

August 5, 2024

To: Members of the Presidential Search Committee

Fr: Dr. Josh Lepawsky, MUNFA President

**Re: Presidential Search Process (Open vs. Closed Search)**

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Dear Members of the Presidential Search Committee,

This is a follow up to our letter dated April 15, 2024, which can be found [here](#).

According to the July 30 Gazette the “Board approved the engagement of executive search firm Perrett Laver to support the presidential search”. Our union has outlined a myriad of concerns with the use of external, corporate-minded search firms for such tasks [previously](#). I would also like to share the [policy statement on Academic Administrative Searches](#) issued by our national organization, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), which provides a framework for best practices.

The use of corporate, third-party search firms, at substantial cost, have shown to have very little benefit in terms of value or outcomes. Mounting evidence and experience shows this to be the case as outlined in a report by the [Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations \(OCUFA\)](#).

The reason I am writing to you today, however, is with respect to the openness of the search. The [Gazette](#) noted:

*“The committee also discussed the possible degrees of openness with respect to reviewing candidates. These included a range of options under the categories of open, closed and hybrid.”*

The search for the President of our University is a critical one. Whoever is chosen for this important role will wield significant power over the operations and overall direction of the University - their work will have an impact on our members, students, staff and the role of the University in our province. Our University has a special obligation to the people of the province; it is an institution like few others in terms of the integral role it plays academically, socially, culturally, and economically. This public University belongs to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Everyone in this province has a stake in the decision making process and outcome of the current Presidential search process. As a result, the search process must be open and transparent.

The members of our union, the University community at large, and the people of our province must have faith and confidence in the process; a closed search undermines that. A closed search sends the wrong message - that the process is top-down, and unnecessarily secretive. Closed searches erode [collegiality](#), undermine shared-governance, and widen the gap between students/faculty/staff and the administrative structures. It is extremely difficult to support and have confidence in a selection process that occurs behind closed doors and that one has little to no information about.

Our union knows all too well what the arguments are for closed searches - so the process maintains privacy and does not scare anyone away. We reject these claims. Why would someone who shields themselves from public scrutiny be better than someone who wants to actively and openly engage with the University community and public? The very process of open engagement with the broader community is, in and of itself, very informative in terms of getting a glimpse into how short-listed candidates would interact with the University community and stakeholders if they were selected for the job. Don't we want to make such important decisions with the best information available? The people who are short-listed for this important role should be more than willing to step forward and be known, they should be excited and proud to have that opportunity.

Our University needs and deserves Presidential candidates that know and have a passion for academia, understand the role and importance of our University to the province, have a commitment to public service, have a commitment to scholarship and research, who see the University community as partners and not adversaries, and who see the role of our University [as serving and advancing the public good](#). We need a President who puts the good of the University above all else. The best way to achieve these goals is by having a search process that is open, engaging, consultative, and transparent.

Our Union calls on the Board and Presidential Search Committee to ensure that the search process is open and transparent. We firmly believe that doing so will be to the benefit of all involved and impacted by the process and the outcome.

Sincerely,

Josh Lepawsky  
MUNFA President