

Choosing new president offers chance to heal split, OCC is told

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

As executive director of the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), William H. Meardy has seen lots of badly split boards.

But he believes Oakland Community College's board of trustees must "heal" itself before hiring a new president.

"Bringing on board a new president is the time to begin the healing process," Meardy told OCC's elected officials.

"You should bring him on with a 7-0 vote. That's a signal to everybody that you want to take this college and go forward together."

TWO WEEKS AGO, OCC's board voted 4 to 3 against renewing President Robert F. Roelofs' contract. The move increased tensions on the split board and caused a flurry on the college's four campuses.

In a petition, 400 of the school's full-time employees protested the forced retirement. Urging the seven board members to reconsider their Jan. 17 vote to retire the president June 30, they credited Roelofs with maintaining fiscal integrity and high employee morale, and keeping the school

functioning in an "excellent and efficient manner."

While planning to reply to the petition at the next regular meeting Feb. 28, the trustees will hold a special session at 8 p.m. Feb. 12 to discuss what kind of president they want next.

MEARDY'S APPEARANCE before the board officially kicked off the presidential search process. Trustees invited the head of the non-profit organization to outline the search service ACCT provides to members.

If employed by OCC, ACCT would locate candidates for a new college president in four to six months. The service is expected to cost between \$15,000 to \$18,000.

ACCT's executive director assured trustees they would have input into the process, with the final selection entirely up to them.

Hiring a consultant would bring objectivity to the process, Meardy explained.

"A presidential search can become emotional and highly political," said the former college teacher and administrator.

"All we want to do is assist you up to a point. Selecting a president is the most important decision your board will ever make."

SINCE UNDERTAKING presidential

searches four years ago, ACCT has located new leaders for 20 community colleges. Some of those have had very split boards.

"There are no guarantees, but outside objective people can begin the healing process for a split board," he said.

Meardy stressed the importance of an advisory committee to carefully define a presidential profile. The job would be advertised according to the committee's specifications, and only those who meet the basic requirements would be considered.

He also cautioned that the college consider what kind of president it wants for the year 2000 — because that person may not be what was needed in 1970 or 1980.

"Here's a unique opportunity for your college to decide where you came from, who you are and what you want to be in 1990," explained Meardy.

"It's a chance for this board and district to take a new look at the goals and mission of the college."

THE CONSULTANT said he expects at least 150 people to apply for the OCC post, which now pays \$72,000 plus benefits.

"Your district represents the highest pinnacle of challenge in the United States. A lot of people are going to be interested in applying," said Meardy, who has 50 potential applicants in his files.

ACCT's executive director said most colleges do their own presidential searches. He supports that process, if the board has time to undertake it.

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