

At each Board of Trustees meeting, the Chair of the Faculty is provided an opportunity to address the Board. At the December 12, 2003, Board of Trustees meeting, Professor Niswander discussed the Faculty Senate resolutions pertaining to the chancellor search.

Comments to the Board of Trustees

Rick Niswander, Chair of the Faculty

December 12, 2003

First, on behalf of the faculty, I would like to wish you and yours the best this holiday season and throughout the year.

My messages concern the Chancellor search. In October and November, the Faculty Senate passed two resolutions concerning the Chancellor search that I want to briefly discuss today. The resolutions were given to the search committee. I want to make sure this Board hears about them and understands the rationale because by the next time I speak to you we are hoping to have already selected a new Chancellor.

The first resolution requested that the Chancellor Search Committee consider candidates meeting the minimum criteria of (1) holding a terminal degree in their discipline (2) having a distinguished record in teaching, scholarship, and service, (3) having a demonstrated record of upholding shared governance and (4) being able to lead the university in accordance with its core academic values.

These criteria all revolve around the concept of seeking someone who has an academic background.

You may wonder or you may be asked why faculty believe it to be so important – most would suggest critical – that our next chancellor have an academic background.

The short answer is that this is an academic enterprise. There are obviously components that are not strictly academic – housing, dining, athletics, community engagement, and so forth. However, fundamentally, a University is academics. Academics is the reason we are here to start with and virtually everything else we do is built upon that foundation.

The academic enterprise is different in many respects than a non-academic enterprise. In November in my comments I noted some ways in which the two differ.

Let me turn the scenario around just a little bit. Business enterprises often seek new CEO's. Sometimes those individuals come from within the organization – someone who has spent decades working their way through the company. The somewhat recent succession of Jeff Immelt to the chairmanship of General Electric is an example. These inside individuals are immersed in the business and in the culture of the enterprise.

Sometimes new CEO's are brought in from outside the enterprise – possibly from someone in the industry or from a similar kind of corporation. It is important to note that even if the new CEO comes from outside, it is virtually always the case that the individual has a background in business and understands management.

The Board of Directors of General Electric (or the Board of any other public corporation) would never propose an academic to run the company. More locally, think of the reasons you or someone you know would be highly unlikely to choose an academic to run your company. For each of those reasons, there is a mirror image reason why faculty are reluctant to embrace a non-academic.

Let me be clear that I absolutely agree with the chairman and the other members of the committee that the pool of applicants must be as broad as possible. The net needs to be cast wide because you never know what you might catch. However, from the perspective of the faculty, absent highly unusual circumstances, the fish in the net with academic credentials are the only ones that stand a chance to be lepers.

Let me also be clear that the faculty are not saying that someone must have academic credentials alone. The faculty are saying that strong academic credentials are a necessary precondition to other characteristics.

Will hiring an academic ensure success. Heck no – any more than hiring Jeff Immeldt will ensure GE's success.

It is vitally important that our next Chancellor hit the ground running immediately. As someone who has been in both the business world and the academic world, it is my strongly held belief that it is extremely unlikely that a pure non-academic can do that. The differences between the academic world and the non-academic world are too extreme. And, frankly, I believe the risks to East Carolina University are too great.

In the second resolution, the Faculty Senate requested that the final candidates meet openly with the faculty. This is a matter that has not yet been decided, but will be decided before we meet again.

The search consultant has told the committee and has apparently told many of you that if the search is opened at the end that some qualified candidates will drop out, particularly those individuals who are sitting presidents or chancellors. I do not argue with her comments. My point is that it is a risk that I am willing to take and a price I am willing to pay. Here's why.

First, the implication of the comments is that the search will fail because the individuals will drop out. That suggests that only those individuals can run a University. If that is the case how do Universities in states with open search laws, such as Florida, even exist?

Second, I would like to point out that the only Chancellor ECU has ever had that was a sitting president or chancellor prior to his arrival here was Bill Muse who was also the only individual we have hired using a closed search.

Third, there is no question that for some individuals an open search at the end involves some risk. In my view, effective leaders take risks.

Fourth, there are many constituencies of a Chancellor. Three are extremely critical. One is the Office of the President, the second is the Board of Trustees, and the third is the faculty. In any search – open or not – all members of the first two critical constituencies get to fully evaluate each of the finalists on a face-to-face basis. The faculty is requesting that the third critical constituency be given the same opportunity.

And fifth, we all want and need a Chancellor who wants to be **our** Chancellor with every fiber in his or her being. They need to have a passion for ECU. In my view, if they are more interested in the job they have than the job they are seeking they do not have the necessary passion for East Carolina University.

I have told Chairman Talton, I will clearly and forcefully speak within the search committee on these two issues. I wanted you to hear what the two critical issues are and why they are so important to the 1,400 faculty members at ECU.

That concludes my remarks. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.