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Statement on Presidential Searches

In recent months at a number of colleges and universities across the country controversy has emerged over decisions by governing boards to conduct searches for new presidents or chancellors in secret, abandoning the previously standard practice of inviting a select group of finalists to visit the campus and meet publicly with faculty and other members of the campus community. The rationale for such secrecy is that open meetings discourage applications from highly qualified candidates, although no evidence has ever been offered to suggest that this is in fact the case.

AAUP policy statements make clear that such decisions to forgo public campus visits and public forums by finalists violate longstanding principles of shared governance. Shared governance helps ensure that universities and colleges serve the public interest. Serving this interest is why we have public universities and colleges and why we grant special tax status to nonprofit private universities and colleges.

As the Academic Senate at Sonoma State University has declared, "Forgoing announcing finalists' names publicly and scheduling official campus visits for them would be behavior more characteristic of a private corporation than a public university. Doing so would also mean a less transparent search process and less confidence in the outcome on the part of the university community and public. . . . Such visits give the university and public insight into finalists' knowledge of the campus and their ability to unify and lead the students, faculty, staff and administration. They also give finalists insight into the university community they aspire to lead."

Although governing boards have the legal responsibility for selection of a president, the process of selection is fundamental in determining which candidate has the most appropriate academic leadership and administrative skills needed to lead the institution. The 1966 [Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities](#), formulated jointly by the AAUP, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges states:

Joint effort of a most critical kind must be taken when an institution chooses a new president. 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 2013 report from the AAUP's Committee on College and University Governance entitled [Confidentiality and Faculty Representation in Academic Governance](#) declares:

Unless mandated to be open by state law, many such searches [for higher administrative officers] have an initial, confidential screening stage conducted by a search committee that includes faculty members. The next stage is normally one in which finalists are interviewed. At this point in the process, the names of finalists should be made public to the campus community so that the community at large, faculty committees, or at least selected faculty members have an opportunity to interview the finalists and forward their views to the search committee or to a consulting firm employed by the college or university.

The conclusion of the same document recommends:

Searches for presidents and other chief academic officers should have an open phase that allows individual faculty members as well as faculty bodies to review the credentials of finalists, ask questions, and share opinions before a final decision is made.

Finally, the AAUP website provides a [Presidential Search Committee Checklist](#) to guide institutions in the application of these policies. This emphasizes that

open visits are crucial in the success of the search process because they permit members of the campus community to participate in providing impressions, as well as to contribute to the candidate's understanding of the culture of the institution. In this final phase of the selection process, open visits present vitally important opportunities for both the campus community and the candidate to determine each other's suitability. This final step is extraordinarily useful to the search committee in making its final recommendation to the board.

The AAUP thus calls upon colleges and universities to resist calls for closed, secretive searches and reaffirm their commitment to transparency and active faculty engagement in the hiring of higher administrative officers. Faculty members should demand that their institutions observe established norms of shared governance by involving faculty representatives in all stages of the search process and by providing the entire faculty and other members of the campus community the opportunity to meet with search finalists in public on campus.

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