

To: Gordon Sayre
From: Jon Erlandson
Date: 15-Sept-2007

Hi Gordon: I've just returned from one field trip and head for England for a week-long conference tomorrow at Cambridge. While in Eugene this week, a concerned faculty member sent me a copy of an email message and letter written by Sherwin Simmons about the reassignment of the Museum of Art (MoA) from the Provost's Office to University Advancement. Much of Sherwin's letter addresses decisions or issues I have not been involved with, so I will leave those for others to respond to.

As a UO faculty member, museum director, and chair of the search committee for a new executive director of our art museum, however, I feel I have to respond to allegations or insinuations Simmons made about the pace and integrity of the search. I was originally asked to chair this search committee by Terri Warpinski and Linda Brady, agreeing reluctantly because much of the search was scheduled to take place this summer when I was already heavily obligated. After President Frohnmayer announced his decision to reassign the MoA to the Office of University Advancement, I was again asked by Allan Price, Linda Brady, and Terri Warpinski to continue as a chair of the search committee. There was some brief discussion at that time about the feasibility of accelerating the search, but this idea was quickly discarded.

Simmons implies that an accelerated search has taken place over the summer without public discussion about the composition of the search committee or the nature of the position description. This is a gross mischaracterization of the search process as it has unfolded and (in my opinion) impugns the hard work of a distinguished group of faculty and community members who have dedicated a significant amount of their summer (and now fall) to find the best possible director for the Museum of Art. Early on, I insisted that the search committee be comprised of thoughtful and forward-thinking individuals who were knowledgeable about the arts and art museums AND devoted to solving the problems of the MoA. Along with myself, the search committee includes several distinguished faculty members from departments or campus units intimately involved with the mission of the MoA—including Francis Bronet (Dean AAAS), Robert Melnick (Interim Director), Andrew Schulz (Art History), and Kathleen Wagle (Head, Art Dept.). In an organizing meeting attended by Dave Frohnmayer, Linda Brady, and Allan Price, it was made clear that a search process would proceed through the summer, but no candidates would be brought to campus until after the beginning of fall quarter, when they could meet with a variety of faculty, administrators, students, and community advocates in an open setting. We have strictly adhered to that charge and schedule.

Over the summer, the committee has met or consulted with concerned faculty members (including Simmons) from appropriate departments, with museum staff members, with knowledgeable and engaged community members, and with distinguished directors of university art museums to discuss both the UO art museum and the characteristics of an outstanding museum director. Before advertising the position we encouraged members and other museum advocates to forward the names of potential candidates to the committee and to encourage those they considered to be appropriate candidates to apply. We also engaged a search firm to help us research candidates and recruit high-quality candidates.

Despite the fact that more than 20 positions for directors of university art museums are open around the country, we received nearly 40 applications, 26 of whom met our minimum requirements

of five years senior administrative experience in an art museum and an advanced degree in a related field. Search committee members have conducted a preliminary review of these applications and will meet soon to select a top tier of candidates to request further application materials from. This search was designed to remain open until the position is filled, but in my opinion we now have an excellent field of 10-12 candidates to take a closer look at.

In short, whatever individual faculty members think about President Frohnmayer's decision to reassign the MoA, the search for a new museum director has proceeded as an open and collaborative process, without internal or external interference. The museum is currently in good hands under Robert Melnick as interim director, but I personally believe some of the issues raised by the Pappas report about the governance of the art museum cannot effectively be solved until a new and permanent executive director is installed. For now, please share my update on the nature of our search with members of the Faculty Senate and other appropriate individuals or parties.