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Ouachita trustees hear updates on presidential search and new degrees, name two emeriti faculty members

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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita trustees hear updates on presidential search and new degrees, name two emeriti faculty members

By Trennis Henderson, OBU vice president for communications

March 18, 2016

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ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Sharing an update on Ouachita Baptist University's presidential search process, search committee chairman Gene Whisenhunt told members of Ouachita's Board of Trustees that the committee "is diligently seeking the right leader for this university at this time."

In other board business, trustees heard a report about four new degree programs being introduced this fall and approved several personnel-related actions, including naming two emeriti faculty.

Since being appointed last summer following the resignation of Ouachita President Rex Horne, Whisenhunt said the presidential search committee has focused on gathering and then narrowing the list of potential presidential candidates. He said among key qualifications they are evaluating are candidates' Christian faith, leadership experience, fundraising ability, management style and vision as the committee seeks "God's confirmation of the right person at the right time."

Following the board meeting, trustee chairman Jay Heflin emailed an additional update about the search process to Ouachita faculty and staff members. Noting that "the search committee had narrowed its list to three individuals and it is their hope to have a candidate to present to the Board of Trustees in the coming few weeks," Heflin added. "Once that recommendation is made, the board will review the information presented by the search committee, interview the candidate and vote to move forward or not."

Heflin encouraged faculty and staff to "pray that the search committee continues to strive to seek and follow God's will in the process" and to "pray for the candidates and their families as they make potentially life-changing decisions, seeking to follow God's will." He also urged prayer "for wisdom and discernment for the board as they contemplate a very meaningful decision for the university."

In other board updates, Interim President Charles Wright reported that university administrators and faculty have approved adding four new degree programs at Ouachita this fall: a Bachelor of Arts degree in music business, a Bachelor of Arts in applied physics and Bachelor of Science degrees in biophysics and physics/mathematics with a teaching emphasis.

"There are demands for these," Dr. Wright explained, adding that such degrees should help increase enrollment "and ultimately our mission" as a private, Christian liberal arts university.

According to the proposal approved by faculty for the music business degree, "enrollment in music business programs has steadily increased throughout the U.S. and we have had numerous students inquire about the possibility of a music business major at Ouachita." Courses in the new degree program will address such issues as music publishing, commercial music, music production, songwriting, instrumentation and film scoring. The degree will be introduced this fall pending approval by the National Association of Schools of Music.

The BA in applied physics, which requires a co-major, is designed for “students who convert to physics late in their academic career or transfer into physics and do not have the time to complete a full degree.” It is intended for “students who want more than a minor and desire the problem-solving skills a physics major develops, but have designs of pursuing other career paths.”

The new Bachelor of Science degree in biophysics will be combined with a minor in chemistry or mathematics. The biophysics degree is designed to provide students “unique abilities to combine their science knowledge and various career opportunities after graduation. Students in this degree will take a significant number of hours in math, chemistry, physics and biology, granting a degree that allows students to become well-versed in several different sciences.”

The BA degree in physics/mathematics with a teaching emphasis involves a partnership among Ouachita’s physics, math and education departments. It is designed for students interested in being licensed to teach math and physics at the secondary level. Final approval for the new degree will come from the Arkansas Department of Education which introduced the new combined licensure area in physics/mathematics in 2012. Pending approval, Ouachita will be the first private university in the state to offer the degree.

Trustees approved a number of personnel-related issues, including naming two emeriti faculty: Dr. Hal Bass, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, and Dr. Charles Fuller, Professor Emeritus of Music.

Dr. Bass has taught at Ouachita since 1976, including serving as a full professor since 1989. He holds degrees from Baylor University and Vanderbilt University. He also has served in several administrative roles, including chair of the Department of Political Science, director of the Maddox Public Affairs Center and founding dean of the W.H. Sutton School of Social Sciences.

Dr. Bass has been recognized five times with the Student Senate Outstanding Faculty Member Award and in 2005 he was awarded the Ouachita Purple and Gold Heart Award for outstanding service to the university. His publications include a Historical Dictionary of United States Political Parties and several journal articles, book reviews and book chapters. He has been active in professional organizations on the state, regional and national levels, including serving as president of the Southwest Social Sciences Association in 2007-08.

Dr. Bass also has been actively involved in community organizations, including serving as a longtime member of the Arkadelphia Rotary Club, the Clark County Democratic Committee and the Clark County Election Commission. He and his wife, Mitzi, are active members of First Baptist Church of Arkadelphia.

Dr. Fuller served at Ouachita from 1993 to 2007. He holds degrees from Baylor University, West Texas State University, Arizona State University, Truett Theological Seminary and Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. He joined the Ouachita faculty as an associate professor of music and director of choral activities after serving in a similar role at East Texas Baptist University. He was promoted to full professor in 1997 and was named dean of Ouachita’s School of Fine Arts and chair of the Division of Music in 2004.

During his years at Ouachita, Ouachita choral ensembles were twice selected to perform at the American Choral Directors Association conventions. As conductor of the Ouachita Singers, he took his students on several international concert tours. He also initiated Ouachita’s annual Service of Lessons and Carols presented during the Advent season.

Dr. Fuller has served since 2010 as minister for congregational life at Second Baptist Church of Little Rock. He and his wife, Cindy, continue to support Ouachita, including endowing the Rachel Fuller Memorial Scholarship named in memory of their daughter who died following the 1999 plane crash as the Ouachita Singers were returning from a European concert tour. The Fullers also provided the lead gift for the 2013 renovation of Ouachita’s Daniel and Betty Jo Grant Center for International Education.

Dr. Fuller has been active in several professional organizations including the American Choral Directors Association, the Texas Music Educators Association and the National Association of Schools of Music.

He also has served on the Executive Council of the Southern Baptist Church Music Conference and the Board of Advisors for the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra.

In other personnel-related business, trustees appointed Dr. Chris Brune, associate professor of finance, as the holder of the George Young Endowed Chair of Business. Dr. Brune, a 1994 Ouachita graduate, has taught at Ouachita since 2009. He also holds MBA and PhD degrees from the University of Arkansas.

Two faculty members were granted tenure: Dr. Kathy Collins, assistant professor of education, and Dr. Elizabeth Kelly, assistant professor of sociology. Dr. Collins has taught at Ouachita since 2009. She holds degrees from Baylor University, Tarleton State University and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Dr. Kelly, who joined the Ouachita faculty in 2010, holds degrees from the University of Texas and Baylor University.

Trustees granted promotions to several faculty members, including: Dr. Summer Bruch, associate professor of visual arts; Dr. Chris Brune, associate professor of finance; Dr. Ray Franklin, professor of Christian missions; Dr. Tim Hayes, professor of chemistry; Dr. Sara Hubbard, associate professor of chemistry; Dr. Rebecca Jones, associate professor of communications; Dr. Cai Lei, professor of music; Dr. Ryan Lewis, associate professor of music; Dr. Ruth Plymale, associate professor of biology; Margaret Reed, professor and periodicals/electronic resources librarian; Dr. Wendy Richter, professor and archivist; and Dr. Steve Thomason, associate professor of political science.

Faculty members granted sabbaticals for fall 2017 include Dr. Tully Borland, associate professor of philosophy, and Summer Bruch, associate professor of visual arts. Approved for sabbaticals in spring 2018 are Dr. Lori Hensley, professor of biology; Dr. Ryan Lewis, associate professor of music; Dr. Chris Mortenson, associate professor of history; and Jim Rothwell, assistant dean of the Hickingbotham School of Business and assistant professor of accounting.

Affirming the faculty members' "well-deserved awards," Dr. Stan Poole, vice president for academic affairs, said, "We're grateful for their service and blessed by their contributions to the Ouachita community."

Upcoming major campus events reported to trustees include Tiger Serve Day on April 2, Early Registration on April 23 and 30, Scholars Day on April 27 and spring commencement on May 14.