

ORNL and UT name Bienvenue director of Oak Ridge Institute

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Joan Bienvenue has been named new executive director of the Oak Ridge Institute at the University of Tennessee, beginning March 8.

Joan Bienvenue has been selected as the first executive director of the Oak Ridge Institute at the University of Tennessee, established last year to align the expertise and infrastructure of Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the university in support of world-leading research and talent development. As director, Bienvenue will also serve as a vice provost at UT. She begins her new position March 8.

“Joan is a scientific leader with a track record of leveraging university programs and sponsored research to address national priorities,” ORNL Director Thomas Zacharia said. “She is perfectly suited to lead partnerships between ORNL and UT that will create long-term national impact, accelerate critical research and prepare our next generation of scientists and engineers.”

Bienvenue comes to the Oak Ridge Institute from the University of Virginia, where she has been senior executive director of the Applied Research Institute — which she launched — since June 2013. As ORI director, she will develop a strategy for establishing leading-edge interdisciplinary graduate research in emerging fields, build world-leading programs that leverage UT and ORNL’s capabilities, and lead recruitment of faculty, staff and students.

“Our outstanding faculty, researchers and graduate students are at the heart of the Oak Ridge Institute, and they will no doubt thrive under Dr. Bienvenue’s leadership,” said UT Knoxville Chancellor Donde Plowman. “Provost John Zomchick, Vice Chancellor Deborah Crawford and I look forward to supporting her in this partnership as the world’s leading scientists at both our institutions work together to solve big problems and produce tomorrow’s scientists and engineers.”

“The opportunity to lead this partnership between a national research university and the country’s leading science and energy laboratory holds transformative potential,” Bienvenue said. “The institute is a truly visionary initiative that positions UT, ORNL and the state of Tennessee at the forefront of developing the research and talent required to lead the industries of the future. I can’t wait to get started.”

UT System President Randy Boyd said ORI at UT represents a tremendous opportunity for the state.

“Under Joan’s leadership, we will be able to continue building the relationship across the UT System with Oak Ridge National Laboratory and have greater opportunity to inspire and develop the talent and innovation America needs to compete in this global economy,” he said.

UT Health Science Center Chancellor Steve Schwab added, “The Oak Ridge Institute at UT provides the perfect platform to take advantage of and connect the diverse research talent across the state. UTHSC and ORNL have a strong history of collaborative innovation that will thrive under ORI at UT.”

In addition to her role at UVA, Bienvenue served almost five years as program manager and chief scientist of biometrics/health and life sciences for Lockheed Martin, with responsibility for program management, business development, research commercialization and technical leadership. She is a chemist by training, with a doctorate in chemistry from UVA, a master’s in forensic science from the University of New Haven in Connecticut, a bachelor’s in chemistry from Rivier University in New Hampshire and an MBA from the University of Mary Washington in Virginia.

She is a member of the Board of Army Research and Development of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, and a fellow of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences.

The ORI director reports to the ORNL director and is responsible for oversight of all ORI operations and activities, with accountability to UT’s provost for academic and research matters unique to the university.

The institute was announced last year and will create a robust talent pipeline in areas of growing national need and demand. As a result, Tennessee will become the go-to destination for top-level talent development and discovery. ORI at UT will address top-tier industry and workforce needs emerging from the introduction of automation and artificial intelligence. The institute will develop scientists and engineers who will be locally relevant and globally competitive. By the time students graduate, they will have gained the leading-edge innovation and interdisciplinary problem-solving skills needed to accelerate the growth of Tennessee's economy.

UT and ORNL's relationship dates nearly 80 years to the laboratory's earliest days. UT faculty members were instrumental in advocating for establishment of a national laboratory in the Southeast, and research partnerships over the decades have accelerated university and lab contributions in biomedical science, biology, nuclear engineering, neutron science, supercomputing, materials science and other fields.