



Search for the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College

Grinnell College

Grinnell, Iowa

THE SEARCH

Grinnell College (Grinnell), one of the top liberal arts colleges in the nation, seeks a vice president for academic affairs and dean of the college (VPAA) to lead its distinctive academic program. A designer of the individually advised curriculum, Grinnell has long been an innovator in teaching and learning, providing students access to challenging and diverse courses of study that allow them to follow their passions with the guidance of dedicated faculty and staff, with the goal of moving knowledge into action for the common good.

Grinnell College is a highly selective, private, residential liberal arts college recognized for its rigorous curriculum and strong tradition of social justice. Founded in 1846, Grinnell enrolls approximately 1,725 students, generally from all states and about 50 countries, in 29 major fields and 17 concentrations. Among the nation's small liberal arts colleges, Grinnell is widely viewed as an institution of the first rank, with an excellent faculty, a skilled staff, a consistently strong and diverse student body, a global outlook, and a well-equipped and beautiful campus.

In close partnership with President Anne Harris, and in collaboration with a team of talented vice presidents and associate deans of the college, the next VPAA has an unparalleled opportunity to create stronger and more effective systems and processes across academic affairs that allow the skills and experience of the college's deeply engaged and knowledgeable faculty and staff to be effectively utilized. The VPAA will be a strategic institutional leader, guiding academic affairs at Grinnell to meet a high standard of excellence across education, pedagogy, research, advising, and innovation in an evolving world.

Compelling candidates will be outstanding academic leaders with significant experience supporting talented and committed teachers and scholars, fostering relationships with faculty and staff, and advocating for the core principles of a liberal arts education. They will be well-versed in issues of shared governance, a systems thinker, and skilled at operating in a highly collaborative and relationship-focused

environment. The successful VPAA will be one who listens authentically, builds trust, and empowers individuals throughout an academic organization.

Grinnell College has retained the services of Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important search. All inquiries, applications, and nominations should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

GRINNELL COLLEGE

In 1843, eleven new graduates of the Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts promised to one another that they would set out for the Iowa territory, the only free territory that had been organized west of the Mississippi, and that there they would each establish a church and together found a college. In June 1846, this Iowa Band of religious idealists and ardent abolitionists made good on their motto of “each a church; all a college,” and the Iowa College was founded. In 1858, the trustees moved the school from the riverside town of Davenport to Grinnell, a more idyllic site 115 miles to the west where students could be educated “for the different professions and for the honorable discharge of the various duties of life.”

Grinnell College has embodied the aspirations of these early social reformers at every stage of its history. Grinnell has admitted women since it was founded, awarded its first degree to a female student in 1865 and to an African American student in 1871, established the first major in political science in 1883, and initiated an individually advised curriculum in 1970. The college’s belief in education as a cornerstone of social reform, secularized long ago, has endured to the present day. With a long-standing commitment to a need-blind admission policy, approximately 93% of Grinnell’s students receive some form of aid, and one in four receives a grant totaling at least the full cost of tuition. Grinnell meets 100% of demonstrated student need and, since 2021, has operated with a “no-loan” policy in its financial aid awarding.

Program

In the early 1970s, Grinnell initiated a new model in undergraduate education, removing distribution requirements and developing the individually advised curriculum. In consultation with their advisers and informed by the six [elements of a liberal education](#) presented in the [academic catalog](#), students plan their curriculum by choosing courses from departments in the three divisions ([humanities](#), [social studies](#), and [science](#)), in addition to a number of interdisciplinary units.

First-year students are required to take a [first-year tutorial](#) where faculty from all departments across the college teach a small, writing-intensive course on a topic of their choice. The course introduces students to the Grinnell community of learners by teaching critical reading and writing skills, developing oral expression of ideas, acquainting students with library resources, and introducing them to the expectations for proper citation and academic honesty. Additionally, each first-year student takes a .5 credit First Year Experience course, which meets in small-group sessions over a semester to discuss personal sustainability, respect, personal and cultural conceptions of identities, living in a diverse community, and using resources

with the goal of empowering students to develop skills that will contribute to their academic and personal success during their time at Grinnell and beyond.

The advisor plays an essential role in this model. The tutorial professor serves as a student's advisor until a major is declared and, in this role, provides the starting point for a strong advising relationship at the college. Faculty members have an early and deep understanding of their advisees and expertly guide students to be responsible for the quality of their education, an approach that emerges from Grinnell's historic ethos of civic and personal responsibility. Although students generally report they are pleased with their academic advising experiences, the college's advising system has not had a comprehensive review in 25 years, and the next dean will lead a strategic review of the existing model. The college has experienced how advising is an important factor in contributing to achieving institutional goals around student engagement and belonging, equitable experiences, and improved retention and graduation rates, which are among the key objectives of its new strategic plan. It also recognizes the high-intensity nature of the existing advising model, which is a significant addition to the teaching load.

Notably, with the guidance of faculty advisors, most students choose a balanced and varied curriculum, frequently electing to double major or combine a major with one or more of 17 interdisciplinary concentrations. Inquiry-based, interactive, and collaborative teaching and learning are encouraged and supported. A robust system of academic support is available to students, including writing, reading, science, language study, data analysis, digital liberal arts, and math labs that address individual learning needs in these important developmental areas. Grinnell has a long-standing commitment to interdisciplinary study, including a broad array of interdisciplinary [majors or concentrations](#). Tenure lines exist in fields that cross traditional departmental boundaries, and faculty have added new interdisciplinary courses, some team-taught, at all levels of the curriculum.

Faculty

Grinnell boasts an excellent faculty of 245 scholar-teachers housed in 28 departments, although many teach in interdisciplinary concentrations and programs as well. While many great colleges and universities stress the importance of the classroom, strikingly few have embraced the teaching and learning mission as a vital part of intellectual life in the way that Grinnell College has done. Advising at Grinnell is designated as teaching rather than service, signaling the value of the faculty-student relationship in charting a course of study and engagement. Tenure requires both an excellent, proven teaching record and a body of scholarship.

Faculty excellence does not stop at teaching. The value of research among the faculty is ever-present, and partnership with a talented grants office has yielded substantial external funding support. Many faculty members are well-known in their disciplines and have significant national and international impact in their fields of study.

In addition to teaching and scholarship, faculty members actively contribute to a strong system of shared governance, serving on myriad standing and ad-hoc committees, including the faculty personnel

committee, curriculum committee, faculty organization committee, and the committee on academic standing. The Executive Council of the faculty meets weekly with the President and the VPAA to discuss matters of policy and the College. This service work is a significant time commitment for faculty but is a critical component of the Grinnell model of faculty governance.

Grinnell's faculty members come from remarkably diverse backgrounds, especially since the college began its Faculty Diversity Initiative in 2000. With respect to tenure-track or tenured faculty, nearly 30% are faculty of color, and 48% are women. Although Grinnell has made progress in the recruitment of a diverse faculty, further increasing diversity and improving retention of talented individuals remains an important long-term goal within the larger attention being paid to faculty labor.

Staff

The dedication of the faculty is matched by the dedication of approximately 583 professional staff, more than 163 of whom report through the VPAA. These individuals are integral not only to the administration, maintenance, and operation of the College but also to its educational mission. Staff advise, counsel, guide, and protect students and contribute to the overall campus environment and community.

Through the Staff Council, staff actively engage in the shared governance of the college by advocating for a balanced and supportive environment for staff to thrive in their positions. The Council also promotes awareness of staff contributions to the college, provides social opportunities, and helps to recognize staff members' achievements. Staff engagement is an important institutional goal and will remain a priority for the next VPAA.

Students

Grinnell offers a geographically and culturally diverse environment for living and learning to a student body of roughly 1,725, of which 30% are domestic students of color and 19% are international students from a broad range of countries; over 60 different languages are spoken at the college. Grinnell has always attracted a high-achieving student body, with 96% of entering students coming from the top quarter of their high school classes.

Grinnell students, on the whole, value their independence, take their academic exploration seriously, and are eager to create positive change in the world. Often, students are "Grinnell busy," serving as full members on many standing and ad-hoc committees on campus, including those dealing with educational policy as well as disciplinary boards. They also provide input to committees for faculty appointments and tenure and promotion reviews. In addition, the student body has a great deal of responsibility in governing itself both academically and socially. Students work extremely hard in their classes, and the majority of students also work (for pay) on and/or off campus. Because Grinnell offers so much choice and invites students to take responsibility, the combination can be an intense—and at times stressful—experience for them.

Grinnell is a rich co-curricular environment. Students have long valued the sense of community they feel on campus, both inside and outside their classrooms. Ninety percent of students live on campus in residence halls, project houses, and language houses with co-curricular activities that enhance their intellectual lives. Grinnell is committed to collaboration between faculty and student affairs professionals in thinking about the student experience and education in a holistic way that fosters the development of active global citizens. There are more than 150 student organizations and 20 NCAA Division III varsity sports. Roughly one-third of the student body participates in varsity and competitive club sports; additionally, 400 students participate in organized outdoor recreation and intramural programs. At Grinnell, coaches are also faculty members, and athletic teams have faculty liaisons, all of whom play a significant role in integrating the academic and co-curricular experiences of students. An equally impressive number of students pursue their passions in music, theatre, dance, or the fine arts, many under the direction of Grinnell's faculty and distinguished visiting artists, with even more in student-directed ensembles and performances.

Leadership and Governance

Grinnell has a rich tradition of shared governance. The Executive Council serves as a board of review for the president and has oversight of the curriculum. It also provides important input on the appointment of new faculty and long-range planning for the college. The Executive Council is composed of the VPAA and elected faculty, including the chairs of the three academic divisions, the chair of the faculty, and two at-large members. The Staff Council supports the professional well-being of staff members and advocates for staff issues, meeting regularly with the president and other senior administrators. Grinnell's Student Government Association (SGA) has an unusually active role on campus. SGA allocates student funds, represents student interests to the college administration and faculty, encourages student debate, and partners with other offices across campus to address student needs.

Dr. Anne Harris is the 14th president of Grinnell College. She came to Grinnell in 2019 as the vice president for academic affairs and dean of the college. Prior to her appointment by unanimous vote by the Board of Trustees, she served as acting president during a national search. Before her time at Grinnell, President Harris was a professor and vice president for academic affairs at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, where she also held numerous faculty and administrative appointments over more than 20 years. Her work has been marked by leadership in the areas of diversity and inclusion, academic program and community development, and financial stewardship and fundraising. President Harris holds a bachelor's degree in art history and classical languages from Agnes Scott College, where she earned Phi Beta Kappa honors. She received her master's and doctoral degrees in art history from the University of Chicago. A prolific researcher and author, she has published numerous articles and juried and invited papers and is a co-author of a textbook on medieval art history. In recognition of her exceptional leadership and service to the college, in October 2024, the Trustees of Grinnell College entered into a five-year contract extension with President Harris through June 30, 2030.

Finances

Grinnell has an operating budget of approximately \$160 million and an endowment of \$2.6 billion. The Academic Affairs budget is \$56 million. The college is undoubtedly privileged in its financial strength. Yet, relative to peers, it draws a larger portion of its operating budget from the endowment distribution than most. Generous financial aid policy and a less established philanthropic tradition are among the reasons for this distinction. Grinnell is working to ease pressure on the endowment, most notably through the Reducing Endowment Dependency (RED) initiative, ensuring that its mission of access and commitment to excellence are sustainable long-term.

Place

Grinnell's campus comprises 190 acres and 94 buildings in the center of Grinnell, Iowa. The last 20 years have seen great improvements and additions to the Grinnell campus, including a campus center, new and impressive athletic facilities, an expansion of the Noyce Science Center, a new Admission and Financial Aid Center, and substantial renovations to many existing buildings. A new Humanities and Social Studies Complex (HSSC) opened in 2019 that added significant flexible space for social studies and humanities, and new spaces designed to support teaching and learning. A new suite-style residence hall, Renfrow Hall, named for the first Black alumna of Grinnell College, Mrs. Edith Renfrow Smith '37, will open fully in January, with significant space available to the public and designed for partnership with Grinnell's civic sector in the Weingart Civic Innovation Pavilion.

Grinnell College is located in Grinnell, Iowa— “the Jewel of the Prairie”—approximately one hour east of Des Moines and one hour west of Iowa City, home to the University of Iowa. With a historic downtown, independent retailers, restaurants, 70 acres of parks, and over ten miles of recreational trails, Grinnell is a vibrant micropolitan area boasting a thriving arts and culture environment and plentiful leisure opportunities. Known for its historic architecture, especially the Louis Sullivan-designed Jewel Box Bank, Grinnell has been listed as one of the “coolest” small cities in America. In collaboration with local partner organizations, the college has made significant investments in Grinnell in recent years in public pre-K-12 education, childcare, downtown development, housing, health and safety, arts and culture, and recreation. Students, faculty, and staff benefit from the many restaurants, cafes, and small businesses that line downtown streets, including a boutique hotel and an independent movie theater that is co-owned by the college with other local investors. Grinnell College was a close partner to multiple civic entities in the place-making project *Build a Better Grinnell*, whose work is nearing completion.

THE ROLE OF VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND DEAN OF THE COLLEGE

The VPAA, as chief academic officer of Grinnell College, will ensure that the academic affairs division effectively supports faculty teaching and research as well as student learning while embracing change and innovation without losing the distinctive characteristics of the institution. This will be a collaborative effort with the president and fellow members of the college's leadership team, including the Executive Council, faculty, staff, and students.

The VPAA is responsible for appointing, retaining, and supporting an excellent and diverse faculty and overseeing department and academic program reviews. A personnel committee composed of elected faculty members advises the president and the VPAA on faculty contract renewals, promotions, and tenure. The VPAA serves on, or is represented on, many college-wide committees and chairs the academic subcommittees of several, including the budget steering committee, the admissions and financial aid committee, the curriculum committee, the committee on academic standing, and the committee for support of faculty scholarship. The VPAA staffs the academic affairs committee of the board.

In addition to oversight of the faculty and academic program, the VPAA oversees the libraries, athletics, the Grinnell College Museum of Art, the Institute for Global Engagement, the Center for Teaching and Learning, the registrar's office, corporate, foundation, and government relations, student success and academic advising, and academic centers and special programs. The VPAA currently has ten direct reports, including three associate deans who serve in rotating three-year terms and an office staff of four.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND DEAN OF THE COLLEGE

The VPAA will be expected to address the following challenges and opportunities:

Champion the liberal arts and Grinnell's approach to the liberal arts

The VPAA must be an inspiring advocate for the power and possibility of a liberal arts education, clearly articulating the ways in which the vibrancy and excellence of the college's academic program encourage intellectual exploration while simultaneously preparing students to navigate life and affect social change after graduation. The individually advised curriculum is a significant point of distinction for Grinnell. It draws both students and faculty to the college and is a core piece of the Grinnell identity.

As the world evolves, so too must the curriculum. As the needs of students today and tomorrow change, Grinnell must ensure that students have the opportunity to explore intellectually and feel prepared for professional outcomes. This brings the obligation to periodically examine the curriculum in service of students. The VPAA will facilitate conversations to shape the next chapter of the college's curriculum and support faculty in this endeavor. The below-defined focus on governance, collaboration, and organization will allow sustained engagement in this work. The VPAA will champion this attention to craft, support a commitment to principle, and pave the way forward for Grinnell to continue with a distinctive curriculum and advising that remains the gold standard in liberal arts education.

Further reinforce academics as the core of a Grinnell experience for students and faculty

A rigorous and immersive liberal arts education and expert, research-active faculty are the hallmark of Grinnell College. As the leader of academic affairs at Grinnell, the VPAA is the principal advocate for the academic mission, ensuring that these essential qualities are nurtured such that they remain the points of

pride and distinction they have long been. The VPAA will be able to articulate the value of a vibrant academic program and embody this core message in their actions, including budgetary decisions. They will ensure teaching and research are well represented in the process of strategic institutional decision-making. These essential Grinnell qualities are not maintained or defined by any single individual, and the VPAA will seek and promote innovative ideas, bridge units, and collegially engage faculty, staff, and students across the college in support of the academic program.

Ensure research and creative activity is well supported

Grinnell is committed to the mission of world-class research and knowledge generation, and it has long been a leader in this way among its peer group. The VPAA will support this commitment, working diligently to ensure that time and resources are readily available for faculty to actualize their dedication to research and creative activity. The VPAA will ensure the systems and support for faculty research are in place and functioning well, and that these scholarly pursuits engage students and inform classroom teaching across the college.

Foster a committed and balanced organization for faculty, staff, and students that promotes academic well-being

Grinnell is home to expert scholars and teachers. Yet, too often, the realities of administration and governance manifest in a burden of time and energy that take faculty away from these core functions. The college's robust shared governance model, coupled with the increasing complexity of modern higher education, has resulted in many overly complex systems and processes on campus. Roles and responsibilities in—and systems and processes of—governance are too often unclear and unstructured, and the effects of this inefficiency and murkiness are felt daily. The VPAA, in partnership with the faculty, Executive Council, and campus leadership, will work to clarify, adjust, add, and subtract systems and processes where needed and will empower individuals across campus to think critically about these issues in a measured way. With respect and nuance, they will look at culture and norms with an eye toward the future and the intent of making faculty life more fulfilling and productive. They will work to find areas of efficiency and build fruitful, productive relationships that allow faculty, staff, and the administration to function in concert. Through successes and challenges, the VPAA will always keep service to institutional mission, and the well-being of faculty, staff, and students centered in the conversation.

Continue Grinnell's long-standing commitment to creating an anti-racist, diverse, welcoming, and inclusive environment

Grinnell strives to be a welcoming and engaging space on campus for all. This commitment is embedded in all the work of the college, and this work remains essential. The VPAA will be a committed leader working to advance this crucial value, ensuring that everyone employed by or attending the college feels welcomed and supported and experiences a genuine sense of belonging over time. The VPAA will work closely with the president, the chief diversity officer and vice president of diversity and inclusion, and the associate dean for faculty development and diversity, equity, and inclusion to institutionalize anti-racist

pedagogy, programs, structures, and processes to create a stronger and more inclusive community in academic affairs, departments, units, and experiences across campus.

Clarify, prioritize, and implement the institutional goals and objectives of the strategic plan in academic affairs and beyond

The VPAA and Dean of the College occupies a unique and essential space that bridges the faculty and administration. With this holistic college-wide perspective, they play an essential role in strategically coordinating and prioritizing the work ahead for Grinnell, especially in academic affairs. They will help align resources with institutional needs and provide a clear channel of communication across campus. The successful VPAA will ensure coordinated efforts between the faculty and administration that flow from commonly defined objectives and clearly articulated and understood goals, as well as the strategic prioritization of such projects. This important work will allow for the successful completion of initiatives, reforms, and implementations, and the college will recognize consistent, sustained progress in addressing both areas of need and strategic innovation.

In addition, a well-functioning and efficient division of academic affairs is essential in allowing faculty to faithfully execute the full nature of their role at Grinnell. The VPAA is responsible for the development of a strategic vision for the academic affairs division that will ensure a common direction towards which division leaders, faculty, and staff can work, and serve as a guide to inform decision-making. The VPAA will guide and support faculty through the work of actualizing the vision, ensuring that efficient systems and processes are paired with equally effective leadership. The VPAA will work to diffuse agency across the division, empower the faculty to make change, empower department, concentration, and division chairs to think innovatively, and empower the associate deans, directors, and staff to make decisions and push initiatives forward. In facilitation of such a working culture, the VPAA will be a clear, transparent, and consistent communicator, and ensure that roles and responsibilities are well-defined and the commonality of mission recognized.

Ensure a transformational curricular and co-curricular experience for students

A vital tenet of the Grinnell education is a rich and engaging co-curricular experience in tandem with the classroom experience. Delivery of such an experience consistently, and to all students, requires a high degree of coordination between faculty and staff. The VPAA will build bridges and break down silos in service of this goal, resulting in the divisions of student affairs, careers, life and service, and academic affairs—and the staff and faculty represented therein—working together and coordinating efforts more often. In such work, the VPAA, in partnership with other senior leaders, will ensure that strategic goals are articulated, that systems are defined to meet these goals, and that roles, pathways, and structures for students, faculty, and staff are clearly mapped out. Throughout this work, student, faculty, and staff well-being will remain a priority. While the roles of faculty and staff may differ, all will be able to articulate the mission at hand and their role in helping to achieve it.

QUALIFICATIONS

While no one person will possess all the qualifications enumerated below, the ideal candidate will have many of the following professional experiences and personal characteristics:

- *Academic accomplishment and a deep commitment to the liberal arts:* The VPAA must be an accomplished teacher and an engaged scholar whose academic vision is compatible with Grinnell's educational commitments and whose achievements command the intellectual and professional respect of its faculty, students, and staff. An earned doctorate or equivalent terminal degree and a record of distinguished teaching and scholarship are requisite for an appointment as a tenured full professor.
- *The ability to provide engaged and transparent leadership in times of change:* Grinnell values leadership that is accessible, trustworthy, collegial, and visibly engaged in the life of the campus. The VPAA should be an institutional leader who empowers, is fair, is transparent about their decision-making, and who will draw the best from people and the institution by establishing priorities and standards of accountability, while also respecting others' professionalism and allowing them scope for judgment as well as action. The VPAA will be a convener, facilitator, collaborator, and coordinator among campus-wide constituencies.
- *Outstanding listening and communication skills:* The VPAA will be a hub of communication among faculty, students, trustees, staff, the president, and the broader community in town and across the state. The VPAA needs to be open to new ideas and perspectives, effective in learning from others, assisting others in developing their ideas when appropriate, translating their thoughts for broader consideration with transparency, and speaking publicly on behalf of the college, representing its values and the critical importance of a liberal arts education to society.
- *Demonstrated leadership in fostering a culture that prioritizes diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging:* As Grinnell engages in the difficult and essential work of becoming an anti-racist institution, the college requires a VPAA with a deep passion for, and demonstrated experience in, fostering faculty, staff, and student diversity; addressing systemic racism; and building programs that encourage empowerment, inclusion, and belonging.
- *Demonstrated experience with budgets:* The VPAA should possess budget experience as well as planning and financial skills, including setting strategic financial and programmatic priorities that align with the college's mission and values, especially its commitment to building a more diverse community and fostering a more equitable and inclusive campus.
- *Personal qualities:* The successful candidate will possess integrity, energy, high emotional intelligence, agility, diplomacy, a sense of humor, and flexibility. The VPAA will also be highly organized and genuinely enjoy processes and creating effective systems that empower constituencies of a liberal arts education.

APPLICATIONS AND NOMINATIONS

Grinnell College has retained the services of Isaacson, Miller to assist with this search. Review of applications, nominations, and expressions of interest will begin immediately and continue on a confidential basis until an appointment is made. Nominations, applications, and inquiries should be sent in confidence to:

Jeff Kessner, Partner
Andy Marshall, Managing Associate
Jenny Rubin, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/grinnell-college/vice-president-academic-affairs-and-dean-college>

Electronic submission is strongly encouraged.

Grinnell College is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer committed to attracting and retaining highly qualified individuals who collectively reflect the diversity of the nation. No applicant shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status, religion, creed, or disability.

For further information about Grinnell College, see our website at <http://www.grinnell.edu>.