

Bennington College Appoints Laura R. Walker as 11th President

Bennington College Media Relations <mediarelations@bennington.edu>
(10 days ago)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 1, 2020
CONTACT: Alex Dery Snider, aderysnider@bennington.edu, 802-440-4399

Bennington College Appoints Laura R. Walker as 11th President

BENNINGTON, Vt. – June 1, 2020 – Laura R. Walker [has been selected](#) to be the next President of Bennington College. A pioneering media executive and leader in the arts, Walker has a long record of empowering prominent non-profit institutions to realize their creative potential and strengthen their impact.

Walker is widely recognized for leading the transformation of New York Public Radio (NYPR) into an independent media powerhouse -- effectively setting and supporting an entirely new paradigm for public media -- and for spearheading highly successful, innovative initiatives at Sesame Workshop and Carnegie Hall. Active in the academic realm, with a particular dedication to progressive education, she was a long-time member of the board of Saint Ann's School and Education Development Center, and currently serves on The President's Council at Wesleyan University and Yale School of Management's Center for Customer Insights. Today she serves as a Becton Fellow and an Executive Fellow at the Yale School of Management.

Walker will succeed Mariko Silver, who stepped down in July 2019, and Interim President Dr. Isabel Roche, who has served for the past year in this role. Walker will formally start her term as President Elect on July 1 and become President on August 1, 2020.

"Laura is the unique, emboldened leader who can serve as both a visionary and a change agent. Throughout her career, she has ignited profound innovation, paving new paths in journalism, public broadcasting and the arts, and her fresh ideas are complemented greatly by a demonstrable ability to lead through change," said Nick Stephens, Chair of the Board of Trustees of Bennington College. "This trademark skill and style was most evident at New York Public Radio, where Laura took a small, local news station and turned it into a media powerhouse, changing the way news is consumed on local and national levels. We are thrilled to welcome her to Bennington in this moment of rapid cultural, economic, and educational change, to guide the college into the next chapter of its story as a fearless and innovative institution."

Walker served as President and Chief Executive Officer of NYPR for 23 years, overseeing the largest, most lucrative growth period in the media entity's history, and perhaps one of the most significant media expansions of its kind. Under Walker's leadership, NYPR developed into an independent non-profit that grew to own the largest public radio station group in the country.

Walker's success at NYPR spans a number of categories, from increases in audience size, revenue, and capital endowment, to the creation of one of the largest newsrooms in New York, the expansion of company holdings with a number of strategic acquisitions, and the launch of

major programs and platforms that elevated the brand, including one of the first formal podcast divisions of its kind. During her tenure, Walker raised more than \$150 million in long-term investments, expanded NYPR's audience from one million monthly listeners to more than 25 million, and increased the annual operating budget from \$8 million to \$97 million.

Walker oversaw the launch of more than 20 nationally distributed NYPR programs, including *Radiolab*, *The New Yorker Radio Hour*, *More Perfect*, *Freakonomics Radio*, and *Two Dope Queens*, all part of NYPR's podcast division, *WNYC Studios*. She also founded the popular women's podcasting festival *Werk It*, and led the acquisition of the online digital platform *The Gothamist*, as well as *WQXR*, *New Jersey Public Radio* and *Pocketcasts*. For its editorial work during Walker's time at the helm, the organization was honored with 10 George Foster Peabody Awards and five Alfred I. DuPont Columbia Awards.

"Bennington's rich history and distinguished approach to a liberal arts education set it widely apart from many other institutions, and I am both honored and humbled to serve as the College's next President," said Walker. "Every institution of higher learning has an important responsibility to strive for a better and more just world. The need for change and progress is as clear and as serious today as it's ever been and I believe Bennington can and will contribute significantly to making positive change. I look forward to serving as both a steward of and explorer on Bennington's path to the future, upholding its proud traditions while helping the college to forge its own course in a changing world, and always seeking to achieve the most for its students, faculty, staff and alumni."

Prior to joining NYPR, Walker served as Vice President of Development at Sesame Workshop (then Children's Television Workshop), and on the staff of the storied arts venue Carnegie Hall.

Walker began her career as a print journalist and news producer at National Public Radio. She holds a Master's of Business Administration from the Yale School of Management and a Bachelor's of Arts in History magna cum laude from Wesleyan University, where she was an Olin Scholar.

"Laura brings a bold and powerful vision for Bennington that builds on its tradition of innovation and creativity," said Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation. "She is the president Bennington needs as it goes into a challenging period for higher education which will require unconventional thinking, new ideas and courageous leadership."

Walker was honored with the Municipal Arts Society of New York's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Medal (2019), the Edward R. Murrow Award from the Corporation for Public Broadcast (2008), and was twice named to *Crain's* 50 Most Powerful Women in New York City.

Walker is an advisor to Springboard Enterprises and MasterClass, as well as various venture capital foundations and startups in the media space. She is a member of The Commonwealth Fund Board of Trustees, The President's Council at Wesleyan University, and Yale School of Management's Center for Customer Insights. She is married to Bert Wells, an attorney who holds a doctorate in Mathematics and has two young adult children.

“Congratulations to Bennington and to Laura Walker on this superb news, one of the most promising developments in higher education these days,” said Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, Senior Associate Dean for Leadership Studies and Lester Crown Professor of Leadership Practice, Yale School of Management. “Bennington has always been a pioneer in education with concern for social impact and reflection. Laura has always been a pioneer in media as well as non-profit on learning and social impact. Laura is the perfect leader in this time of disruption in so many levels from campus health, institutional finances, social justice, new technologies of teaching, and educational purpose. I have closely watched Laura build bridges across constituencies to catalyzing new shared purpose; ideas, arts, learning, and technology in the media world across sectors. Laura, as a magnet for talent and other resources, will lead Bennington’s bold mission into this new challenging era with inspiration, energy, collaboration.”

The selection was made after a rigorous presidential search and inclusive interview process led by a committee of Bennington College faculty, staff, and members of the Board of Trustees. This spring, all faculty, staff, and students had several opportunities to hear from each candidate and to submit their feedback to the committee. The Board voted today on Walker’s appointment, and is grateful for the time and attention that so many members of the Bennington community devoted to the process. In particular, they are deeply grateful to Dr. Isabel Roche, who has ably led the College over the past year as Interim President, and spearheaded its [COVID-19 Response](#) and its [Fall 2020 Plan](#) for reopening campus with a blended in-person/remote model.

#

About Bennington College

Bennington College is a pioneering liberal arts school located on 440 acres in the Green Mountains of southwestern Vermont. It has distinguished itself for more than eighty years by its commitment to rigorous student-directed, experiential, and hands-on learning. Founded in 1932, Bennington was the first in the country to include visual and performing arts in a liberal arts education, and is the only college of its kind to make an extended term of real work in the world central to each student’s educational plan. The College offers a full range of study, with programs in the humanities, natural sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and visual and performing arts. Additional graduate programs include a Master of Fine Arts in Writing, a Master of Fine Arts in Dance, a Masters of Fine Arts in Music, a Masters of Fine Arts in Public Action, and a Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program.

Media Relations
Bennington College