

NEW JERSEY

Rutgers boards approve hiring university's first non-white president in school's 254 years

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Published 10:17 a.m. ET Jan. 21, 2020 | Updated 4:35 p.m. ET Jan. 21, 2020

Rutgers University's governing boards on Tuesday morning officially approved hiring Northwestern University provost Jonathan Holloway to be Rutgers' first non-white president since the university's inception 254 years ago.

Holloway, a former dean at Yale University who was once a football teammate of Sen. Cory Booker's at Stanford, will take the helm at Rutgers on July 1, when current president Robert Barchi retires.

Holloway's base salary will be \$780,000.

Holloway, 52, will take the reins from Barchi, the university's 20th president, with the state university in its best position in years. During Barchi's tenure, enrollment at the state institution continued an upward trend, even while national college enrollment declined. Annual fundraising nearly tripled to \$250 million, and endowment swelled from \$690 million to well over \$1 billion.

Rutgers' undergraduate enrollment stood at 35,600 in 2017.

During Tuesday's board meeting, Gov. Phil Murphy praised Holloway's leadership. The two reportedly met last week to discuss the position.

"I look forward to working alongside Jonathan to see Rutgers realize its full potential," Murphy said. "Today is a historic day for Rutgers but is an equally historic day for the state of New Jersey."

Holloway said he looks forward to breaking financial barriers to Rutgers' New Brunswick, Camden and Newark campuses.

He added that he hopes to strengthen the university's ties with New Jersey political leaders in ways that not only promote funding for the institution but also facilitate opportunities for faculty.

"Through my scholarship, I have come to appreciate the nuances that are woven into the fabric of a research university," he said.

"I think of universities as beloved communities," he added.

During the search for Barchi's successor, some in the Rutgers community had discussed that it might be time for a non-white leader at the state's public university.

"Rutgers presidents have consistently been white men, and that doesn't reflect New Jersey," Todd Wolfson, a journalism professor at Rutgers and president of the faculty union, said recently. "I would hope one of the top priorities the committee has is to select candidates who are women and a person of color."

Rutgers was far from unusual among academic institutions by not having a minority or woman at the helm. In 2016, seven out of 10 college presidents were men and fewer than one in five were a racial minority, according to a study of American college presidents by the American Council on Education.

The study also showed a move toward more diversity at the college presidential level as the percentage of women and minority presidents had increased, albeit slowly, over the last 30 years.

"We live in an era of first," Holloway said Tuesday, calling it "exciting, flattering, shameful."

Holloway also addressed the university's ties to slavery. Rutgers in 2016 released a groundbreaking report with research that painted a dramatic picture of slaves' roles in constructing the university.

"Rutgers has demonstrated the maturity to recognize its history," he said. "Universities are too often afraid of that kind of honest reckoning. This will not be a university afraid of its

past."

Rutgers Board of Governors Chairman Mark Angelson said race was not a factor in selection. Holloway was the final pick from roughly 250 nominations narrowed down during the course of several months.

"It was clear from the beginning, out of all those candidates, that this was our guy," Angelson said. "He has a giant heart and a sense of humor, maybe the most important attributes for a university president."

Northwestern President Morton Schapiro praised Holloway for creating a rigorous budget review process that "aided in Northwestern's financial turnaround."

He also credited Holloway for helping to strengthen the administration's relationship with the faculty senate, emphasizing global issues and having a strong voice on diversity and inclusion.

"Jonathan has been an indispensable member of my senior leadership team," Schapiro said. "Rutgers has found an outstanding new president."

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Holloway is a professor of history and African American studies, focusing on post-emancipation U.S. history.

When he was teaching at Yale, Holloway started his course each semester by telling students about how he became a historian, according to a story in the Yale News from 2008.

His mother was a preschool teacher in Concord, Massachusetts, and would take the 5-year-old on her field trips, where he would see the breastworks where the minutemen had stood during the historic Battle of Lexington and Concord. On one of those trips, she made a headstone rubbing of a slave who bought his freedom and died on the eve of the American Revolution.

“Though he was born in a land of slavery, he was born free,” the epitaph read. “Though he lived in a land of liberty, he lived a slave.” The rubbing hung in the Holloway home for years, and he later hung it in his office at Yale, according to the Yale News story.

Holloway was the first black dean of Yale College, a post he filled from 2014 to 2017.

But in addition to his roles as administrator and professor, Holloway, who teaches about the civil rights era, found himself in the middle of on-campus racial protests in 2015.

The protests were set off by an email from the university's Intercultural Affairs Committee that asked students to avoid culturally insensitive Halloween costumes. A faculty member challenged the request, and tensions flared.

Holloway, who supported the request, worked to repair frayed relationships between students and the university and was known as receptive to student demands.

Yet he was also criticized by some students who said he remained disconnected from their problems and wasn't doing enough to mend race relations on campus.

At one impromptu protest, The New York Times reported, Holloway spent two hours listening to nearly 200 black students voice their concerns.

"When I literally went out to be amongst them," he said Tuesday, "they knew enough to trust that I would listen to them, that I will be honest with them, frankly to the point of saying I will do better."

The story continues below the gallery.

A year later, Holloway announced he would leave Yale to become provost of Northwestern. He said the decision was not related to the protests.

In late 2018, Holloway defended Northwestern's decision to allow a controversial researcher on campus. Some faculty and students decried the researcher's work as racist and sexist, but officials, citing academic freedom, declined to expel him from campus.

Speaking Tuesday about the incident, Holloway called it an "extremely painful" and "no-win situation."

"A university should be about testing ideas," he said, adding that he "was not prepared to sacrifice Northwestern's academic reputation" but is committed to safety on campus.

Holloway earned a doctorate in history from Yale in 1995. He spent 22 years at the institution.

Holloway grew up in Montgomery, Alabama, but moved to California to attend Stanford University.

While earning his undergraduate degree, he played outside linebacker for Stanford Cardinal football. One of his teammates was U.S. Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey.

"He and I were there at the same time," Holloway told The Daily Northwestern in August. "In fact, we were both recruited by the same guy. He played wide receiver and just couldn't cut it there and sort of was on the same track I was: Big recruit, flame out."

Holloway earned USA Today All-American honorable mention in high school. He also ran indoor and outdoor track. But in college, he said, athletics were frustrating.

"I learned what failure looked like," he said. "I'd not failed publicly like that in my life. I love working with athletes, because they fail every single day. And when they fail, they get up and they try again."

Holloway will take the reins as Rutgers' dismal Big 10 football program starts to rebuild under head coach Greg Schiano, who was just rehired last month. He had led Rutgers to multiple bowl appearances over 11 years before departing in 2011 to coach the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Holloway on Tuesday acknowledged concerns about the outsized role of athletic programs in the university environment but added that they are critical to the school's "purpose and pride" when directed ethically.

"Nothing can convene more people at once," he said of athletics programs. "It coheres community in a great way."

Staff Writer Scott Fallon contributed to this article.