

Dr. Francis L. Lawrence: Getting to Know You

By Bill Glovin

As higher education job descriptions go, it's hard to beat: A salary upwards of \$150,000, a spacious house and grounds in Piscataway, and the top post at one of only 58 members of the prestigious Association of American Universities. On the other hand, winning the job wasn't going to be easy. Some 245 people had applied, 21 had been interviewed, and just four would be recommended to the selection committees.

Adding fuel to the competitive fire were the many observers who believed Rutgers would seek a "star" candidate and follow the lead of Drew University, which named retiring Gov. Thomas Kean as president last year. Some believed the search committee might even go outside of higher education; perhaps a former diplomat, a former cabinet member, or some other international celebrity.

From the caldron has emerged Dr. Francis L. Lawrence, a relatively unknown professional educator who has spent more than three decades quietly helping Tulane University earn a reputation as "the Harvard of the South." He became the 18th president of Rutgers University on October 1.

"Rutgers certainly is a world-class institution," Lawrence told the board of trustees and the board of governors immediately after the announcement. "You have done everything you could to make Rutgers University a superb institution in the 1980s. Now it is perched, poised, and ready to realize what the 1990s can bring."

Lawrence comes to Rutgers with a resumé that demonstrates wide experience and a distinguished track record. In a 24-hour whirlwind tour after his appointment was announced, Lawrence—with the aplomb of a seasoned diplomat—seemed to make the same positive impression on the governor and the press as he had on the University's search committee.

A native of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, Lawrence received his doctorate in French classical literature from Tulane in 1962. He stayed at Tulane, teaching French, chairing his department, and serving in various administrative posts. Most recently he has been academic vice



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president, provost, and dean of the graduate school.

Lawrence has spent the past few months reading volumes of material on Rutgers' various campuses and schools; he realizes that a learning period must transpire before he sets a course for the University. He is aware of the points of contention on campus—annual tuition hikes, the increased emphasis on research, gay rights, minority issues, among others. He thinks he can make a difference.

"I would describe myself very much as a people-oriented person, someone who encourages dialogue with individuals who may disagree with me," says Lawrence. "Communicate and you may change your mind or change the other person's mind."

His record seems to reflect as much. In 1977 and again in 1985, the Tulane Student Senate gave Lawrence the John H. Sibbs award for outstanding service to students. He established a task force to study sex discrimination in salaries and another to develop a plan to increase

black enrollment. Since 1982, undergraduate minority enrollment at Tulane has risen from 11.6 to 16 percent.

Lawrence believes it is the duty of a university—especially a state university like Rutgers—to provide strong community support and public service. He also believes in a strong research program. And although he was instrumental in the decision to suspend Tulane's basketball program in the wake of a recruiting scandal, Rutgers' sports enthusiasts will be happy to learn that he's a strong advocate of intercollegiate athletics and a fan who rarely missed a Tulane home basketball or football game.

It will be a difficult adjustment at first to be separated from his four adult children, and their children, all of whom will continue to reside in the New Orleans area, he admits. But he and his wife, Mary Katherine, who "work very closely on all kinds of issues," are looking forward to the change. "It's one of those areas where you have a choice," he says, "and we chose to make a move to what I consider a great university." □