



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH

Driven to DiscoverSM

Search for Vice Chancellor for Student Life
University of Minnesota Duluth
Duluth, Minnesota

THE SEARCH

The University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD), one of five campuses within the University of Minnesota (UMN) System, seeks a strategic and collaborative leader to serve as the next Vice Chancellor for Student Life (VCSL). Reporting directly to the Chancellor, and as a key member of the senior leadership team, the VCSL will be responsible for creating and implementing a vision that supports the holistic development of students so they can thrive at UMD. The VCSL will play a central role in shaping the future of student life at UMD while closely collaborating with senior leadership in fostering a supportive and inclusive campus environment rooted in enhancing student success and wellbeing; promoting a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion; overseeing the development and implementation of programs that promote belonging; and building stronger partnerships across the university and University of Minnesota System (UMN System).

The University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) is a comprehensive public 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 and the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy both have programs in Duluth 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.

The new VCSL will be joining UMD at a transformational time, as they recently welcomed their new Chancellor in July 2024. Dr. Charles Nies brings a student-success lens to his work, and he is eager to cultivate his leadership as they embark on strategic planning and crafting a new vision for the university. The Chancellor's senior leadership team is also evolving, with the recent hire of the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Operations and more hires anticipated in the coming years to fill interim roles, creating a unique opportunity to shape a collaborative and forward-thinking strategy for the university. The VCSL will empower a team of talented student affairs professionals and partner across the university and UMN System in promoting best practices, cultivating a culture of student success, thoughtfully managing

resources, breaking down barriers to success, and inspiring collaboration around student wellness, wellbeing, and belonging efforts. The VCSL will address the following opportunities and challenges:

- Develop an inclusive vision and strategy for the Division of Student Life in alignment with university strategic planning
- Strengthen collaborations across the university, especially with Academic Affairs and Strategic Enrollment Management
- Cultivate an experienced and dedicated Student Life team around new strategies, best practices, and translate theories into practice
- Strategically steward and enhance financial resources
- Serve as a thoughtful and strategic partner to UMD and system-wide leadership while serving as a voice for all students

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

At UMD, there are more than [250 student organizations](#), a vibrant on campus living community, an active [Greek life system](#), [faith-based groups](#), more than 50 [different intramural](#) and [recreational activities](#), and countless opportunities for students to have fun and find their place and their people. Approximately 2,900 students live on campus across 5 residence halls and 4 apartment complexes.

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.

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 CHANCELLOR

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.

THE LOCATION

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 SYSTEM

The University of Minnesota (UMN) is a globally recognized 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 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, including 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.

THE DIVISION OF STUDENT LIFE

The Division of Student Life at UMD plays a central role in fostering a supportive campus environment that empowers students to succeed academically, grow personally, and thrive socially through holistic development. By fostering strong partnerships across campus, the Division ensures that students have access to the resources and opportunities they need to achieve their goals. Grounded in UMD's mission and values, the Division strives to cultivate an inclusive and vibrant community where all students feel supported, engaged, and prepared for future success. The Division includes the following offices and units:

- Budget and Personnel
- Career Center
- Recreational Sports Outdoor Program
- Disability Resources
- Boulder Lake Env. Learning Center
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Dining Services
- Health and Counseling Services
- Housing and Residence Life
- Kirby Student Center
- Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution
- Transportation & Parking/U Card Office
- UMD Stores/Print Services

For more information about the Division of Student Life, visit <https://student-life.d.umn.edu>.

THE ROLE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR STUDENT LIFE

The Vice Chancellor for Student Life (VCSL) is a key member of the Chancellor's senior leadership team and is responsible for shaping a holistic student experience by creating and implementing strategic initiatives, building key partnerships, and leading an experienced team to advance student success and belonging. They are responsible for the development, assessment, and improvement of services that meet and support the needs of all students and the university's mission. The VCSL works closely with the senior leadership team, and especially with the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Strategic Enrollment Management, in the efficient onboarding, success, and graduation of students, along with promoting opportunities for all students to participate in research and experiential learning opportunities. The VCSL ensures financially sound operations and successfully manages auxiliary functions. The VCSL plays a critical role in aligning the Division of Student Life with UMD's strategic priorities and collaborating across the university and within the University of Minnesota System to ensure inclusive support structures for all students to thrive while on campus and beyond.

The Division is currently going through a reorganization with the creation of AVC roles to ensure the VCSL can focus more on strategy moving forward, with fewer unit-level direct reports. The VCSL oversees 240 staff and 600 student staff, and an overall budget of \$51 million (including auxiliary areas).

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

It is a pivotal time to join UMD as the university embarks on new ambitions with a student success lens. The VCSL will have the opportunity to help shape an ambitious future for UMD by addressing the following opportunities and challenges:

Develop an inclusive vision and strategy for the Division of Student Life in alignment with university strategic planning

As UMD embarks on the creation and implementation of strategic planning, the VCSL will be instrumental in being a voice for all students and ensuring student success and belonging are central priorities. Collaborating closely with UMD's leadership team and campus partners, the VCSL will develop new strategies and programs that aligns with UMD's mission and ensures students feel valued, connected, and supported throughout their academic journey. Guided by a holistic framework, the VCSL will evolve the Division to best support the mental health, academic and social wellbeing, and wellness of all students from enrollment to graduation. The VCSL will ensure that initiatives are innovative and geared toward fostering an environment where all students can thrive. They will bring a demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in all aspects of student life. They will offer a data-informed perspective to decision making and the thoughtful allocation of resources while making key investments to augment the student experience and their success while encouraging an even-more-vibrant campus community.

Strengthen collaborations across the university, especially with Academic Affairs and Strategic Enrollment Management

Partnerships and collaboration will be the key to the success of the next VCSL to build strong relationships across the university, especially with Academic Affairs and Strategic Enrollment Management, and alignment around strategy and programming. This will include working across the university to adapt strategies and policies to help ensure the recruitment and success of an increasingly more diverse student body. They will stay informed and learn about student's needs, especially those of historically underrepresented communities, including first-generation, pell-eligible, LGBTQ+, adult learners, students with disabilities, international, transfer and veteran students, among others. The VCSL will work collaboratively to ensure that resources and support structures are accessible, integrated, and tailored to meet the needs of all students. Together, the university will fulfill the shared goal of creating a more seamless, holistic, and supportive experience for all students across UMD's diverse departments and entities, which will include ensuring students have unparalleled opportunities for hands-on, impactful learning while augmenting the great work already happening at UMD in providing proactive wellness and wellbeing support.

Cultivate an experienced and dedicated Student Life team around new strategies, best practices, and translate theories into practice

The VCSL will inspire and empower a newly reorganized and talented Student Life team to create a nimble and highly responsive Division through innovation, collaboration, and best practices. The VCSL will leverage the team's talents and expertise where possible to ensure the Division can best respond to evolving student needs and deliver impactful programs, services, and outcomes. The Division will continually adapt its procedures, infrastructure, and services to best respond to student needs and wants as the university continues on its ambitious path. The VCSL will cultivate the team to fulfill a new vision for Student Life while building bridges with other units on campus to facilitate impactful collaborations. The VCSL will champion professional growth and development by providing mentorship opportunities and supporting efforts to stay at the forefront of critical issues affecting the student experience and changing student demographics.

Strategically steward and enhance financial resources

The VCSL will oversee a complex Division, including robust self-operated auxiliaries services, where they will be expected to thoughtfully manage and optimize financial and facilities resources across the Division and university. They will be expected to identify opportunities for revenue generation while ensuring the efficient use of existing resources and aligning budgetary decisions with the university's strategic priorities to maximize impact. The VCSL will explore innovative housing options and opportunities to ensure the University is able to meet a growing demand for on-campus living. The VCSL will explore grant writing and fundraising opportunities by telling the student story and building relationships with donors, alumni, and community leaders in support of the Division. These efforts will help ensure the sustainability and growth of student services and programs that enhance the UMD student experience for years to come.

Serve as a thoughtful and strategic partner to UMD and system-wide leadership while serving as a voice for all students

The VCSL will be a highly collaborative and strategic leader focused on the good of the whole as UMD embarks on new ambitions. They will assist the campus leadership team in the creation and execution of university strategic planning while also serving as a thought partner and bridge between UMD and the UMN System in ensuring institutional goals and objectives align with System goals, especially as it relates to the student experience. The VCSL will be a strong advocate for UMD student needs, ensuring their perspectives are reflected in all decision-making at every level. The VCSL will serve as a leader among the five UMN campuses, spearheading collaborative efforts to develop programs and strategies that promote student wellbeing and belonging throughout the University of Minnesota System.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The VCSL will be an experienced leader with at least 10 years of progressive leadership and administrative experience in student affairs administration. A Master's degree in higher education, student affairs, educational leadership, or a closely related field is required, with a doctoral degree strongly preferred. Additionally, candidates will also bring most, if not all, of the following professional qualifications, skills, experiences, and personal qualities:

- Proven track record of success in strategic planning and managing a sizable budget;
- Knowledge and experience working effectively with diverse student populations;
- Extensive experience with crisis management, student safety, wellness, and care;
- Proven ability to cultivate a team around a new vision and strategy, building and maintaining effective partnerships with academic affairs and other areas across a university;
- Creative program planning, implementation, and administration, including management of budgets and personnel;
- Demonstrated experience overseeing a broad portfolio of student affairs functions, including housing and residence life, health and wellness services, diversity and inclusion initiatives, student activities, conflict resolution, career services, and auxiliary operations, with a proven ability to align these areas to enhance the overall student experience;
- Excellent communication, collaboration, and consensus-building abilities, with the skill to effectively communicate information in a clear and understandable manner;
- A thorough understanding of current trends and best practices in student development theory and student affairs administration;
- Successful experience in change management and program improvement;
- Proven experience and a continuing commitment to foster and strengthen an inclusive and diverse campus community that supports academic achievement of all students; and
- A strong personal orientation toward collaboration, teamwork, transparency, accessibility, accountability, and delegation.

COMPENSATION

The Vice Chancellor for Student Life is a 100%-time, 12-month, professional and administrative (P&A) appointment. Salary is commensurate with education and experience, with an anticipated salary range of \$200,000-\$230,000.

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:
<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-minnesota-duluth/vice-chancellor-student-life>

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