

# Presidential search committee holds meeting in Wise

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By Allie Robinson  
Editor-in-Chief  
[agr2q@uvawise.edu](mailto:agr2q@uvawise.edu)

College officials, members of the community, students and members of the Board of Visitors at the University of Virginia held a “town hall” meeting to discuss the search for a new university president.

The meeting, held Tuesday in the Slep Student Center, was the last of six open forums hosted by the Special Committee on the Nomination of a President, and the only one held on the UVa-Wise campus.

Current president John Casteen announced in June that he plans to retire in August 2010.

John “Dubby” Wynne, UVa Rector and chair of the search committee, said the search process started in the summer. He said the process includes seeking input from the campus and local communities, building a profile of the type of president the university would like to hire, interviewing candidates and then selecting Casteen’s successor.

There is no deadline, he said, and the committee will spend as long as it takes to select an ideal candidate. After the interviews the committee will make a recommendation to the Board of Visitors, which ultimately will hire the new president.

Chancellor David Prior said he was pleased the committee decided to have a meeting in Wise in addition to the ones held in Charlottesville.

“It’s a very clear statement from the Board of Visitors that Wise is an important part of the deal,” he said.

Prior said the relationship with Charlottesville is important to UVa-Wise.

“Casteen has been enormously helpful to the college,” he said. “He understands us and believes in what we do. The challenge will be in finding someone with a broad base understanding

of higher education and...[someone] who is very agile in dealing with multiple constituents.”

Others echoed his sentiments at the meeting.

Faculty Senate Chair Bryan Hoyt said the new president needs to be the champion of the whole university. “We need a champion here because there are challenges here not in Charlottesville,” he said, citing the socio-economic status of the region and also the number of first-generation students at the college.

Student Government Association President Travis Brannon, who is a senior business administration and administration of justice major, said the new president must possess the qualities necessary to “lead the university through economic turmoil and maintain the student quality of life during those times.”

“Even when the economy forces an institution to tighten its belt, it is very important students experience no decline in quality or opportunity,” he said.

He said the two most important qualities in a university president are visibility and approachability. He said a new president should participate in as many events as possible with students and post photos and videos on the Internet of the president working on projects that help students to improve his or her visibility.

Chancellor Emeritus “Papa” Joe Smiddy said that the university should look for a “Virginia gentleman.”

He said Virginia gentlemen don’t have to be born in Virginia, but that they must have those traits, especially in the pursuit of the Jeffersonian tradition of liberal arts.

“Jefferson said we want to base our future on talent and character,” Smiddy said. “Recognize

talent wherever it is found—which is in the hearts and lives of people.”

He also said that while he enjoys athletic success, classroom education comes first. “The new president should be strong enough to stand in line and say, ‘We’re gonna have school first,’” he said.

Shannon Blevins, director of economic development, said the committee should pay attention to the commitment to a rural area that the candidates may have, because that is integral to working with people in the Wise area.

Sophomore nursing major Emily Baxter said she came to UVa-Wise from Northern

Virginia because of Jefferson’s dream and the sense of community and family she felt at Wise.

“The new president should also have a sense of family and community,” she said.

Wynne said it was reassuring to him to hear the level of commitment and enthusiasm shown by the people in Wise.

“This place has energy,” he said. “We expected a prospective from Wise, and this has been as good or better turnout than other meetings. It reflects the enthusiasm here.”

Prior said students and the community should embrace the search process.

“This is Jefferson’s experiment still unfolding,” he said.