



CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

Assistant Vice President for Engagement and Belonging
University of San Francisco
San Francisco, California

THE SEARCH

The University of San Francisco (USF), a private, Catholic, Jesuit research university, seeks a collaborative and innovative leader to serve as Assistant Vice President for Engagement and Belonging (AVP). Reporting directly to the Vice President of Student Life, the AVP will serve a pivotal role in assisting the University to enhance student retention, learning, development, engagement, and success. In collaboration with colleagues across campus, the AVP will have the opportunity to leverage USF's vision, mission, history, and location to provide an environment of holistic development that encourages all students to pursue on- and off-campus engagement, meaningful social connection, and leadership training as critical parts of their university experience.

USF is well positioned to address the challenges facing today's students and prepare them to have a positive impact. Established as San Francisco's first institution of higher education in 1855, USF instills Jesuit values in its graduates and these timeless values, especially *cura personalis* or care of the whole person, recognition of the human dignity of all people, and changing the world for the better, are more relevant than ever. USF serves approximately 5,800 undergraduate and approximately 3,400 graduate and professional students in Arts and Sciences, Education, Law, Management, and Nursing and Health Professions. The USF community is home to 1,127 faculty and librarian members, 963 staff members, and has an operating budget of over \$515 million.

The AVP will join the Core Leadership Team of the Division of Student Life at an exciting time of reimagination after recent leadership shifts within Student Life and a new President joining USF in Fall 2025. The AVP will play a vital role in helping to shape new strategy as the team member responsible for the overall vision, leadership, direction, assessment, evaluation, and coordination of services and programs for Cultural Centers, New Student and Family Programs, and Student Leadership and Engagement. They will also play a critical role in both curricular and co-curricular student experiences. The AVP role has been newly renamed to include belonging, emphasizing the division's longstanding commitment to fostering a sense of inclusion for every student and increasing campus engagement and student retention. The AVP also plays a key role in the administration's efforts to ensure a safe environment in which to engage challenging and complex topics. The AVP will partner with the

administration to foster a community where all voices are valued and heard, proactively build relationships with students and administrators to facilitate conversation around current events and difficult topics, and thoughtfully manage free expression and peaceful assembly on campus. By encouraging creativity around student activities, cultivating belonging through co-curricular programs, and shaping ongoing dialogue and relationship building, the AVP will ensure that all students are able to find their place at USF.

The AVP will have the opportunity to address a number of opportunities and challenges, including:

- Realize a shared vision for student engagement and belonging rooted in USF's values and responsive to its diverse urban environment.
- Increase the visibility of the Student Engagement unit among the student and campus community to cultivate proactive and cohesive partnerships for even greater impact.
- Inspire the Student Engagement team and manage resources effectively.
- Work closely with the Core Leadership Team to enhance campus culture by integrating co-curricular activities, guiding constructive dialogue, and supporting retention efforts.

A list of the desired qualifications and characteristics of the AVP can be found at the conclusion of this document, which was prepared by the search committee with the assistance of Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to provide background information and detail the key opportunities and challenges related to the position. All confidential applications, inquiries, and nominations should be directed to the parties listed at the conclusion of this document.

ABOUT USF

The University of San Francisco distinguishes itself as a diverse, socially responsible learning community of high-quality scholarship and academic rigor, sustained by a “faith that does justice.” The university draws from the cultural, intellectual, and economic resources of the San Francisco Bay Area and its location in a dynamic and culturally rich location to enrich and strengthen its educational programs. Deeply rooted in its [Jesuit mission](#) and guided by [aligned Catholic values](#), the community is mid-course in the implementation of the five-year strategic plan, [USF Strategic Plan 2027](#). Developed in June of 2022, the plan positions the university to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape, bolster student success, strengthen enrollment, and ensure the academic program's sustainability.

US News and World Report ranks USF in the top 15% of universities nationally for social mobility, and #109 among all national universities. The university is frequently recognized for its contribution to the common good. *US News* also ranks several undergraduate programs in the top 30 nationally, including nursing, entrepreneurship, and marketing. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classifies USF as an R2: High Research Spending and Doctorate Production institution and a Community Engaged institution.

The university welcomes and supports a student body reflective of San Francisco's diversity and rich multiculturalism. Over 30 percent of the university's students are first-generation college students, and

the university has been designated an [Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution](#) by the Department of Education. The 2025 *US News and World Report* ranks USF as tied at number one for student body ethnic diversity among national universities, in addition to the distinction of being a “Best Value” national university.

USF’s campus culture reflects the vibrancy of its location and student body. Approximately 3,000 undergraduate and graduate students live on campus. At the heart of campus engagement are over 190 graduate and undergraduate student organizations, including academic, honorary, and professional organizations; [social fraternities and sororities](#); cultural, international, religious, and spiritual associations; media and performing arts groups; and political, service, and special interest organizations. University Ministry, open to community members of all faiths, beliefs, and identities, engages with students to help achieve USF’s social justice mission. The [Change the World From Here Institute](#) provides an array of leadership development programs for undergraduate and graduate students and fosters campus-wide community around social engagement, including an annual Change the World From Here Week. USF is also home to the [ROTC Dons Battalion](#). Signature community events, from annual collaborations with the San Francisco Giants to the recently launched [415 Day](#), celebrate the Bay Area’s unique cultural offerings.

Athletics help cultivate the health, character, and sense of community among the student body and USF has a long and rich history of excellence in athletics. The [USF Dons](#) boast 13 team and individual national championships, 101 conference championships, and 102 All-Americans throughout the institution’s history. The men’s and women’s basketball teams have developed a particularly strong national reputation in recent years and the university also fields teams in baseball, men’s and women’s teams in soccer, cross country, golf, and track and field, and women’s volleyball, beach volleyball, and triathlon. In addition to varsity sports, USF offers robust club sports programs and a thriving intramural sports program.

In addition to its campus in San Francisco, USF has a long, distinguished history of providing working adults the opportunity to further their education through its additional locations. These locations are in Downtown San Francisco, Sacramento, Santa Rosa, San Jose, Pleasanton, and Orange County and offer full services conveniently located to students’ homes and workplaces. Online degree programs are available in a growing number of fields.

To learn more, visit <https://www.usfca.edu>

ABOUT THE DIVISION OF STUDENT LIFE

The mission of Student Life is to fully support holistic student development within a social justice framework centered in preparing students to be caring, socially responsible citizens in our global and local community. The Division includes the following departments: Career Services, Case Management, Center for Academic and Student Achievement (CASA), Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Cultural Centers (includes the Gender and Sexuality Center and the Intercultural Center), Health Promotion Services, Learning Center, New Student and Family Programs, Off Campus Living, Office of the Dean of

Students, Office of Student Conduct, Rights and Responsibilities, Public Safety, Residence Life, Student Disability Services (SDS), Student Leadership and Engagement (includes Change the World From Here Institute), Title IX, and University Ministry. A number of programs are also included within the division: Bias Education and Resource Team (BERT), Care Referral Program, Food Pantry, and Muscat Scholars (First Generation Students).

Dr. Shannon Gary is the Vice President of Student Life at the University of San Francisco. He arrived at USF in February 2017 as Associate Vice Provost and Dean of Students and became Vice President of Student Life in September 2024. Dr. Gary is a first-generation college student from Philadelphia, PA. He earned his undergraduate degree from Muhlenberg College, and a master's degree and Doctor of Education degree in Higher Education Management from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. Dr. Gary has a background that spans a diversity of higher education institutions, and throughout his career has been a student-centered advocate for all students.

The Core Leadership Team of the Division of Student Life consists of the Associate Vice President and Dean of Students, Associate Vice President and Dean of Student Academic Services, and Assistant Vice President for Engagement and Belonging. This recruitment is the result of the recent promotion of the previous AVP for Student Engagement, Lester Deanes, to the position of Associate Vice President and Dean of Students after Shannon Gary became Vice President of Student Life.

To learn more, visit <https://myusf.usfca.edu/student-life>

ROLE OF THE AVP FOR ENGAGEMENT AND BELONGING

Reporting to the Vice President of Student Life, the AVP will work closely with the Core Leadership Team on the overall vision, leadership, direction, assessment, evaluation, and coordination of services and programs for a vibrant co-curricular student life experience. They will also work collaboratively with Strategic Enrollment Management and academic units to assist with the successful onboarding and retention of students. The AVP will continually evaluate and promote existing programs while encouraging new programs to foster engagement on and off campus, the development of students as healthy and socially responsible adults, and an increased culture of belonging across USF locations. The AVP will need to be a visible and trusted leader, capable of providing support and guidance while also holding students responsible and cultivating a culture of accountability.

As a member of the larger staff in Student Life, the Assistant Vice President for Engagement and Belonging also collaborates and cooperates to create leadership and intercultural competence opportunities to support student learning and development in the Jesuit Catholic tradition. The AVP will help to define and implement the Division's mission, vision, values, and strategic goals; play a critical role in both curricular and co-curricular student retention efforts; assist in response to student protest, demonstrations, and other forms of free expression; and participate in committees, task forces, and special projects or other duties as requested by the Vice President of Student Life.

USF also offers the Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA), which combines an academic curriculum with practical experiences in various areas of student life. While the AVP does not oversee the academic program, the AVP is responsible for coordinating the internship and practicum placements, cultivating partnerships with on- and off- campus placement locations, and conducting internship training in partnership with HESA faculty members and administrators.

The AVP's office includes the Cultural Centers, New Student and Family Programs, and Student Leadership and Engagement with a team that includes the Director of Student Leadership and Engagement, Director of the Cultural Centers, an Assistant Dean for Initial Year and Family Engagement, and a Program Assistant as direct reports with a total full-time staff of 12 and a number of graduate interns. The AVP has supervisory responsibility for an approximately \$1.5 million unrestricted expense budget, approximately \$600 thousand in restricted funds, and approximately \$3.1 million in restricted student club funds.

More information about the AVP's unit area is available in the Appendix at the conclusion of this document.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE AVP

To be successful in this dynamic environment, the AVP will need to be a visible, student-centered, collaborative leader with a thorough understanding of best practices in student affairs. They will address the following opportunities and challenges:

Realize a shared vision for student engagement and belonging rooted in USF's values and responsive to its diverse urban environment.

The next AVP will play a key role in cultivating and sustaining a university-wide vision for student engagement and belonging that builds upon USF's values and mission to meaningfully engage USF's diverse student body. Working closely with the Student Life Core Leadership Team and colleagues across campus, the AVP will create a more comprehensive student engagement experience that responds to student interests and the unique needs of all students, including first-generation, commuter, transfer, graduate and professional, international, low-income students, and students pursuing coursework at other locations. The AVP will foster an environment in which students are both exposed to the many engagement options at USF and compelled to get involved in academic and student life. The AVP will implement tools for measuring and tracking student engagement, with a significant opportunity to capitalize on existing academics, programs, student organizations, and Greek life to deepen the culture of belonging within the USF community. The AVP will find new ways to partner across Student Life units to accomplish common goals and leverage data in strategy and programming.

USF is immersed in the dynamic urban backdrop of San Francisco and the Bay Area, providing many opportunities for students off campus. The next AVP will find new ways to leverage the urban environment to enhance the USF experience and combine on-and off-campus programs to deepen student engagement and create a vibrant university community during and outside the academic week.

The successful AVP will revitalize campus life to create a sense of community and school spirit for the entire University community.

Increase the visibility of the Student Engagement unit among the student and campus community to cultivate proactive and cohesive partnerships for even greater impact.

The Student Engagement unit intersects across the University in a variety of forms, and the AVP will be successful through collaboration and a robust team effort. It will be vital for the AVP to build strong connections with the various offices across the University to explore opportunities for collaboration and cohesiveness. This will include collaborations such as admissions yield events leading up to new student and family orientation, working closely with residential life on programming, and collaborations throughout students' academic tenure, working closely with faculty and staff to create a holistic and vibrant co-curricular experience for all students. To sustain these collaborations, the AVP will seek opportunities to increase the visibility of the entire Student Engagement team across all USF campuses, ensuring they are called upon as trusted partners by constituents across the University. Through collaboration, there is an opportunity to evaluate and reduce redundancies of services and promote resource-sharing to best leverage each other's expertise and allow the University community to work together to achieve university-wide goals.

The AVP will be highly visible to all students, and, at times, serve as the first line of contact for students due to the high visibility of their role. The AVP will be a clear, transparent communicator, responding to student needs—especially in times of crisis—in a timely fashion and leveraging colleagues in Student Life and across the University in these efforts. The AVP will be highly approachable to undergraduate, graduate, and professional students and work to keep a pulse on student needs, encourage engagement, help ensure a sense of belonging and well-being for all students, and augment their co-curricular experiences. The AVP will be a trusted liaison between students and University administration and proactively build positive relationships with all students, including student leaders and activists, maintaining a balance between supporting student autonomy and educating students on the expectations, values, and Jesuit mission of the University.

Inspire the Student Engagement Unit and manage resources effectively.

The AVP will inherit a caring, talented, and dedicated staff—some who have a longstanding tenure at USF, while others have entered the community more recently—all of whom are eager to evolve and innovate to continue providing outstanding services for all students. The AVP will be expected to inspire the team for the future and engage them in strategic discussions around how best to leverage their expertise and interests while also increasing their exposure to other offices on campus. They will engage staff in program evaluation, encouraging risk-taking and new ideas and offering support in navigating University policies and procedures. Whenever possible, the AVP will find opportunities to invest in the staff's ongoing professional development and growth.

To ensure the division's future sustainability, the AVP will effectively steward resources, set data-informed budget goals, and prioritize to ensure the thoughtful distribution of resources. With a limited budget, the AVP will be tasked with being both creative and prudent. This will include monitoring and tracking expenditures in the unit, leveraging technology to synchronize efforts among Student Life units and with other campus units, and identifying new opportunities for investment. In doing so, the AVP will help the division operate efficiently while also maintaining excitement for and pride in the team's essential work.

Work closely with the Core Leadership Team to enhance campus culture by integrating co-curricular activities, guiding constructive dialogue, and supporting retention efforts.

In partnership with colleagues across USF, the Core Leadership Team will contribute to strategies for the onboarding of students, providing a holistic student experience, managing protests, and encouraging a collaborative effort for improved retention and persistence. This will include evaluating programs throughout the student cycle, including new student and family orientation as well as transitions to the second year and beyond. The Core Leadership Team will work together to bridge Student Life and other University units to identify and cultivating meaningful points of connection throughout students' academic, co-curricular, and social spheres. There is a significant opportunity to increase the visibility of existing resources to help students navigate academic, financial, and social barriers for their increased engagement, success, belonging, and persistence.

Jesuit education is built on a commitment to explore, engage, and improve the world and USF students embody this through their participation in activism and engagement in difficult conversations. In line with this commitment, the Core Leadership Team will guide activity around free expression and peaceful assembly. This includes providing students with comprehensive and accurate information about free expression as well as providing on-site logistical support during protests, demonstrations, and other forms of expression by offering policy guidance, timely warning notices, remedies for a return to compliance, and additional support as needed. In doing so, the Team will bolster USF's commitment to developing students as ethical leaders, change agents, and movement builders.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will be a highly collaborative leader with a minimum five years of senior level management in student leadership and engagement, orientation, development and programming. A master's degree is required with an earned doctorate in higher education administration, college student services administration or related field preferred.

While no one candidate will possess all qualifications, the ideal candidate will have most of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- Demonstrated expertise in student programming and leadership development and training, including the design, coordination, and evaluation of educationally purposeful activities and leadership programs.

- Proven experience in conflict resolution, mediation, and de-escalation techniques.
- Knowledge and experience of the methodologies used to enhance students' academic and personal development, such as collaborative and student-centered teaching/learning models, small group facilitation, coaching, mentoring, and advocacy.
- Knowledge of trends and experience addressing issues facing students from a diverse array of backgrounds and experiences.
- Demonstrated ability to oversee comprehensive student organizations, supervise professional staff and student workers, and manage large budgets.
- Track record of successful collaboration and team leadership.
- Strong written and oral communication skills.
- Commitment to, and understanding of, a diverse, urban institution.
- A demonstrated interest in, and commitment to, the vision, mission, and values of a Jesuit institution and education.

LOCATION

USF's main campus is perched in the center of San Francisco and the hilltop campus is divided between two adjacent plots: Lone Mountain and lower campus. Spread across 55 acres in a residential neighborhood, the campus is separated by Turk Street in San Francisco's Inner Richmond neighborhood. From there, students have easy access to everything San Francisco offers, including 27 distinct neighborhoods, nearby recreation in Golden Gate Park, the Financial District, and music and museums south of Market Street as well as easy access to Silicon Valley and greater Northern California and the exciting and dynamic industries including high technology, bio-technology, AI, as well as venture capital and innovation in all its forms.

COMPENSATION

The salary range for this position is \$140,000-160,000 annually, commensurate with related experience and qualifications. Occasional weekend and evening hours are required.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-san-francisco/avp-engagement-and-belonging>. Electronic submission of materials is required.

Lindsay Gold, Aku Ammah-Tagoe, Julia Hochner
Isaacson, Miller

The University of San Francisco is a Jesuit Catholic University founded in 1855 to educate leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world. Candidates should demonstrate a commitment to work in a culturally diverse environment and to contribute to the mission of the University.

USF is an Equal Opportunity Employer dedicated to affirmative action and workforce diversity. The University provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request.

APPENDIX: DEPARTMENTS OF THE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT UNIT

The **Cultural Centers** include the Gender and Sexuality Center and the Intercultural Center. The centers serve as both physical spaces on campus where students build community, and as outlets for student-run programs that explore social issues and identity. The Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC) is a gender justice and LGBTQ+ resource center for student development opportunities and support. The Intercultural Center (IC) is a center for students of color and students who are working in solidarity towards social justice at the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and culture. The Cultural Centers bring students together to increase their understanding, and embrace their roles, as members of a diverse community on the local and global levels.

New Student and Family Programs provides support for new students and their families in making a smooth transition to USF and building lasting connections that promote student success. The USF Bound, Orientation, and Weeks of Welcome experience for first-year and transfer students and their families is a university-wide effort planned in collaboration with Strategic Enrollment Management, the academic colleges, and other campus entities. New Student and Family Programs includes support for parent and family weekend and other engagement programs and initiatives.

Student Leadership and Engagement (SLE) supports student leadership development and engagement through leadership workshops and programs, student activities and events, graduate student engagement, student organizations, fraternities and sororities, and advisor programs. SLE also encompasses the [Change the World From Here Institute](#), the Associated Students of University of San Francisco (ASUSF), and the Associated Graduate Students of the University of San Francisco (AGSUSF).