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Princeton Names Its First Female President

BY JAMILAH EVELYN

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY has named its first female president, an internationally renowned molecular biologist who has been on the faculty since 1986.

Shirley M. Caldwell Tilghman will become Princeton's 19th president in June. She joins a growing number of women heading Ivy League institutions; the others are Judith Rodin, president of the University of Pennsylvania, and Ruth J. Simmons, who will become president of Brown University in July.

"I think of Princeton as my home," Ms. Tilghman said. "I can't think of a better way to spend the last part of my professional life than helping give back to Princeton what it has given to me."

Ms. Tilghman won Princeton's highest teaching honor in 1996 and has headed the university's Lewis-Sigler Institute for Integrative Genomics since 1988. She is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, and the Royal Society of London, among other organizations.

Princeton's choice of a woman is significant in part because the university was among the last in the Ivy League to admit women, in 1969. But the decision represents a bold move for other reasons, too.

It is rare for a college, especially an elite research university, to choose a president who is a scholar and teacher but who has never held a senior administrative post. Slightly less than 5 percent of all college presidents come directly from the faculty ranks, compared with 68 percent who were presidents, provosts, or senior executives, like chief fund raisers, in their previous jobs, according to a study by the American Council on Education, using data from 1998.

Robert H. Rawson Jr., chairman of the Board of Trustees' executive committee and head of the presidential search committee, said that

while Ms. Tilghman's selection was unconventional, he had no doubts that she is up to the job. She had shown administrative talent in running her lab, which required skillful planning, budgeting, hiring, and fund raising, he said. He considers her an able leader, someone who "is able to develop a vision, to develop a plan, to put it into place, and to inspire people to follow her down that road." Besides, he added, she will have a seasoned staff and a supportive board.

"One of the main things that motivated us was to look for a person that resonated with the values we associate with Princeton: the combination, the wedding, of scholarship and teaching," he said.

"She will bring fresh eyes and a different perspective to university management," he added.

John V. Fleming, an English professor, called the new president a "person of transparent integrity and great personal charm."

"She focuses on you when she talks," he said. "She listens."

"For a faculty member, this is a very inspiring and inspired choice."

ONE OF ITS OWN

Ms. Tilghman's selection was also somewhat unusual because she was on the presidential search committee that was formed last fall when Princeton's current president, Harold T. Shapiro, said that he would step down in June after 13 years. She left a committee meeting early to teach a class one day, and the rest of its members decided to ask her to step down from the panel so that they could consider her for the presidency.

"At that point there were perhaps two or three strong candidates," said Thomas H. Wright, vice president and secretary at Princeton, and secretary to the search committee. "There was

some real concern that our admiration and affection, based on our associations with her, would overwhelm our good judgment. Because of that, she was held to a higher standard than the rest of the candidates."

Ms. Tilghman sparked some controversy several years ago when she wrote an opinion piece in *The New York Times* asserting that the tenure-review process puts women at a disadvantage because it often comes up during their child-bearing years.

"I really just intended to broadly talk about the challenges to increasing the participation of women in the sciences," she said last week. "What I learned from the reactions I got from that is that there's a way to be deliberately provocative that contributes to the message, and there are ways that hurt the message."

Ms. Tilghman has served on a number of panels on ethics in molecular biology, including stem-cell research. She was a researcher on the Human Genome Project.

"She is truly an eminent scholar," said Mark Johnston, chairman of Princeton's philosophy department and a member of the search committee. "But one of the things that really impressed us was that we found a consistent theme of service both within and outside of the Princeton community."

Ms. Tilghman, 54, has a daughter who is a junior and an art-history major at Princeton, and an 18-year-old son who just graduated from high school. Ms. Tilghman is divorced. She got her bachelor's degree from Queens University, in Ontario, and her Ph.D. in biochemistry from Temple University.

Her salary had not yet been discussed, Mr. Rawson said.

Kit Lively contributed to this article.