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Brandeis president to resign, join Yale Law School

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WENDY MAEDA/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Brandeis University President Frederick M. Lawrence.

By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 30, 2015

Brandeis University President Frederick M. Lawrence announced Friday he will step down at the end of the academic year to become a senior research scholar at Yale Law School.

In a campuswide letter, Lawrence said he was “tremendously proud of the ways Brandeis has grown and thrived” since he took over as the eighth president of the Waltham college in January 2011, and is “looking forward to returning to full-time scholarship and teaching.”

“Brandeis is a strong, vital, and dynamic institution, and I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside so many extraordinary students, faculty, alumni, staff, parents, and friends of the university,” Lawrence said in a statement.

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Lawrence, a prominent civil rights scholar, holds a law degree from Yale.

Before he took the helm at Brandeis, Lawrence worked for five years as a dean and professor at George Washington Law School, taught at Boston University Law school for nearly two decades, headed the national legal affairs committee of the Anti-Defamation League, and has practiced law, including a stint as an assistant US attorney for the southern district of New York during the 1980s.

University officials credited Lawrence for improvements and growth at Brandeis.

Brandeis trustee chairman Perry M. Traquina said in a statement that Lawrence “has brought an unbridled energy and enthusiasm to our campus, and our students have benefited greatly from Fred’s hands-on approach—to their education and student experience” and “has worked tirelessly to move our university forward and has the results to show for it.”

Traquina said applications to the university have risen 35 percent during his tenure, that Lawrence has made “significant progress” toward balancing the university’s budget, and the school’s endowment is at a record high. Audited financial statements put the endowment at about \$860 million at the end of the latest fiscal year in June.

But the statements also show declining contributions to the school while Lawrence has been president. College presidents are increasingly valued by their ability to raise funds.

While the school brought in about \$90 million annually on average during the four years before Lawrence took over, contributions dropped in each of the four years under his watch, averaging about \$37 million annually, the statements show. The school raised \$63.8 million in 2010, the year before he started, and raised \$32.5 million last year, according to the statements.

A Brandeis spokesman said fund-raising is up since June, when the university put out its most recent financial statement.

A native of Long Island, N.Y., who earned his bachelor’s degree from Williams College in 1977, Lawrence joined Brandeis amid some angst after the school’s endowment plummeted during the recession and after the university laid off staffers, cut employee benefits, and retreated on a proposal to shut down its popular Rose Art Museum and sell its collection.

Lawrence’s efforts to shore up the school’s finances have involved tuition increases and cutbacks, including buyouts.

Meanwhile, the college has faced criticism and protests by students, faculty, alumni and others after a Globe

report in November 2013 revealed that Lawrence’s predecessor, Jehuda Reinharz, has received millions of dollars from the school for part-time work since stepping down as president in 2010.

In response to the controversy, Brandeis announced changes designed to set a more open and fair process for determining executive compensation.

A campus spokesman said details about Lawrence’s compensation after he steps down were not available Friday.

Professor Eric Olson, who has taught at Brandeis for about a decade and a half, said he was surprised to hear of Lawrence’s plan to resign.

“Intellectually, we had a star,” said Olson, who remembered Lawrence giving academic talks. “His ability to teach and to talk about really big matters — he was just amazing.”

The trustees said they are launching an international search to find a new president to lead the private, secular, Jewish-sponsored, liberal arts-focused research university, which enrolls about 3,600 undergraduate students and 2,100 graduate students and employs 500 faculty and 1,100 staff.

Starting July 1, university provost Lisa Lynch will take over as interim president

The former dean of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis, Lynch “is an internationally renowned economist who brings experience and success in senior leadership positions in academia and the government,” Traquina said in his statement.

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