

Sweet Briar College Names Dr. Lisa J. Powell as Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the College

Dr. Lisa Powell appointed Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the College, and Chief Sustainability Officer, continuing her leadership at Sweet Briar.

AMHERST, VA, UNITED STATES, March 2, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Sweet Briar College's new dean will be familiar to many: Dr. Lisa Jordan Powell will assume her new role as [Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the College](#), and Chief Sustainability Officer on July 1, 2025. She was selected following an internal application and interview process in January and February. The college's current vice president and dean, Jeffrey E. Key, Ph.D., will resume his role as an associate professor of political science.



Aerial Shot of Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar, Virginia

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President Mary Pope M. Hutson

“Dr. Powell is uniquely qualified as the next Dean of Sweet Briar College as an outstanding academic leader with a national reputation dedicated to the liberal arts,” said President Mary Pope M. Hutson. “Her focus on sustainability is central to Sweet Briar’s strategic plan and the College’s ethos. She has consistently shown dedication and commitment to education at Sweet Briar, increasing auxiliary revenues through excellent produce and creating and enhancing partnerships across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Accolades like our recent announcement of [Sweet Briar College Farm’s](#) earned the Rosé, earning gold in the Virginia Governor’s Cup, speak to the quality of Dr. Powell’s

work and her ability to ensure our college’s full potential is realized.”

"I am committed to the areas of focus Sweet Briar has set for the coming years, including building academic excellence, raising the profile of the College, and establishing financial sustainability," said Dr. Powell. "I am eager to bring my energy and experience to sustain, grow, and move the college forward. I have learned so much from those I've met through Sweet Briar—the amazing students, faculty, staff, alumnae, and friends of the College—and I look forward to continuing to learn from and work with our community."

Dr. Powell serves as STEM Division Head, Director of the Center for Human and Environmental Sustainability, and a tenured environmental science and agriculture faculty member. She holds a B.A. in Mathematics from Harvard University, an M.S. in Mathematics from Vanderbilt University, and an M.A. and a Ph.D. in American Studies with a Sustainability portfolio from the University of Texas at Austin, where she also completed a Graduate Certificate in First-Year Instruction. Before coming to Sweet Briar, Dr. Powell held faculty and administrative appointments at universities in British Columbia, Canada, where her research and knowledge mobilization efforts focused on strengthening regional food systems, agricultural land use policy and planning, adoption of new agricultural technologies, crop diversification, and food literacy education.



Dr. Lisa J. Powell as Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the College, and Chief Sustainability Officer



Where Bold Women Thrive, nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, is more than just a campus—it's a launchpad for fearless leaders, innovators, and changemakers.

Dr. Powell officially joined Sweet Briar's community in January 2020. In her time at the College, Dr. Powell has affirmed the Center for Human and Environment Sustainability as a unit combining academic programs and entrepreneurial initiatives that prioritize hands-on coursework and employment experiences for students, such as the community-supported agriculture (CSA) program and produce markets, wholesale produce distribution, apiculture, and wine sales. She developed and secured buy-in from internal and external stakeholders for the Leadership in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Certificate, and with the generous support of the Willits Foundation, she has built and leads the Willits Food Systems Summer Fellows program. Dr. Powell has also worked alongside student leaders to grow the Sustainability Club, one of the largest clubs on campus.



Sweet Briar College Farm's Rosé wine earned Gold

In addition to supporting sustainability efforts at Sweet Briar, Dr. Powell has helped to strengthen relationships with partners such as the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, regional wineries and other businesses, and local government. Dr. Powell has extended Sweet Briar's reach by speaking at national, state, and local events on Sweet Briar's work to prepare future leaders in sustainability and agriculture, as well as partnering with the College's admissions department to recruit students interested in sustainability to Sweet Briar.

"Dr. Powell is well-known by faculty and very capable," said search committee member Dr. Dwana Waugh, Associate Professor of History and Social Sciences & Humanities Division Head. "She also has a keen sense about the future direction of the college."

Throughout her time at Sweet Briar, Dr. Powell has continued and expanded her research programs to include collaborations with faculty across Virginia and work centered around her students' interests. She has supervised numerous senior honors theses and Honors Summer Research Program projects. Her work has been published in journals such as Agriculture and Human Values, Food, Culture, and Society, Urban Climate, The Geographical Journal, The Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences, Teaching and Teacher Education, and The Journal of Rural Studies, among many others.

“Dr. Powell has been remarkably successful doing what she was hired to do at Sweet Briar,” said search committee member Dr. Brent Shea, Professor of Sociology. “Lisa’s administrative background in food and agriculture is ideal for supporting Sweet Briar’s commitment to sustainability. Beyond that, Professor Powell has numerous peer-reviewed publications. Lisa exemplifies the teacher-scholar model for college professors to maintain credibility over one’s career as a professor of one’s field of knowledge. Professor Powell’s qualifications compare favorably with deans who have prevailed at Sweet Briar after national searches here in recent decades.”

Dr. Lisa Powell’s appointment continues a long tradition of excellence among Sweet Briar’s administrators, particularly among those who have come to those positions having already served as faculty or staff. Her service to Sweet Briar has extended from the classroom to the greenhouse, apiary, vineyards, forests, and even the wine shop and tasting room in the Wailes Center. In her new role, Dr. Powell will continue teaching selected courses, directing the [College’s sustainability and agriculture academic programs and initiatives](#), and serving as a co-leader of Sweet Briar College Farm.

“Dr. Powell will elevate academic excellence at Sweet Briar along with our distinguished professoriate for years to come, as already evidenced through strengthened sustainability and environmental science programs,” said President Hutson.

To learn more about Sweet Briar College’s Environmental Science programs, contact Admissions at admissions@sbc.edu or call 434-381-6142. Explore the opportunities awaiting you at <https://www.sbc.edu/center-for-sustainability/>

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