
HCC announces finalists for next college president

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College is one step closer to hiring its next president.

The HCC search committee evaluating candidates to succeed President Christina Royal has whittled a field of 50 down to four. All four finalists have many years of experience in higher education and now hold top-level administration positions at community colleges in the Northeast, and all four are persons of color – two Latinas and two African-American men.

They are: Noemí Custodia-Lora, vice president of the Lawrence Campus and Community Relations at Northern Essex Community College in Massachusetts; Tony D. Hawkins, provost and vice president of Academic Affairs, Continuing Education and Workforce Development at Frederick Community College in Maryland; Arlene Rodríguez, provost and vice president of Academic and Student Affairs at Middlesex Community College in Massachusetts; and George Timmons, provost and senior vice president of Academic and

Student Affairs at Columbia-Greene Community College in New York.

The announcement was made today in a message to the HCC community from Eleanor P. Williams, chair of the search committee and vice chair of the HCC Board of Trustees, and Robert Gilbert, chair of the HCC Board of Trustees.

“As conversations continue toward the selection of HCC’s fifth president, we have total confidence that the candidate selected from among our finalists will bring strong, inspiring leadership to the college,” they said in a joint statement.

In August, President Royal, who’s been with HCC since January 2017, announced that she would retire after the 2022-2023 academic year. Her last day will be July 14, and she expects to assist with the transition to the next administration.

The 18-member search committee included five members of the HCC Board of Trustees – Williams, Gilbert, Vanessa Smith, Ted Hebert,

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and Ivonne Vidal – three HCC faculty members, seven HCC staff members, one member of the HCC Foundation Board of Directors, and one student, as well as Robert Awkward, assistant commissioner for Academic Effectiveness at the Massachusetts Dept. of Higher Education. Four members of the search committee are also HCC alumni.

To aid in the search process, HCC retained the Pauly Group, Inc., a national consulting firm that previously assisted the college in the hiring of Royal, HCC's fourth president.

"This truly is an exciting time for the HCC community as we seek to find the next leader for the college," Williams

said in a separate statement.

Each of the four finalists has been invited to visit the HCC campus for a day and a half of tours, open forums, presentations, and interviews: April 6-7, Noemí Custodia-Lora; April 10-11, George Timmons; April 11-12, Tony D. Hawkins; April 13-14, Arlene Rodríguez.

Custodia-Lora, a former biology professor, holds a Ph.D. in physiology and endocrinology from Boston University and a bachelor's degree in biology from the Universidad de Puerto Rico.

Timmons holds a Ph.D. in higher education administration from Bowling Green State University, a master's degree in higher education from Old Dominion University, and a bachelor's degree in

financial management from Norfolk State University.

Hawkins, a former professor of speech, communication and theater, holds a Ph.D. in higher education, leadership and technology from New York University, a certificate of advanced study in administration, planning and social policy from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, a master's degree in speech communication from the University of Georgia, and a bachelor's degree in mass communications from Towson State University.

Rodríguez, a former English professor, holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, a master's degree in English from Lehigh University, and a bachelor's degree in

English from Fordham University.

The HCC Board of Trustees is expected to vote to approve a new president at its next meeting on Tuesday, April 25.

"The search attracted a strong and diverse pool of candidates," said board chair Gilbert. "While replacing the leadership of President Royal is a daunting task, our finalists exhibit qualities that will continue our journey as a college of excellence. I thank trustee and search committee chair Eleanor Williams for her leadership as well as members of the search committee for their dedication to the search process."

Full resumes of the candidates can be viewed at hccpresidentialsearch.com/finalists