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Wagner College's McNair named Tuskegee's first female president

Dr. Lily D. McNair will become Tuskegee University's eighth president after being unanimously selected by its Board of Trustees. She will serve as the first female president of the institution in its 136-year history.

McNair currently is provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Wagner College in New York City. She will begin her duties at Tuskegee on July 1, 2018.

"When we launched our presidential search last October, our goal was to identify someone who could champion both Tuskegee's historic legacy and her place in the future of higher education," said John E. Page, chair of Tuskegee's Board of Trustees. "Our Board of Trustees is confident that Dr. McNair brings to Tuskegee the precise skill set required to ensure we continue thriving as one of the nation's leading HBCUs."

Since 2011, McNair has served as the second-ranking executive of Wagner College — a private college of 2,200 students located on New York City's Staten Island. A clinical psychologist by training, Dr. McNair's higher education career includes other academic, research and executive appointments at Spelman College, University of Georgia, the State University of New York at New Paltz, and Vassar College.

A native of New Jersey, Dr. McNair holds an undergraduate degree in psychology from Princeton University, and master's and doctoral degrees in psychology from the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Burt Rowe, a 1970 Tuskegee graduate, president of the Tuskegee National Alumni Association Inc., and search committee member, attested to McNair's collaborative approach to engaging alumni, donors and other university stakeholders.

"I am honored and excited to welcome Dr. McNair to the Tuskegee family. She is a trusted and well-respected leader who understands Tuskegee's unique heritage, culture and traditions," Rowe said. "Deeply engaging and collaborative, she is committed to ensuring that all voices of the Tuskegee family will be heard, and I am confident that alumni will enjoy working with Dr. McNair to continue moving 'the pride of the swift-growing South' forward."

Graduating senior Austin Turk, who represented students on the search committee and has worked closely with university administrators as Tuskegee's current Student Government Association president, was equally encouraged by McNair's credentials.

“I was very impressed with Dr. McNair’s enthusiasm for fostering student success,” Turk said. “She has demonstrated a strong commitment to mentoring many students and providing academic and professional guidance. I know that Tuskegee will benefit greatly from her leadership.”

McNair views both Tuskegee’s reputation and legacy as its foundation for continued success under her leadership.

“I am honored and humbled to be selected to serve as the eighth president of Tuskegee University,” she said.

“The historic contributions of the university’s students, faculty and alumni are well known and valued throughout the nation. I very much look forward to building on the legacy of my predecessors so that Tuskegee University will ascend to even greater heights in the years to come.”

Wagner College President Richard Guarasci reflected on McNair’s appointment by saying, “I congratulate Lily for her selection, as well as for the intelligence, professionalism and grace that she has maintained throughout her seven years as provost.”

McNair’s appointment follows a six-month national presidential search that began on Oct. 18, 2017.

During that time, and in partnership with the search firm Isaacson, Miller, the Presidential Search Committee conducted listening sessions with senior administrators, faculty, staff, students and alumni; administered a stakeholder survey to garner additional opinions about the requirements, qualifications and opportunities for the university’s eighth president; and evaluated more than a 150 prospective candidates, narrowing the field to a small group who were interviewed in person.

Since Tuskegee University’s founding in 1881, it has been under the leadership of seven presidents — the first of which was Booker T. Washington, who led the institution from 1881 to 1915. McNair will succeed Interim President Charlotte P. Morris, whose 35-year tenure with the university has included two terms as interim president — the most recent of which began on July 1, 2017.

Morris, who accepted the appointment as interim president on a temporary basis, will remain in service to the university during the fall semester as a member of the Brimmer College of Business and Information Science’s teaching faculty. She also will assist with the transition of leadership in the Office of the President.

The university’s presidential search webpage provides additional information about McNair, as well as details the presidential search process.