

FAMU NEWS

'New leadership is essential': FAMU interim president Beard asks for resignations



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Florida A&M University interim President Timothy Beard has asked for the immediate resignations of his entire senior leadership team, effective Tuesday.

And one administrator is already out the door, according to an email obtained by the Tallahassee Democrat.

"The purpose of this communication is to let you know that effective immediately, I am no longer employed at FAMU," Athletics Director Tiffani-Dawn Sykes wrote in the email to athletics staff. "Please route any questions or concerns to AVP for Athletics, Michael Smith until you receive additional direction from Interim President Timothy Beard. Best of luck to you each of you!"

BREAKING: 'That's on me': Florida A&M interim president discusses resignation order, next steps

The email was not verified by FAMU officials, which have not responded to requests for comment.

Beard sent the request for resignations to leadership team members Monday to notify them of his directive and has scheduled one-on-one meetings with the individuals for Tuesday.

Not only does Beard's request come a week into his tenure as interim president, but also at a critical time for the university as the fall semester starts in a couple of weeks and the football season is about to commence, along with vital preparations for the start of the 2024-2025 academic year.

“As you know, our university (FAMU) is at a critical juncture, where we must align our leadership, vision and strategies to meet the evolving challenges and opportunities ahead,” Beard said in the letter first published by HBCU GameDay.

The move comes as the fallout continues from the donation debacle that rocked the university. Last week, an investigative report determined that a Texas hemp farmer's "fraudulent" \$237 million gift to Florida A&M University hoodwinked administrators. The Board of Trustees, calling for accountability, voted to take steps to bolster its gift acceptance policies.

Attempts to get immediate confirmation of the resignations and comments Tuesday from Beard and FAMU Board of Trustees Chair Kristin Harper were unsuccessful.

FAMU Director of Communications Keith Miles, who resigned per Beard's directive, says he is “appreciative” of the opportunity he had of working with the university's Office of Communications.

“We have a great team, and I've had the wonderful privilege of working with them. I'm happy that I had the opportunity to help move FAMU forward,” Miles told the Democrat Tuesday afternoon during a phone call.

“I think we can take some pride in the rankings of being no. 91 (in the nation) and the no. 1 public HBCU for five years in a row. A big part of that was people being aware of what was going on at FAMU.”

Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President Donald Palm and FAMU Director of Government Relations Danielle McBeth, both members of the senior leadership team, declined to comment on the matter while at Lee Hall Tuesday, where Beard held the individual meetings.

“Please know that this request may not be a reflection of your individual contributions or dedication to our institution,” Beard wrote in the letter to his team. “Your hard work and commitment to the university over the years have been invaluable, and we deeply appreciate the many ways you have served our community. However, at this time, we believe that new leadership is essential for the University to achieve its long-term goals.”

The FAMU senior leadership team, which directly reports to Beard, consists of nearly 20 members — including Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President Donald Palm,

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Allyson Watson, Chief of Staff Linda Barge-Miles, Vice President of Student Affairs William Hudson and Sykes,

Florida Board of Governors Chair Brian Lamb declined to comment on the FAMU matter before the university's Board of Trustees, according to the State University System's Associate Vice Chancellor of Public Affairs Tony Lee.

According to the letter, Beard's decision for a change in the leadership was made "after careful consideration and in consultation" with the FAMU Board of Trustees, former President Larry Robinson — who stepped down and officially ended his presidential tenure Aug. 4 — and from his own observations.

Like Beard's expeditious decision making, Robinson enforced similar directives during his time as an interim president at FAMU years ago.

A few days into Robinson's tenure as FAMU's interim president in 2016, he terminated three top aides to his predecessor Elmira Mangum — Provost Marcella David, chief of staff Jimmy Miller and Elise Durham, assistant vice president for communications — along with three other individuals who served as assistants to the president.

More: Robinson begins housecleaning at FAMU

Other FAMU news: 'Lack of common sense': FAMU trustees discuss report on 'fraudulent' donation

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