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Suffolk faculty seek voice in presidential search

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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 28, 2014

As Suffolk University launches a search for a new president, faculty members are speaking out to ensure that its board of trustees includes the entire community in the process.

Until two weeks ago, more than three months after Suffolk abruptly replaced James McCarthy as president, the university still had not formally announced a search for a permanent leader, an omission that had not gone unnoticed on the downtown Boston campus.

“Everyone has been wondering



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Interim president Norman Smith.

what's going on," said longtime Suffolk professor John Berg, who e-mailed a large group of faculty about his concerns.

"There's been a lot of speculation about what's happening."

Other professors and staff at the university have raised similar concerns in recent weeks about the status of the search and about the desire to have a wide variety of voices and opinions heard about what Suffolk needs in a new leader.

But Andrew Meyer, the chairman of Suffolk's board of trustees, said it will announce more details soon, and the search will be open to input from across the campus community.

"There is no effort to exclude any appropriate interested parties from weighing in," he told the Globe by phone. "Faculty and students will certainly have an opportunity to weigh in.

"There will be transparency and inclusiveness," added Meyer. "But by the nature of the process, and for the protection of the candidates who wish to apply, some parts of that process will be confidential."

After seeing Berg's e-mail and following questions from the Globe, Meyer sent an e-mail to the Suffolk community on Dec. 17 to address the concerns.

Meyer told the Globe that the search process is “in the earliest possible stages.” Suffolk recently hired a consulting firm to help attract candidates, he said; he declined to disclose the company’s name.

The trustees have not met since the firm’s hiring, Meyer said. During its next meeting, at the end of next month, the board is scheduled to discuss the pursuit of a new president and will announce details about the search process shortly thereafter, he said.

He said there is no timeline for the search.

“Our goal is to get the finest candidates before us,” said Meyer. “It’s understandable that people within the university community have an interest and would like to know the process, and the board has every intention of announcing that process when that process is arrived at.”

The hunt for a new president follows a period of tumult at Suffolk, which enrolls roughly 8,500 undergraduate, graduate, and law school students.

At the end of August, just days before the start of the fall semester, Suffolk replaced McCarthy with an interim leader, Norman R. Smith. The surprising move came on top of buyouts and salary freezes over the past year, amid declines in enrollment and revenue.

Now, university officials hope a new president can rally the institution, which is constructing a \$62 million classroom complex on Somerset Street that is scheduled to open in the fall.

The Globe reported earlier this month that the outgoing state treasurer, Steve Grossman, is interested in becoming Suffolk’s next president, and that he has both opponents and supporters on the university’s board. Faculty said the news report prompted concerns that the search process was moving along without input beyond the university’s trustees.

Speculation had also risen recently from the fact that, coupled with the lack of an announcement about a search process, Smith has frequently referred to himself simply as Suffolk’s president, leaving out the “interim” designation.

“There hasn’t been a lot of discussion about it, but people have noticed and some people interpret it as thinking he’s going to stay here permanently,” Berg said.

Meyer dismissed that notion.

“He’s the interim president,” Meyer said of Smith. “I think we made it very clear at the time that he was joining us as an interim president.”

But, he added, “I don’t think people like to refer to themselves or introduce themselves that way.”

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