

Louisiana College to seek new president

April 18, 2014

Rather than losing his job or getting a contract extension, an embattled Baptist college president in Louisiana will return to the classroom with an honorary title, and trustees will search for a new president to replace him.

☒ Joe Aguillard [Louisiana College](#) trustees voted April 15 to designate President Joe Aguillard as president emeritus, a title typically used in academia to recognize distinguished service, effective Aug. 1. Argile Smith, associate dean of the Louisiana College Caskey School of Divinity, will function as interim president while trustees seek a new president.

Aguillard, 57, will remain at the [Louisiana Baptist Convention](#) school in Pineville as a tenured professor in the graduate teacher education program. Aguillard served on the faculty as assistant professor and chair of the education division prior to his election as eighth president of Louisiana College in 2005.

Controversy over Aguillard's hiring

Controversy surrounded his hiring. First, a nine-member presidential search committee interviewed six candidates and narrowed the field to three before offering the job to Malcolm Yarnell, now a professor at [Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary](#).

Yarnell withdrew his name from consideration after failing to reach a contract agreement. Rather than moving to another finalist, trustees added six members to the search committee, and Aguillard was nominated as president.

- ☒ Argile SmithAt a subsequent meeting, Aguillard was nominated again, this time with another candidate, John Traylor, a retired pastor who had served as interim president.

Trustees voted 17-13 in favor of Aguillard. A group of alumni filed a lawsuit accusing trustees of violating bylaws and asking a judge to limit selection to a nominee recognized by the original search committee. A district court agreed a majority of trustees did not follow established procedure but ruled the election valid nonetheless.

Controversy about Aguillard's leadership intensified in 2013 when he declined to renew contracts of three faculty members who supposedly were promoting Calvinism.

Two vice presidents filed whistleblower complaints, prompting a meeting in April 2013 where trustees voted to retain Aguillard as president 17-13.

Documents allege misdeeds by Aguillard

Previously unreleased internal documents recently surfaced alleging misdeeds by Aguillard, including misappropriation of funds, lying to donors and trustees and ignoring sexual misconduct by a staff member paid hush money after threatening to go public with inside information.

Timothy Johnson, former executive vice president at Louisiana College, filed a lawsuit March 11 claiming wrongful termination in retaliation for obeying the school's whistleblower policy. The other whistleblower, former vice president Chuck Quarles, released audio recordings that appeared to contradict a press release on the college website declaring Aguillard "fully exonerated" of the whistleblower claims.

- ☒ Timothy JohnsonThe Southern Association of Colleges and Schools indicated it would investigate allegations in the leaked documents that

signatures were forged on documents submitted prior to SACS reaffirming Louisiana College's accreditation after two years on warning status.

Aguillard reportedly told senior staff he had no plans to step down as president, after a local newspaper reported he had lost trustee support and been asked to resign. Bloggers critical of Aguillard said trustees, who as recently as last month reportedly planned to renew his contract, had no alternative except to fire him.

The *Town Talk* newspaper in Alexandria, La., reported Aguillard will begin a one-year paid sabbatical June 1 at his full \$202,007 base salary. When he returns to the classroom he will receive 50 percent of his current base salary—\$101,003.50—for his first year as a senior professor and 30 percent of his current base salary—\$60,602.10—for all subsequent years he works at the college.

Trustees honor Aguillard

Trustee Chairman Tommy French released a statement crediting Aguillard for serving the college "with diligence, fortitude and Christian commitment." He announced trustees "voted to bestow upon Dr. Aguillard the honor of continuing his contributions to Louisiana College in the role of president emeritus."

According to the *Town Talk*, trustees also voted 18-14 to approve a new confidentiality agreement that French reportedly told trustees was required by SACS. The newspaper contacted a SACS official who said the agency has no such requirement.

French told the *Baptist Message*, news journal for the Louisiana Baptist Convention, Aguillard's last day as president is May 31.