

Kenyon

Chief Operating Officer
Kenyon College
Gambier, OH

THE SEARCH

Kenyon College, one of the nation's preeminent liberal arts institutions, seeks a strategic and collaborative leader to serve as its inaugural Chief Operating Officer (COO). The COO will play a critical role in facilitating the seamless integration of administrative services and operational functions. Working closely with the president and senior leadership, the COO will ensure capital, human, and financial resources are deployed to the best use, align and support strategic priorities, and strongly position the college to navigate the changing higher education landscape.

Reporting directly to the president and serving as a key member of Senior Staff, the COO is responsible for a broad portfolio, which includes facilities, design and construction, business services, information technology, and human resources. The COO will serve as an important partner on strategic financial planning and analysis, and capital strategy. The COO will be a strong partner to the president, fellow Senior Staff members, and the Board of Trustees, providing strategic leadership for all short- and long-term operational and financial decision-making. The COO's overarching charge will be strategic alignment and strong management of Kenyon's infrastructure and systems to support institutional priorities across the college ecosystem.

As the inaugural leader of a portfolio that newly unites all operational and administrative units under common leadership, the COO will serve as a change leader and systems thinker, breaking down silos, developing synergies between and among functions, and ensuring effectiveness and efficiency across all areas. As the manager of a large and diverse team, they will support and develop their staff, modeling a culture of service and utilizing the expertise of their direct reports. The COO will be a vital and visible member of the Kenyon community, possessing the interpersonal skills to connect and collaborate with a wide range of engaged constituents. They will bring a deep appreciation of Kenyon's academic mission and an understanding of how operational and administrative functions come together to support and enhance teaching, learning, research, and the student experience.

Kenyon College has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important search and to help identify outstanding candidates. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT KENYON COLLEGE

Founded in 1824, Kenyon is the oldest private college in Ohio and one of the nation's finest. Its academic excellence goes hand-in-hand with a strong sense of community, bringing together 1,750 young people to study with more than 200 professors on an exceptionally beautiful hilltop campus in central Ohio. Students, professors, and staff share in the ethos of Kenyon's community: embracing rigor and friendship. Kenyon prides itself on the strength of its faculty—accomplished scholars who place the highest value on teaching. Its curriculum is rooted in the traditional liberal arts and sciences and enriched by interdisciplinary programs. Other highly notable academic pillars of its education are a distinguished literary tradition, as well as an emphasis on excellent written communication.

Campus

Kenyon's beautiful 1,200-acre campus is in Gambier, Ohio, 45 miles from the state's capital, Columbus. Kenyon's campus is often cited as one of the most beautiful campuses in the country, and Kenyon College is on the National Register of Historic Places. Kenyon blends the modern with the traditional, allowing the campus' timeless beauty to endure while responding to new needs and adopting new technologies.

Middle Path is the primary organizing element of campus, extending two-thirds of a mile from Bexley Hall on the north to Old Kenyon on the south. Middle Path connects the campus together as a central artery, uniting the historic and academic core, the Village of Gambier, and north campus.

The campus includes more than 140 buildings, including historic buildings representing a mix of handsome Gothic and Classical Revival buildings and white clapboard houses, as well as modern, state-of-the-art and architecturally stunning buildings constructed within the last decade. For example, the newly constructed West Quad includes a new library, a new academic building, a new building for admissions and financial aid building, and an extensive underground parking garage. Kenyon also recently completed two new residence halls—one opened in January 2025 and the other will open in fall 2025—adding a total of 244 beds to campus. New construction is highly sustainable, ADA-compliant, and beautifully designed.

In addition to the thoughtfully planned built environment, the campus is also home to a nature preserve. The Brown Family Environmental Center offers beautiful gardens plus over 600 acres of woodland and prairie habitats, accessible by eight miles of hiking trails.

Students & Academics

Kenyon believes that a student population representing diverse geographic, economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds is essential to a liberal arts education. The college's student body of approximately 1,750

hails from 47 U.S. states and 48 countries, and 33% of students identify as domestic students of color or international students.

Faculty and Academics

The Kenyon community is animated by its commitments to liberal arts education and to educating students who go out into the world and change it for the better. The curriculum is both wide and deep, as well as highly interdisciplinary, offering more than 50 majors, minors, and concentrations, plus the option for students to design their own. An education at Kenyon enables graduates to stand out. Kenyon is a top producer of Fulbright Fellows and ranks eighth in the nation for the proportion of STEM graduates who earn a doctorate in their field.

Kenyon is home to more than 200 engaged and dedicated professors who devote their full attention to their students. Kenyon faculty members are also authors, artists, and researchers immersed in scholarly and creative projects. 99% of Kenyon's tenure-track faculty hold a PhD or other terminal degree in their field. Because teaching is prioritized at Kenyon, every class at Kenyon is taught by a member of the faculty. The 10:1 student-to-faculty ratio makes for small, intimate classes, enabling faculty and students to form long-lasting and meaningful relationships. Once required to live in Gambier, many Kenyon faculty still reside just steps away from campus.

Associated Nonprofit Organizations & Businesses

Kenyon supports and is supported by associated nonprofit organizations of local importance and national distinction. Although different in mission, resources, and structure, the *Kenyon Review*, the Philander Chase Conservancy, Kokosing Nature Preserve, and the Gund all augment and enhance the college's mission. These organizations, based on Kenyon's campus, provide students with special opportunities to apply classroom study to real-world problems, build career credentials, and interact with the community. The COO will provide operational and administrative oversight, guidance, and support to these areas.

The Kenyon Review

Founded in 1939, [The Kenyon Review](#) is a nationally prominent quarterly literary magazine that enhances Kenyon's reputation as The Writer's College. It publishes breakthrough work by prize-winning authors and daring new voices. The *Review* has featured the early works of notable writers such as Flannery O'Connor, Dylan Thomas, Maya Angelou, and Ha Jin. Each summer, the *Review* welcomes adult and high school students to campus for various programs, including its prestigious Young Writers workshop.

The Philander Chase Corporation & Kokosing Nature Preserve

The [Philander Chase Corporation](#) conserves open space and important natural habitats in a five-mile radius surrounding Kenyon. The conservancy works with farmers, landowners, environmental groups, and

government agencies to ensure the rural character of the surrounding area is maintained. Kenyon formed the Conservancy in 2000 in anticipation of a greater need to protect the farmland and rural nature of the surrounding area and is the only college or university in the country to establish its own land trust. In over two decades of conservation, 5,600 acres and 66 farms and properties have been preserved, and more than 5 miles of the Kokosing River are protected by easements. A project of the Philander Chase Conservancy, the [Kokosing Nature Preserve](#) is a conservation burial ground located in Gambier that offers a natural burial option on 23 acres of restored prairies and woodlands.

The Gund

Kenyon's teaching art museum and visual arts center, [The Gund](#), began in 2011 as a place to experience modern and contemporary art and, over the last 14 years, has expanded its vision to include programming that extends far beyond a traditional gallery space. The Gund is home to a growing collection of more than 450 modern and contemporary works and the building itself is an architectural destination. Named for Graham Gund '63, a celebrated architect, art collector, and philanthropist, the building is a 31,000-square-foot LEED-certified building.

Businesses

Kenyon's Business Services oversees the Bookstore and the Kenyon Inn. The Bookstore, located centrally on Middle Path in the Village, is the nation's longest continuously operating college bookstore and the third-oldest bookstore of any kind in America. The Kenyon Inn, also in the center of Gambier, offers fine lodging accommodations and is one of Knox County's fine dining options. The Kenyon Inn also hosts corporate retreats, weddings, and special events.

Financial Position

Given its impressive fundraising capability, solid cash and investments relative to operating expenses, competitive admissions, and sound management, Kenyon's financial position is strong. Kenyon's adjusted operating expense for FY24 was \$206 million and its endowment is approximately \$626 million. In June 2024, Kenyon concluded the [Our Path Forward to the Bicentennial](#) campaign as the most successful in the college's history, raising \$532 million, exceeding both the original goal of \$300 million and a revised goal of \$500 million. Tuition, room and board, and fees were \$87,160 for the fall of 2024, which represented 81% of gross revenue, and the tuition discount rate was 47.7%. Together, these factors provide Kenyon with consistently strong bond ratings. In January 2024, Moody's gave the college a rating of A2 stable and in January of this year, S&P reaffirmed its A/Stable rating.

While Kenyon enjoys a strong position, the college has not been immune to external pressures facing small liberal arts colleges, namely downward demographic trends, lingering effects of COVID-19, and rising costs and inflation. The construction of two new residence halls, which were mostly donor-funded, could facilitate enrollment growth of about 200 students over the next five years, resulting in improved operating performance.

Leadership

President Julie Kornfeld, Kenyon's 20th president

Julie Kornfeld began her presidency at Kenyon on October 1, 2023. A champion of interdisciplinary collaboration, curricular innovation and cross-cutting institutional partnerships, Kornfeld previously served as vice provost for academic programs at Columbia University and as vice dean for education at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health. Read more about President Kornfeld [here](#).

Location: Gambier, OH

The village of Gambier is located right in the middle of Kenyon's campus, and by design. The village includes the community's post office, market, bookstore, coffee shop, and a handful of other shops and restaurants. With a population of 2,450 sprinkled across less than a square mile, Gambier's location off the beaten path is a vital part of Kenyon and shapes the way students, faculty, and staff love and learn.

Gambier, located in Knox County, is nestled on a hilltop bordered by the Kokosing River and surrounded by the gently rolling hills of Ohio countryside. Many professors and staff live in Gambier or neighboring Mt. Vernon and are active members of the community. While Kenyon may sit within a rural, small, wide-open space, the campus is only a little over an hour drive to Columbus, Ohio's vibrant capital city.

ROLE OF THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

The Chief Operating Officer position is a new role at Kenyon College. The COO will join Kenyon College at an exciting moment, marked by the energy and optimism of President Kornfeld's first year in office, and will be presented with substantial opportunities for making a lasting impact. The COO will be a critical leader in shepherding Kenyon into its next iteration, serving as strategist and steward of the college's financial, physical, and human resources.

The portfolio, which unites facilities and operations, information technology, human resources, and business affairs, has been designed to ensure that operational and administrative services are integrated and seamless, enabling resources to be used most effectively and efficiently, deployed to the best use, and aligned with Kenyon's strategic priorities.

A direct report to President Kornfeld and a key member of the senior leadership team, the COO is broadly responsible for ensuring operational and administrative excellence across the college. Initially, the COO will oversee a team of directors who have responsibility for design and construction, facility maintenance, information technology, human resources, and business services. The COO will have the opportunity to build the team that best aligns with the evolving needs of the College. Additionally, the COO will be a key partner to the president, Senior Staff, and the Board on long-range strategic, financial, and capital planning.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Strategic and Long-Range Planning in Service of Kenyon's Academic Mission

In joining the president's senior leadership team, the COO will serve as a strong partner to the president, fellow senior leaders, and the Board of Trustees, bringing strategy, vision, and creative thinking to Kenyon's operational and resource management. For the first time, many administrative and operational functions will be united under the COO's portfolio; the new COO will be expected to create efficiencies across the college, aligning and modernizing processes and systems with the goal of creating a more seamless experience for faculty, students, and staff and in support of Kenyon's academic mission. Across this work, the COO will leverage long-range financial planning tools and a data-informed approach to provide the analyses and information required for strategic decision-making. The COO will identify opportunities and problems proactively, offering new approaches to advance the institution.

Given the rapidly evolving higher education landscape, the COO will need to be a resident expert concerning financial and operational issues facing higher education. They will be well-informed about best operational and administrative practices and bring a fresh perspective to the college's policies, contracts, and budgets. Serving as a vigilant steward, the COO will be expected to provide strategic, forward-looking, and mission-informed direction for Kenyon's resources, guiding change where needed and ensuring the college's business model adapts as needed in coming years.

Operational and Facilities Leadership

In many ways, Kenyon functions as a small municipality, requiring considerable oversight of diverse functions across operations, facilities, infrastructure, design and construction, and services. Given that the campus includes both historic buildings and recently constructed, modern buildings, the COO will need to be highly attuned to the very different needs that exist across 150+ physical structures. Many of Kenyon's more recently constructed buildings include "smart" features that require seamless coordination between facilities and information technology functions. As these areas will be newly unified under the COO's portfolio, it will be expected that the COO implements systems and processes that facilitate the smooth co-functioning of these teams to best support the ever-more technical realities of Kenyon's built infrastructure. More generally, the COO will also need to prioritize deferred maintenance and renewal needs of all existing facilities, guided by a recently completed comprehensive facilities assessment. Given the breadth of their portfolio, the COO will need to rely on their senior leaders as subject matter experts and empower them to take ownership and move initiatives forward.

Kenyon's current campus master plan was completed in 2014 and many of the proposed projects outlined in that plan have been completed. In the coming years, the COO will likely be expected to undertake a new master planning process to continue Kenyon's track record of intentionally planned capital projects. Additionally, the COO will ensure that sustainability is prioritized and incorporated into institutional operating and capital decision-making, supporting Kenyon's goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040.

Advocate and Support Information Technology

The new COO will understand and embrace technology as a means for delivering a best-in-class educational program and for running essential operations of the college efficiently and effectively. Working in close partnership with IT leadership, the COO must leverage adept budgeting and planning skills to strategically approach technical resource investment to provide faculty, staff, and students with access to needed tools, systems, hardware, and software. In the coming months, Kenyon will embark upon an enterprise-wide ERP implementation. The COO will play a lead role in seeing this project to a successful completion. Understanding the interconnections between IT and facilities, the COO will develop a holistic, well-integrated operations and IT strategy that serves as a road map for ongoing investments in Kenyon's tech infrastructure. Today, the IT team is seen as a responsive, customer-focused, strategic partner to units across the college—the COO will preserve this culture and orientation, modeling service excellence, collaboration, and responsiveness.

Provide Strategic Oversight for Human Resources

Kenyon is a vibrant community and a wonderful place to work. The COO will be a partner to the Director of HR, providing strategic guidance in relation to planning and prioritization as it relates to developing a stronger HR infrastructure. As with many institutions of higher learning, recruiting and retaining staff can pose challenges. The COO will support the Director of HR in identifying areas with high turnover, reviewing staffing levels, and developing creative strategies for streamlining processes and filling vacancies. Supporting initiatives that promote staff development and professional growth and looking closely at Kenyon's compensation philosophy and structures to ensure competitiveness will be integral to Kenyon's comprehensive talent management strategy.

Collaborate, Engage, and Communicate within the Kenyon Community

Kenyon College is a tight-knit, residential campus where students, faculty, and staff are highly engaged and invested in creating and sustaining a purposeful, welcoming, intellectual, and kind community. It will be critical for the COO to become enmeshed within the character that undergirds Kenyon's campus and uphold a values-based leadership style that emphasizes transparency and accountability. The COO will be expected to take time to genuinely engage, ask questions, and learn about the campus community. Additionally, they will demonstrate a sincere interest in the life of the college, an appreciation for shared governance, and excitement for the dedicated work of faculty, staff, and students.

The COO must create strong, collaborative working relationships with all constituents across the college, serving as a trusted thought partner and leader to support and develop existing and emerging initiatives. As a key representative of the president's leadership team, the COO must be a clear communicator and active listener, able to present complex information, processes, and policies to a wide variety of audiences while also being approachable and receptive to input and feedback from the extended community.

Unify the Newly Created COO Portfolio, Lead Strong Teams, and Manage Union Relations

The COO's portfolio will newly unify facilities and operations, information technology, human resources, and business affairs teams. Given that staff from these areas previously existed within separate units, the COO will serve as the inaugural leader and be charged with developing a division that is service-oriented and responsive to the needs of the Kenyon community. The COO will be a strong manager and communicator, able to articulate goals and direction, break down historical silos and pain points between functions, and inspire a shared vision.

The COO will inherit a talented and dedicated team across functional areas. They will be expected to support their team, utilizing the institutional knowledge and expertise of seasoned members while also providing mentorship and encouraging professional development and growth. Additionally, the COO will cultivate a culture of creativity, flexibility, mutual respect, integrity, and shared accountability, motivating strong teams to continue to provide a high level of service to departments across the college.

Kenyon's facilities team includes members of the IAM and UE labor unions. The COO will work with the union representatives and support the college in collective bargaining every two to three years.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will have a strong track record in operational and administrative management, ideally within a higher education institution, and have the requisite experience to lead and develop teams across information technology, facilities, human resources, and business services. The COO will be a values-driven leader and adept strategic financial planner able to support leadership in the most effective and efficient use of resources to sustainably advance Kenyon's mission, values, and goals.

A minimum of 10 years of experience in and knowledge of administrative and operational management practices, ideally in higher education, is required. A master's degree is preferred.

Additional qualifications and experience include:

- Demonstrated operational leadership in key areas including information technology, human resources, facilities management, and business services;
- Strong finance, long-range planning, and business skills that enable strategic, visionary, and proactive approaches to complex financial and budget management;
- Proven effectiveness in a complex organization and familiarity with managing the diverse requirements of affiliated nonprofit entities;
- Demonstrated capacity to communicate broadly across an institution. The ability to convey technically complex information and concepts in accessible terms to a diverse array of constituents. The ability and inclination to work well with people at all levels of an organization;
- An outstanding collaborator with strong interpersonal and relationship-building skills; superb listening and influencing skills; the ability to cultivate and sustain trust and credibility with

colleagues, and build unity across teams and across difficult issues; a facilitator, convener, and mediator;

- A commitment to consensus building and suasion rather than hierarchy;
- A track record of strong management, demonstrated ability to manage, empower, and support staff and to provide successful oversight of budgets and facilities; an effective delegator; ability to define and implement effective management structures and systems, establish and uphold high performance standards, and sustain a culture defined by excellence and responsiveness;
- Familiarity working with collective bargaining units;
- A liveliness of intellect and a commitment to engage collaboratively with and be accessible to colleagues and community members, and to respond effectively to their needs and concerns;
- A strategic and creative problem solver, the ability to make difficult decisions, and strong decision-making skills tempered with flexibility and adaptability;
- An ability to manage both big picture and operational details; to move projects from conception to completion;
- A familiarity with liberal arts education and an understanding of the current issues facing liberal arts colleges.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Confidential inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and letters of interest responding to the opportunities and challenges outlined above) should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/kenyon-college/chief-operating-officer>.

Daniel Rodas, Partner
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Kenyon College is an equal opportunity employer and applications from members of all underrepresented groups are encouraged. It is the College's policy to evaluate qualified applicants without regard to race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, physical and/or mental disability, age, religion, medical condition, veteran status, marital status, or any other characteristic protected by institutional policy or state, local, or federal law. Kenyon College has a strong commitment to supporting diversity, equity and inclusion. Please visit our [Diversity at Kenyon](#) website.