

OCC trustees ready to choose new president

By Teri Banasz
staff writer

After visiting the candidates on their home campuses, Oakland Community College trustees will end their six-month search for a new president tonight.

It's expected the trustees' decision will be based on the individual leadership styles of the three finalists. Trustees last week were careful to give no hint of the man they want to replace Robert F. Roelofs, who retired June 30 after seven years.

All were interviewed at OCC in June. Site committees visited their home colleges recently. All are currently community college presidents.

Finalists are: Dr. Fred Gaskin of Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, Ill.; Dr. George T. Miller Jr. of Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City; and Dr. R. Stephen Nicholson of Mount Hood Community College in Gresham, Ore.

BOARD CHAIR Suzanne Reynolds called tonight's meeting following a special meeting last Thursday night when site committee members presented their findings into the candidates' background checks.

Three committees spent two to three days on each campus.

Besides speaking with typical sources such as college administrators, faculty and students, many committee members said they stopped people at

random on the streets, in airports and restaurants to get a total picture of the community's college president.

Overall, the comments were favorable. In one member's words, they found "nothing we would be ashamed of." All agreed the men were "well qualified" to serve OCC.

Here's a summary of those reports, presented by the team captains of the visiting committees:

FRED GASKIN hails from a community college of nearly 17,000 students drawing from mostly middle income households in suburban Chicago, according to Christine Gram, provost of OCC's Auburn Hills campus.

Sometimes called a "workaholic," Gaskin was described as a dynamic leader who knows how to identify the best and brightest resource people and get their input, according to faculty, trustees and administrators. He is a communicator who has "made the college glow," in their words. In general, the college's reputation has soared in his leadership.

Community leaders like Gaskin because he involves them in the development of college curriculum through advisory committees. He has been successful in petitioning education money from the Illinois legislature.

He is visible on the campus and his style was described as "management by wandering around." The students seemed satisfied with their academic

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services, the group found.

Other descriptions: cultured, direct, a good delegator.

Trustee Sandra Ritter, who served on the committee, said: "I nosed around into business that really wasn't my business, and I found nothing we would be ashamed of." Ritter said she also was impressed by the large number of summer-session students of all ages there.

Gaskin, she said, apparently has made many changes in the college and surprisingly "no enemies." She quoted one comment: "We don't want to lose this man. He's really turned Moraine Valley around."

GEORGE MILLER is president of the oldest community college in Michigan, Northwestern Michigan College, and was described as the school's "strongest president so far." It has a technical center, an aviation center and an "astrochemical observatory," noted chairman Richard Thompson, OCC's academic vice president.

Miller was described as an "outstanding long-range planner" and highly regarded in Lansing on fiscal matters. In his administrative style he works through channels and "dwells on the positive."

Thompson said he also "doesn't run a one-person show" but allows other administrators to be visible to the board.

Students seemed satisfied with campus services.

Though Miller was criticized as long-winded and "not the most exciting

speaker," his communication skills were praised in a recent millage increase he won for the college. The victory was particularly important in light of a millage defeat for K-12 schools that preceded it in the Traverse City area, Thompson said.

Involved in civic activities, Miller doesn't merely join organizations but gets involved. His fund-raising skills were praised.

Above all, he was described as a "man in motion," who is concerned with the college's priorities.

Miller was described as a believer in the liberal-arts side of community colleges and at home is a promoter of the college's museum, specializing in Eskimo art.

STEPHEN NICHOLSON is president of a community college where recent unemployment in the paper and lumber industry native to Oregon has led to fiscal problems for the campus. Nonetheless, committee members were impressed by the natural beauty of Nicholson's home campus on a 200-acre site under Mount Hood. The school has 8,000 students.

Chairman Anthony D. Jarson, OCC acting president, said he was impressed by feelings of "strong affection and respect" awarded Nicholson. Another OCC committee member said she felt she "grew professionally and personally by meeting the man."

Nicholson was described as a man of high principle and a "promoter of quality." Above all, he's the most human-

tic person you ever met in your life," Jarson said. "He virtually has no detractors."

He is particularly available to students, attends 80 percent of school functions and is involved in fund raising for student activities.

He's considered a strong motivator by the support staff and, despite instituting staff cuts, is considered fair. One asex employee, asked if he liked the president, answered, "Like him? I love the man."

Mount Hood trustees there said Nicholson works in the open and doesn't have "secret agendas." They said they

felt proud to work with him.

Administrators consider him highly organized, preferring a "flat" organizational chart.

He is well educated and speaks several languages including Japanese.

"When this man says he gets around, he gets around," noted trustee Earl Anderson. "Everyday people on the street, they all know him."

"He's not what I call a great driver," quipped Jarson, who rode with Nicholson on a particularly bumpy mountain voyage. Jarson said he tried to remain calm by keeping his eyes "on that mountain."

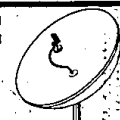
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The session is open to the public without charge.

Dr. Stuart Finch, department chairman at the Rutgers University medical school in Camden, N.J., will speak on the continuing health effects on survivors of the atomic blast. Finch spent 6 1/2 years working with survivors in Ja-

pan of the first wartime atomic blast. Dr. Felix Rogers, a Pleasant Ridge osteopath, will report on the recent Budapest conference of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. That group's two largest affiliates are Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Soviet Committee of Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

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