Search for Next UNH President Just Getting Underway

Members of the Presidential Search Committee listen to the voices of the community as they begin the long search for UNH’s next leader.

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As the grind towards the end of the fall semester ramps up, most students’ minds are on finals or the month-long break they will soon be enjoying for the holidays. But there is another very important topic that may be front and center for many: who the next president of the University of New Hampshire (UNH) will be.

With President James W. Dean’s retirement announcement in September, the long process of choosing who will lead the university started. This process involves a committee of more than fifteen people in the UNH community, from members of The Board of Trustees, to deans of colleges and student representatives.

But how exactly does this process work, and what can students hope to expect from the next president?

In a series of listening sessions held the week of Nov. 13, representatives from the search committee opened the floor up to faculty, students, and the general public in an effort to make their voices heard. The committee then shared more details about how the search (and eventual choice) will be done and what specifically they will be looking for in UNH’s next president. They also heard many voices sharing what the UNH community hopes to see in its next leader.

The process of finding UNH’s next president is, on paper, rather simple. A search committee is put together in order to work with the community and among themselves to figure out what exactly UNH needs. They will then work with Isaacson, Miller, a premier search firm, to develop a profile for the position which will help guide the search. After a series of interviews to narrow down the field of candidates, the semi-finalists will be interviewed by the committee. Recommendations then will be made to The Board of Trustees, who ultimately make the final decision. The goal is to have the new president installed by July of 2024.

Other than an explanation of the process of searching for a new president, the panel also took suggestions from the audience as to what specific traits they should keep an eye out for when creating their profile and considering candidates.

Some of the priorities and preferences of the audience included a president who can attract more students to UNH, help with the current financial deficit and connect with the community as a whole, with one student saying they want a president who is “likable.”
As for things that the Search Committee personally believes to be important, Jamie Burnett, the Search Committee Chair and Vice President of The Board of Trustees, had a lot to say.

“There are a myriad of qualities we are looking for;” he said at the listening session geared toward students. “You might hear echoed [that] we want people who are optimistic in their approach, not afraid of challenges, and are also seeking out opportunities to make UNH an appealing prospect for current and new students.”

Burnett also highlighted the importance of inclusivity and engagement with all members of the UNH community.

“We want someone who understands the concept of shared success,” he said. “That we are all in this together.”

Diving into the specific skill sets of a desirable candidate, Burnett said that financial acumen, political acumen and strong leadership skills are absolutely necessary for a successful president at UNH. He also highlighted the importance of creating leadership and connections within the community.

“It’s a huge enterprise, and it’s a big mission,” he said, “it takes a lot of people to play a part in that and we need someone who can bring that all together.”

More information about the ongoing search can be found on UNH’s presidential transition page, where information will be updated as the search continues.