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Sweet Briar College Names Meredith Woo as Next President

Noted scholar, global leader in higher education, experienced administrator is 'ideal' fit for College's new era

SWEET BRIAR, Va. (Feb. 6, 2017) — Sweet Briar College today announced the appointment of noted scholar, liberal arts advocate, experienced administrator and global leader for women's education Meredith Woo as the College's 13th president. She will succeed Phillip C. Stone, who will retire in May 2017.

Woo served as the Buckner W. Clay Dean of the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences at the University of Virginia (2008-14). As dean, she oversaw 11,000 undergraduate students, 1,600 graduate students and 800 full-time faculty, and was a noted innovator and reformer of its graduate programs, international partnerships and fundraising operations. Annual philanthropic support for the College nearly tripled under her leadership.

Most recently, Woo has been in London working as director of the Higher Education Support Program for the Open Society Foundations. This program is responsible for creating and supporting more than 50 liberal arts colleges in the former Soviet bloc and supporting higher education for refugee populations in the Middle East, South Asia and Africa.

"Meredith stood out as a star among stars in our search process, but what was undeniable was her passion for women's education, her commitment to innovation and solution-making and her desire to be part of a close-knit community," said Teresa Pike Tomlinson '87, chairwoman of the board of directors and of the Presidential Search Committee. "She is our ideal fit. She can see a vision of strength for this College and has the capability to lead us there."

"It is a privilege to have the opportunity to work with a College so beloved," Woo said. "Educating women is like educating generations. Around the world, I have seen the demand for superior women's education and the demand for the graduates of those institutions. Here at Sweet Briar, we have a real opportunity to recast the significance of single-sex higher education in today's world, and I'm excited to be a part of that effort."

Prior to UVa, Woo was the associate dean for social sciences at the University of Michigan and a tenured professor of political science. She was a visiting scholar at the Ministry of Finance in Tokyo. She also taught at Northwestern University in Illinois and at Columbia University in New York.

Woo holds a Ph.D. in political science as well as an M.A. in international affairs, both from Columbia University, and a B.A. from Bowdoin College in Maine. Her specialty is international and comparative politics with a focus on East Asia. A native of Seoul, Korea, she speaks Korean and Japanese and is proficient in Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese. She has authored or edited six books and numerous scholarly articles, and she is the executive producer of an award-winning film, which premiered at the Smithsonian Institution in 2006.

Woo is married to Bruce Cumings, an author, lecturer, and the Gustavus F. and Ann M. Swift Distinguished Service Professor of History at the University of Chicago. Their son, Ben Cumings, 23, is a recent graduate of Bowdoin College and an aspiring actor.

On April 3, 2017, President-elect Woo will begin a transition period at the College, working closely with President Stone. On May 15, 2017, she will assume the helm as the next president of Sweet Briar College.

Nationally recognized search firm Storbeck/Pimentel & Associates, led by partner Anne Coyle, facilitated the Sweet Briar presidential search process.

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Sweet Briar College is a women's liberal arts and sciences college located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Central Virginia. Sweet Briar was founded in 1901. More than a century later, it continues to empower and educate young women to build and reshape their world however their passions lead them. Sweet Briar focuses on personal and professional achievement through a customized educational program that combines liberal arts and sciences, preparation for careers and individual development. Its faculty and staff guide students to become active learners, to reason clearly, to speak and write persuasively and to lead with integrity. They do so by creating an educational environment that is both intense and supportive, and where learning occurs in many different venues, including the classroom, the community and the world.

On March 3, 2015, prior leadership of the College announced its impending closure. That leadership was successfully challenged in Virginia courts by alumnae, faculty and students, and the Virginia attorney general led a mediation effort that resulted in the College staying open and a new president, Phillip C. Stone, and a new board of directors taking the helm on July 2, 2015. Since the installation of new leadership, the College has garnered national headlines for exceeding budgeting and fundraising expectations, among other important milestones and higher education accolades.