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Ouachita News Bureau

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NEWS

OUACHITA NEWS

For immediate release

Dr. Justin K. Hardin named Ouachita's vice president for academic affairs

By Felley Lawson

March 29, 2022

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Dr. Justin K. Hardin has been named Ouachita Baptist University's vice president for academic affairs, effective in summer 2022. He brings a strong background in teaching, scholarship and administration to his new role as the university's chief academic officer.

Hardin succeeds Dr. Stan Poole, who is returning to the classroom as full-time professor of English after serving for 19 years as Ouachita's VPAA.

Hardin earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history and Biblical studies from Ouachita in 1998, a Master of Divinity degree from Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in 2001 and two degrees from the University of Cambridge: a Master of Philosophy in theology in 2003 and a Doctor of Philosophy in New Testament in 2007.

He comes to Ouachita after serving for eight years at Palm Beach Atlantic University (PBA) in West Palm Beach, Fla., where he has led their flagship



Photo 1 Dr. Justin K. Hardin
(Photo by John Sizemore)

and innovative Master of Divinity degree as well as broader graduate programs in the School of Ministry, including the university's only Doctor of Philosophy program. He currently serves as associate dean for graduate programs and professor of Biblical and theological studies.

PBA, founded by Florida Baptists in 1968, is a comprehensive, interdenominational, Christ-first university enrolling 3,600 students. In Hardin's leadership role at PBA, the School of Ministry added three fully-accredited graduate degrees. PBA was one of the earliest schools in the country to adopt an accelerated ministry program, creating a pathway for students to earn Bachelor of Arts and Master of Divinity degrees in five years. During Hardin's tenure, enrollment in School of Ministry graduate programs climbed from fewer than 50 to more than 120 students. He has taught courses in New Testament and Greek at the graduate and undergraduate levels and also teaches in PBA's undergraduate honors program.

Hardin's other academic and administrative roles include serving for six years at Wycliffe Hall, the evangelical college of the University of Oxford, where he was director of studies and tutor in New Testament. He began his professional career at Oklahoma Baptist University as the Rowena Strickland Assistant Professor of Bible.

"Dr. Justin Hardin is a gifted teacher, scholar and administrator who's deeply committed to excellence in Christ-centered higher education," said Dr. Ben Sells, Ouachita's president. "He's an emerging leader in Baptist higher education who's been effective and innovative at serving students in traditional undergraduate programs as well as in graduate and online programs.

"This appointment adds to the university's momentum, including several new programs and record enrollment," Sells noted. "Hardin is another example of Ouachita attracting the next generation of leaders to extend our progress."

"As I prepare to return to Ouachita, I'm filled with joyful and humble enthusiasm," said Hardin, who will also serve as professor of biblical studies. "I look forward to advancing Ouachita's academic vision and building upon our strong Christian liberal arts tradition that Dr. Stan Poole and our outstanding faculty and deans have cultivated so well. One of my goals is therefore to build upon our momentum as we prepare a new generation of Ouachitonians, rooted in Jesus Christ, to love God and others as they serve in the fields to which God has called each of them."

A native of Henderson, Texas, Hardin received the Outstanding Student Award in Biblical Studies during his time at Ouachita, earned a 4.0 GPA, was elected president of his class all four years and was active in the Ouachita Student Foundation. Hardin said his interest in teaching and research was kindled through his selection to participate in Ouachita's chapter of the Pew Younger Scholars Society, a national program of the Pew Charitable Trust designed to foster a network of Christian scholars who intend to pursue the highest level of teaching and scholarship.

Hardin is the recipient of several academic honors, including two for teaching. Oklahoma Baptist University recognized him with the Most Promising Teacher Award in 2007; in 2012, he was selected from among more than 330 student nominations to be named Oxford University's Most Innovative Teacher in the Humanities Division.

Active in academic organizations within his field, Hardin has written several publications and given more than a dozen major conference presentations. He's writing a 250,000-word commentary on 1 Corinthians to be published by Zondervan. An ordained Southern Baptist minister, Hardin regularly teaches and preaches in local churches. He and his wife, Jill, and their family are active members of Family Church, an SBC congregation in West Palm Beach.

During his post-graduate studies in Cambridge, Hardin played basketball for the university. His interest in serving his community led him to coach youth soccer in England and Florida; he holds United States Soccer Federation (USSF) Level D1 and England Football Association (FA) Level 1 coaching licenses.

Hardin was named VPAA at Ouachita following an expansive national search that yielded a large, diverse candidate pool. In fall 2021, more than 130 Ouachita faculty and staff members gave input into developing the VPAA job description. Sells then appointed and chaired a 12-member advisory committee composed of deans, faculty, staff and a student representative.

JobfitMatters, an executive recruiting firm specializing in searches for Christian organizations, helped identify 99 potential candidates. After a group of 23 men and women supplied materials to the committee, eight semi-finalists were selected and interviewed. Three finalists each came to campus for a day and a half of interviews.

"We were fortunate to attract a large and strong candidate pool," Sells said. "I'm grateful for colleagues on the advisory committee as well as faculty, staff and students who participated in this deeply collaborative process along with the support of the search firm."

"The campus today is a wonderful blend of legacy and looking ahead, of tradition and innovation, of past memories and future dreams," Hardin said. "I am eager to serve the Lord with all my energy and focus as Ouachita's VPAA."

Ouachita Baptist University, a private liberal arts university in Arkadelphia, Ark., is in its 136th year as a Christ-centered learning community and is ranked the No. 2 "Regional College in the South" by *U.S. News & World Report*. Learn more about the university's highly personal approach, reflected in a student/faculty ratio of 13:1, at www.obu.edu.

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

"Justin is respected, loved and acclaimed by faculty, staff and students at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He helps lead our School of Ministry, which is our most innovative one. Our loss is Ouachita's gain."

Dr. Debra Schwinn

President, Palm Beach Atlantic University

"I had heard about Justin for several years when we both landed at PBA in 2014. I saw immediately that his reputation was well-founded. For nearly a decade, I've watched him develop as a scholar, a leader and a colleague. I knew that it was only a matter of time before he became a chief academic officer and am thrilled that his calling has brought him to Ouachita at this historic and providential moment. I commend both him and the university on this outstanding, forward-looking decision."

Dr. Gene Fant, Jr.

President, North Greenville University

Former Provost, Palm Beach Atlantic University and Union University

"Justin is a gifted teacher and scholar with broad international experience. I have known Justin for more than 20 years. I'm fully confident, as a former faculty member who knows and loves Ouachita and now as the provost at PBA, that Justin will lead by example and will bring to Arkadelphia his deep love for Christ and his commitment to academic excellence."

Dr. Randy Richards

Provost, Palm Beach Atlantic University

Former faculty member, Ouachita Baptist University

"Knowing Justin as his pastor with children the same age, as a PBA Trustee, as a former academic administrator and as someone committed to Southern Baptist life, Justin has no ceiling on what he can lead. I can't imagine Ouachita would find a better candidate than Justin."

Dr. Jimmy Scroggins

Lead Pastor, Family Church, West Palm Beach, Fla.

“Justin has played a key leadership role in establishing the partnership, developing curriculum, seeking accreditation and securing funding—including a \$1 million gift, for PBA’s School of Ministry initiative—to help meet the theological education needs for Black churches in South Florida. Justin is a gifted scholar, impactful teacher and skillful administrator.”

Dr. Terriel Byrd

Professor of Urban Christian Ministry, Palm Beach Atlantic University

“In the three decades plus that I have taught in the Pruet School of Christian Studies, I have encountered some very impressive students who have graduated to carry on careers and ministries of impact. Dr. Justin Hardin is one of the most impressive of those graduates. Justin was a Christian studies and history major, a Pew Scholar and a class leader at Ouachita, which instilled in him a passion for students, stellar scholarship and the mission of a Christian liberal arts education. Dr. Hardin will serve with distinction and offer a fresh perspective as our next vice president of academic affairs as he faithfully advocates for faculty and the vision of Ouachita Baptist University.”

Dr. Terry Carter

*Associate Dean of the Pruet School of Christian Studies and W.O. Vaught Professor of Christian Ministries, Ouachita Baptist University
Member, VPAA Search Advisory Committee*

“This process in hiring the new VPAA was extensive, and I am very satisfied with the result. Dr. Hardin was warm, welcoming and focused on the needs of students in every conversation he had throughout the interview process. I was impressed by his need and desire to serve students, in his words, as a ‘teacher, a coach and a pastor.’ Those roles, together, exceed every expectation I have for a VPAA, professor or any member of faculty here at Ouachita. It’s encouraging to see a Ouachita alumnus come back and want to serve this school well. I’m excited to see what Dr. Hardin contributes to Ouachita and the impact he will have on the students’ success both in and out of the classroom!”

Kinley Ritter

*Honors Student, Ouachita Baptist University
Member, VPAA Search Advisory Committee*