** on the search committee.

The Associated Students of Michigan State University (the undergraduate student government) expressed its preference as to undergraduate representation via Bill 59-42 on December 8, 2022, and the University Council defers to Bill 59-42 on the question of the number of representatives. ASMSU called for “a minimum of four undergraduate students . . . representing the various student governing organizations on campus.” Specifically, there should be a representative of ASMSU, the Residence Halls Association, the Council of Racial and Ethnic Students/Council of Progressive Students, and the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement selected by each group by procedures of their choosing.

In order to match the roughly 4:1 ratio of undergraduate students to graduate/professional students at MSU (39,201 undergraduates to 10,822 graduates in Fall 2022¹), the University Council proposes that there be one graduate/professional student representative selected by the Council of Graduate Students (the graduate student government) according to procedures of that body's choosing.

Other Constituencies

While the *Bylaws for Academic Governance* only require the University Council to develop procedures for the participation of faculty and students, the degree to which the representation of those groups is meaningful naturally depends on how many other constituencies are represented and how many representatives those other constituencies have. Accordingly, the University Council offers the following suggestions.

The University Council proposes that the search committee include **two deans** selected by the Deans' Council; **no more than two support staff** selected by the Coalition of Labor Unions; and **no more than two alumni** selected by the Alumni Advisory Board. Additionally, the University Council suggests that each of the identified groups select their representatives by procedures of their own choosing and that their selections be seated on the search committee.

¹ https://msu.edu/state-transparency-reporting/Section245FY17_2a

The Role of Trustees

It has already been publicly announced that the search committee will include four trustees, one of whom will be the chairperson of the committee and one of whom will be its vice chairperson.

The University Council proposes—as it did in 2018—that the trustees on the search committee serve as non-voting, ex-officio members. The search committee is ultimately advisory. Given that its work will culminate in a recommendation to the Board of Trustees, and given that the trustees will vote on whether to accept that recommendation, it is unnecessary for the trustees on the search committee to have voting rights in developing that recommendation. While the trustees' contributions to the discussions of the search committee will no doubt be valuable, the principles of shared governance are best upheld if they are not essentially given two votes.

Alternates

If a member is unable to serve or continue once seated, a replacement should be appointed following consultation with the group that appointed them.

The Nature of the Search

The University Council acknowledges—though does not necessarily agree with—the position that a search for a president must be “closed” (i.e., not include public identification of finalists) in order to attract the best applicants.² The University Council recommends the Board of Trustees conducts an open search. If the Board of Trustees insists on a closed search, the University Council proposes exploring ways of opening the search as much as possible while keeping finalists' identities confidential.

The University Council specifically proposes the following method of doing so: Once the search committee identifies finalists (perhaps three to six individuals), the search committee should solicit questions for the finalists from the university community. The search committee could then decide which questions the finalists should be asked to respond to in writing (at least three but fewer than ten), pose those questions to the finalists, and share their anonymous responses publicly prior to developing a final recommendation to the Board of Trustees.

Approved by the University Council by a vote of 72 to 1 on March 28, 2023.

² See Turner Street, “Is secrecy necessary for a successful university presidential search? Here's what the numbers say”, which concludes “no” to the titular question (<https://medium.com/@UFbrechnercenter/is-secrecy-necessary-for-a-successful-university-presidential-search-heres-what-the-numbers-say-b429f954145c>).