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## **Statement on the University of Wisconsin's Presidential Search**

*On November 1, following the announcement of current University of Wisconsin system president Ray Cross's retirement, the president of the Board of Regents of the UW system appointed a nine-member presidential search committee. Breaking decades of institutional precedent, he did not include any faculty members on the search committee, a clear violation of widely accepted standards for shared governance as set forth in the American Association of University Professors' Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities.*

**The AAUP's Committee on College and University Governance has issued this statement on the University of Wisconsin's presidential search.**

Earlier this month, Mr. Andrew S. Petersen, president of the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System announced the appointment of a nine-member committee charged with searching for a new UW system president. The committee includes no members of the faculty or academic staff, groups that make up nearly 60 percent of the system's employees. In its decision to exclude faculty and staff representatives, the board has demonstrated its willingness to ignore not only the interests of the citizenry it represents but long-standing and widely recognized norms of academic governance.

The American Association of University Professors has for decades called for direct faculty involvement in presidential searches. The Association's foundational *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, formulated more than fifty years ago in collaboration with the American Council on Education and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, asserts that "joint effort of a most critical kind must be taken when an institution chooses a new president." It continues:

The selection of a chief administrative officer should follow upon a cooperative search by the governing board and the faculty, taking into consideration the opinions of others who are appropriately interested. The president should be equally qualified to serve both as the executive officer of the governing board and as the chief academic officer of the institution and the faculty. The president's dual role requires an ability to interpret to board and faculty the educational views and concepts of institutional government of the other. The president should have the confidence of the board and the faculty.

A derivative Association statement, *Faculty Participation in the Selection, Evaluation, and Retention of Administrators*, provides detailed guidance regarding the presidential search process and the composition of a search committee:

The search may be initiated either by separate committees of the faculty and board or by a joint committee of the faculty and board or of faculty, board, students, and others, and separate committees may subsequently be joined. In a joint committee, the numbers from each constituency should reflect both the primacy of faculty concern and the range of other groups, including students, that have a legitimate claim to some involvement. Each major group should elect its own members to serve on the committee, and the rules governing the search should be arrived at jointly. A joint committee should determine the size of the majority that will be controlling in making an appointment.

According to [a national survey of governance practices](#), 94 percent of institutions included faculty representatives on their most recent presidential search committees.

In appointing the current presidential search committee, the UW board of regents has ignored these broadly accepted principles and procedures. It has also disregarded its own established precedent, followed in each of the last three presidential searches since 1991, of including voting members of the faculty and academic staff on search committees.

As a result, the board's action has generated swift and consistent condemnation. In [a November 5 letter](#) to the regents and current system president Ray Cross, state representative Katrina Shankland criticized the regents' decision to "willfully exclude" from the search committee faculty, staff, and students who are not regents and requested the addition of representatives from all three groups. During [an interview](#) on Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR), she stated, "I think that potential candidates might look at the composition of this committee and recognize that not only is it problematic, but it could seriously undermine their ability to lead down the road when the entire process will come into question from day one." Professor Nick Fleisher, president of the Wisconsin AAUP state conference, echoed that sentiment: "The regents setting up the search in this way does not bode well for whoever's hired through this process. They will come into a situation where faculty, staff, students feel disrespected by how they were hired." In [an interview](#) on WPR, Fleisher added, "Whether it's intentionally sending a message or not, it means that [the regents] simply do not value the input from those groups, and they are not willing to make people from those groups full voting members of the search committee." On November 8, the UW-Madison faculty advocacy organization PROFS sent [a letter](#) to the chair of the board in which it referred to the exclusion of faculty and staff as "a deliberate insult." The faculty and staff senates of a number of UW campuses have passed resolutions calling for the expansion of the search committee to include faculty and academic staff representatives as voting members. The Wisconsin AAUP Conference and the AFT-Wisconsin Higher Education Council issued [a joint statement](#) on November 12, decrying the "shocking level of disrespect . . . and troubling lack of humility on the part of the Regents" and presenting two resolutions aimed at improving the search process.

The AAUP's Committee on College and University Governance shares these widespread concerns about the composition of the presidential search committee and its implications for the process of selecting the UW system's next leader. The committee therefore calls on the UW board of regents to realign itself with traditional norms of academic governance, as well as with its own decades-long practice, by immediately expanding the presidential search committee to include a significant number of elected faculty, academic staff, and student representatives as voting members.