

# Ole Miss hires former Texas coach Chris Beard



Texas head coach Chris Beard looks on during the first half an NCAA college basketball game against UTEP on Nov. 7, 2022, in Austin, Texas. Mississippi has hired Chris Beard as basketball coach five weeks after his firing from Texas following a domestic violence arrest. The Rebels announced Beard's hiring on Monday, March 13, 2023, and will introduce him Tuesday in a public event at the SBJ Pavilion. (AP Photo/Michael Thomas, File)

Following a domestic violence arrest.

The Rebels announced Beard's hiring on Monday and will introduce him Tuesday in a public event at the SBJ Pavilion. Beard is a four-time conference coach of the year and was AP's national coach of the year in 2019.

But his two-year tenure at alma mater Texas ended abruptly in January, though felony domestic charges were ultimately dismissed on Feb. 15. A prosecutor said his office determined that the charge of assault by strangulation/suffocation-family violence could not be proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Texas suspended Beard after his Dec. 12 arrest and fired him three weeks later when Texas officials told Beard's attorney he was "unfit" to lead the program. Beard was arrested when his fiancée, Randi Trew, called 911 and told officers that Beard strangled, bit and hit her during a confrontation in his home.

She later said that Beard didn't choke her, and was defending himself, and that she never intended for Beard to be arrested and prosecuted.

Beard replaces Kermit Davis, who was ousted on Feb. 24 after going 74-79 in nearly five full seasons.

"We thoroughly evaluated a number of outstanding candidates, and there is no doubt Coach Beard is one of the top coaches in the nation," said Keith Carter, the school's vice chancellor for athletics. "After conducting due diligence and speaking to a number of individuals on and off the court, it was evident he is the right person to guide our team to greatness."

Beard has led three different programs to the NCAA Tournament since 2016, including an appearance in the 2019 championship game and an Elite Eight run the year before at Texas Tech. He is 237-98 as a head coach and 11-5 in the NCAA Tournament.

"I am honored to be joining the Ole Miss family and excited to get started at this great university," said Beard, who was 29-13 at Texas. "I can't express how grateful I am to Chancellor (Glenn) Boyce, Keith Carter and the rest of the search committee for their belief in me to lead this program. I am really looking forward to being an active part of the Oxford community."

Beard spent five seasons at Texas Tech, going 112-55 at a program that had endured five losing seasons in the previous six years. The Red Raiders went to their first Elite Eight in his second season and made it to the national championship game in 2019.

Beard led Little Rock to a 30-5 record and a Sun Belt Conference title in his lone season, making the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Increase in challenges to youth mental health, youth experiences of violence, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors among teenagers, especially teenage girls. This includes a finding that nearly one-third of teen girls seriously considered suicide in 2021, a nearly 60% increase from a decade prior. Other peer-reviewed research shows increased teen social media use is a significant driver of this crisis.

Because use of social media platforms like TikTok has a significant role in the ongoing youth mental health crisis, it is critical that TikTok produce all relevant internal corporate communications to understand whether the company broke any laws. TikTok's failure to preserve and share relevant internal communications hampers the investigation. The filed

# Major questions unanswered about JSU president's leave one week later



THOMAS HUDSON

Mississippi Today by Molly Minta

Significant questions surrounding the abrupt pause to Thomas Hudson's tenure as president of Jackson State University remain one week after the Institutions of Higher Learning Board of Trustees placed him on administrative leave with pay.

So far, a spokesperson from the board has declined to answer multiple questions in detail.

Those include context like if Hudson's contract has been terminated or if it is still in effect, the nature of the personnel issue that led the board to place Hudson on leave (rather than letting him resign or firing him), and if the board has ever before placed a president of the state's eight public universities on leave.

Jackson State community members have said the silence makes it harder for them to hold the board accountable for its decision-making.

On Thursday, March 2, the IHL board met twice — all trustees attended virtually — and immediately went into executive session to discuss "a Jackson State University personnel matter." After the final meeting, members of the press and public ques-

brief therefore requests that the court compel TikTok to provide the information sought.

In addition to Attorney General Fitch, other attorneys general joining the amicus brief are from Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, as well as the Hawaii Office of Consumer Protection.

tioned IHL spokesperson Caron Blanton about how the board could call an open meeting but immediately close it to the public.

"It was an open meeting, you were all here, you could all hear everything except for what was said in executive session," Blanton said at the time.

The Open Meetings Act permits public bodies like the IHL board to go into executive session for the "transaction of business and discussion of personnel matters relating to the job performance, character, professional competence, or physical or mental health of a person holding a specific position..."

Hours after the meeting adjourned, IHL sent out a press release stating the board put Hudson on leave and selected Elayne Hayes-Anthony, the chair of Jackson State's journalism department, to serve as temporary acting president. The release expounded on Hayes-Anthony's credentials and service to the university but did not explain the criteria that trustees had used to appoint her. If Hayes-Anthony ultimately replaces Hudson, it would be the third time the IHL board has passed on a national search to select Jackson State's president.

The press release ended with a note that the board "will discuss the future leadership of Jackson State at its regular Board meeting later this month."

No other information about Hudson was provided. The press release did not include the reason the board placed Hudson on leave.

The night of the meeting, a Mississippi Today reporter emailed two questions to Caron Blanton, IHL's communications director about the board's authority to place institutional executive officers on leave because it is not outlined in IHL's policies and bylaws.

Blanton replied the next day, writing in an email that "the Board's authority to place an institutional executive officer on administrative leave is provided in the Board's powers and responsibilities outlined in Mississippi Code Section 37-101-15."

That code section does not specifically mention "administrative leave," so Mississippi Today sought more information and asked if the board has ever before placed a university president on leave. A search of IHL's website, which contains press releases dating back to at least 2006, found just one other mention of administrative leave. That occurred in 2008, in a press release about a former commissioner's

"request to voluntary (sic) step aside from his day-to-day duties during the State Auditor's investigation."

Blanton did not reply until Wednesday, March 8.

"I am not declining to answer your questions," Blanton wrote. "I answered your original question. The follow-up questions are a thinly-veiled attempt to gain additional information on the reasons JSU president Thomas Hudson was placed on administrative leave, which is a personnel matter. Since it is a personnel matter, I have no additional information to provide."

On Wednesday evening, Blanton elaborated after Mississippi Today sent her the question again, along with eight more.

"The Board hires the institutional executive officers," she wrote. "Any employer can place an employee on administrative leave."

Blanton did not answer if the board had ever before placed a university president on leave, writing that "it would take a great deal of research to determine this. Please submit a public records request and I will provide you with the estimated cost to provide the records."

In response to questions about when the IHL board had conducted a background check on Hudson prior to his appointment as president in November 2020, including who conducted the check and how much they were paid, Blanton also directed Mississippi Today to submit a records request.

Blanton offered the same reply to five questions about Hudson's contract, if he had signed a separation agreement, why he was placed on leave or if the board had ever received complaints or grievances about his conduct.

"It is a personnel issue, so I will not be able to provide additional information," she wrote.

This lack of transparency from the IHL board is familiar to many community members of Jackson State.

Ivory Phillips is a dean emeritus at Jackson State who fought for equitable funding for the university as the president of the faculty senate in the 1990s. In a recent editorial for the Jackson Advocate, the oldest Black newspaper in Mississippi, Phillips linked the IHL board's silence on Hudson to other answers that citizens of Jackson are routinely denied about the water system and the roads.

"Frankly, we were not surprised at this turn of events," he wrote. "It simply shows how many government entities, especially the college board, never plan to be transparent or accountable."