

NEWS

Tech names first Chief Diversity Officer

Published Friday Jun 28, 2019 | [MEDIA RESOURCES \(/NEWS/\)](#)

For more than 40 years, Marc Burnett has worked diligently to bring diversity to Tennessee Tech's campus. It came as no surprise, then, that he has been named the university's first Chief Diversity Officer, in addition to his role as vice president of Student Affairs.

"It's an honor. As an African American man, I want to see us be better at diversity on this campus," Burnett said.

"We can't live in a world that is not diverse. Our students don't benefit from that and our employees

don't benefit from that. It should be diverse. It's a responsibility and a duty to make sure this campus is as diverse as it can be."



The role of Chief Diversity Officer took shape as the faculty-led Tech Tomorrow Strategic Planning workgroups delved into achieving the goal of a more diverse campus. They determined a strong leader assigned the responsibility for leading diversity-related initiatives would help shape institutional culture.

Burnett will be an advocate for those initiatives at the president's cabinet level. He'll focus on developing, executing and monitoring strategic efforts around diversity, inclusion and equity for students, faculty and staff, specifically with regard to recruitment, admissions and enrollment.

"I know the board and I share a lot of interest in moving diversity initiatives along on the campus," said Tennessee Tech President Phil Oldham at the June 20 Board of Trustees meeting.

"The strategic planning group has worked very hard on developing ideas and strategies on how to improve our overall diversity on campus, and I applaud their efforts."

One of the group's strong suggestions was to name a Chief Diversity Officer, to which Oldham "agrees totally."

"I think in Marc Burnett we have found the ideal person in that Marc's commitment to the university is extremely well-known," Oldham said.

A standout basketball player for the Golden Eagles, Burnett graduated from Tech in 1982 with a bachelor's degree in English/Journalism. He has also earned two graduate degrees from Tech: a master's in educational psychology, and a educational specialist degree in administration and supervision. As the lead administrator in student affairs, he has worked with students, faculty and staff to create and maintain student development. He has overseen policies and programs performed within the Division of Student Affairs.

"I love this university. This is my university," Burnett said. "It is all I have known and it means the world to me."

Oldham also told the board that Burnett has announced he is retiring at the end of this calendar year, which led to more discussion between the two men about what Burnett can accomplish in six months with his new responsibilities.

"We both believe he can do a lot of good for us in this diversity effort, even in those six months," Oldham said. "He will help set the tone for these efforts and in that time period we will then begin to work on what comes next"

Burnett also serves as pastor of a local church and is an accomplished artist.

This new role will not open new offices or staff needs, but give the university a high-profile individual who can provide guidance to the campus, as well as provide a single person to oversee Tech's diversity initiatives across many departments.

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Cookeville, TN 38505

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