



Laura Skandera Trombley, PhD

Tenth president of the University of Bridgeport

Trombley is president emerita of Pitzer College and The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Previously, she served as vice president for academic affairs at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A preeminent Mark Twain

scholar, she has coupled impassioned advocacy for the humanities with deft and strategic leadership to transform some of the country's most important cultural and academic institutions.

The Board of Trustees said, "A rigorous national search surfaced many highly talented candidates, but Dr. Trombley stood out, both in terms of prior experience and in terms of vision for the University's future. Her background ideally positions her to help the University take the next step in its development."

The Board added that Trombley is charged with "leading the University's efforts to assert its value in uniquely combining career-oriented education with a strong tradition of local, regional, and international recruiting. Trombley's background positions her to push forward the University's work in community relations, development and fundraising, and strategic planning as it embarks on furthering efforts identified in its campus master planning process."

Speaking about her new role at UB, Trombley said she was drawn by "the mission of this vital university, its long commitment to the city of Bridgeport, and the crucial role that it plays in higher education in New England. I am deeply impressed with the breadth and depth of the curriculum and the excellence of their professional and graduate programs. I am passionate about education, students and the University of Bridgeport."

Trombley's leadership skills are impressive. Under her direction, Pitzer College raised more than \$110 million as its endowment climbed to \$134 million. The campus was physically transformed, too, as two phases out of a three-phase Master Plan were completed under her direction. Capital projects included the construction of eight sustainably designed mixed-use residential buildings that earned either LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum or Gold certification, a record number among U.S. liberal arts colleges. Most notably, Pitzer rocketed 38 spots, from No. 70 to No. 32, in *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. Its stature as an institute for global learning was enhanced, too, as record-setting numbers of its students were awarded Fulbright Fellowships for ten out of 11 years. In 2013, President

Barack Obama appointed Trombley to the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, calling her “intelligence, warmth, and dedication to international education . . . a vital addition.” In 2017, she was appointed Chair of the 12-member body.

In 2015, her first year as president of The Huntington Library, Trombley raised \$39.4 million, \$10 million more than the previous year. In quick succession, she proceeded to set other milestones to modernize the educational-and-research institution and establish new connections within and beyond its Southern California community. Through expanded hours and dynamic programming, membership and attendance levels rose. Spending was reined to new lows. Projects, including a 20-year Chinese Garden, the Jonathan and Karin Fielding Wing, an expansion of the Scott Galleries of American Art, and funding for directors of sustainability and research, were completed. Trombley also negotiated new agreements for The Huntington-USC (University of Southern California) Institute on California and the West and the USC-Huntington Early Modern Studies Institute. She currently serves as an adviser to the Huntington Board of Trustees.

Trombley’s work as a Twain Scholar (highlights include her expert commentary in Ken Burns’s documentary series, *Mark Twain*) has informed years of scholarship, including her most recent book, *Mark Twain’s Other Woman* (Alfred A. Knopf; 2011). Her first book, *Mark Twain in the Company of Women*, was published in 1994. In 2017, Trombley won the Louis J. Budd Award for her contributions to Mark Twain studies. Her scholarly articles have appeared in the *Paris Review*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Huffington Post*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, among other publications. She has edited three books: about Mark Twain, Maxine Hong Kingston, and an exegesis of the meaning of poetry.

Trombley is a consultant to the Libra Foundation, a private foundation with \$260 million in endowments, and the Harrington-Schiff Foundation. It supports nonprofits working in the areas of community-based health, the environment, arts, and culture.

Trombley's mother was an elementary school principal; her father taught second grade in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Guided by their example, Trombley was imbued with a love of learning that set the course of her scholarship and career. As a student, Trombley was as intellectually precocious as she was inspired. At 16, she enrolled as a freshman at Pepperdine University, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in English/Humanities. She remained at Pepperdine, graduating *summa cum laude* with a Master of Arts in English. She received her PhD in English from the University of Southern California as a Virginia Barbara Middleton Scholar and a recipient of the Lester and Irene Finkelstein Fellowship for Outstanding Humanities Student.

Her son is a junior at college.