

## News about the Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs

President Joanne Berger-Sweeney <President@trincoll.edu>

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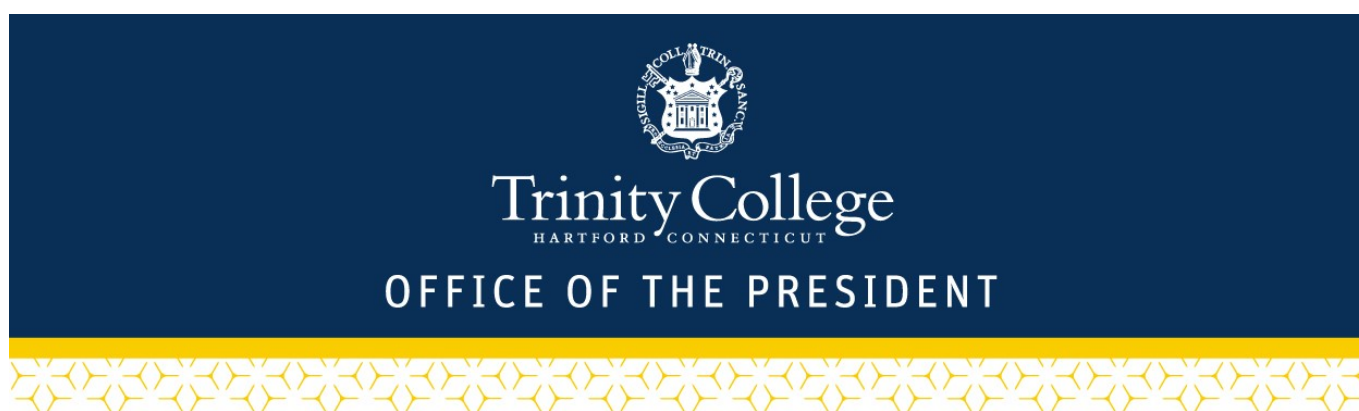
To: President Joanne Berger-Sweeney <President@trincoll.edu>

Dear Trinity Staff and Students,

This afternoon I sent the following message to our faculty, and I'm sharing with you this important and exciting news about the dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs. Please join me in congratulating Sonia Cardenas on her permanent appointment as Trinity's chief academic officer.

Sincerely,

Joanne Berger-Sweeney  
President and Trinity College Professor of Neuroscience



September 2, 2021

Dear Faculty,

I write to share some important and exciting news with you: I have decided to appoint Sonia Cardenas to the role of dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs and chief academic officer. Sonia, a member of the Trinity College community for 20 years, has served in the role in an interim or acting capacity since March 2019, and her excellent leadership through an extraordinary time for Trinity College has convinced me that she is the very best candidate for this position. I am delighted that she has agreed to serve, effective immediately.

This appointment represents a change in the process I had outlined to the community in academic year 2019-20 and I want to be clear about why I am taking this different path. Back then, before the pandemic hit, I announced a plan, developed in consultation with Faculty Conference, to launch a national search led by a multi-constituency committee that would recommend a short list of finalists for my consideration. In the spring, the search committee shared with me candidates for interviews, which included Sonia. But within a few weeks, the world had changed. To ensure stability amid the COVID-19 crisis, I halted the search in April 2020 and named Sonia as acting dean through June 30, 2022. Sonia had been serving as interim dean since the 2019 departure of Tim Cresswell, who was appointed at another institution to a named chair. Additionally, Sonia has served in various critical roles in the Office of the Dean of the Faculty since 2013.

My decision now to ask Sonia to lead the academic division on a longer-term basis does not come out of a sense of crisis. The pandemic is an important context, just as it has been for nearly everything we have done at Trinity for more than a year and a half, but the pandemic did not drive this decision. What drove it was my certainty that this is the best, most strategic decision for Trinity College—for its present and its future.

[Sonia](#) has been an esteemed member of the political science faculty at Trinity since 2001. She served as director of the Human Rights Program from 2007 to 2013 and is a prolific human rights scholar. She previously served as the interim dean of the faculty—in 2015–16 along with Melanie Stein—and has taken on leadership roles for reaccreditation and strategic initiatives and innovation, as well as overseen implementation of Summit, our strategic plan, since its launch in 2017.

Her deep institutional knowledge and commitment to Trinity have served us well through a great deal of transition and evolution, and her energy, ideas, work ethic, and strategic approach have propelled us forward in truly significant ways, even during a global pandemic.

Some of you will recall that the chief academic officer position at Trinity historically has seen high turnover; this certainly is true since my arrival. The negative impact of such instability in this key leadership role can be long-lasting, affecting not only short-term consistency but also the ability to plan and build momentum in our educational program. It is the combination of stability and momentum that is critical for the college, and that is exactly what Sonia's leadership provides.

In three areas in particular, Sonia has played a leading role in advancing critical programs that are ongoing. She has been key in some of our ambitious initiatives such as the new curriculum, Special Opportunity Hires, and the comprehensive campaign and bicentennial planning, which continue to be urgent priorities for the college.

So, while this may have felt like a tumultuous period in many ways, it's extraordinary to reflect on just how steady our progress has been, much of it due to the consistent and strategic leadership of Sonia and to her valued partnerships—with fellow associate deans Takunari Miyazaki and Mitchell Polin, as well as with her other cabinet colleagues and faculty, staff, and students across the institution. She also is a valued adviser to the Board of Trustees (as well as other volunteer leadership groups). In this respect, the board discussed and strongly supports this decision to appoint Sonia as the permanent chief academic officer because of her outstanding performance over the last several years.

I did not make this decision lightly. The principles of shared governance matter deeply to me, and I knew that changing course now, and in this way—while not prohibited by our charter, the *Faculty Manual*, or any other governing rules or policy—might be viewed as disregarding those principles. I assure you that I have not disregarded them. As president, I am ultimately responsible for making decisions that are in the best interest of the college as a whole, and that is what I have done here. I also assure you that I will follow the practice of an evaluation of the dean every three years by a committee appointed by Faculty Conference. That evaluation has proved highly valuable to me in the past.

This is the simple truth: After seeing Sonia perform at such a high level for the past two years and receiving considerable feedback from faculty and others about her performance, having worked with her closely for more than seven years and in various roles, and being familiar with deans across various institutions over the last 15 years, I know that a renewed national search, costing us time and expense and slowing progress toward our ambitious goals, would not yield a better candidate. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to promote from within a long-

serving member of the Trinity community who is unquestionably qualified and dedicated to this outstanding institution.

I intend to do my best to ensure Sonia's long-term success. This includes seeking your consultation. To that end, I invite you to write to me with your ideas, suggestions, and perspective on the role of the chief academic officer and priorities for the dean's office. I welcome your input and will respond in writing collectively in the spring semester to what I hear from you. As we begin this exciting new chapter in the history of Trinity College, please join me in thanking Sonia for her long-standing service and congratulating her on this appointment.

Sincerely,

Joanne Berger-Sweeney  
President and Trinity College Professor of Neuroscience