

Paul Quinn Names New Leader

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Dallas: Interim president staying at the helm of small black college

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By HOLLY K. HACKER / The Dallas Morning News

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Michael Sorrell says he has three professional dreams in life: to own an NBA franchise, be a Cabinet secretary and run a historically black college.

At age 40, he just reached one of those goals. Mr. Sorrell said Tuesday that he's been selected the new president of Paul Quinn College in Dallas. He's had the job on an interim basis since March.

"Whenever you have an opportunity to have one of your dreams come true, it's exciting but humbling at the same time," said Mr. Sorrell, who's also a lawyer and political consultant. "We have so much work to do, but it is such a joy every day to advocate for that school and those students."

The trustees of the small private liberal arts school, which is affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, decided last month to give Mr. Sorrell the job, officials said. They still have to sign a formal agreement, which is expected within two weeks.

When he became interim president, Mr. Sorrell was the third person to lead Paul Quinn in a year, and the fifth since 2001. His immediate predecessor left suddenly after only six months.

The college's accrediting agency has put it on probation because of financial, academic and other problems. College officials say they've addressed many of the concerns and are tackling the others.

For instance, under Mr. Sorrell, Paul Quinn cut its football program to save money and has eliminated some academic programs to make the remaining ones stronger. The accrediting agency – the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools – will return in the spring for another review.

Most recently, Paul Quinn has drawn national attention for a new business-casual dress code. Some have said the dress code robs students of individual freedom, while others have asked whether students' clothing should be a focus when so many serious academic and financial problems need attention.

Officials said C-SPAN is sponsoring a debate on campus next week about the dress code and other recent changes, including a mandatory attendance policy and curfew.

About 600 students are enrolled at the school this fall, Mr. Sorrell said, down from 700 last year. He attributes the drop to several factors, including tougher academic requirements.

"Some students were not prepared for those changes," he said.