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Former dean of nursing named the interim president of Penn

By Howard Goodman
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Claire M. Fagin, former dean of the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, will become interim president of the university on July 1, Penn's trustees announced yesterday.

Fagin, 66, an oft-described dynamo who is credited with elevating the nursing school to national prominence, will serve until the trustees find a permanent successor to Sheldon Hackney.

She will be the first woman chief executive of Penn. In the Ivy League, only Yale has had a woman at the helm — Hanna H. Gray, acting president from May 1977 to June 1978, according to a Penn spokeswoman.

Hackney is President Clinton's nominee to head the National Endowment for the Humanities. He will leave the Penn presidency no later than June 30 after 12 years as the university's 21st chief executive.

Fagin emphasized she would be interim president, not acting president.

"Acting really means acting, and interim means really being president for a time," she said.

Fagin made it clear she had no intention of being a figurehead.

"I'm not a good watch-person," Fagin said. "I think you're going to see movement, and I think you'll see a wonderful sense of spirit in the university community. I'm very enthusiastic about taking this job."

Her appointment, expected to be made official when the trustees' executive committee meets tomorrow, was a "very courageous" decision by the university, Fagin said. "I think it's wonderful for women and wonderful for nursing."

The trustees hope to complete their search for a permanent president by mid-1994.

Penn's trustees are expected to cast a wide net in hopes of attracting a large group of candidates for the job.

But speculation has already begun over the likely successor. One highly placed source within the university said the current front-runner is Yale provost Judith S. Rodin, 48, a Philadelphia-born psychology professor.

Rodin was a top contender for the Yale presidency that was filled last week with the appointment of Rich-

ard C. Levin, until then dean of Yale's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Rodin preceded Levin in the graduate school post.

Rodin did not return a phone call yesterday seeking comment.

Yale's search committee considered more than 400 candidates in a national search that began last May — an indication of how long and difficult the process of filling top college jobs can be. Yale's presidency became vacant when Benno C. Schmidt Jr. quit to lead the Edison Project, a national system of private elementary and high schools still in the design stage.

A Penn source said the pool of candidates for Hackney's job would likely include other runners-up for the Yale presidency. They included David Kennedy, a Stanford University historian; Donald M. Crothers, chairman of Yale's chemistry department, and James Duderstadt, president of the University of Michigan.

Fagin, who headed Penn's nursing school from 1977 to March 1992, is a key figure in health reform (she wrote a paper for the Clinton transition task force) and an advocate for raising the status of nurses. The book *Charting Nursing's Future*, which she co-authored, argues for the cost-effectiveness of health services provided by nurses.

"She's really dynamic," said one Penn official. "She brought the nursing school from being nothing to being number one."

The number-one ranking was conferred in a U.S. News & World Report survey of graduate education published this spring.

Since leaving Penn last year on a sabbatical, Fagin has been scholar in residence at the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, where she is investigating how well federally mandated changes are being implemented in nursing homes. She also serves as president of the National League for Nursing, based in New York City.

Previously, she had roles with the World Health Organization, the National Board of Medical Examiners and the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

Fagin earned her bachelor's degree in nursing at Wagner College, Staten Island; her master's at Colum-

bia University, and her doctorate from New York University.

In an interview yesterday, Fagin said the appointment came too suddenly to plan specifically what she will do as president.

She talked of continuity, but in temperament, at least, the ebullient Fagin is very different from Hackney, who tended to stay out of the spotlight while delegating authority.

"We're on a very good path," Fagin said. "I think Sheldon did a very good job."

She said Penn's fund-raising — nearly \$1 billion gained in less than four years — "is going smashingly." She said she would address problems over state funding and recent on-campus controversies over free speech and minority rights.

Fagin said she did not intend to apply for the permanent Penn presidency because of her age. "I think there are certain realities in life," and a loss of energy when getting older is one of them, she said.

The temporary presidency, however, is "a very good fit."

"I have a great track record — I've been there," she said. "I have come to really love this place."

She plans to live in the president's house on the Penn campus, moving in in late summer.

"I will be non-threatening to everybody," Fagin said. "I will be non-competitive in the search for the permanent president. I will be very, very helpful in the search, and will be helpful to the new president."

"I think it's terrific, a capstone for me, and it's great."