

INSPIRE

# Bennett College is Preparing Women of Color to Lead with Purpose, Integrity and a Strong Sense of Self-Worth



BENNETT COLLEGE STUDENTS CELEBRATE ITS 150TH ANNIVERSARY DURING 2023.

**U** NCF-member Bennett College is one of only two all-women historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the country and one of UNCF's 37 member institutions. Founded in 1873 by formerly enslaved individuals, Bennett transitioned into a women's college in 1926 and is one of just 26 women's colleges in the United States.

In 2023, Bennett earned recognition as one of the nation's "Best Women's Colleges" by BestCollege.com. Dedicated to fostering bold women leaders, entrepreneurs and agents of social change through an integrated approach

to intellectual, social and spiritual development, Bennett celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2023.

Bennett College embraces the concept of being a “microcollege,” which President Suzanne Elise Walsh defines as being deliberately small with an enrollment of under 1,000 students.

“Our smallness is our strength. It allows us to be nimble and flexible. Bennett College was not built for more than about 840 students. We’ll never be in the 5,000-student place. This is who we are, and we are proud of it,” said Walsh. “Everybody usually focuses on the number as if the number tells them something. But, if you’re not keeping the students or they’re not graduating, something’s not working. It’s not about size, it’s about what kind of services you can provide. A ‘microcollege’ is about wrapping yourselves around students and giving them all the things that you would want in a boutique environment.”



BENNETT COLLEGE PRESIDENT SUZANNE WALSH

Under Walsh’s leadership, Bennett implemented a “minimester” system, replacing traditional semesters. This innovative approach has decreased cognitive load and increased first-year student retention to 90%.

Nationwide, based on IPEDS data, retention from first to second year for full-time students is about 75.6%.

President Walsh and her team used data to revamp academic structures and right-size the institution, achieving three consecutive years of positive cash flow, introduced a virtual learning option for students unable to attend in-person, created innovative business partnerships to support key administrative functions and secured a historic financial investment strategy through The Historic Fund, a venture capital fund, exceeding \$10 million.

Bennett is also the first and only women's college with a U.S. Small Business Administration Women's Business Center on its campus.

On the national front, Bennett ranked first in social mobility among liberal arts colleges in 2022 and was rated a Best College for Social Mobility in 2022-2023 by *U.S. News & World Report*, as well as receiving a designation as a Fulbright HBCU Institutional Leader for multiple years.

A United Methodist Church-affiliated institution, Bennett has accreditation status with the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges.

With those outstanding credentials, Bennett College is making an impact and helping to secure better futures for us all