On Campus

Jennifer L. Mnookin Named University President

Spring/Summer 2026



Columbia University

Jennifer L. Mnookin, a nationally recognized legal scholar who has served as the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Madison since 2022, will become Columbia University's next president on July 1.

"I am honored and thrilled to join Columbia University at this important moment," wrote Mnookin in a January 25 announcement. "Columbia is defined by rigorous scholarship, a deep commitment to open inquiry, world-class patient care, and an inseparable and enduring connection to New York City, the greatest city in the world. I look forward to working closely with faculty, students, and staff, and with both our local and global community of alumni and friends, to advance the University's critically important mission and to ensure that its teaching and research continue to

contribute meaningfully to society.”

At Wisconsin, Mnookin has led a flagship public research campus that serves more than fifty thousand students across thirteen schools and colleges with more than twenty-five thousand faculty and staff, including a medical school and an affiliated health system. Her tenure included significant investments in faculty hiring and research infrastructure, the launch of major cross-campus initiatives on artificial intelligence and interdisciplinary research, and sustained leadership through an uncertain federal funding environment. She has also advanced initiatives to expand access and increase affordability for students.

“Jennifer will be an exceptional leader for Columbia’s future,” wrote David J. Greenwald ’83LAW and Jeh C. Johnson ’82LAW, co-chairs of the Columbia University Board of Trustees, in the announcement. “She understands the essential role that higher education and research play in advancing knowledge, serving the public good, and addressing our most pressing challenges. She is also a keen listener who builds consensus and does not shy away from making difficult decisions when necessary. As president, she will lead Columbia forward with strength and a firm commitment to the University’s cherished values.”

Mnookin’s appointment came after an extensive national search led by a committee of Trustees and faculty members, who sought input from students, staff, alumni, fellow faculty, and other members of the Columbia community.

“From the outset of this process, we sought a leader with both intellectual depth and demonstrated leadership,” said Andrew Barth ’83CC, ’85BUS and Jonathan Lavine ’88CC, ’23HON, co-chairs of the Presidential Search Committee. “Jennifer’s record as a scholar and university leader reflects a deep understanding of how research universities function — how they must continuously evolve in an ever-changing world to enable the pursuit of new knowledge while remaining true to their academic mission and institutional values.”

Prior to her time at Wisconsin, Mnookin served for seven years as dean of UCLA School of Law, following nearly two decades on the UCLA and University of Virginia law faculties, holding multiple senior academic leadership roles.

One of the nation’s most prominent legal scholars, Mnookin received her bachelor’s degree from Harvard University, her JD from Yale Law School, and a PhD in the history and social study of science and technology from MIT. Her academic work sits

at the intersection of science and the law, examining how expert evidence is evaluated and used within the legal system.

Mnookin was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2020. She and her husband, political scientist Joshua Foa Dienstag, have two children.

“To be entrusted with Columbia’s leadership is both humbling and incredibly exciting,” wrote Mnookin in a message to the University community on January 26. “The last several years have been challenging ones for higher education, certainly including Columbia. Having had the privilege for the past few years of leading a public flagship university in a complex time, I well understand the significant uncertainties and heightened scrutiny many universities are now facing. Moments like this demand, in my view, an urgent assertion of the role universities must play in civic life, a clear articulation of both our value and our values, and, simultaneously, a genuine openness to taking seriously the views of those who see the world differently, both inside our campus and in the broader world. Columbia has the depth of talent, the tradition of excellence, and the capacity for innovation to meet this moment with clarity and purpose.”



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