



# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH

## **Driven to Discover™**

Search for Vice Chancellor for Finance and Operations  
University of Minnesota Duluth  
Duluth, Minnesota

### **THE SEARCH**

The University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD), one of five campuses within the distinguished University of Minnesota (UMN) System, seeks a strategic, collaborative, and mission-driven leader to serve as its next Vice Chancellor for Finance and Operations (VCFO). The VCFO will join UMD at an exciting time of transition, with the recent appointment of a new Chancellor and opportunities to shape the leadership team for continued success. This role is pivotal in supporting UMD's position as Minnesota's premier sea and land grant university and a key contributor to the region's research, creative activity, and economic development.

Reporting to the Chancellor and serving as a key member of the senior leadership team, the VCFO will oversee all finance and operations units, including the Controller's Office, the Office of Budget and Analysis, Human Resources, the Police Department and Facilities Management, which includes the Office of Sustainability. The VCFO will manage UMD's \$300 million operating budget, ensuring that financial, capital, and human resources are aligned with the university's strategic educational and research objectives. This role is crucial to advancing UMD's strategic vision, serving as an advisor to the Chancellor and senior leadership on resource allocation to support the university's mission and priorities.

The ideal candidate will have demonstrated experience in leading finance and operations in a complex higher education environment that relies on both system and state-level support. This leader will be adaptable, collaborative, and capable of managing change effectively. With strong problem-solving skills, the VCFO will find innovative ways to prioritize projects, utilize resources efficiently, and communicate complex financial and operational concepts transparently to build trust among the UMD community. The VCFO must be a strategic leader with strong financial and business acumen and the ability to motivate and support teams and apply best practices to advance UMD's long-term priorities of fostering impactful research, growing enrollment, and enhancing the economic prosperity of the region and the state.

The University of Minnesota Duluth has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national search firm, to assist in this important search. All inquiries, applications, and nominations should be directed in confidence to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH

The University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) is a comprehensive public land and sea grant university that serves as a critical driver of regional research and economic development in northeastern Minnesota. The second largest campus in the University of Minnesota System, UMD enrolls roughly 10,000 students and offers 89 undergraduate and 24 graduate programs. The University of Minnesota Medical School, Duluth campus, and the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, Duluth, both have programs on the UMD campus. As a mid-sized university, UMD consistently ranks among the top Midwestern regional universities and provides an alternative to large research universities and small liberal arts colleges, providing a personalized learning experience with the feel of a larger university.

UMD has distinguished itself in natural resources and freshwater sciences and touts an impressive research portfolio with over \$25 million in annual sponsored projects. The University features several research centers, including the [Large Lakes Observatory](#), the [Natural Resources Research Institute](#), the [Minnesota Sea Grant](#), and the [Bureau of Business and Economic Research](#). The Duluth campus is known for its diverse array of academic and research facilities, which significantly contribute to the university's role in regional economic development and innovation.

The University's main campus features new and cutting-edge buildings, including its library, business school, science building, a Cesar Pelli-designed music hall, and a state-of-the-art civil engineering facility, all incorporating beautiful lake vistas and public art that spans its 244 acres. UMD is also strongly committed to sustainability and is home to four LEED-certified buildings, including one with the coveted Platinum certification. The University's [Campus and Climate Action Plan \(CCAP\)](#) was introduced in 2023 and provides a 30-year planning horizon for UMD to mitigate its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and advance its sustainability goals. The University's off-campus facilities include a historic lower campus, a Jacobean Revival mansion, and a Great Lakes research vessel. UMD's sustainable practices and facilities emphasize its commitment to environmental stewardship.

The City of Duluth, the fourth largest city in Minnesota, is located on the north shore of Lake Superior and has a population of approximately 85,000, with a metropolitan area population of about 276,000. Rated by Money magazine as one of the top four Midwestern small cities for livability, Duluth was named the #1 best place to live by Outside magazine in 2014. The city offers more than 11,000 acres of park space for various outdoor activities, including rock climbing, skiing, biking, and wildlife viewing. Major industries in Duluth include health care, education, aviation, technology, and tourism, complemented by a thriving arts and culture scene. UMD plays a vital role in the vibrancy of the region and state and has contributed roughly \$582 million in economic impact through its operations, construction, and student and visitor spending. It is estimated to support more than 4,100 jobs in the region.

## **UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

The University of Minnesota (UMN) is a respected public research university and Minnesota’s land-grant institution, with five campuses across the state—Twin Cities, Duluth, Morris, Crookston, and Rochester. Known for its strong tradition of education and public engagement, UMN drives innovation and societal improvement. With an annual budget of \$4.5 billion, the university contributes \$9 billion to Minnesota’s economy. The flagship Twin Cities campus, located in Minneapolis-St. Paul, enrolls nearly 55,000 of the university’s 68,000 students, offering interdisciplinary education and research across diverse fields, including liberal arts, sciences, business, and medicine.

UMN averages over \$1 billion in annual research expenditures, ranking 13th among public universities nationally. The university boasts 26 Nobel Prize-winning faculty, alongside recipients of prestigious awards like Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships. Located in a diverse and economically vibrant region, the university system reflects Minnesota’s multicultural connections, housing significant Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, and global communities, including the largest urban American Indian and Somali populations in the country.

UMN acknowledges its location on the traditional homelands of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples, working to strengthen relationships with Minnesota’s 11 sovereign tribal nations. The university emphasizes diversity, equity, and inclusion, ensuring support and resources for American Indian students, staff, faculty, and community members. With over 27,000 faculty and staff, UMN is the state’s seventh-largest employer, featuring regional Extension offices, research centers, clinics, and educational programs throughout Minnesota. It is also recognized by Forbes as one of the country’s top 20 educational employers.

## **UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH LEADERSHIP**

### **Chancellor Charles Nies**

Dr. Charles Nies became UMD’s 10th chancellor in July 2024. Most recently, Chancellor Nies served as the vice chancellor for student affairs at the University of California, Merced, for eight years. He has held previous leadership positions at Miami University of Ohio and Washington State University and brings with him over 25 years of higher education experience. He holds a doctorate in education administration and leadership and a master’s in counseling psychology from Washington State University. He earned his bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of St. Thomas. A native of Hutchinson, Minnesota, Chancellor Nies is committed to fostering academic excellence and student success at UMD.

Chancellor Nies follows Interim Chancellor David McMillan, who served in the role from 2022 until June 2024. Before his interim appointment, he was a regent on the University of Minnesota Board of Regents from 2011 to 2022. Prior to his tenure on the board, McMillan served as an executive for Minnesota Power and its parent company, Allete, and as a corporate attorney for Union Pacific in Omaha. McMillan is a

UMD alumnus who holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics and history and a law degree from the University of Minnesota. He currently serves as Special Assistant to the President of UMN and chairs the Great Lakes Seaway Advisory Board.

## THE ROLE OF VICE CHANCELLOR FOR FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

The [Vice Chancellor for Finance and Operations \(VCFO\)](#) serves as the University's chief financial and business officer, directly overseeing the Controller's Office, the Office of Budget and Analysis, Human Resources, the Police Department and Facilities Management, which includes the Office of Sustainability. With responsibility for an annual institutional budget of approximately \$300 million and roughly 190 FTE, the VCFO reports directly to the Chancellor and serves as a senior member of the executive team, providing visionary leadership in fiscal, operational, facilities, and security oversight and planning for the UMD community.

As the University's CFO, the VCFO will ensure that the university operates with integrity and fiduciary compliance while strategically managing resources to maintain a strong financial position. They will oversee all aspects of operating and capital budgets, financial planning, resource allocation, real estate, accounting, business services, institutional master planning, facilities planning, construction and maintenance, and campus safety and security, including emergency operations and continuity planning.

The VCFO will collaborate with senior administrators at UMD and across all University of Minnesota campuses to develop and implement strategies that strengthen business, financial, and administrative policies aligned with the [UMD Strategic Plan](#). The VCFO will ensure that the University's financial systems are transparent and can provide necessary data for effective decision-making and understanding of this data throughout the institution. Additionally, the VCFO will provide strategic leadership in human resource operations, leveraging talent management and best practices to support a healthy workforce.

The VCFO will join UMD during the [PEAK Initiative](#), an ongoing systemwide effort that supports the University of Minnesota's [MPact 2025](#) strategic plan and aims to transform service delivery in finance, HR, IT, and marketing and communications across the system. PEAK launched in April 2021, and Phase 1 was implemented in December 2023. PEAK Phase 2 is currently scheduled for implementation in November to December 2024. As VCFO, this next leader will lead these change management efforts at the university level to ensure a smooth transition of its finance and HR functions.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

### *Develop and implement a financial and operational strategy in support of UMD's strategic plan*

The next VCFO will join UMD during an exciting time of transition, marked by the arrival of Chancellor Charles Nies and incoming U of M System president Dr. Rebecca Cunningham. UMD's last strategic plan

was drafted in 2011 and refreshed in 2017, and Chancellor Nies is expected to embark on a strategic planning process that will build upon the systemwide plan in the near future.

The VCFO will play a critical role in this leadership transition, collaborating closely with a high-performing senior leadership team to update and fulfill the University's strategic plan in alignment with the new Chancellor's vision and institutional priorities. To do so, the VCFO must be a forward-thinking leader who can creatively prioritize projects that drive university-wide innovations and long-term efficiency, particularly in addressing the university's current financial challenges and capital planning needs, advancing its sustainability initiatives, and developing its strategic workforce planning. They will bring a strong understanding of the financial implications of the strength of the university's academic programming and research and advocate for support for both. Additionally, the VCFO will stay attuned to the dynamics of the surrounding Arrowhead Region (northeastern part of Minnesota) and its impact on addressing on-campus challenges, such as housing, to serve the UMD community most effectively.

***Provide effective financial and operational leadership of University resources***

As the University's chief financial and operations leader, the VCFO will possess a keen understanding of the economic and enrollment challenges currently facing higher education. They will spearhead innovative financial and operational initiatives that align with the University's mission and values. By anticipating potential challenges and crafting effective short- and long-term solutions, the VCFO will drive continuous improvement and efficiencies across all facets of the University's operations.

UMD currently receives roughly 35% of its revenue from tuition fees and 24% from state appropriation and funding. The VCFO will need to think creatively to identify new revenue opportunities and uncover additional cost-saving measures without compromising key programming and campus services. Their entrepreneurial mindset and strategic decision-making will guide resource allocation, fostering innovative approaches to funding and disbursement that address ongoing challenges such as on-campus space utilization and aging campus infrastructure. By balancing fiscal responsibility with a growth-oriented approach, the VCFO will ensure that UMD can achieve long-term stability by utilizing space efficiently, enhancing productivity, and expanding its revenue streams.

***Serve as an excellent community member and representative of the campus***

In addition to serving its campus constituency, UMD also contributes to the economy and cultural vibrancy of the City of Duluth and the surrounding region. To maintain these key partnerships, the VCFO will need to truly and unapologetically embrace the collective ambitions of the campus community, the City of Duluth, and the Arrowhead Region. This will involve listening carefully to all university, system, and community constituents to fully understand the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the campus and surrounding communities and delivering on them where possible. The VCFO will leverage the region's unique strengths to build lasting connections and partnerships that enhance its economic, cultural, social, and environmental sustainability. They will serve as a compelling representative and astute communicator

on behalf of UMD, effectively engaging with the U of M System, community leaders, and elected officials. By fostering close, collaborative relationships at all levels, the VCFO will be an effective advocate for UMD's distinctive strengths and support efforts to secure increased funding support, ensuring the university's continued positive impact on campus and on the Duluth community.

***Strengthen relationships across the UMD community and provide open and transparent communications about financial operations***

University finances and operations thrive on collaboration. The VCFO will foster this spirit by building and maintaining key relationships across UMD's campus with openness, transparency, and respect. Utilizing exceptional interpersonal skills, the VCFO and their team will cultivate strong working partnerships with other campus units, ensuring seamless communication and cooperation around complex financial matters. The VCFO will ensure that all university stakeholders are well-informed about current and future fiscal budgets and business initiatives, providing campus leaders with straightforward access to financial data for clear decision-making. By prioritizing honesty and integrity, the VCFO will effectively communicate complex concepts, engaging all stakeholders and addressing their needs and aspirations.

Externally, the VCFO will strengthen partnerships with their counterparts at the other system campuses, leveraging shared knowledge and best practices across the system to enhance overall effectiveness. Through these efforts, the VCFO will ensure a cohesive and collaborative financial and operational environment at UMD.

***Foster a collaborative and innovative environment amongst a high-performing and cross-cutting team***

UMD has experienced considerable change amidst its leadership transitions and turnover within the financial team associated with the pandemic. The VCFO will have the opportunity to rebuild and strengthen the finance and operations units by assembling a deep bench of professionals dedicated to providing exceptional service to the UMD community. They will lead this team through creating workflows for new initiatives and foster closer collaborations with relevant departmental units, such as sponsored program administration staff, to enhance cohesion and support on all financial and operational matters across UMD. The VCFO will bring a transparent and servant-leadership style to the role, demonstrating a strong commitment to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. By prioritizing openness, respect, inclusivity, and integrity, the VCFO will build and maintain trust across teams, ensuring that the university's financial operations are managed efficiently and responsibly.

**QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

The successful candidate will be an innovative and collaborative leader with a demonstrated track record of leading complex financial and administrative functions. While no single candidate will bring all of the listed qualifications and experiences, the search committee seeks candidates with a well-rounded combination of the following:

- A bachelor's degree in finance, accounting, business management, public administration, or a related field is required; a Master's degree is preferred.
- 8+ years of progressively responsible experience in fiscal, human, and physical resources management.
- Significant leadership experience in an institution of higher education or similarly complex organization; experience in a multi-campus system or multi-site organization is preferred.
- Successful leadership experience working in an environment of shared governance, collective bargaining, and collaborative decision-making.
- Experience in and commitment to supporting and advocating for programs and initiatives in sustainability.
- Strong knowledge of finances and the ability to apply this knowledge in today's higher education landscape.
- Proven ability to be a creative and flexible problem-solver, using data and principles to align activities with strategic priorities while working at both strategic and detailed levels.
- Experience with continuous quality improvement, aligning programs and processes with a mission and strategic plan.
- Proven ability to create workflows that detail all relevant steps from start to finish, allowing for revisions as circumstances evolve.
- Demonstrated ability to develop, communicate, and implement strategies, building both internal and external relationships with public/private sectors and the community.
- Success in leading and working with diverse communities and cultures, particularly in recruitment, team building, and conflict resolution.
- Ability to effectively accomplish work through others by managing people well.
- Commitment and proven experience in promoting and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.
- Ability to be energized by difficult challenges, solve complex problems, glean meaning from data, and use multiple problem-solving tools and techniques.
- Ability to quickly assess situations, adapt as needed, and apply personal wisdom and experience to develop effective solutions.
- Evidence of outstanding written and oral communication skills, effective in preparing documents, reports, and presentations to various groups, including senior management.

## **TO APPLY**

The University of Minnesota Duluth has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this recruitment. Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. All inquiries, nominations, referrals, and applications, including a resume and a letter of interest, should be sent via the [Isaacson, Miller website](#).

Rebecca Kennedy, Partner (she/her)  
Damla Williams, Senior Associate (she/her)  
Cortnee Bollard, Senior Search Coordinator (they/them)  
Isaacson, Miller

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