The provost occupies a position of great responsibility, charged not only with representing the university in many settings but also with providing intellectual leadership for the faculty and, above all, guaranteeing the quality of students’ education. In order to identify candidates capable of such work, the search committee and president must closely coordinate their efforts in order to ensure that the president, who has ultimate responsibility for making the appointment, feels confident that all relevant factors have been considered and that the appointee fits the university’s expectations.

The following protocol describes the steps Marquette follows in its provost searches, with special attention to the respective roles of search committee and president. In general, the search committee handles the detailed evaluation of candidates’ qualifications and coordinates the overall search process, consulting regularly with the president throughout the search. The final decision on hiring a provost rests with the president.

Preparing for the search

Choosing a search committee chair and members

The president appoints a committee chair, with input from faculty and others, as needed. Committee chairs need to be highly respected as faculty in their colleges, experienced, reliable, discreet, and discriminating. After a faculty member agrees to chair the committee, the president invites the other committee members, again with input from current deans, the committee chair, faculty, provost team members, and advancement (for alumni members and trustees), as needed.

The president should choose search committee members with an eye to expertise, experience, effectiveness, willingness to invest the time, and representativeness. The committee must be able to speak to the various intellectual interests of the university, and be considered credible in the judgments it will be asked to make.

As a matter of course, each provost search committee should include faculty members from a representative group of the university’s colleges and schools, a current voting member of the Academic Senate, an academic dean, and a trustee. Including a trustee creates an opportunity for engaging him/her in meaningful work, and often provides a useful outside perspective. The dean representative provides knowledge about the day-to-day general demands of the position, as well as the nature of work with the president, the provost, alumni, deans, and other administrators.

If possible, a provost search committee at Marquette should include a student member, with care taken that the student understands that searches often involve candid comments about possible internal candidates, and the high confidentiality expectations of external candidates. If students are not appointed, search committees should make an extra effort to solicit student opinions (through MUSG,
GSO, and/or other representative bodies of students) at the beginning of the process and include time for at least one meeting with students during all finalist interview schedules.

**Staffing the committee**

The searches work best when the committee members are free to focus upon the work of evaluation and discussion and are relieved of the many logistical details that come with a search. An individual will be assigned by the president to serve as the search committee’s facilitator.

**Gathering information on stakeholder interests**

Before drafting the job description and beginning the actual search, the committee should open itself to ideas and opinions from faculty and other stakeholders, whether by public forum, e-mail, or personal conversations with the president, provost, deans, and Academic Senate. Consultation with alumni and professionals can also prove helpful.

**Charging the committee**

The president should prepare a written charge for the search committee. That charge should describe the key qualifications provost candidates are expected to meet, the timeline for the search, and the work product being requested: a written evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each finalist.

The president should attend one of the first meetings with the committee in order to thank the members for their participation, describe a tentative timeline for the process, encourage them to think on behalf of the whole university in their deliberations and not just as representatives of particular interests, give every candidate a full and fair hearing, listen carefully and respectfully to one another’s opinions, and maintain strict confidentiality.

The committee should not rank the candidates. The act of ranking can create problems if the “first” candidate is offered the job and declines, and a perfectly acceptable “second” candidate is offered the job and accepts, only to learn later that he or she was the “second choice.” The committee’s role is to advise the president whether, from its perspective, each candidate is highly acceptable, acceptable, or unacceptable, and to identify strengths and weaknesses for each.

**Choosing a search firm**

Universities routinely employ executive search firms to conduct provost searches in order to gather a better pool of candidates, guarantee a back-channel through which candidates can confidentially explore a position, provide more expert comparison of candidate strengths and weaknesses, and relieve faculty search committees of correspondence and scheduling tasks. Normally, the president chooses any search firm used, in consultation with, if possible, with the committee chair.
Training the committee members

Before the committee begins reviewing any dossiers, it should meet with the vice president for inclusive excellence to discuss strategies for encouraging diversity in the applicant pool, and with the vice president for mission and ministry to discuss the role of the Jesuit, Catholic mission of Marquette in guiding its deliberations. Similarly, before interviewing candidates, the committee should meet with the vice president of human resources to insure that it adheres to legal requirements and best business practices in its interviewing.

Drafting the position description

The committee drafts the position description, with input and feedback from the president, and in collaboration with the search firm. The committee may choose to start with descriptions developed in previous provost searches, and begin to amend it. The search firm provides invaluable advice about what candidates will be looking for, and how to position the university in order to attract strong candidates.

The act of writing the draft position description is an important first step in helping the committee work together as a group, and it allows important questions to surface (e.g., how much weight do we want to give a candidate’s scholarly record?) so that they might be addressed early in the process in collaboration with the president.

Conducting the search

Advertising the position

The search firm’s efforts provide the largest single source of applicants, typically the firm has access to hundreds of names of candidates who can then be screened according to the criteria that the committee establishes. The committee members should also recognize that part of their role is using their own professional organizations and networks, as well as the network of AJCU schools, to identify potential candidates that the search firm might approach.

Developing slates of candidates

The search firm representative working with the university should meet with the committee chair and president before beginning to screen candidates in order to understand their expectations for the position and the particular criteria that will matter most to them. As the search firm identifies potential candidates and completes its preliminary research on them, it begins to share with the committee slates of candidates it has developed from its own research or from applications or nominations it has received. The search firm representative reviews each qualified candidate, offers initial impressions, and answers questions from the committee. The committee then deliberates further on its own and decides whether any of these candidates would be worth a phone or off-campus interview.
**Conducting off-campus interviews**

After it has identified at least three or four promising candidates, the committee should begin to arrange off-campus interviews. (The staff does the actual work of arranging these meetings.) It should share with the president the curriculum vitae and letters of any candidates chosen for a preliminary interview, so that the president has the opportunity to suggest questions that should be posed to candidates.

These preliminary interviews are typically one to two hours long. In preparation, the committee decides on key questions it wants to ask, and identifies members who will take the lead in asking those questions. When conducting the interviews, the committee should recognize that, beyond its immediate task of evaluating the credentials of the candidates, it is also trying to encourage candidates’ interest in and enthusiasm for working at Marquette.

After the interview, the committee deliberates on what it has heard and begins to decide whether that candidate might be a possible finalist. While the committee is conducting its first off-campus interviews, the search firm continues to develop other slates, which often include candidates who have more recently expressed an interest in the position. In order to use its time and money well, the committee should expect to conduct no more than 8 to 10 preliminary interviews in most searches. It should endeavor to eliminate marginally acceptable candidates through its earlier deliberations.

**Considering candidates for campus interviews**

After it has conducted its off-campus interviews, the committee identifies a short list from which it chooses as many as three finalists for campus interviews. With permission from the president, the committee can invite more than three candidates, but only when it is absolutely convinced that a fourth or fifth candidate is equally competitive.

After recommending its finalists but before inviting anyone to campus, the committee should meet with the president to affirm that all parties consider those finalists viable.

The committee should also maintain a long list of 3-5 other highly regarded candidates. It should inform these candidates that while Marquette does not immediately plan to interview them, they are considered active candidates for the position. All other applicants should receive letters at this point thanking them for their interest and saying that they are no longer being considered for the provost position.

**Bringing candidates to campus**

Quantitative and qualitative data from executive search firms and from human resources professionals demonstrates that potential candidates are more attracted to a senior academic leadership position if their names are not made public. As such, it is the president’s decision that provost searches be conducted in such a manner that the names of finalists are not made public. Participants in the finalist visits must sign an acknowledgement of confidentiality document developed by the office of the general
counsel. Since a provost search will not be a public search, it is important that the search committee invites a wide and representative range of stakeholders from across the university to participate in the finalist visits to campus.

The search committee facilitator will work with the chair to begin arranging a one-and-a-half to two-day campus visit for each finalist. The committee should follow templates developed in previous academic executive (provost and dean) searches, which provide insight into the many stakeholders with whom the candidate should meet, the forums and venues needed, the numbers of people to be invited to meals, and the ideal order of the meetings.

Conducting reference checks

As soon as the committee identifies the finalists being brought to campus, the search firm begins a more detailed reference check on each. Working with the search firm, the committee chair should make sure that all candidates understand that coming to campus is a signal of strong interest in the provost position.

Making an offer

Evaluating finalists

Within one week after the last finalist has visited campus, the committee should meet to compare their impressions of the candidates, discuss the evaluations they have received from others, and hear the results of the search firm reference checks and other inquiries committee members have made. Before beginning its deliberations, the committee should receive all the available written feedback from stakeholders who have met with the candidates or attended any of the public forums. The committee should treat all such feedback as confidential.

Once this deliberation is complete, the committee chair should prepare a brief summary of the committee’s discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate, and evaluate each candidate as highly acceptable, acceptable, or unacceptable. That report is shared with the search committee and the president.

Consulting with the search committee

After the committee has completed its review, the president should meet with the search committee to discuss the committee’s evaluations of each candidate in more detail. This meeting offers an important opportunity to ask very specific questions about each candidate and probe areas where there may be disagreement or uncertainty in the committee’s evaluation.

The president should also follow up with the search firm representative in a similar manner, asking questions, testing concerns raised by others, and inviting the representative’s own reflections on a candidate.
Consulting with the president

The president will normally take the responsibility for working out the details of any offer and making the actual offer.

Throughout the search process, regular contact between the president and the committee chair is crucial. The finalists discussed at the end of the process should all be realistic and serious aspirants to the position. The mode of communication should be dialogic, with the committee chair and president feeling free to ask questions, and expecting that their concerns will receive a full and fair hearing.

Addressing mission questions in the hiring process

The search committee should make sure that it talks explicitly about the Catholic, Jesuit mission of Marquette with each candidate, and emphasize the importance of mission leadership as a factor in our evaluation and choice of a provost. Candidates should be told that this topic will be raised by a variety of groups they meet in the course of a campus interview. All finalists should meet with Marquette’s vice president for mission and ministry during the campus visit, typically as part of a meeting with the President’s Advisory Team. While this interview is in part informative for candidates, it is also designed to help test the potential fit between a candidate and Marquette. Provost candidates of all faiths are welcome at Marquette, insofar as they can contribute to the university’s mission and serve as mission leaders at the university. The questions asked by all of the groups throughout the campus visit can help address the candidates’ (1) familiarity with Catholic and Jesuit higher education; (2) pedagogy and philosophy of education; (3) understanding of research as a constitutive element of the mission; (4) understanding of Jesuit universities as agents for promoting the common good; (5) ability to work collaboratively with colleagues throughout the university and at the level of senior leadership; and (6) comfort with questions of faith and transcendence in the university community and student learning experience.

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