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Dr. A. Charles Thomas
Dr. Colette Pierce Burnette becomes the first female president of the merged Huston-Tillotson University and only the second female president in the institution’s 140-year history.

Dr. Pierce Burnette is an experienced leader in higher education with a deep commitment to student success. In 2012, she served as interim president at Pierce College in Puyallup, WA, leading the college within a district environment and working collaboratively with executive leadership to serve more than 30,000 students each year. Dr. Pierce Burnette had an extensive career at Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio, from 1999 – 2012 that scaled to vice president for administration and CFO where she provided financial, analytical, physical plant, auxiliary services, capital construction and human resources leadership to achieve mission-based goals. In addition, at Central State University, Dr. Pierce Burnette served as vice president for information technology and chief information officer.
She earned her master of science degree in administration with honors from Georgia College in Milledgeville, GA, in 1983 after completing a bachelor of science degree in industrial and systems engineering from Ohio State University in Columbus, OH, in 1980. In 2003, Dr. Pierce Burnette was accepted and graduated from the Harvard Graduate School’s Education Management Development Program. She earned an Ed.D. in higher education administration at the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Pierce Burnette said, “I am deeply honored to serve as the sixth president of Huston-Tillotson University. When I stepped on the grounds of this campus and interacted with the distinguished faculty, administrators, alumni and bright and engaging students, I could see myself here. HT has a rich and remarkable history of preparing students for careers that enhance our society and world. The diverse student population, enhancement of STEM offerings, the future Community Health and Wellness Center, and this beautiful campus are just some of the reasons why I see Huston-Tillotson as a truly special place.”

Dr. Pierce Burnette is the mother of two children Daarel II, a journalist in Memphis, TN, and Daana, a public relations professional in New York, NY. She is married to Dr. Daarel Burnette, a proficient administrator and consultant in higher education finance and fiscal leadership. She is affiliated with many organizations and has membership in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell

Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell is the 10th president of Spelman College.
Prior to arriving in Atlanta, Dr. Campbell was a major force in the cultural life of New York City. Her career in New York began at the Studio Museum in Harlem, where she served for 10 years. Her role there began at a time when the city was on the verge of bankruptcy and Harlem was in steep decline. However, under her leadership, the museum was transformed from a rented loft to the country’s first accredited Black Fine Arts Museum. Dr. Campbell also established herself as a stalwart supporter who championed the need for professional development opportunities for women and people of color in the arts. When she left the Studio Museum of Harlem in 1987, the organization was recognized as a linchpin in the economic revitalization of the 125th street corridor and a major center for the study of the visual arts of the Black Atlantic.

New York’s late Mayor Edward I. Koch invited Dr. Campbell to serve as the city’s cultural affairs commissioner in 1987. In this role, she led the Department of Cultural Affairs which oversees the operations and capital development of the city’s major cultural institutions. As a commissioner, she gained a reputation as an indefatigable advocate for large and small arts organizations throughout all five boroughs.

Dr. Campbell returned to the private sector to become dean of New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts in the fall of 1991. In her more than two decades as dean, the Tisch School gained a reputation for producing artistic trailblazers in theater, film and interactive media. As dean, Dr. Campbell diversified both the student body and the faculty fourfold, and she incubated several new arts and technology divisions within the school and the university. She developed the NYU Game Center, The Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music, The Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program, and a joint MBA/MFA Graduate Film and Business program. Additionally, she doubled the size of the school’s Interactive Telecommunication Program and founded and chaired Tisch’s Department of Art and Public Policy, which examined the intersection of art, politics and public policy as it impacts individual artists and the institutions that support them in a democratic culture.

In September 2009, President Barack Obama appointed Dr. Campbell as the vice chair of the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, a non-partisan advisory committee to the President on cultural matters. As vice chair, Dr. Campbell took an active role in reaffirming the arts as one of the ingredients essential to effective public school education.

She is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and currently sits on the boards of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Estee Lauder Companies Charitable Foundation and the High Museum of Art, as well as on the advisory board of the Bonner Foundation. In 2017, Dr. Campbell was appointed to serve as a member of the Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments and Markers in the city of New York. She also holds numerous honorary degrees, including one from her alma mater, Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.

Currently, she is completing a book on Romare Bearden for Oxford University Press. Campbell received a bachelor’s of art degree in English literature from Swarthmore College, a master’s of art in art history from Syracuse University, and a doctorate in humanities, from Syracuse. She and her husband, Dr. George Campbell, Jr., president emeritus of The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, are the parents of three sons and have six grandchildren.

Dr. George T. French, Jr.

Dr. George T. French, Jr., is the the fifth president of Clark Atlanta University (CAU).

Dr. French served as president of Miles College, 2006-2019 before taking the lead at CAU. During his tenure, Miles College exceeded capital campaign goals —besting previous fundraising records, achieved an unprecedented financial composite score to position the school for growth, increased student access to educational funding, and more than doubled the size of the existing campus with key land acquisitions.
Prior to serving as the president of Miles College, Dr. French served in the roles of acting and interim president for the institution between October and December 2005. Before serving as interim president, Dr. French served as a member of the president’s cabinet in the capacity of director of institutional planning and development, and as such directed the offices of alumni affairs, federal contracts and grants, Title III, institutional research and effectiveness, congressional relations and public relations.

A native of Louisville, KY, Dr. French earned a bachelor of arts in political science with an emphasis in policy analysis from the University of Louisville. He was competitively accepted into the University of Richmond Law School and completed two years of studies before being recruited by Miles College to serve as the director of development. He completed his final year of law school at Miles Law School, earning a juris doctorate. Dr. French received his Ph.D. in higher education from Jackson State University.

Dr. French also has great influence off campus grounds. He served two terms, respectively, on the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges’ Board of Trustees, and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity. He is a member of the Birmingham Business Alliance’s Executive Committee and Birmingham Museum of Art’s Board of Directors. In 2015, Dr. French co-founded Higher Education Leader Foundation to help prepare highly-skilled talent for positions of leadership at historically Black colleges and universities.

“I am thankful and blessed to have the opportunity to lead another great institution and serve as the fifth president of Clark Atlanta University,” Dr. French said. “CAU has strong faculty, students and academics. I’m optimistic about the university’s next stage of growth and eager to build on the strong foundation CAU has established.”

Dr. Logan C. Hampton
Logan C. Hampton is 10th president of Lane College by the Lane College Board of Trustees, named to the post in 2014.

Dr. Hampton has a doctorate in higher education from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, received a master’s degree in student personnel services from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, LA, and a bachelor’s degree in biology from Arkansas Tech University. He also is a graduate of the Harvard Institute of Management and Leadership in Education. Before UALR, Hampton held positions at Texas A&M University, Texas Christian University and the University of Central Arkansas.

Prior to coming to Lane College, Hampton served in numerous student services capacities at UALR. His most recent appointment at UALR was vice provost for student affairs. In this position, Dr. Hampton served as the chief student affairs officer and led the student development and student life programs, including judicial affairs, budgetary and administrative services. In addition to working as a higher education administrator, Hampton was a member of the Board of Trustees for Arkansas Baptist College.

He and his wife, Susan, are the parents of three children: Elise, Crystal and Logan III.
A native of Kent, Ohio, Billy C. Hawkins, Ph.D., has a bachelor of science degree in teacher education from Ferris State University, a master of arts degree in education administration from Central Michigan University, and a doctorate of philosophy from Michigan State University in education administration. He has completed post-doctoral studies at Harvard University.

Hawkins has been in education for 36 years. He began his successful career as a teacher in the Lansing Michigan Public Schools System. His passion for teaching led him to the field of higher education where he has served as provost and vice president for academic affairs/professor at Mississippi Valley State University; vice president for academic affairs/professor at Saint Paul’s College in Lawrenceville, VA; acting dean, associate dean and assistant dean/professor in the College of Education at Ferris State University; and as director of the Educational Opportunity Program, State University of New York at Morrisville College.

Hawkins became the 20th president of Talladega College in 2008. He has transformed Talladega College and is moving it forward to its return of preeminence. Since his arrival, student enrollment has increased more than 70%, the entire physical plant has been upgraded, one classroom building has been renovated, restored and reopened; three dormitories were refurbished, a new police station was built, a $4.5 million rehabilitation/restoration of Foster Hall Dormitory began, finances have been restructured and stabilized, new academic programs have been added; he successfully guided the institution through a new 10-year SACS Accreditation, the college gained reinstatement to the NAIA National Athletic Association and won three national championships in men’s and women's basketball.
Previously, he served as the 20th president of Texas College from 2000 to 2007. Under Hawkins’ leadership, Texas College underwent a complete transformation and revitalization. Tremendous growth was evident in literally every area of the institution including an 82% increase in student enrollment within the first 10 months of his tenure. To his credit, the institution stabilized its finances, regained accreditation in 2001, and regained membership in UNCF.

Hawkins implemented five new academic programs, constructed three new facilities, remodeled all academic and student service facilities, procured property assets, eliminated all long-term debt, and started seven new athletic programs, which won three championships. Adding to the school’s successful turnaround, the college received a new 10-year accreditation in 2006.

An advocate for education, Hawkins was featured on the ABC Evening News with the late Peter Jennings and the U.S. News and World Report. He has been listed in Who’s Who among Executives and Professionals in 2005-2006. He is the author of two books, Educating All Students (A Pathway to Success) and Reaching for the Stars. Recognized for his expertise in the education of our nation’s young people, he has been the keynote speaker at regional and national conferences and has testified before committees of the U.S. Congress.

Hawkins currently serves on the Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of the Commission on Colleges, Board of Directors of the Ritz Theater in Talladega and has served on numerous other boards including being a member of the Southside Virginia Business and Education Commission appointed by former Virginia Gov. James S. Gilmore, III.

Additionally, he was appointed to serve on theHistorically Black Colleges and Universities Capital Financing Advisory Board by former Secretary of Education Rod Page. Also, he serves as a member of the UNCF Board of Directors, and is a current member of the NAIA President’s Council. He is the recipient of numerous honors and awards. Most recently in 2011, he was a recipient of the Ultimate 50 Who’s Who of Birmingham Award; he received the Omega Century Award of Excellence in Education from the National Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. He received the National Associate of Colored Women’s Clubs, Inc. Achievement Award, and the Texas Alliance of Black School Educators Leadership Award. Hawkins was inducted into the Kent City Schools Hall of Fame in 2004 and in 2007. He was also inducted into the Elementary Alumni Hall of Fame in Kent, OH.

Hawkins is a proud member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Dr. Walter Kimbrough
A native of Atlanta, Dr. Walter M. Kimbrough was his high school salutatorian and student body president in 1985, and went on to earn degrees from the University of Georgia, Miami University in Ohio, and a doctorate in higher education from Georgia State University. He has enjoyed a fulfilling career in student affairs, serving at Emory University, Georgia State University, Old Dominion University, and Albany State University. In October of 2004, at the age of 37, he was named the 12th president of Philander Smith College. In 2012 he became the 7th president of Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Kimbrough has been recognized for his research and writings on HBCUs and African American men in college. Recently he has emerged as one of the leaders discussing free speech on college campuses. Kimbrough also has been noted for his active use of social media. He was cited by Education Dive as one of 10 college presidents on Twitter who are doing it right (@HipHopPrez), and in 2015 he was named by The Best Schools.org as one of the 20 most interesting college presidents. In 2020 he was named by College Cliffs as one of 50 Top U.S. College and University Presidents.

Dr. Kimbrough has forged a national reputation as an expert on fraternities and sororities, with specific expertise regarding historically Black, Latin and Asian groups. He is the author of the book, *Black Greek 101: The Culture, Customs and Challenges of Black Fraternities and Sororities*, and has served as an expert witness in a number of hazing cases.
Dr. Ernest McNealey

Dr. Roderick L. Smothers
Dr. Roderick L. Smothers, Sr., was named 14th president of Philander Smith College on October 1, 2014, and began his tenure in January 2015. A dynamic scholar, transformative leader and forward-thinking visionary, Smothers is committed to building upon the institution’s strong and historic legacy, while advancing its mission to new levels of excellence. His focus is on strengthening academic programs, enhancing the college’s local and national presence, growing enrollment, increasing donor giving, and better equipping graduates with the qualifications, skills and resources that will allow them to compete in the globalized 21st century marketplace.

Previously, Smothers served as vice president for institutional advancement at two historically black universities: Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, TX, and Langston University in Langston, OK, where he was responsible for university development and fundraising, sponsored programs, marketing and public relations, external affairs, community engagement and alumni affairs. As an accomplished fundraiser, he has worked extensively with individuals, non-profit organizations, corporations, and foundations along with federal, regional and state agencies, and holds a cumulative fundraising/grant writing record that exceeds $60 million.

While at Langston, Smothers also served as the associate vice president for academic affairs, assistant dean of the school of education and behavioral sciences and assistant professor of education. Years prior, he was on the faculty of the University of Louisiana-Lafayette and was dean of enrollment management at South Louisiana Community College in Lafayette. His higher education career began at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, where he spent eight years as an administrator in academic and student affairs. As a higher education professional, he is also experienced in conducting scientific and applied research, facilitating data-driven, community-based interventions, and training educators aspiring to leadership roles in elementary and secondary school administration. His research agenda includes the past, present and future of historically black colleges and universities; the transformation of toxic urban school districts, strengthening the secondary and post-secondary educational pipelines for African American males; effective mentoring programs; the access dilemma in higher education for minority students; and the effectiveness of state merit-based tuition programs.

A native of Vidalia, LA, Smothers earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology, a master’s degree in public administration (with a concentration in higher education administration), and a doctoral degree in educational leadership, research and counseling, all from LSU. He also holds a certification in fundraising management from The Fund Raising School at The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University through the Thurgood Marshall College Fund Initiative. Additionally, he has served as a U.S. Air Force reservist with active-duty time spent during Desert Shield/Desert Storm.
Smothers holds membership in several professional organizations, including the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), American Association of Governing Boards (AGB), Research Association for Minority Professors (RAMP) and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). A strong youth, community and civic proponent, he currently serves on the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Texas Board of Directors. He formerly served on the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., National Board of Directors as its Southwestern regional vice president, and remains active at the local, regional and national levels. He looks forward to becoming engaged in service with the Central Arkansas community. In his leisure time, Smothers enjoys college sports, fishing, reading and traveling. He is the proud father of five children: Roderick Jr., Joshua, T’Keira, Wilson and T’Keyah.

Dr. Leroy Staggers

Dr. Leroy Staggers is the 10th president of Morris College. Joining the Morris College family in 1993, Dr. Staggers, whose passion for students’ intellectual growth, has provided dedicated service to Morris College for roughly 27 years. Most recently, he has served 16 years as the institution’s academic dean. As academic dean, Dr. Staggers was responsible for the supervision of all academic programs, all full-time and part-time faculty members as well as all academic support instructional programs. He worked very closely with former President Dr. Luns C. Richardson on all aspects of Morris College’s reaffirmation of accreditation efforts.
Before joining the Morris College family, he served as vice president of academic affairs, associate professor of English, and director of faculty development for Barber-Scotia College in Concord, NC. Additionally, he has served as instructor of English and reading at Alabama State University in Montgomery, AL, and chairman of the division of humanities and assistant professor of English at Voorhees College in Denmark, SC.

Dr. Staggers is a Salters, SC, native. He earned an undergraduate degree from Voorhees College and earned both masters and doctorate degrees from Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, GA. Also, he completed the Harvard University Institute for Education Management Program, which addresses the critical stewardship role played by senior-level leaders at their respective institutions. It provides a core set of conceptual tools for understanding both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of effective institutional leadership. Dr. Leroy Staggers is a member of Jehovah Missionary Baptist Church in Sumter, SC, where he served for six years as chairman of the board of trustees of the Jehovah Missionary Baptist Church Christian and Academic School.

Under his leadership, Dr. Staggers has initiated the first phase of upgrading the campus broadband infrastructure, implemented a campus wide Hypersign digital communication system, as well as initiated a complete redesign of the Morris College website and has begun the process of a campus beautification to include a new digital marquee at the front of the campus. “Dr. Staggers has a deep passion for Morris College. We are confident in his ability to lead Morris into the future without losing the momentum built by our late and legendary president, Dr. Luns C. Richardson,” said Dr. James Blassingame, president, Baptist E&M Convention.
Prior to his appointment at Xavier, Dr. Verret served as provost and chief academic officer for Savannah State University. He served also as provost at Wilkes University in Pennsylvania and as dean of the Misher College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of the Sciences in Philadelphia. At these institutions, he led the revisions of general education curricula, oversaw accreditations, developed international programs, established collaborative agreements with neighboring institutions at the K-12 and higher education levels, instituted new state-approved academic programs, promoted interdisciplinary efforts between the humanities and sciences, and planned new facilities. Dr. Verret also served on faculty at Tulane University and also at Clark Atlanta University, where he was chair of the department of chemistry for many years.

As a scientist, Dr. Verret’s research interests have included the cytotoxicity of immune cells, biosensors and biomarkers. He has published in the fields of biological chemistry and immunology. At the University of the Sciences, he led a faculty effort establishing a knowledge network on social exclusion in support of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health within the World Health Organization.

Throughout, Dr. Verret works to enhance student achievement and progression to degree. He has contributed to increasing the number of U.S. students pursuing degrees in STEM disciplines and continuing to advanced study. This has included initiatives to mitigate the shortage of qualified science and math teachers in K-12.

He has served on many professional organizations and advisory bodies, including those of the National Institutes of Health, the Board of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council and the Georgia Coastal Indicators Coalition. He has received awards and fellowships for teaching and scholarship.

Dr. Verret received his undergraduate degree cum laude in biochemistry from Columbia University and Ph.D. in biochemistry from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. To these, were added postdoctoral experiences as fellow at the Howard Hughes Institute for Immunology at Yale and the Center for Cancer Research at MIT.

Officers of the Corporation

Dr. Michael L. Lomax
Since 2004, Dr. Michael L. Lomax has served as president and CEO of UNCF, the nation’s largest private provider of scholarships and other educational support to African American students and a leading advocate of college readiness: students’ need for an education, from pre-school through high school, that prepares them for college success. Under his leadership, UNCF has raised more than $3 billion and helped more than 110,000 students earn college degrees and launch careers. Annually, UNCF’s work enables 60,000 students to go to college with UNCF scholarships and attend its 37 member historically black college and universities (HBCUs).

At UNCF's helm, Dr. Lomax oversees the organization's 400 scholarship programs, which award 10,000 scholarships a year. He also launched the UNCF Institute for Capacity Building, which helps UNCF’s member HBCUs become stronger, more effective and more self-sustaining.

Under Dr. Lomax’s leadership, UNCF has fought for college readiness and education reform through partnerships with reform-focused leaders and organizations and worked to further advance HBCUs with Congress, the administration and the Department of Education. He serves on the boards of the KIPP Foundation, America’s Promise, Teach for America and the Studio Museum in Harlem.

Before joining UNCF, Dr. Lomax was president of Dillard University in New Orleans and a literature professor at UNCF-member institutions Morehouse and Spelman Colleges. He also founded the National Black Arts Festival, was a founding member of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) and served as chairman of the Fulton County Commission in Atlanta, the first African American elected to that post.

Get to know the CEO
Desireé Boykin is the senior vice president, general counsel and secretary for UNCF. She joined UNCF in 2002 and provides advice and counsel to the UNCF Board of Directors, senior staff and member presidents in the areas of higher education, insurance, constitutional law, intellectual property, corporate compliance and corporate governance. She was elected secretary of the corporation in October 2017. Additionally, she practices probate, contracts, employment and nonprofit law. Desirée manages UNCF’s legacy portfolio (testamentary gifts), which has resulted in more than $67 million in revenue during her tenure.

Prior to joining UNCF, Desirée was an associate attorney at the law office of John Paul Simpkins, where she was responsible for all phases of general civil practice including personal injury, product liability, family law and medical malpractice.

She has numerous professional and civic affiliations, including membership in the National Bar Association, the Greater Washington Area Chapter Women Lawyers Division, Howard University Alumni Association, DC Club and the Howard University School of Law Alumni Association.

Desirée has a law degree from Howard University School of Law and a bachelor’s degree in communications from Howard University.