

Hire Power

Select staff with student feedback

By Student Leader staff

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆
University of Washington President Mark Emmert makes almost \$500,000 a year. **University of Delaware** President David Roselle takes home just under a million dollars in pay and benefits. A handful of private university presidents make more than a million each.

With so much invested in their top officials, universities often put candidates through a series of intense interviews before making hiring decisions. During this process, administrators shouldn't underestimate the value of consulting students.

Whether adding a Student Government representative to a search committee or holding open forums where students can question wannabe deans, the "powers that be" on campus need to stay connected with and influenced by the voice of the student body when making these important choices.

Valuing Student Representation

Inclusion in the hiring process denotes a certain amount of respect between administrators and students. "We believe that student participation in our searches gives a clear signal to the importance we place on having senior staff who want to work directly with students," says Robert Reid, communications manager at **Washington & Jefferson College** in Pennsylvania.

Students should aim for direct representation on all standing college committees. Student involvement on these committees often varies from being an observer (most common) to being a full member with equal voting rights (more rare). The existence of student seats, along with the level of participation, often indicates whether or not SG has a healthy relationship with the administration. "At our school, students are usually involved either on the search committee or as interviewers," Reid says.

No Job Too Small

Sometimes the level of student participation depends on the position itself, such as whether or not the selected individual would be interacting with students on a daily basis. At **Augustana College** in Illinois, two students typically sit on all search committees. However, when the search is for a position that deals

mostly with trustees and other top-level administrators, such as the college president, students don't have a seat and aren't as involved.

"Students have varying input, depending on the position," says Dr. Evelyn S. Campbell, dean and vice president of student services. "For a coach, the student team members would meet privately and give direct feedback to the athletic director. For positions in Student Services, students have more opportunity to meet the candidates and give feedback than for a new comptroller."

Students shouldn't be discouraged if they only take part in lower-level searches, such as for new faculty members. Student feedback can sometimes be more vital for these positions than for higher ones, as the individuals often work more closely with



students. Demonstrating excellence on these committees can also earn students a spot or two on higher-level committees down the road.

Other Avenues of Feedback

Having voting privileges on a search committee is ideal, but students can share their opinions in other ways. For example, Augustana's SG often organizes open forums where students can ask candidates questions directly. This gives the student body a public voice regardless of whether or not they have an official seat on a committee.

At **Juniata College** in Pennsylvania, SG officials and selected students sit in on luncheons, interviews, and informal meetings with candidates and then are asked to prepare a response. Although higher-ups and supervisors make the final hiring decisions, student feedback can heavily influence their choices.

"While we don't have a formal voting appointment, there's an informal expecta-

tion that students are included in the decision," says Demetri Patitsas, 2006-07 SG president. "This year we interviewed with candidates for comptroller and dean of students. Each time, we nominated people from within the senate to arrange these luncheons and tours with the candidates."

Student involvement in the hiring process is similar at cross-state school **Moravian College**. "In general, there's more outside input accepted on behalf of the students rather than direct influence," says Patrick McDermott, 2006-07 United Student Government president. "Last year's USG president sat on the search committee for our new college president and had substantial say in the committee, which was an exception. This year, we had a search for a new academic dean, and students met with the candidates during a formal luncheon in addition to providing important feedback on the candidates."

Luncheon encounters may seem unimportant when compared with formal committee positions. Yet they still provide valuable face time with candidates. "The formal luncheons give us a chance to have direct and un-moderated discussion and questions with the candidates," McDermott says. "Student opinions are obviously valued among our administration, though I'd personally like to see more substantive input on behalf of the students in these types of processes."

Increasing Influence

When students aren't as involved in hiring decisions as they would like, it's often SG's place to change that. Showing physical proof of student opinions—via formal polls or scientifically designed surveys—can give SG instant legitimacy. In time, administrators may even seek out SG to provide student input.

SGs should also conduct research to find out how students at similar schools are involved in the hiring process. If SG can provide examples of peer institutions where students have a voice on hiring committees, demonstrating this precedent might convince faculty and administrators to be more inclusive.

Once students have earned representation in the hiring process, it's essential that they maintain a professional image. Showing up appropriately dressed for luncheon meetings, arriving on time for committee interviews, and coming prepared with well-researched questions will go a long way in demonstrating that students are mature enough to handle important jobs and more responsibility. **SL**

Contact Reid treid@washjeff.edu, Campbell at evelyncampbell@augustana.edu, Patitsas at patijm3@juniata.edu, or McDermott at stpdm01@moravian.edu.

ASGA members: Read more about campus hiring decisions in the Summer 2007 Issue Brief.