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# Sheahon Zenger Named 21st President of Illinois Wesleyan University

BY ANN AUBRY | APRIL 10, 2024

## NEWS

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Sheahon J. Zenger, previously the interim president at the University of New Haven, has been named the 21st president of Illinois Wesleyan University, effective July 1.

Zenger was elected by the IWU Board of Trustees after a national search that drew a broad and enthusiastic set of leaders. He was introduced by board chair Timothy J. Szerlong '74 at a campus event on April 10, which can be viewed at [www.iwu.edu/announcement](http://www.iwu.edu/announcement). Zenger will succeed President S. Georgia Nugent, who is stepping down after five years at the helm.

"Sheahon's track record of strategic leadership, relationship building and successful fundraising makes him an ideal leader to guide Illinois Wesleyan as we build on our traditional strengths to innovate and ensure our vitality in the future," Szerlong said.

Zenger has more than 30 years of experience in higher education leadership, including as an assistant to the chancellor at Texas Christian University, plus terms as director of athletics for the University of New Haven, University of Kansas and Illinois State University.

Across his career, he has raised nearly \$400 million to support capital projects and strategic initiatives, with demonstrated success in building relationships with private donors.

"I am honored and excited to be joining the Illinois Wesleyan family, and I am humbled to be selected to serve as president of an institution with a rich history and a strong tradition of giving back and doing good," Zenger said. "The mission of this university as a leader in liberal arts education has been and will continue to be life changing for so many.

"I greatly admire this community's sense of pride, its purpose, and its commitment to making a difference. There is such a compelling story to tell, and I am looking forward to working with Titans near and far to help advance the great work taking place across this close-knit community."

At the University of New Haven, Zenger's accomplishments included creating new opportunities for collaboration and partnership with city and state governments; launching a new brand campaign aimed at increasing visibility and enrollment for the university; and initiating comprehensive student recruitment efforts, key to securing two of the largest incoming classes in the university's history in the past two years. He also facilitated implementation of the university's strategic plan and the launch of eight new degree and certificate programs, with active involvement in faculty development initiatives.

Zenger's strong experience in developing programs to support the welfare, scholarship and future success of student-athletes during each of his terms as athletic director also befits the [guiding philosophy](#) of Titan Athletics, where more than 40% of the IWU student body participates in intercollegiate athletics.

His leadership is marked by culture-building: throughout his career in higher education, Zenger has prioritized inclusion and equity, creating or leading diversity programs, and initiating a gender equity review and upgrade while at ISU. At the University of Kansas, he introduced The Kansas Way to orient new staff more effectively to the organization and promote staff development.

"The search committee worked incredibly hard to make sure we found the right president for Illinois Wesleyan at this time," said W. Thomas Lawrence '80, vice chair of the IWU Board of Trustees and chair of the presidential search committee. "Sheanon's background in higher education, his passion for the liberal arts, and his love of Bloomington-Normal and Illinois Wesleyan University made our decision incredibly easy."

Zenger earned a bachelor's degree in English and secondary education and a master's in journalism and mass communications, both from Kansas State University, and a Ph.D. in educational policy and leadership at the University of Kansas. He and his wife Pam have three adult children.

Illinois Wesleyan retained the services of the international search firm, WittKieffer. In addition to Lawrence, who is Retired Managing Partner, Ernst & Young, the search committee members included several IWU trustees: Rod Adams '95, principal, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, Chicago; Herbert A. Getz '77, president, Aspen Creek Partners Inc., Naperville, Illinois; Colleen Kannaday, president, Carle BroMenn Medical Center, Normal, Illinois; Leah Merrifield '78, LAM Consulting, St. Louis, Missouri; Laura C. Randolph '92, plastic surgeon, Bloomington, Illinois; and Robert K. Zimmermann '71, treasurer of the Board and retired vice president, Energizer Holdings, St. Louis, Missouri.

The committee also included staff representative Michael Thompson, Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness; student representative Raji More, Class of 2026, computer science major from Bloomington; and three members elected by the faculty: Stephanie Davis-Kahl, University Librarian and Copyright Officer; Joanne Diaz, Isaac Funk Endowed Professor of English; and Bryan McCannon '98, Director of the School of Business and Economics and Robert S. Eckley Endowed Professor of Economics. Sharla Brown-Ajayi, Director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, served as Search Advocate.



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