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# UMass Selects a New President

# Elements of a Search Strategy

*Richard A. Hogarty*

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*The selection of a new university president, an event of major importance in academic life, is usually filled with tensions on the part of those concerned about its outcome. The 1992 presidential search at the University of Massachusetts exemplifies such tensions. There were mixed reactions to the overall performance. When they finished reviewing candidates, the search committee had eliminated all but Michael K. Hooker, who, they deemed, has the necessary competence, vision, and stature for the task. The main conflict centered on the question of "process" versus "product." The trustees rejoiced in what they considered an impressive choice, while many faculty were angered over what they considered a terrible process. Each side was dismayed at the other's behavior. This study focuses on the search itself and the leadership potential the new president brings to the office.*

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In early December of 1991, the trustees of the University of Massachusetts launched a six-month search for a new president to head its five-campus system. Their efforts went beyond merely filling a vacancy: their long-term objective was to find someone who could lead the institution to the levels of strength and excellence that would turn it into the top-ranked university envisioned by the special blue-ribbon panel that had drafted the Saxon Commission Report in March 1989. Their more immediate objective was to find someone who could help them resolve their fiscal crisis and deal with racial divisions on campus.

The criteria developed by the search committee called for a leader of stature and vision, an institution builder, an individual of personal and intellectual integrity. They were looking for a successor to Elbert K. Fretwell, who had served as interim president for slightly more than a year. He had been recruited to replace president Joseph Duffey, whose sudden departure in March 1991 had left the board of trustees eager to fill the position temporarily or at least until they could find a more permanent replacement. Fretwell, nearing the end of his career, had filled the position on a stop-gap basis. With nine months of his incumbency remaining, he had been expected to step down from office at the end of August 1992.

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Comparing this search for a permanent president with those which preceded it, one finds some striking similarities and differences. From start to finish, the trustees went about their work efficiently and expeditiously, announcing the appointment of Michael K. Hooker as the new president in late May 1992. Curiously enough, the results of the search produced mixed reactions, if not opposite conclusions, especially when it came to drawing distinctions between process and outcome. As events would verify, the trustees were genuinely pleased with the outcome, regarding Michael Hooker as a superb choice. Although many faculty members liked the selection and seemed reasonably satisfied with Hooker, they were disturbed by the search process, which they saw as closed, secretive, unilateral, and undemocratic. But more about that later.

This article examines four separate but interrelated questions. First, why did the Hooker search work as well as it did from the perspective of the trustees and the members of the search committee? Second, what experience, if any, contributed to the outcome? Third, why did the faculty object to the search process? Fourth, what led the participants to reach such a high level of consensus about their final choice? Suitably explored, these and similar questions should shed light on presidential searches in general, and on the Michael Hooker selection in particular.

Before their memories faded and while the evidence was still fresh and discernible, I interviewed most of those who were involved in the search. They included all the trustees and faculty members who served on the search committee, plus students, alumni, faculty governance officials, two chancellors, the chairman of the board of trustees, and the new president. As a consequence, I have incorporated much of the information obtained from these interviews into this narrative and used it to interpret what actually happened. In addition, I examined all the pertinent public documents related to the search.

Most studies indicate that there is no perfect way to conduct a presidential search. Nor is there an ideal model that has universal application. What works at an elite private institution, for example, does not necessarily work at a public one, since the public nature of the search exposes it to sunshine laws, extensive press coverage, and the vicissitudes of state politics. Moreover, the competing forces involve people with conflicting interests and human frailties. They are usually engaged in a group process that is, by definition, less than perfect. Division and conflict are ordinary and inevitable, as are randomness and unpredictability.

Although the Hooker search exceeded ordinary expectations, it could not avoid the contentious group conflict and tensions that usually characterize such searches. These tensions, as we shall see, revolved around issues dealing with affirmative action, openness, confidentiality, the selection of the search committee, the balancing of process and outcome, campus visits by the candidates, and the enduring debate as to whether a "good search" produces a "good president."

Despite the tension, the UMass experience is important because it illustrates that presidential searches do indeed matter and that, if they are organized properly, they can identify the most appropriate person for the institution. The results of the search, however, were by no means limited to the choice of a new president. Interestingly, the search process afforded a unique opportunity for the university to examine its priorities and values and to consider the kind of leadership it desires. Achieving such a consensus was at best a delicate task, but it served to legitimate the new president

and to smooth his transition into office. Ultimately, most of these results were achieved in this particular case. What follows, then, is a reconstruction of the search in all its essential detail.

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### **The Changing Faces of UMass**

The UMass community is composed of many different people and many different parts. UMass was founded in 1863 as a small agricultural school that specialized in teaching scientific farming methods and researching problems related to growing crops and animal husbandry. The original aims and directions of UMass have changed dramatically through the years, but the aims of the School of Agriculture remain basically the same. By the turn of the century, nine field research and experiment stations were set up across the state to provide technical assistance to farm families through the cooperative extension service. Secluded in the farmlands of the majestic Connecticut River Valley, the original site at Amherst was UMass's only campus for the first hundred years of the school's existence. But this idyllic campus setting is largely a memory frozen in the past as its contemporary high-rise dormitories dwarf the surrounding landscape.

Affectionately known as Mass Aggie, the agricultural school was elevated to a state college in 1931 and to a full-fledged university in 1947. Shortly thereafter, with the return of numerous World War II veterans eager to obtain a college education with their GI benefits, UMass/Amherst grew considerably as the demand for admission expanded in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. Many more professors were needed to teach the large numbers of students.

By the early 1960s, with the baby-boom generation reaching college age, two urban branch campuses were established in the cities of Boston and Worcester. The former was created as a nonresidential commuter campus, the latter as a state medical school. Within this state university system, the emergence of newer metropolitan universities in the population centers of Massachusetts have threatened the premier position of UMass/Amherst, whose academic rank is as one of the so-called public Ivies. Still the largest campus, Amherst evokes the most intense alumni loyalties and takes intercollegiate athletics, especially basketball, seriously.

Following the recommendations of the special blue-ribbon Saxon Commission, the University of Massachusetts system was enlarged in September 1991 from three campuses to five. At the same time, two separate and distinct public universities at Dartmouth and Lowell were merged with those at Amherst, Boston, and Worcester. As a result, the newly configured institution has become a modern comprehensive university spread across the commonwealth. Managing this complicated system is no easy task: it employs approximately twelve thousand faculty, professional, and classified staff, and its overall budget is close to a billion dollars. Collectively, the five campuses enroll nearly fifty-nine thousand students, who reflect in varying degree the ethnic, racial, and gender composition of the larger society. Besides the normal teenage high school graduates, working adults, single parents, elders, military veterans, and large numbers of foreign students have added significantly to its diversity. In the early 1990s, as the demographics of higher education continued to change, the UMass system was still in the process of defining itself.



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## **The Role of the UMass President**

As the state university has grown and greatly expanded its programs, the job of its chief executive officer has become much more complicated. More diverse groups and constituencies are sending more messages, making more demands, and applying greater pressure. The job is not only complex and difficult, but also multidimensional. A modern president is, among other things, chief administrator, chief negotiator, chief of external relations, and symbolic and ceremonial head of the academic community. The person holding the position wears several hats and performs many duties, ranging from preparing the budget to fund-raising and defusing explosive racial incidents on campus.<sup>1</sup>

As its most visible advocate and roving ambassador of good will, the president represents the university at various ceremonial functions and important civic events. More to the point, he or she plays a vital role in formulating and implementing the central questions of university policy. The task requires someone who is relatively sophisticated about academic life and possesses the vision and leadership ability to advance its mission. The effective leader must also be equipped not only to comprehend a broad range of issues but also to speak clearly about them.

Strengthening the public university and actively marshaling its resources is the essential leadership role of the president. In dealing with state politicians and the media, the president plays an indispensable role in providing needed protection and lending coherence and meaning to its mission. Defending UMass along these lines is a constant struggle, one in which the incumbent must at times be prepared to do battle. In their landmark study of presidential searches, Judith McLaughlin and David Riesman describe the executive function as follows:

In the public sector of American higher education, college and university presidents must defend their institutions daily against the attacks and incursions that will make them mediocre. At the same time, they must lobby for the public funding necessary to maintain and improve their capacities for research and teaching. In both endeavors, the president is a central figure whose actions can enhance public relations or threaten the curtailment of public support.<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious, of course, that UMass presidents must be inclined to assert themselves — to feel sure that they ought to lead — if they are to be effective. This is a matter of values, of approach to political realities, and different presidents have manifested different styles. Some have aspired to no more than a modest overseer's role. Others have felt that the only route to administrative success, given the political conditions of the state, is to stir no fuss, to anger no one, to play it safe and wait for promotion as the head of a major institution somewhere else. Still other presidents, for example, John Lederle (1960–1970) and Robert Wood (1970–1977), have firmly believed that it was their duty to step out front and insist on leading.

It helps to remember that these presidents, like other public managers, are mortal humans with diverse strengths and weaknesses. As Duane Lockard, an observer of New England state politics, has aptly said:

Too often officials are rendered into abstractions by lumping all occupants of offices together and ignoring the tremendous variations that exist among human beings. We sometimes forget that some individuals inspire confidence and can

win loyalty and support where others cannot; that some can comprehend complex situations and see the interrelationships of problems and people and plan coordinated approaches accordingly while others can neither comprehend nor plan or explain. An individual lacking the qualities of leadership occupying an office well-endowed with formal authority may achieve remarkably little. An official who has formal power and leadership qualities but who is disinclined to use the authority he possesses will simply not be comparable to one of equal talents (or perhaps of lesser talents) who is determined to get action. The abilities, attitudes, personal traits, values — even the personal appearance — of individuals condition their effectiveness as leaders.<sup>3</sup>

These human differences assume even greater importance when one takes into account the role of the public university president, for the kinds of tasks to be performed require prodigious effort, energy, and patience in addition to ineffable personal qualities and abilities. Because the job is so demanding and survival so precarious, it is hard to find qualified people who are willing to take on such an arduous task. This is especially true during a period of economic austerity, when times are hard and the erratic fluctuation of rising costs and falling revenues squeezes the budget and leaves the president with little room to maneuver.

In setting objectives or trying to advance them persuasively under such adverse conditions, the chief executive finds his or her options severely limited. There is simply not enough money available to sustain the level of service. Operating under these constraints, rational decision making forces an executive to engage in downsizing the internal organization and reallocating its resources. Difficult decisions are necessary to keep its fiscal house in order and maintain a robust and responsible institution.

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### **The Fiscal Crisis and Faculty Morale**

Between 1988 and 1991, UMass suffered the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression as state funding declined precipitously. Suddenly, with the economy faltering, its immediate financial picture looked terrible, the long-run future bleak. In a protracted series of deep cuts that extended over this four-year period, 30 percent of its budget was slashed. These drastic cutbacks damaged faculty morale and reduced teaching positions, student enrollment, financial aid, library acquisitions, and administrative staff. Some academic programs were eliminated, resulting in many employee layoffs.<sup>4</sup> Hiring freezes were accompanied by a policy of no pay raises. At one point the faculty and staff found themselves furloughed for a brief period. As these budgetary pressures mounted, the constant refrain heard on campus was to do more with less money.

To make up for the shortfalls, it became necessary to tap private foundations and corporate sources for additional dollars. The university also found that it had to increase student tuitions and fees substantially. But the crippled economy could not be blamed for all its woes. Some resulted from public dissatisfaction and the loss of legislative support. The public relations problems, partly the product of diminishing revenues, were fed by disparities between initial claims and actual performance. Yet one public opinion survey, conducted in Massachusetts in the late fall of 1989, found that 68 percent of the respondents would be willing to pay higher taxes if the money

raised were earmarked for the support of public colleges and universities.<sup>5</sup> By early December 1991, however, UMass financing seemed to be as much at risk as it had been four years earlier.

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### **The Legacy of Previous Searches**

At this point we have to take a few steps backward in time to see the connection of previous searches, which is essential to reconstructing the story. Between 1970 and 1992, the University of Massachusetts had five presidents. The searches that produced them were fraught with difficulty in one form or another. When Robert Wood was selected as the first system president in 1970, the trustees interrupted the work of an ongoing search committee and unilaterally imposed their choice. As the appointing authority, they saw the selection of the chief executive officer as their exclusive prerogative. Such an imposed choice, however, created turmoil and consternation. The intervention by the trustees infuriated the faculty at the flagship campus in Amherst. Bungling marred the whole episode. The selection of Bob Wood immediately became a flaming symbol of an old-boy network.

On assuming the presidency, Wood was aggressive in asserting control over external as well as internal affairs. Within relatively short order, his personal style and mode of operation made him a figure of extreme controversy. He insisted on micromanaging at the campus level. This posture, coupled with the concentration of power in the president's office, did not sit well with the campus chancellors. They chafed at what they perceived as Wood's meddling. Before long, they were competing against each other over issues of internal organization and resource allocation. Wood won the power struggle, but the costs were high. It eventually led to the resignation of both chancellors — Oswald Tippo at Amherst and Francis Broderick at Boston. Whatever the problems Wood may have had along these lines, they should not be allowed to obscure his many notable accomplishments and presidential effectiveness.

In the wake of this rebellion, the trustees adopted a new policy on university governance in the spring of 1973. Recommended by a multicampus committee headed by Professor Robert Wellman, the policy gave faculty exclusive power over academic matters. The Wellman Report also outlined areas of "primary responsibility" for initiating action and called for some form of shared governance with faculty and students. The mood of the times had a great deal to do with bringing about such reform. As Riesman and McLaughlin remind us:

Civil rights activists and anti-war protesters brought issues of student power into the struggles for campus hegemony. The temporal juxtaposition of the increasing leverage of faculty and the visibility of student revolts had the consequence of developing a norm in which not only faculty members were included on presidential search committees, but one or more students as well.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, the Wellman Report not only called for faculty and students to serve on presidential search committees, but also for them to be recommended by their respective governance bodies. While this new policy diffused for the moment the tensions that had been building since the creation of the new system, it did not



fundamentally alter the distribution of power.<sup>7</sup> The trustees retained their right to govern the university.

When Bob Wood was ready to step down from office in 1977, the trustees decided to replace him with Franklin Patterson, whom they named as interim president. Patterson, who was chosen without any faculty consultation or participation, assumed a modest caretaker role. The same method was followed in 1990, when Joseph Duffey was chosen for the presidency. Trustee failure to consult faculty had become a recurring pattern. The one major exception was in 1978, when David Knapp was selected as president, the first time ever that faculty and students participated in a trustee search committee. The trustees scrupulously adhered to the Wellman Report and the governance principles of “joint effort” and “primary responsibility,” but the Knapp search was marred by lack of confidentiality and by a violation of the state’s “sunshine” or open-meeting law.

The same mistakes were repeated in 1991, when E. K. Fretwell was appointed president. In a state known for its political interference in public higher education, this last search became highly politicized and divisive. These searches provide chronological continuity to the story. Taken together, they left a legacy of mutual distrust between faculty and trustees that still lingers.<sup>8</sup> Unless one understands the tensions surrounding them, one cannot fully comprehend the tensions and conflict that surrounded the Hooker search.

There was also the problem of a “revolving door” presidency. The rapid turnover of three presidents within five years, along with the exit of numerous administrators and teachers, was alarming in terms of institutional stability. Adversely affected by the drastic budget cuts in recent years, the power and prestige of the president’s office had suffered accordingly. In the late 1980s, Governor Michael Dukakis attempted to abolish the office. With a powerful state board of regents in place at the time, he saw the UMass president’s office as an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. But he did not succeed. Instead, the state board of regents was abolished by the legislature in 1991 and has since been replaced by a new agency known as the Higher Education Coordinating Council. There was also a lingering feeling that the expected leadership role in the president’s office was not being filled. All of this gave the upcoming search a sense of heightened urgency.

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### Devising a Search Strategy

In this onerous setting, the trustees were more than eager to find a new leader who could assert the authority of the office and revitalize the public university. They wanted someone who would be able to restore faculty morale and public confidence. Unsure of the political terrain and what lay ahead, the trustees were somewhat skittish about how to conduct a search that would avoid the blunders of yore. They had ample grounds for concern: no matter what they did, they were bound to be criticized. To quote McLaughlin and Riesman again:

Questions concerning how the search committee will be constituted, which constituents should be represented with membership on the search committee, and how these representatives should be determined often embroil a campus in controversy at the very outset of the search process. Similarly, the question of confidentiality versus publicity is often one of the most controversial issues.<sup>9</sup>



Against this background, board chairman Gordon Oakes asked trustee Daniel Taylor to chair the search committee. In naming Taylor, Oakes got as a bonus the benefit of a strong-minded individual with legal and political experience.<sup>10</sup> A Boston attorney associated with the prestigious law firm of Hill and Barlow, Taylor was talented and well suited for the assignment. Prior to his appointment as a trustee, he had served as legal counsel to Governor Michael Dukakis, and from 1982 to 1986 he had chaired the state Judicial Nomination Commission, which gave him valuable experience in screening and selecting judges. From 1990 to 1991, Taylor had served on the state board of regents. His professional life provided sufficient flexibility so that he could devote the requisite time to a search. He began by reading everything he could find on the subject.

Reading and experience alike had taught Taylor that the trustees would have to conduct a different kind of search this time. He understood that it was no longer feasible for them to act unilaterally. As an attorney, he likewise understood that they were legally required to conduct a national search which complied with affirmative action guidelines and the state's open-meeting law. Both Taylor and Fretwell paid a special visit to David Riesman and Judith McLaughlin at Harvard University. These two experts in presidential searches discussed with Taylor and Fretwell the requisite procedures and ground rules for planning and executing a sound search.

Though Taylor wanted to find a dynamic leader, his judgment on what to do was disciplined by awareness of what had gone before and might happen again, and also by the potentials of the present. He knew firsthand how politicized the Fretwell search had been the previous year. His worst fear was that they might wind up with a "dull administrative bureaucrat" — a result, he felt, that would condemn the university to mediocrity. While he earnestly believed that the kind of motivated leader they were seeking was out there somewhere, he initially had some doubts about whether they would be able to attract such a person.<sup>11</sup> Acting on what he knew in terms of institutional history, he set the stage for that new direction. He was to push hard for a systemwide approach that would involve the five campuses acting as a unified entity. On that score he remained steadfast.

With these thoughts in mind, Taylor sat down with Gordon Oakes, and they put together a diverse and well-balanced search committee in terms of ethnic, racial, and gender composition. They were meticulous in naming people whose stature and presence added credibility in useful quarters, and they also appointed to the committee several trustees who represented both the old and the new campuses. All told, the search committee was comprised of seven trustees, three faculty members, several prominent civic, labor, and business leaders, alumni of the university, and four sitting presidents of other higher education institutions. Interim president E. K. Fretwell served as an *ex officio*, nonvoting member.

At the request of board chairman Gordon Oakes, Governor William Weld invited Neil Rudenstine, president of Harvard University, and Terrence Murray, president of Fleet Bank, the largest bank in New England, to join the group. Intrigued by the invitation, both men agreed to serve. The three other sitting presidents were Stanley Ikenberry of the University of Illinois, Elizabeth Kennan of Mount Holyoke College, and Katherine Sloan of Greenfield Community College.

In addition to Dan Taylor, the trustees included Joseph Finnerty of New Bedford, Michael Foley of Arlington, Peter Lewenberg of Waban, James O'Leary of Boston,

Alan Solomont of North Andover, and student trustee Thomas Winston of Lowell. The three faculty members were Ronald Story from Amherst, Miren Uriarte from Boston, and John Russell from Dartmouth. They were arbitrarily handpicked by Taylor and Oakes, not by their respective faculty colleagues. Along with a few others, former NBA basketball star Julius Erving and businessman Lawrence McKenna represented the alumni. Rounding out the group were James Bailey, a member of the state Higher Education Coordinating Council, Hugina McNally, a labor union official, Benaree Wiley, president of a minority community organization, and Bing Lou Wong, a business executive. The search committee's twenty-two members represented the right political mix, but some faculty considered it a public relations gimmick.

No sooner had the membership of the search committee been announced than trouble started. Rumbles of discord were heard concerning the composition of the committee and the manner in which it had been chosen. Campus chancellors were upset because they were denied representation, and students felt that they were seriously underrepresented. Faculty at both the Boston and Lowell campuses were likewise upset because they had not been consulted. The faculty at Lowell contended that trustee failure to consult them amounted to a breach of their contract. At Boston they argued that the trustee action violated provisions of their Faculty Council constitution. In their view, the constitution was a two-party document that could not be abrogated without the consent of the other party.

More serious and worrisome, the faculty complained that the three professors who had been chosen to represent them had not been recommended by their respective faculty governance bodies as was specified in the Wellman Report. Such protests made little headway. Professor Charles Knight, who chaired the Faculty Council at Boston, wrote a forceful letter to Taylor, explaining that the faculty regarded themselves as entitled to have a voice in the selection of the next president. The trustee decisions were briefly contested in an exchange of letters, but to no avail. As Knight later explained, "It would have been just too disruptive to file litigation at this point."<sup>12</sup> Professor Paul Tucker, who served as faculty representative to the board of trustees from the Boston campus, was of the same opinion. He believed that it would have been too damaging to the search process. Nevertheless, Tucker argued that the trustee action amounted to "an abrogation of faculty primary responsibility."<sup>13</sup>

Since Taylor was a lawyer, that problem fell initially to him. Taking a firm stand, he refused to be budged. Not long in coming, though, was the answer to the question. By the time the faculty had exchanged correspondence with Taylor, the point was moot. The trustees' charge to the search committee directing it to recommend three candidates to the board for selection was approved by the trustees on December 4, 1991. In drafting the motion to approve the charge, Taylor carefully worded it to read, "It is hereby voted, notwithstanding any other policy or procedure to the contrary."<sup>14</sup> It was a subtle power play. By playing this card, Taylor had finessed the faculty, who were angry. They regarded Taylor's move as deliberately provocative in nature. But the faculty was too demoralized to protect their legitimate interests.

By a stroke of a pen, the trustees had wiped the slate clean by short-circuiting the Wellman Report. They purposely did not want to appoint a student and faculty member from each campus. Strategically, their intent here was to foster a sense of "system awareness" and to sharpen sensitivity toward the idea that decisions should be

made in the interests of the university as a whole. They were concerned that competing forces from rival campuses might use their influence as potential veto groups, and that this set of circumstances might conceivably lead to stalemate or possible separatism and division. The trustees also wanted to maintain control of the search and to reassert their appointing authority. Above all, they were determined to find a new president without getting bogged down in what they deemed as time-consuming and counterproductive entanglements over process.

E. K. Fretwell's contribution was crucial. When he was appointed president he had agreed not to become a candidate for the permanent position. His pledge sent a message to the outside world that the search was on the level, or at least that it was not rigged for an insider. Fretwell also agreed to help the trustees find a permanent president with whom they could feel comfortable. Moreover, he suggested that the search committee seek its own independent space in which to operate.

Following his advice, they obtained an office at One International Place in downtown Boston, which was physically removed from any campus and from the university's central office. This had symbolic importance, reinforcing the impression that the search committee was running its own show. The downtown location gave them a place where committee records could be kept under tight security. In all, Fretwell's counsel made their job a lot easier. The search committee hired Stephen Kulik, who had worked as a consultant to former president Joseph Duffey at the Amherst campus, as executive director to coordinate its activities. All their meetings were posted and held in accordance with the requirements of the Massachusetts open-meeting law.

Another participant who contributed significantly was Ronald Story. A professor of history at Amherst, he was secretary of its Faculty Senate and director of the University Fund for the Future. Prior to the search, Story had written a paper entitled "Our Present Ordeal: A Historical Note," which he presented to an alumni leadership conference on June 16, 1991. In his paper he traced four distinct cycles of university growth and looked at the present issue with a sense of both the past and the future.<sup>15</sup> At least in some general way, he brought to bear an understanding of how UMass had evolved as an institution of higher learning and how it had arrived at its current predicament in 1991. That understanding contributed immensely to the committee's deliberations.

Afterward, Taylor referred to Story as "the intellectual godfather of the search." Both men came from public land-grant universities, and both had done graduate work at similar institutions. Taylor had attended the University of Illinois, Story the University of Texas. Close friends, they frequently went on fishing trips together. More important, both men shared a dream of building a first-class university comparable to the great public universities of the Midwest.<sup>16</sup>

For his part, Story moved expeditiously to help straighten things out with regard to the thorny issue of faculty consultation. On January 7, 1992, an informal coordinating group composed of faculty governance officials from the five campuses met at the Publick House in Sturbridge. This group, which was organized at Story's suggestion, was formed partly to facilitate informal faculty involvement in the search and partly to smooth ruffled feathers over the divisive issue of consultation. Fretwell and Taylor were invited to attend. The main agenda item was the presidential search. This meeting gave those in attendance a chance to sound off and to express their concerns.



Before the group adjourned, they agreed to meet at least once a month while the search was going on, an agreement they kept.

It should be noted that the five campus faculty representatives, who served as liaison to the board of trustees, were also part of this group. They interacted with the trustees and shared information with their faculty colleagues. This sort of linkage and communication was important, because it enhanced the process by making it more inclusive. Yet participants like Paul Tucker sensed that faculty were going to be avoided as much as possible.

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### Launching the Search

A few weeks later, on January 21, the search committee held its first meeting. Piedad Robertson, secretary of education, who brought greetings from Governor William Weld, spoke about the importance of the presidency and higher education's need for accountability. Dan Taylor proposed a schedule for carrying out the search and indicated his desire to conclude it by the June 3 meeting of the board of trustees. He then outlined three tasks that needed to be done and asked for volunteers to work on them. These tasks involved (1) developing a case statement; (2) establishing a compensation package; and (3) selecting a search firm.<sup>17</sup>

Given his prior experience in selecting state judges, Taylor put a high premium on confidentiality. He knew what could go wrong and was afraid that attractive candidates might be scared off if their names were disclosed prematurely. Similarly, he feared that intrusive news media might dismantle the search process if there were leaks. Several trustees on the search committee believed that strict confidentiality should be maintained until the full board had made its selection. In other words, they felt that no one, except the members of the search committee and the board, should ever know the identity of any candidate other than the new president. They honored this commitment.

A lengthy discussion then followed on the kind of leadership they desired. The search committee agreed to disagree about specific candidates, especially at this early stage of the search. Their discussions were far-ranging but centered on the question of whether the university faced a long-term or short-term managerial problem. Improvement depended on personalities and circumstances. On the one hand, they felt that if it was a short-term problem, it required bringing in someone who would make tough managerial decisions, even at the risk of alienating the academic community. On the other hand, if the problem was a long-term one, the dynamic changed appreciably. Under these conditions, they felt that a new president could not win the long-term battle without genuine support from the faculty at large. They pretty much decided that their dilemma fell into the latter category. "The tenor of this discussion was the single most important determinant of the search," Ron Story later said, trying to evoke the feeling in the room.<sup>18</sup>

The next step was to select the search consultants. After soliciting proposals from ten recognized executive search firms, the subcommittee interviewed three and chose Academic Search Consultation Service (ASCS), a nonprofit firm based in Washington, D.C. This firm, run by Ronald Stead and Allan Ostar, had a good track record in working with public universities. Stead himself was a graduate of Michigan State University. Trustee Michael Foley checked them out thoroughly. In his words, "They



not only understood the cost factor and were reasonably priced, but they also were not in it to rip us off.”<sup>19</sup> Stanley Ikenberry, president of the University of Illinois, was very helpful in selecting the consultants.

As things developed, it became clear that Stead and Ostar knew their business. They had previously been involved in some 127 searches in higher education. They operated with the utmost integrity and extended the reach of the search committee. A trust relationship soon developed between them. Meanwhile, Stead for his part came to realize that the search was on the level, especially when he heard an unidentified trustee jokingly remark, “This search is wired to be nonpolitical.”<sup>20</sup> Since ASCS eventually discovered Michael Hooker, they were well worth their price.

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### **Formulating the Announcement**

The early stages of the search proceeded routinely. Through February and into March, Dan Taylor met personally with each of the five chancellors, their senior staff, and in some instances, academic deans and student leaders as well as with key central office staff. The views of several prominent educators outside the university were also sought. At the same time, the search consultants undertook a similar series of meetings to develop their own views of the university’s leadership needs. They shared their findings with the trustees in a detailed memorandum. While this memorandum mentioned the various pitfalls and priorities of the search, it also urged the trustees to provide the budget necessary to run the president’s office before the new president was appointed. If this was not done, the next executive would be blamed for the inevitable need to increase the resources to operate the office.<sup>21</sup> That was wise, considering what Taylor ultimately set out to achieve.

These meetings, aided by discussions within the search committee, produced a draft “Announcement” that defined the objectives of the search and made the case for why a motivated leader should want to seek the UMass presidency. Ron Story wrote the initial draft of the document, which was then widely circulated on the five campuses. It served as the basis of discussion at public hearings, which were held on each campus in early March. Those who spoke at these hearings commented on the qualities that they would like to see in the new president. Taylor had to keep his case focused on this issue distinct from and unimpaired by the hostility he himself might arouse while doing such work.

Taylor himself was highly involved in this second phase of the search. He talked frankly with the various constituencies on campus, in terms befitting their status, appealing more to logic than to parochial campus views, offering the outline of a lawyer’s brief and asking them to help him fill it in. Taylor avowedly sought to start a dialogue and offer a process that allowed for appropriate input. He gave them a chance to air their complaints and welcomed their feedback. Faculty members were worried that the trustees might prefer a nonacademic person, perhaps someone from the business community or the political world.

After the public hearings, Taylor revised the case statement and integrated the campus feedback into it. The document no doubt benefited from such contributions. It described the presidential job opening as providing a challenging opportunity for someone “to leave his or her indelible mark on this unshaped system.” This incentive had a powerful appeal. As Taylor put it: “Through the power of words, we

encouraged people out there to take a shot at us. We didn't complain about the budget cuts, and we didn't promise them a bed of roses."<sup>22</sup>

Despite its length, the document made very clear that the committee was seeking a person who could lead, not simply manage. More precisely, they wanted someone who possessed four basic qualities: (1) a leader of public stature; (2) a creator of vision; (3) an institution builder; and (4) an individual of personal and intellectual integrity. Under each of these categories they listed numerous other criteria.<sup>23</sup> In sum, they wanted a high-energy "evangelical" leader who would hit the road and take the message of the university to the far corners of the state. The job profile left no doubt as to the kind of visionary person they had in mind, and everyone benefited from this clarity.

But as ever in Massachusetts, it was the person in power that mattered most, so the focus of attention swiftly shifted to the new governor, William Weld, who came from a privileged Yankee Brahmin social background. Harvard-educated and a patrician by disposition, Weld was fast becoming a convert with regard to the importance of public higher education to the state's economy. Not long in office and still popular, he had changed his position dramatically from the previous year, when he had threatened to close some public colleges and impose harsh budget cuts. Speaking to a conference of environmentalists and civic leaders at UMass/Boston on March 6, Weld declared:

The more I see of our system of public higher education in Massachusetts, the better I like it. I do not think that everything that works in education costs money, and not everything that costs money works. However, I've said before, and I'll say it again, that when we get a little bit of daylight and the fiscal crunch eases up a little bit in Massachusetts, higher education will be standing, if not first in line, at least tied for first place with the claimants on our public resources.<sup>24</sup>

To be sure, Weld's conversion along these lines was an important development, because his support would later bolster the search at a crucial stage.

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### **The Compensation Package**

Meanwhile, in late March, a subcommittee composed of trustees Finnerty, Lewenberg, O'Leary, and Taylor, plus James Bailey of the Higher Education Coordinating Council, began working on an executive compensation report to establish salary guidelines for the UMass presidency. The salary issue, which had been troublesome in years past, had not been reviewed or revisited since the merger in 1991. It was of crucial importance to the overall scheme of things. According to them:

The last thing we need, as one of our Chancellors put it, is someone who gets a lot of balls up in the air and then leaves after 3 or 4 years because he or she knows they can't catch them. Clearly, building the kind of top-ranked public university system that the Trustees desire will take a solid, ten-year effort by the new President. The Trustees should not expect the job to be finished, or for the end to be in sight in ten years. But with the right leader, ten years is, perhaps, time to reach the end of the beginning.<sup>25</sup>

The goal here was to recommend guidelines that would enable the trustees to offer a competitive salary and fringe benefits that would compare favorably with those at similar public universities across the country. What is more, they wanted to be able to accomplish this goal before the search committee began considering candidates. By so doing, they could avoid the possible embarrassment at the end of the search of the impression that they were haggling over salary, or that the person they had picked was holding out for more money. As they said:

Principles of equity and fairness are served in the short term by doing this now. And long-term harmony is also fostered if the new President, on the one hand, doesn't come with the idea that the Trustees are cheap and will have to be reeducated along the way, and the Trustees, on the other hand, don't feel that they were taken to the cleaners.<sup>26</sup>

Since the compensation question was such a sensitive issue politically, they did not want to saddle the new president with the political liability of a package being designed specifically for him or her.

Other public university systems were surveyed to determine the salary of their chief executive officers, and published data was researched. The UMass subcommittee recommended a basic salary of \$150,000 to \$175,000. By comparison, former president Joseph Duffey had been paid \$130,000, plus a \$30,000 annuity payable at his retirement. Among other fringe benefits, the subcommittee recommended that the housing allowance be somewhere between \$19,000 and \$30,000, and if necessary, a noninterest-bearing second mortgage loan of up to \$200,000 be made available, this to be repaid when the president's house was sold. The subcommittee made its recommendations to the full search committee, which in turn endorsed and forwarded the report through its chair to the board of trustees in early April. These recommendations received active endorsement by the trustees. From then on, the salary issue would be negotiated with the person who was finally selected as president.

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### Casting the Net

On March 15, the "Announcement," along with a cover letter from Dan Taylor, was mailed to more than nine hundred knowledgeable people, asking them for suggestions and assistance in developing a pool of prospects. As is true in most presidential searches, advertisements were placed in publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Black Issues in Higher Education*. No specific application deadline was mentioned. On this point, Taylor created some breathing room by saying that the search committee planned to present its report to the board of trustees by the summer of 1992. The troubles at UMass had been widely publicized, and some feared that it would be difficult to attract good candidates.<sup>27</sup>

Once the net was fully cast, names of prospects came to the search committee from four different sources. First, seventeen applications were received in response to the advertisements. Second, in response to the March Announcement mailing, fifty-three names were suggested as possibilities. Third, members of the search committee suggested forty names. Fourth, the search consultants developed a list of thirty-nine prospects.<sup>28</sup>



At its April 6 meeting, the search committee began to focus on potential prospects. Names like U.S. Army General H. Norman Schwarzkopf and former U.S. Senator Paul Tsongas surfaced. Although Tsongas had chaired the state board of regents, it was felt that he carried too much political baggage. Nobody wanted to see a repetition of the clamorous public spectacle that took place in 1991, when former Massachusetts House Speaker David Bartley sought the position and the search became highly politicized. These past mistakes were to be avoided as much as possible. At one point in the meeting, trustee Michael Foley, a medical doctor, suggested that in order to be sure they were getting the best pool of applicants possible, they should think of three people in their own fields of endeavor. He then went out and brought back the names of three prospects in the field of medicine. By this time, however, most of the participants were looking for an academic rather than a politician or a business executive. Although they did not formally rule out the category, there was general agreement that they would consider only an extraordinary nonacademic as a strong contender.<sup>29</sup>

Several duplicate names surfaced on the four lists. The search committee reviewed them and decided to focus its attention on a limited number. Most of the people were then contacted by the search consultants to determine their level of interest, if any, in the presidency. During this third phase of the search, the focus was on twenty-seven prospects from throughout the country. In comparison with previous searches, it was a shallow pool of prospects. Of these, nine were women, and eight were African-Americans. Several were chief executives of campuses within public university systems. A few were high-level system executives. Some were deans of colleges at public universities. Still others had distinguished themselves in academic life and public affairs. Soon after this screening, the search committee decided that they would not pursue anyone at the dean level or below. They were warned that their focus on "prospects" did not necessarily imply any reciprocal interest, and in many instances that proved to be the case. All in all, a number of well-qualified individuals expressed preliminary interest.

The name of Michael Hooker, who was then president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, first appeared on the consultants' — Ronald Stead and Allan Ostar's — list. A gifted scholar and highly respected administrator generally recognized as having a talent for leadership, Hooker seemed to them to be an attractive candidate. He also had a reputation for taking risks. By temperament, he was a builder and an innovator. A check of his curriculum vitae revealed his record of scholarly publications — he had edited two books and published eighteen articles in his academic discipline of philosophy.<sup>30</sup> Stead knew of his availability and contacted Hooker to determine if he might be interested in the job. At first pass, Hooker turned Stead down, mainly because he did not believe that the Massachusetts economy would rebound quickly enough. Under such circumstances, he saw himself having to implement more budget cuts for the next five years. Since Hooker was more interested in building an institution than in downsizing it, he saw no point in pursuing the UMass presidency any further.

But this did not stop Taylor and the search committee from courting him. Sensing from the start that Hooker might be a prize catch, someone who might more than meet the search committee's criteria, they persisted in their efforts and managed to convince him that the situation in Massachusetts was promising despite the state's sluggish economy. Actively countering all his doubts, they persuaded Hooker to



apply for the university presidency. At the time, he was under serious consideration for the presidency of the College of William and Mary in Virginia, but owing to complications in his private life, he was undecided about his next career move.

Meantime, in mid-to-late April, those prospects who expressed interest in the UMass presidency were invited to meet informally with a small group of search committee members. These exploratory sessions were designed to determine whether the committee wanted to encourage further involvement, and conversely, whether the individual wished to pursue his or her preliminary attraction. At the May 6 meeting of the search committee, Taylor announced that with regard to their affirmative action efforts, serious contacts had been made, but noted that there was no further interest expressed on the part of those identified. Because of the severe funding problem and the perceived negative racial climate in Boston, several good minority candidates who met the affirmative action profile either withdrew or refrained from pursuing their candidacy.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, some critics felt that the search committee should have pursued the minority candidates as vigorously as they pursued Hooker.

By the end of the May 6 meeting, the search committee decided which prospects they desired to invite back for another meeting. They had narrowed their short list to four candidates, none Hispanic or African-American, and only one female.<sup>32</sup> At this point, Taylor went back to the board of trustees and asked them to change their charge to the search committee to allow it to recommend four candidates instead of three as originally specified. The trustees agreed to do so. With four "good fish" in the net, Taylor saw no point in delaying the process any further. Rather than let the process drag out until early summer and run the risk of losing their catch, he accelerated the schedule by two weeks and moved up the next meeting of the search committee to May 12.

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### **Landing Michael Hooker**

On May 12 the search committee met with the four finalists, all of whom had completed legal forms asserting their privacy rights. They were assured that their names and comments would be kept in strictest confidence. As a precautionary measure, Taylor had lined up in advance sufficient votes to go into executive session to achieve this objective. He was even willing to risk a lawsuit should it prove necessary. As a lawyer, he felt that case law would support their position, but no one challenged them on the issue. Consequently, the privacy of the candidates was well preserved and their identities remained a closely guarded secret.

The search committee then split into two groups for interview purposes, making sure that none of the candidates saw one another. During the course of these interviews, both groups asked each candidate the same set of questions:

Based on your current understanding, what interests you the most in this position and what are your reservations? What would be your priorities for the first six months of your administration? What is the most difficult decision you've had to make recently? What have been your successes in regard to addressing the needs of minorities on campus? What would your message be to the opinion leaders of the state and the campuses with regard to improving race relations and the education of minority students?<sup>33</sup>

Of the four finalists, Michael Hooker quickly emerged as the leading contender. He was an ambitious as well as an able man. More than that, in the view of the search committee, he had impressive credentials and a record of administrative achievement in both the private and public sectors of higher education. Hooker had earned his B.A. degree with highest honors in 1969 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he majored in philosophy. Continuing to do graduate work in the same field, he went on to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where he received his M.A. in 1972 and his Ph.D. in 1973. To the extent that there is a customary career line to a university presidency, Hooker had pursued it. From a faculty position at Harvard University, he moved to Johns Hopkins University, where, from 1975 to 1982, he held a variety of posts. He first served as assistant professor of philosophy, then as assistant dean and associate dean, and finally, at the age of thirty-five, as dean of undergraduate and graduate studies.

From 1982 to 1986 Hooker served as president of Bennington College in Vermont, where he first achieved public notice as a skilled fiscal manager. In retrospect, he admits that as a "rookie president" he did not know the right questions to ask beforehand. On his first day in office, he was informed that there was not enough money to meet the payroll at the end of the month. To make matters worse, he inherited a weak and unprofessional administrative apparatus. In short order, Hooker oversaw a refinancing of Bennington's debt, using long-term tax-exempt bonds that included a provision for repayment. In addition, he demonstrated an ability to raise a substantial amount of money, in fact raising more than \$6 million and increasing total gift support by 80 percent. He also streamlined the college's marketing strategy, professionalized its administrative staff, and strengthened its board of trustees. Committed to holding the line on spending, Hooker made some tough decisions that enabled the college to survive its fiscal crisis. The evidence of his accomplishments is documented in a detailed case study written by a faculty member at the Yale School of Management.<sup>34</sup>

After this success, Hooker accepted the presidency at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), in 1986, where he continued to make a name for himself. To the surprise of no one who knew him, he brought about change in two specific areas: improving academic quality and increasing access, especially for minority students. During his six years there, which extended from 1986 to 1992, he boosted enrollment by 20 percent at the undergraduate level and 150 percent in graduate programs. Student retention also improved, with the number of bachelor's degrees granted increasing by 53 percent.

Hooker took fresh initiatives on a variety of fronts. He established an honors college and launched the much-publicized Meyerhoff Scholarship Program for black students who were gifted in science and technology. He also built strong links with Maryland's business community. He initiated new academic programs in biotechnology, biochemical engineering, and bioprocess manufacturing, and with the help of business corporations like Westinghouse and Martin Marietta, he began new specializations in photonics and robotics. Furthermore, he developed a working model of collaboration between UMBC and Catonsville Community College.<sup>35</sup>

On another front, Hooker had been working on a proposed merger between UMBC and the medical school in downtown Baltimore. In order to achieve the political support necessary to get the enabling legislation passed in the Maryland legislature, he had to build an alliance between the rival city and county legislative

delegations, which traditionally had been at odds with each other. While engaged in this endeavor, he suddenly realized that there was one remaining obstacle in the way, namely, himself. Perceived as an empire builder by medical faculty who saw their budget threatened, Hooker sensed that things would go much better if he bowed out gracefully. Such a move was, of course, extremely good politics. As soon as he declared that he would not be a candidate for the head of the merged institution, the legislative proposal gained momentum.

Amid speculation about Hooker's altruistic motives, the bill was approved by the governor, the board of regents, the commissioner of education, and the House of Representatives, but it was killed in committee in the state Senate. At this point, Hooker decided that he had done all that he could possibly do at UMBC and that it was time for him to move on.

For these reasons, Hooker impressed the search committee and the other trustees who were invited to sit in on the interviews. His point of view was fresh, eager, and confident. He conveyed his belief that with political will and courage the future was manageable. In laying out his vision of the future university, Hooker provided them with persuasive and imaginative ideas. He seemed in full command of every question and absolutely confident about his ability to build a diverse and interactive public university that would meet the societal demands of the twenty-first century. His performance, from all accounts, was impressive.

Hooker came across in the interviews as an ideal person to fill the role of president and fit committee criteria better than the other three candidates. According to Professor Miren Uriarte, "Hooker had presented the most coherent vision of the role of public higher education in this state, both in terms of access to minorities, and in terms of cost."<sup>36</sup> Hooker's major shortcoming was that he lacked experience in running a university system. More a visionary than a manager of details, he was not likely to micromanage at the campus level. Actually, he had operated under such a situation at UMBC, and he understood what it was like to operate in the shadow of a "flagship campus."

At forty-six years of age, Hooker saw the UMass opportunity as the next logical step in his career ladder. On this point, he felt confident that he could do a good job as a system head. That was one reason why the UMass presidency appealed to him. It was a relatively new system, at least as far as the addition of the Dartmouth and Lowell campuses was concerned. The other reasons for job appeal were that Hooker was a UMass alumnus who loved the game of politics and wanted to come back to Massachusetts.<sup>37</sup> The four years he had spent at UMass/Amherst during the early 1970s would stand him in good stead.

Hooker was such a striking personality that committee members could not help looking at the other colorful aspects of his life. He was born in Richlands, Virginia, on August 24, 1945, the only son of a coal miner. Soon after his birth, the family moved to the heart of Appalachia in West Virginia near the Kentucky border, where they lived in the midst of abject poverty. At the school young Hooker attended, most of the boys in his class chewed tobacco and wore no shoes. Many of the people living in this rural mountainous region suffered from stark deprivation that resulted from disease, poverty, and malnutrition. Growing up in a coal-mining town, Hooker came to understand the problems of working people and why they needed labor unions to protect them. His whole outlook on life was to be deepened by this sobering experience.



To see how Hooker's life as a coal miner's son shaped his values, one more insight must be added to the composite of his makeup. From early childhood, his parents had told him repeatedly that he was the smartest kid around. They stressed the importance of education. In fact, they consciously decided to have only one child because they wanted him to obtain a college education in order to make it out of the coal mines. In his high school years they drove him around during summer vacations to see college campuses in the South, but they were too ashamed of their poverty to get out of their automobile. Hooker believed deeply in what he was first taught. As he recalls, "My father had desperately wanted to go to college, but he had to work in the mines in order to take care of his father, who suffered from black lung disease. He taught me two things — nobody is better than you, and you are better than nobody."<sup>38</sup> This became a defining moment for him. As a result of these childhood experiences, Hooker grew up acquiring humility on the one hand and self-confidence on the other. This dichotomy explains a great deal about his personal style and mode of operation.

Coming from such humble origins and achieving such success, Hooker struck a responsive chord with the search committee. They saw him as someone who not only understood and appreciated the value of public higher education, but also as someone who could take it to a higher level of quality, diversity, and access. The trustees felt that Hooker's intimate knowledge of UMass/Amherst, obtained while he was a graduate student there, would enable him to hit the ground running. They liked the idea that he had both public and private sector experience. They also liked the idea that he had headed an urban campus similar to UMass/Boston and that he had worked closely with a medical center similar to UMass/Worcester. In fact, the similarities between UMBC and UMass/Boston were striking. Most of all, they liked the track record that he had established in terms of promoting good race relations.<sup>39</sup> This had direct relevance to UMass/Amherst, where racial tensions had reached an all-time high in recent years. Hooker also had established a good rapport with the clerical and professional staff at UMBC. All this seemed clear enough to the trustees. They were definitely not interested in anyone who was nearing the end of his or her career. Hooker, at forty-six, was still in his prime. As was becoming rapidly apparent, he seemed fully qualified for the job.

At the conclusion of the May 12 interviews, the members of the search committee had reduced their options to three prospects. Ranking them, they unanimously recommended Hooker as their first choice. They admired his abilities and understood his limitations. Their comparisons of him with the other three candidates sharpened their consensus for selectivity. So it was settled. Hooker was the person they wanted for the job. Thus, his was the only name they forwarded to the full board of trustees. All three faculty members on the search committee concurred with this decision. The student trustee, Thomas Winston of UMass/Lowell, was noticeably absent from this meeting.

Obscured from public view by the shroud of secrecy that concealed their identities, the other three prospects remain a mystery to the outside world, including the academic community. As a consequence, they quickly faded into complete anonymity. The accounts that come down to us reveal only the vaguest kind of identifying characteristics. All of them were professional academic administrators, and all of them headed an institution of higher learning. None came from New England. One



was a female, another was near the end of his career. Based on what they heard in the interviews, the search committee decided not to recommend the fourth candidate.

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### **An Abbreviated Courtship**

Because the search was moving so rapidly at this point, the courtship of Michael Hooker was fast and furious. It was not a prolonged romance. As Hooker himself explained, "The committee saw very quickly that I was exactly what they were looking for, and they were able to convince me reasonably quickly that this opportunity afforded what I was looking for. So I would say that it was a fairly short courtship, because we each knew a great deal about the other before the courtship began."<sup>40</sup> As the talks continued, Hooker assured the trustees that he planned to stay at UMass for the next ten years, a commitment all participants felt was essential for the next president.

Nevertheless, Hooker would not commit himself one way or the other until after he had a chance to speak with the key political leaders in Massachusetts. He wanted to take some soundings from them to see where they stood on public higher education. No longer a neophyte president, he knew the "right questions" to ask this time. Arrangements were made for him to meet with Governor William Weld, a Republican, and Senate president William Bulger and House Speaker Charles Flaherty, both Democrats. He also met with Piedad Robertson, the secretary of education, and Paul Marks, the chancellor of higher education. These preappointment meetings went well. Hooker came away from them feeling that he could garner the necessary political support to build the twenty-first-century university that he had in mind. With such assurances, he agreed to accept the job for a five-year term. Behind the scenes, the trustees earlier that spring had received strong signals from the governor's office and from the legislative leadership that they could expect a favorable budget if they made a good selection.<sup>41</sup>

Another cause of concern, from Taylor's standpoint, was how to introduce Hooker to the chancellors and faculty leaders without blowing his cover. Worried about possible leaks if the work of the search committee were conducted on campus, the lawyer-trustee who chaired the search committee had ruled out the possibility of campus visits by the candidates. Not everyone was happy with this development. It meant that the five chancellors and their respective constituencies had yet to meet Hooker. They were peeved, not without justification, because they had not been allowed to interview him before the search committee had made its recommendations to the board of trustees.<sup>42</sup>

Understandably, the chancellors as a group felt that they had been completely bypassed. They saw this intentional omission and the disallowance of campus visits as a "double failure" in process. It not only meant that the five campuses had no chance to get to know the candidates, but the candidates in turn had no chance to respond to campus concerns. The problem was partially resolved, but it did not happen until twenty-four hours before the full board of trustees voted.

On May 26, the chancellors, along with the informal group of faculty governance officials, finally got to meet Hooker at the central office in Boston. When Taylor introduced him to the assembled group, he reportedly remarked, "We are still operating in our stealth mode."<sup>43</sup> Both the chancellors and the faculty members felt that this

was secrecy carried to extremes. Such treatment rankled them and reinforced the earlier impression that they were to be avoided as much as possible. As they saw it, the decision had already been made and the vote of the board, which was scheduled for the next day, was a mere formality.

While Hooker was making the rounds at the State House on May 26, he did not pass unnoticed. Word of his being the unanimous choice of the search committee was leaked to the press. Anthony Flint, writing in the *Boston Globe*, broke the story the next day.<sup>44</sup> When it appeared, Taylor was upset with the leak. Prior to the appearance of the news story, all aspects of the search had been kept confidential. Now all that was gone in an instant. Since the news story came out the very day that the trustees voted, it did not seriously hurt Hooker's position.

Meanwhile, Taylor had been busy checking out Hooker with his former employers and other leading educators. Following standard operating procedure for such high-level appointments in state government, the state police conducted its own separate background investigation. On May 20, both trustee Joseph Finnerty and faculty member Ronald Story flew to Baltimore to check out Hooker on their own and to talk with others at UMBC about him as a potential president for UMass.

As Finnerty later explained, "The trip provided us with a chance to go down and kick the tires of the automobile that we were going to buy."<sup>45</sup> He spoke with a variety of people, including UMBC provost Adam Yarmolinsky; Errol Reese, president of the medical school; Theodore Peck, a housing expert; Thomas Chmura, a member of the Greater Baltimore Committee; and Barbara Plantholt, a graduate of the MIT Sloan School of Management, all of whom had nice things to say about Hooker. For example, Plantholt candidly told Finnerty, "Grab him. This guy can sit down at the table with the presidents of Harvard and MIT, and you will know that he belongs at the table."<sup>46</sup>

The responses Story solicited were much the same. He talked with three faculty members, two campus academic administrators, one central office administrator, and one minority student. Freeman Hrabowski, a black professional administrator at UMBC, told Story that "Hooker had turned the institution around on a dime." Hrabowski was impressed with how he had arranged functions. For example, Hooker had placed athletics under student affairs, which resulted in a more constructive relationship between athletics and the quality of student life.<sup>47</sup>

A female clerical worker who gave Finnerty and Story a ride to the airport told them that one of the things she liked most about Hooker is that he made her feel important at the end of the workday. Perhaps of greater significance were the insights provided by Willie Lamouse-Smith, a professor of African-American studies, who commented: "Hooker goes out to put forward ideas and to fight with the politicians and get us what we need to build this place. Before he came, this place was always the whipping boy for the Baltimore papers. Nobody whips us around anymore."<sup>48</sup> All these accounts suggested that Hooker had good political skills when it came to dealing with the news media and with the political establishment.

But on the negative side, an ethical cloud hovered over Hooker's personal finances. In another article that appeared in the *Boston Globe*, Anthony Flint reported that Hooker may have improperly used money from the University of Maryland Foundation for his mortgage payments, baby-sitters, and lawn furniture.<sup>49</sup> Reacting to the negative publicity he had received, Hooker claimed that he had done no wrong. Acknowledging that he may have made a "political error" in spending the money for

such purposes, he said that it had been negotiated as part of his overall compensation package. On this sticky point, he apparently satisfied the scrutiny of the trustees as well as the state police who had investigated the matter.

When all the various background checks had been completed, Taylor was ready to go to the board of trustees. He asked Gordon Oakes to schedule a special meeting, which was held on May 27. There Taylor gave a full report of the search and thoroughly briefed his colleagues. Despite its drama, the vote of the trustees to offer Hooker the presidency ended in anticlimax. There was little discussion. The vote was unanimous.<sup>50</sup> Earlier actions foretold such results, had anyone cared to notice. The committee's unanimity meant more than most people realized.

After this meeting, Hooker held a press conference in which he spoke about the importance of the university to the future of the state economy and its citizens. He also announced that his first priority would be to instill public confidence in the university, declaring: "I am convinced that one can rebuild public confidence, public trust, and public pride."<sup>51</sup> At the same press conference, search consultant Ron Stead publicly acknowledged that of the 128 searches in which his firm had been involved, this one was by far the most efficient. The Hooker appointment became effective on September 1, 1992.

As things turned out, the trustees offered Hooker a salary of \$175,000. This figure represented a 35 percent increase over what former president Joseph Duffey had been paid. When all the fringe benefits were added to Hooker's base salary, the total compensation package came close to \$200,000. Other major public university systems were in a similar range. To cite a few examples, Rutgers University in New Jersey, Michigan State University, and the University of Maryland all pay their presidents \$175,000. On a somewhat higher scale, the University of Texas pays its president \$203,000, while the University of California pays its system head \$307,000 (which includes deferred compensation). When one compares these figures with those of Hooker, his pay was competitive and not out of line.

Once information about the compensation package was released, however, it evoked a public outcry and produced much adverse publicity, which was not unexpected. Newspaper editorials sternly rebuked the trustees for paying Hooker what they considered to be an outrageous salary.<sup>52</sup> So did some faculty members.<sup>53</sup> Since both faculty and staff had not received any pay raises over the past four years, the issue was bound to be controversial. It was a no-win situation for the trustees and the president: there was no way to rationalize his high salary in an atmosphere of economic stagnation, high job losses, and scarce state resources. Yet, on balance, the compensation package seemed to them justified, even if it seemed excessive to the general public.

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### **Gaining Perspective: Two Schools of Thought**

For more than twenty years the trustees and faculty at UMass have fought over the question of power in presidential searches. The dispute is a modern one for the simple reason that only two decades ago, few people saw anything wrong with the trustees unilaterally selecting a president. Before Robert Wood's time, most faculty members accepted the premise that the appointment was the exclusive prerogative of the trustees. In the early 1970s, faculty and students challenged that premise and



sought to have a voice in university governance. In due course, the ideal of participatory democracy, as enshrined in the Wellman Report, became so universally accepted that most of them believed it was a reality. If the intensity of the dispute at UMass is unusual, the issues are essentially no different from those at other colleges and universities.

Borrowing from the field of contemporary political theory, I think it is helpful to analyze the recent controversy in the framework of the community power debate, which contrasts the "power elite" approach to the study of power with the alternative "pluralist" explanation. Those who take the elitist approach argue that there is a relatively permanent "top leadership" which decides the important questions, while the pluralists argue that any significant group in society has the capacity to win redress of its grievances if the group feels intensely about its problems and demands action. In a superficial way, each of these paradigms accurately describes many aspects of the recent search.

For example, the trustees, a small group of power holders, can be identified as a "power elite." In this case, the internal struggle for power centered primarily on the issue of process versus product. By changing their governance policy at the outset of the search, the trustees not only reasserted their appointing authority, but they also diminished the power of faculty and students. All things considered, they saw their appointment of Michael Hooker to be a judicious exercise of power in influencing the future direction of the university. Some of them saw the search as a catalytic event that marked a beginning of a resurgence for UMass.<sup>54</sup>

Not everyone will agree with this conclusion, but the trustees so regarded it. In their eyes, Hooker was the right choice for the presidency. The inferences they drew suggest some of their reasons. They saw him as being ideally suited for the job. He not only met all their criteria, but he also symbolized consensus. As an added dividend, he happened to be a product of the UMass system. Clearly, as the intensity of the process built, the trustees considered outcome to be more important than process.

On the other side, many faculty took a diametrically different stand. They fervently believed that a "good process" would eventually produce a "good president." Within this analytic framework, they can be identified as "pluralists." As such, they wanted greater participation in the search, and on their terms. When they were denied their rights of shared governance, as defined in the Wellman Report, they saw the search process as being closed, secretive, undemocratic, not responsive to their concerns, and leaving large discretionary power in the hands of a relatively few well-placed people. Some faculty saw it as a rerun of the old-time old-boy network that characterized the efforts that produced Robert Wood as president in 1970. Other members of the university community saw the outcome as being politically predetermined. In their view, the trustees had acted in a unilateral manner and had come full cycle.

Citing classic American norms about participatory democracy and belief in the principles of the Wellman Report, one faculty colleague, who shall remain anonymous for obvious reasons, found that the Hooker search fell short of these ideals. He offered the following scathing critique:

What really happened in this search is that the Trustees decided to go out and get a new University President as quickly as possible, with as little internal

University consultation as possible, in as much secrecy as possible, and with no press scrutiny if it could possibly be avoided. And, in this context, they proceeded to violate the University's faculty contract and the state's open meeting law, as well as apparently ignoring serious ethical questions about their final selection (arising from his immediately previous position), and in the process nevertheless generated substantial negative publicity for the University and its new President. And the only way they got away with it was that the University faculty was so demoralized after previous battles that they just didn't want to put up enough effort to protect their legitimate interests.

This interpretation, for all its oversimplification and distortion of what transpired, has an element of truth in it. By operating in secret and not allowing campus visits by the candidates, the trustees left themselves wide open for criticism. The dispute over secrecy and publicity, along with the closed nature of the process, became central because it focused on a question of enduring significance about which it was impossible to reach a satisfactory resolution. The dispute was significant because it had important implications for the university's claim to democratic governance and the diverse nature of the overall system.

Indeed, it posed a classic dilemma, if not a conundrum, of how to maintain confidentiality while supposedly running an open operation in conformance with statutory requirements. Yet the issue could not be resolved, because to reveal the identities of the candidates was, for all practical purposes, to jeopardize their current positions. Newspapers in particular have complained bitterly about the denial of "the right to know," but it is not always clear whether this is the public's right to know what is going on or the newspaper's right to have access to all meetings and information.

If the group effort had a reasonable likelihood to succeed, the trustees were bound to antagonize some people, no matter what they did. The faculty were miffed because Dan Taylor had finessed them on the power question, and he did not consult with them in advance. Though he respected their professional judgment, he concluded that things would go better if the trustees consulted selectively. Some people felt that Taylor tried to have it both ways, reassuring faculty that he wanted their advice while ignoring their demands for greater participation. He understood the need to consult, but he also understood the need to lead.

Taylor was a capable chairman whose role cannot be overestimated. He orchestrated and carefully monitored the search process every step of the way. Taylor's leadership made all the participants feel that they were playing a significant part in the collective enterprise. He elicited trust and performed well. What is more, he did his homework. To be sure, he gave the search a real identity and strengthened that identity by putting people of stature on the search committee. Taylor's enthusiasm was infectious. Members felt that too. His relaxed manner and personal charm put them at ease. He was scrupulous in seeking advice. All accounts substantially agree on this.

Although the search committee was too large to function effectively, Taylor overcame this handicap by relying on a small group of key members. Yet the composition of the committee sent a clear signal that it was going to be a legitimate search. No insiders were going to have an inside track on an inside operation. At the same time, the prestige of the search committee provided sufficient political insulation to keep

the politicians at a safe distance and the search from becoming politicized. In some quarters that was feared. Naming four sitting college and university presidents to the committee was an innovation that gave credibility and judgment to the search. Faculty, however, tended to see the large committee as no more than a public relations gimmick, if not a front. In their minds, the small group that Taylor relied on diminished the representative nature of the full committee.

This brings us finally to the question of affirmative action. Despite the best of intentions, the efforts of the search committee left much to be desired. None of the four finalists, as noted, was a minority candidate. As one critic scornfully remarked, "It doesn't take a flaming liberal to wonder why the search committee was willing to go out of its way and to such lengths to reassure Hooker while letting a perceived negative climate for minorities go unanswered." Why did the eight minority applicants whom they contacted not show up among the finalists? No single explanation is satisfactory. In truth, only the candidates themselves can explain it to us.

Part of the answer, it seems to me, lies in the shallowness of the pool and the two discernible tiers that were established. It posed the dilemma of the "glass ceiling." When the search committee decided to limit the pool to the first tier, only white males (and one white female) at the top or in the corner office were likely to appear. If the pool is shallow, as it was in this case, what one gains in terms of quality one sacrifices in terms of equality and diversity. Another part of the answer had to do with their not considering anyone in the second tier, or at the dean level and below. This recruitment problem, I hasten to add, is not limited to the University of Massachusetts. It applies to all colleges and universities, public or private. This is especially true in the 1990s, when higher education in America is undergoing significant changes and the search for diverse leadership takes on new meaning and greater importance.

When all this is added up, the exercise serves as a reminder that, for thinking about presidential searches, the context of the Hooker search may be special, even unique, for it embodied a mixture of something old and something new. In differing ways, Taylor and his colleagues saw the search as a challenge but also as an opportunity. They did not shirk their duty, nor were they intimidated by the clamorous spectacle that had occurred a year earlier.

While it is true that they spotted their man early and went after him, it is also true that they were keenly aware of their choices and the type of leader they wanted. If any one feature of their work has to be singled out, it would be the clear way in which they defined the job profile. The formula was not a quick fix. More simply, the trustees had an overwhelming desire to settle on a permanent president. With the passing of time, we shall have a much better perspective and vantage point from which to judge the new chief executive and his administration. The trustees themselves suggest that it will take at least ten years' time "to reach the end of the beginning." Only then, of course, will we be able to tell whether or not this presidential search really made a difference. 🐼

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## Notes

1. As this issue of the *New England Journal of Public Policy* was going to press, president Michael Hooker was personally engaged in negotiations dealing with the problem of racism on



- the Amherst campus. For more on this, see Jean Caldwell, "UMass Head Set to Tackle Racism," *Boston Globe*, October 14, 1992.
2. Judith Block McLaughlin and David Riesman, *Choosing a College President: Opportunities and Constraints* (Princeton: Carnegie Foundation, 1990), 7.
3. Duane Lockard, *The Politics of State and Local Government* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 330–331.
4. For a journalistic account of the heavy toll that these budget cuts had taken and the organizational price paid, see Anthony Flint, "State Public College System Staggers amid Funding Cuts," *Boston Globe*, June 7, 1992.
5. See Barry Bluestone et al., *Commonwealth's Choice: Results from the Massachusetts Public Opinion Survey* (Boston: John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs, University of Massachusetts, January 1990).
6. McLaughlin and Riesman, *Choosing a College President*, xxvi.
7. Richard M. Freeland, *Academia's Golden Age: Universities in Massachusetts 1945–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 345.
8. For a detailed discussion and in-depth analysis of these five presidential searches, see Richard A. Hogarty, "Searching for a UMass President: Transitions and Leaderships, 1970–1992," *New England Journal of Public Policy* 7, no. 2 (Fall–Winter 1991): 9–45. Chairman Daniel Taylor made this article required reading for all members of the UMass presidential search committee.
9. McLaughlin and Riesman, *Choosing a College President*, xxviii.
10. Interview with Gordon Oakes, chairman of the UMass board of trustees, July 6, 1992.
11. Interview with trustee Daniel Taylor, June 15, 1992. By way of academic background, Taylor graduated from the University of Illinois and obtained a master's degree in political science at the University of California at Berkeley and a law degree from Harvard University.
12. Interview with faculty member Charles Knight, July 23, 1992.
13. Interview with faculty member Paul Tucker, July 28, 1992.
14. See memorandum of the UMass board of trustees, "Charge to the Committee," December 4, 1991.
15. Ronald Story, "Our Present Ordeal: A Historical Note," June 16, 1991. See also "Summary Report: The IASH Seminar on the Story Analysis," December 1991.
16. Interview with trustee Daniel Taylor, June 15, 1992.
17. Minutes of the UMass presidential search committee, January 21, 1992.
18. Interview with faculty member Ronald Story, June 19, 1992.
19. Interview with trustee Michael Foley, June 22, 1992.
20. Interview with search consultant Ronald Stead, June 25, 1992.
21. Memorandum from search consultants Ronald Stead and Allan Ostar to trustee Daniel Taylor, March 17, 1992.
22. Interview with trustee Daniel Taylor, June 15, 1992.
23. See the final version of the "Announcement," March 1992.
24. A transcript of the proceedings of the Fifth Annual Public Affairs Seminar sponsored by the John W. McCormack Institute on the topic "Rx for Recovery: Planned Growth in a Protected Environment" (Boston: University of Massachusetts, March 1992), 66.
25. Report of the compensation subcommittee, "Recommendations on Compensation and Professional Relationship with the New President," April 1, 1992, 2.

26. Ibid.
27. Interview with faculty member John Russell, July 8, 1992.
28. Daniel Taylor, "Report of the President, Search Committee," May 19, 1992.
29. Minutes of the UMass presidential search committee, April 6, 1992.
30. Curriculum vitae of Michael Kenneth Hooker, 2. For an interesting profile of Hooker, see Rushworth M. Kidder, "Special Report: Agenda 2000," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 25, 1988.
31. Interview with faculty member Miren Uriarte, June 27, 1992.
32. Minutes of the UMass presidential search committee, May 6, 1992.
33. Minutes of the UMass presidential search committee, May 12, 1992.
34. For more on this, see Gregory Dees and Cecily Harshmand, "Bennington College: Managing A Crisis," Yale School of Management, 1986.
35. For more on this, see Freeman A. Hrabowski and James J. Links, "The Metropolitan University and the Community College: A New Symbiosis," *Metropolitan Universities 2* (Spring 1992): 71-79.
36. Dan Currie, "Hooker Named President," *Mass Media*, June 2, 1992.
37. Interview with president-elect Michael Hooker, July 8, 1992.
38. Ibid.
39. Interview with trustee Mary Reed, May 30, 1992.
40. Interview with president-elect Michael Hooker, July 8, 1992.
41. Interview with trustee James O'Leary, July 7, 1992.
42. Interviews with UMass/Amherst chancellor Richard O'Brien, September 29, 1992, and UMass/Boston chancellor Sherry Penney, June 10, 1992.
43. Interview with faculty member Paul Tucker, July 28, 1992.
44. Anthony Flint, "UMass Trustees to Name New President Today," *Boston Globe*, May 27, 1992.
45. Interview with trustee Joseph Finnerty, June 23, 1992.
46. Ibid.
47. Interview with faculty member Ronald Story, June 17, 1992.
48. Anthony Flint, "New President at UMass to Focus on Rebuilding Confidence in School," *Boston Globe*, May 28, 1992.
49. Ibid.
50. Minutes of the special meeting of the UMass board of trustees, May 27, 1992.
51. Ibid.
52. Frank Phillips, "UMass Trustees to Pay New President \$175,000," *Boston Globe*, August 19, 1992. See also Frank Phillips, "New UMass Head Gets Free Luxury Housing," *Boston Globe*, August 22, 1992; "UMass Pay Sends Sour Message," *Patriot-Ledger*, August 20, 1992; and "Pampering President Hooker," *Boston Herald*, August 26, 1992.
53. See, for example, the letter to the editor of the *Boston Globe*, September 20, 1992, written by Professor Martin H. Quitt, who teaches history at UMass/Boston.
54. Interviews with trustee Peter Lewenberg, June 26, 1992, and trustee Alan Solomont, July 9, 1992.