



Blackburn College Names Dr. Mark Biermann As 18th President

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CARLINVILLE – The Blackburn College Board of Trustees is pleased to announce that Dr. Mark Biermann has been named the next President of Blackburn College. He succeeds Provost Dr. John McClusky, who has served Blackburn as Interim President since December. Dr. Biermann will assume office on August 15, 2020.

Mike Smiley '71, chairman of the Blackburn College Board of Trustees, cited Biermann's exceptional administrative and academic background as well as his demonstrated enthusiasm for Blackburn's unique student-managed Work Program among the reasons he emerged as the best possible candidate to lead Blackburn at this key moment in the College's history.

"Dr. Biermann's proven leadership and educational experience is the perfect fit for Blackburn," said Smiley. "We believe he is the right person to help shape the College's future and we welcome him and his family to the Blackburn community."

The selection of Dr. Biermann concludes a national search that formally launched in January 2020. A dedicated search committee consisting of 10 trustees, 4 staff, 4 faculty, and the Student Marshall spent countless hours reviewing information and interviewing an extremely competitive pool of qualified candidates.

"Blackburn's unique educational model and values resonated with all applicants, especially Dr. Biermann, in a profound way," Smiley said.

"I believe that Blackburn is a national leader in what is probably the single most important area for a college or university: social mobility," Dr. Biermann said. "Blackburn not only aspires to but is clearly succeeding in providing a distinctive and innovative model for higher education in America."

He continued, "I am humbled and honored by the privilege of serving as the next President of Blackburn College. Higher education and society more broadly must embrace the current opportunity to oppose and eliminate systemic racism and discrimination in all forms. Blackburn is uniquely positioned to address these issues with its focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity, and its singular commitment to lifting its students and communities through personal attention and outreach. Blackburn's story needs to be shared and I look forward to supporting this work as we begin a new chapter for this remarkable institution."

Dr. Biermann has spent his entire professional career in higher education, holding a range of positions at a number of different colleges and universities. Biermann currently serves as Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs at Valparaiso University in Indiana, responsible for all academic programs, student affairs, retention

and student success, diversity and inclusion, innovation, and institutional effectiveness. Since 2014, he has led the effort to study, develop, and launch a comprehensive retention strategy, leading to first-to-second year retention improvements of 4.7% year to year in 2019. Biermann also worked closely with Valparaiso's leadership in order to develop and implement a financial model that strengthens Valparaiso for long-term flourishing, including a \$250 million comprehensive campaign.

Prior to Valpo, Dr. Biermann has been an assistant or associate professor of physics at Whitworth College, Buena Vista University, Houghton College, and the United States Naval Academy, where he first earned tenure. Biermann served as Chair of the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Eastern Kentucky University and the inaugural dean of the School of Natural and Applied Sciences at Taylor University, leading the development and implementation of the administrative structures of this new School. He then served as the Dean of the Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Wartburg College.

Dr. Biermann earned a Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. in Optics from the University of Rochester. Biermann is married to the former Lois Ann Aude of Waterloo, NY, who also earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Optics at the University of Rochester. Together they are raising two daughters, Grace and Hope. The entire family is looking forward to joining Blackburn and the Carlinville community.

"As we look to the future at Blackburn College, the Board of Trustees are grateful for the commitment and leadership of Provost John McClusky," Smiley said. "Dr. McClusky has been with Blackburn since 2015 and we thank him for his service, deftly guiding the college during this period of transition and its response to a global pandemic."

Founded in 1837, Blackburn College is a four-year, Presbyterian-related, co-educational liberal arts college located in Carlinville, IL. One of nine federally-recognized Work Colleges, Blackburn has the only student-managed Work Program in the nation providing an opportunity to develop critical skills and build a resume along with their degrees. In September 2019, U.S. News & World Report recognized Blackburn College as one of the top 10 best Liberal Arts Colleges in the Nation for Social Mobility. The Center for Education & the Workforce at Georgetown University ranked Blackburn as a top performer for Earnings-Price Return - 209% (#1 in IL, #10 in U.S.) and Net Price (#1 in IL; #11 in U.S.). The Washington Monthly twice ranked Blackburn as the best baccalaureate college in Illinois.

Dr. Mark Biermann, Incoming President of Blackburn College