



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

January 6, 2025

Ms. Abbey-Lynn Gonzalez
President
Student Government Association
Dillard University
2601 Gentilly Boulevard
New Orleans, LA 70122

Re: Expanded Board Engagement and Leadership Training for Dillard Student Representatives

Dear Ms. Gonzalez:

First, congratulations on your election as the 89th Student Government Association President. I know that you have met with other Trustees, including Board Vice Chair Rock Anderson, but regret that my personal circumstances have limited my travel to New Orleans. I did, however, want to personally respond to your very well written letter dated December 19, 2024, which **expressed the concerns of student leaders** regarding the Board's appointment of Dr. Monique Guillory as Dillard's ninth president.

Starting with your astute observation that Dr. Guillory is "undoubtedly a great candidate," external, objective observers have noted that hiring Dr. Guillory for this role was pretty much a self-evident. See https://www.nola.com/news/education/dillard-university-president-new-orleans-monique-guillory/article_06bee302-bf13-11ef-9abb-9be9eae2334f.html and https://www.nola.com/opinions/will_sutton/new-dillard-president-hbcus/article_bd1cbaea-bea3-11ef-9d87-2b4928b371e6.html.

Seven Months of Positive Momentum

Dr. Guillory has been acting then interim president for seven months, following the unexpected resignation of Dr. Ford. During that time, she finalized the hiring of an experienced CFO, implemented the University restructuring plan, oversaw the development of the University's first IT Audit and Master Plan, began an Operations Audit aimed at improving the University's efficiency, and began the process of filling key vacancies, such as Vice President of Enrollment Management and various staff roles. Working with our CFO, she is overseeing a \$14 Million Dollar Capitol Improvement Project, which includes plans to renovate the library.

During these seven months, Dr. Guillory earned the confidence of the Board, faculty, and staff. As one faculty member put it: "Dr. Guillory really stepped up. She was not expecting to be in this position, but she has not blinked, she has not backed up. She is moving us forward."

The Board has charged Dr. Guillory to focus on five key areas:

1. Enhance Student Experience and Outcomes (including retention and graduation rates and Facilities Enhancement);
2. Strategically Grow Enrollment;
3. Enhance Operational Efficiency and Excellence;
4. Increase Fundraising and Auxiliary Revenue; and
5. Lead the Fifth-Rear Reaccreditation Process, while remedying SACSCOC library warning, and setting the long-term advancement of Dillard's Academic Reputation.

As for the fifth point, Dr. Guillory has already engaged a national expert in academic programs who, with other experts and Dillard faculty, will develop a plan for exciting new academic programs for Dillard University.

"A Great Candidate" In Hand vs Candidates in the Bush

As you pointed out, the Board conducted a national presidential search two years ago. Then, Dr. Kimbrough gave the Board a year's notice. The experience from two years ago gave us a good idea of the qualifications of likely applicants, and a national search firm confirmed that a national search was unlikely to yield a stronger candidate than Dr. Guillory, especially given that there are so many HBCU vacancies. Of the four finalists from the Presidential search two years ago, two are sitting HBCU Presidents; one is a President of a community college. Given the need to improve our operations, Dr. Guillory has more operational experience than either of those very impressive individuals.

Dr. Guillory has worked at seven different institutions, including UDC, Morehouse School of Medicine, Saint Elizabeth's University, The Southern University System, Xavier University, and Jackson State University. She has strong experience on the academic and operations side, has received a Ruffalo-Noel Levitz Retention Excellence Award, won significant grants, and already is an established community leader, as demonstrated through her service on the Board of Directors for St. Augustine High School.

Still, as a part of our due diligence, I asked Vice Chair Rock Anderson to convene a Committee to advise the Board on whether to conduct a national search. Mr. Anderson is a Dillard alum and Chief Human Resource Officer for Emory Healthcare, the largest healthcare organization in Georgia. Mr. Anderson understands the nuances of executive searches and has unique insight into the needs of the University's diverse stakeholders at this vital time. This is typical of executive decision making, whether on university Boards or in corporate America: choose the best people to study the hardest issues.

We Appointed an All-Star Committee to Advise the Board Regarding Whether to Conduct a National Search

I want to highlight just a few of the members.

Dr. Lucie Lapovsky, a leading expert in higher education.

- The committee included Dr. Lucie Lapovsky, a former University President, CFO, and a leading expert in higher education, who has conducted numerous executive searches. She is also very familiar with HBCUs, as she was one of my leading experts during the 12-year

litigation involving Maryland's HBCUs. Dr. Lapovsky is a member of the Board.

See: <https://www.kirkland.com/news/in-the-news/2021/03/a-kirkland-partners-journey-to-a-historic-hbcu-set>, and <https://www.lapovsky.com>.

Dr. Joyce M. Roché, a former non-profit CEO, corporate executive and corporate board member.

- Dr. Roché is a Dillard alumna and former Chair of the Board. She has sat on five corporate boards and appeared on the cover of *Fortune Magazine*. She is a true history maker who has made countless hiring decisions. See: <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/joyce-roche>.

Mr. Orim Graves, an executive in the financial services industry, who serves numerous boards.

- Mr. Graves chairs our investment committee and is one of our longest serving Board members. He is a graduate of Hampton University. See: <https://www.bloomberg.com/profile/person/19731670>.

Ms. Kim M. Boyle, Esq., a leading employment lawyer who also serves on Tulane University's Board.

- Among other things, Ms. Boyle was the first African-American President of the Louisiana State Bar Association. In addition to serving on Dillard and Tulane's boards of trustees, Ms. Boyle also served on the board of trustees of her alma mater, Princeton University. See: <https://www.phelps.com/professionals/kim-m-boyle.html>.

While I appreciate that there is a good amount of misinformation circulating, and that some of it may be "alarming," please be assured that the committee's work was quite thorough. For example, the Special Committee consulted with outside experts, including: (1) a four-time HBCU President; (2) the President of a leading HBCU Advocacy Organization; and (3) various stakeholders from the Dillard campus community. The consensus of the experts was that Dillard should focus on building on its current momentum. Faculty and staff leaders, and the President of the National Alumni Association all agreed with this decision, while you, as SGA President, seemed to have nothing disqualifying to report from your interactions with Dr. Guillory.

Accordingly, the Special Committee unanimously recommended that the Board should not do a national search but should offer the position to Dr. Guillory. After debate and discussion, the Board unanimously approved the Special Committee's recommendation.

The SGA was Involved in Prior Presidential Searches but Not the Decision Whether to Conduct a Search

As you rightly note, prior SGA Presidents were involved in the last national Presidential search. I quite enjoyed working with the two SGA Presidents during the search that led to the appointment of Dr. Ford two years ago. I was really impressed with their maturity and judgment. These students, however,

were not involved in the decision whether to launch a national search; the students entered the picture after the Board had already made the decision to do a search. If the Special Committee had recommended that the Board conduct a search, you would have been on the Search Committee.

Regular Student Interaction with the Board: The Dillard Difference

One of the unique features of the Dillard experience is that students have lunch with the Board during its on-campus meetings. This includes not just student leaders, but a broader segment of the student population. At each meeting, the Board discusses feedback from the students to direct the administration to take remedial action where appropriate.

These lunch meetings also allow students to see how far a Dillard education can take them. They get a chance, for example, to engage with Trustees like Tiffany Brunson, who grew up in Shreveport, graduated from Dillard, and is now General Counsel of Federal Express Business. STEM students can see the journey of Dr. Rose-Anne Abange, a Dillard physics major, who is now a Senior Director at Johnson & Johnson. Past students interacted with my classmate Glenda McNeal, who went from a small town in Louisiana to become the first African-American woman on American Express' Executive Committee. Many students have benefited from the expertise and wisdom amassed by our Trustees and particularly, the Dillard alumni who serve on the Board.

The Request for Student Representation on The Board

Since the Board already has regular access to students' perspective, the question you raise is whether a student representative should also have access to the sensitive and confidential legal and personnel issues which come before the Board, often in executive session without the presence of the President's cabinet.

The recent restructuring which led to the layoff of a number of staff, and the current restructuring of our Centers, are good examples of the kind of sensitive issues that the Board addresses. Students' understandable closeness to the affected individuals has led some to reach out to Board members on behalf of their favorite faculty member or staff impacted by the restructuring. The Board, however, is required to put aside personal feelings about individuals in order to make hard decisions in the best interest of the University as a whole.

Best Practice Advises Against Having Student Representatives on University Boards

According to leading higher education organizations, it is important to note that a university Board of Trustees is a fiduciary rather than a representative body. Therefore, best practices advise that Universities should seek student input, but students should not be on governing Boards, with access to highly sensitive information and voting on whether, for example, to raise tuition on themselves and their classmates.

Many, if not most private colleges do not have student representatives on the Board of Trustees. Our consultation with experts in the field advise extreme caution, given the many questions that this issue raises, and the potential liability of the University if confidential information is leaked. This could potentially expose the Board of Trustees, including any student representative to financial liability.

The Board's Efforts to Expose Students to Executive-Level Decisions Without Going Against Best Practices

When the Board considered this issue some years ago, we decided to add a then-recent alum who was close to the student experience, Chelsea Bosley Robinson, class of 2017. Ms. Robinson is a former Miss Dillard and also an excellent attorney who received the same vetting process as other Board members.

The Board has also invited students to participate in certain Finance Committee meetings and had discussed inviting students to participate in additional committee meetings, such as Buildings and Grounds. The unexpected departure of Dr. Ford required that our attention be focused on helping Dr. Guillory steer the restructuring and other pressing campus issues rather than take on new questions around governance and representation. Your letter is timely though, as it again puts the question front of mind.

Next Steps: Expand Student Engagement with the Board and Provide Leadership Training

Prompted by your letter, I have asked two Board members, Chelsea Bosley Robinson and Tiffany Brunson, to meet with you and other students to develop a plan to incorporate students into more of the work of the Board of Trustees. This expanded engagement with the Board will include leadership training that will be useful at Dillard and in your chosen careers. Please consider which students would best represent your stakeholders for this engagement and how all student organizations can come together in a united path forward to help advance Dillard University. We thank all student leaders for their service to the campus community and wish the Class of 2025 a blessed and productive final semester.

Sincerely,



Michael D. Jones
Chair, Board of Trustees