



**Fisk University**  
**Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs**  
Nashville, Tennessee

## THE SEARCH

Fisk University, one of the nation's most treasured academic institutions, seeks an innovative, engaged, and collaborative leader to serve as the next Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs (Provost).

Founded in 1865 in Nashville by John Ogden and Reverends Erastus Milo Cravath and Edward P. Smith, Fisk began as a school for formerly enslaved individuals of all ages, using facilities provided by General Clinton B. Fisk. Officially incorporated in 1867, the university quickly gained a reputation for academic excellence and inclusivity. In 1871, the Jubilee Singers famously toured to raise funds, helping to save the school and fund Jubilee Hall, the first permanent educational building for Black students in the South. Fisk achieved numerous milestones, including early accreditation and the establishment of the first Phi Beta Kappa chapter on a predominantly Black campus. Its campus was named a National Historic District in 1978, reflecting its enduring legacy of resilience and achievement.

Reporting to the President, the Provost must possess the leadership strength and skills to work with deans, faculty, and staff in the continued shaping of the academic mission and progress of a student-centered liberal arts institution. The next Provost will take the helm of the academic enterprise at this key moment in the University's history. The Provost will effectively collaborate with the president, deans, and other university leaders to renew the emphasis on academic quality and rigor while enhancing student success and creating important infrastructures to meet current and future academic and research demands.

The ideal candidate will bring an understanding and deep appreciation for Fisk University's history and traditions, a distinguished record of scholarly and administrative accomplishments, the capacity to build research, teaching, and student success efforts, and a commitment to the full range of academic disciplines represented at the university.

Fisk University has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of the next Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. All confidential inquiries, applications, and nominations should be directed in confidence, as noted at the end of this document.

## FISK UNIVERSITY: A BRIEF HISTORY

In 1865, John Ogden, Reverend Erastus Milo Cravath, and Reverend Edward P. Smith founded the Fisk School in Nashville, utilizing facilities provided by General Clinton B. Fisk of the Tennessee Freedmen's Bureau. The school welcomed students aged seven to seventy, all sharing experiences of slavery and poverty, driven by a strong desire for education. Fisk University was officially incorporated on August 22, 1867, with a vision of inclusivity and high educational standards.

Fisk's tradition of excellence emerged from a history of struggle and resilience. On October 6, 1871, the [Jubilee Singers](#) set out to raise funds for their debt-ridden school, eventually captivating audiences across the United States and Europe. Their efforts preserved the University and enabled the construction of Jubilee Hall, a National Historical Landmark and the South's first permanent structure for educating black students.

Fisk University's strong religious ethos is deeply rooted in its founding mission, as Reverends E. M. Cravath and E. P. Smith were affiliated with the American Missionary Association. Their goal was to provide African Americans with both academic excellence and spiritual development. This tradition continued with figures like Reverend A. P. Miller, whose statement "Her sons and daughters are ever on the altar" became the university's motto. Over the years, Fisk has maintained its spiritual legacy through the [Fisk Memorial Chapel](#), interfaith programs, and student-led religious organizations. These efforts foster a vibrant, inclusive religious culture that enriches the university community.

Fisk gained early recognition from leading universities and agencies, allowing its graduates to pursue advanced degrees. In 1930, Fisk became the first African-American institution accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and later received approval from the Association of American Universities and the American Association of University Women. In 1953, Fisk was granted a charter for the first Phi Beta Kappa Society chapter on a predominantly black campus. The Fisk campus was designated as a National Historic District in 1978.

## PRESIDENT

Dr. Agenia Clark was announced as the 18th President of Fisk University in October 2023. She joins the University after years of experience in higher education, serving on the boards of the Tennessee Board of Regents, Simmons University, and Belmont University, and is an emerita on the Advisory Board of the University of Tennessee's Haslam School of Business.

Dr. Clark's commitment to higher education started with her volunteer instructional work at Fisk University. It continued with a gubernatorial appointment to serve a six-year term on the Tennessee Board of Regents, which during her tenure had oversight of the state's six universities (excluding the U. of Tennessee system), all the state's community colleges and technology centers. Her work with the Regents was followed by her tenure on the board of trustees for Simmons University, a women's liberal arts school in Boston, Massachusetts. Most recently, she served as a trustee for Nashville's Belmont University.

Dr. Clark was recently honored as the 2021 “Nashvillian of the Year,” and is a member of Women Corporate Directors (“WCD”), where she has served as the co-chair of the Tennessee chapter. She is also a member of the International Women’s Forum (IWF), Nashville’s Agenda, and is a member of the 2016 Class of Leadership Tennessee and the 1998 Class of Leadership Nashville.

She was the former president and CEO of Girl Scouts of Middle Tennessee, vice president of human resources for the Tennessee Education Lottery Corporation, senior director of human resources at Vanderbilt University, and worked in numerous leadership roles at Nortel Networks, a Canadian multi-national telecommunications corporation.

Dr. Clark serves on the corporate board of directors for FirstBank Financial Corporation (NYSE:FBK). On the FirstBank board, she is an independent director serving on the Risk Committee and Compensation Committee. Prior to FirstBank, she was a founding corporate director for Avenue Bank (2007), one of Nashville’s fastest growing banks before an IPO offering in February of 2015 and a September 2016 merger with Pinnacle Bank. Dr. Clark is also the President of the Ayers Family Foundation Trust.

Dr. Clark has been recognized in the Nashville Business Journal as one of “Nashville’s 100 Most Powerful People” in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2023 and 2024. An inductee into the Academy for Women of Achievement, she is also “Nashville Post” Person-In-Charge (2014 – 2022).

Dr. Clark has a Bachelor of Science degree and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She completed her doctorate at Vanderbilt University.

## MISSION

Fisk’s mission is to produce graduates from diverse backgrounds with the integrity and intellect required for substantive contributions to society. The curriculum at Fisk is grounded in the liberal arts. Fisk’s faculty and administrators emphasize the discovery and advancement of knowledge through research in the natural and social sciences, business, and the humanities. Fisk is committed to the success of scholars and leaders with a global perspective.

## FACULTY AND STAFF

A distinctive aspect of the Fisk University experience for students is the dedicated and personalized support they receive from faculty and staff. With an 11:1 student-to-faculty ratio, the University is able to provide small class sizes, dedicated faculty who act as mentors, and a dedicated academic support system. As of the fall of 2024, there are 66 full-time faculty and 60 part-time faculty. Approximately 90% of the full-time faculty hold terminal degrees. Beyond their work in the classroom, Fisk faculty are very active and successful in attracting external financial support to advance the research, scholarship, and educational mission. These activities enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of Fisk graduates to corporate, educational, professional, and nonprofit enterprises.

According to the 2024-2025 IPEDS Finance Survey, Fisk University reported \$39,711,141 in total core revenue. The sources of revenue are as follows: \$10,247,814 in Tuition and fees; \$14,413,203 in Government grants and contracts; \$ 9,567,933 in Private gifts, grants, and contracts; \$3,490,895 in Investment income; and \$1,991,296 in Other core revenues. Fisk University reported \$6,553,615 as a Research Expense on the most recent IPEDS Finance Survey. \$6,553,615 represents 17% of the University's total core expenses. The June 2024 edition of Fisk University's Research and Innovation Magazine stated that the University Research Expenses totaled \$4,867,000 in 2023FY.

Fisk is bolstered by the dedication of approximately 249 staff members, many of whom have devoted decades to the institution. Their unwavering commitment is focused on continually improving and enriching the student experience.

## ACADEMICS

Fisk University is ranked among the nation's top 20 HBCUs by U.S. News & World Report. With a focus on the liberal arts, Fisk offers degrees at the baccalaureate and master's levels. At the undergraduate level, 26 degree programs are available through the [School of Humanities and Behavioral Social Sciences](#) and [the School of Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Business](#). At the graduate level, eight master's degrees are offered within the [School of Graduate Studies](#), in addition to partnership and pathway programs with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, [the Galen College of Nursing](#), and Vanderbilt University.

Since its inception, the [Fisk-Vanderbilt Master's-to-PhD Bridge Program](#) has enrolled 190 students. 157 students have earned a master's degree, 137 students have bridged to a PhD, and 70 have earned their PhD. These students have published dozens of manuscripts and have won competitive Ford Fellowships, NSF Graduate Research Fellowships, and NIH Predoctoral Awards, among many other grants.

The curriculum's focus on liberal arts is designed to prepare students for living in a diverse and increasingly technology-driven society. To that end, Fisk continues to invest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education. It is proud to note its Department of Chemistry's place on the approved list of the American Chemical Society. Fisk is also delighted that it remains the only HBCU ever to be awarded the prestigious R&D 100 award, and to date has been awarded the distinction four times.

Outside of the classroom, the [John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library](#) is a first-class repository of some of America's most priceless documents, memorabilia, and African American art. The [Carl Van Vechten Gallery](#) is a one-of-a-kind art gallery that houses resources to which Fisk's students and learning community have ready access. Founded in 1949, the gallery owes its name to Carl Van Vechten, an American writer and photographer known for his support of African American artists during the Harlem Renaissance. Recognizing the need for a dedicated space to showcase the talents and contributions of African American artists, Fisk University established the gallery to serve as a platform for their work and to foster dialogue around the role of art in society.

Located in Cravath Hall, Fisk features a powerful series of [murals](#) by Aaron Douglas, a key figure of the Harlem Renaissance. Painted in the late 1930s, these murals vividly depict African American history, from the Middle Passage to the Civil War and the cultural achievements of figures like Langston Hughes and Duke Ellington. Douglas's unique style blends African art, Egyptian symbolism, and modernist design to convey themes of resilience, pride, and cultural identity. The murals not only enhance the architectural beauty of Cravath Hall but also offer a profound, immersive experience that celebrates and preserves African American heritage.

The [John Lewis Center for Social Justice](#) at Fisk honors the legacy of civil rights leader and alumnus John R. Lewis by promoting equity, activism, and community engagement. Through interdisciplinary programs focused on policy, arts, technology, and business, the center empowers students and communities to drive meaningful social change and uphold the university's historic commitment to justice and leadership.

The University holds membership in the American Association of Schools of Music, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. It is also a member of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States and a sponsoring institution of the Oak Ridge Associated Universities, Inc. The State of Tennessee Department of Education also approves the university for teacher licensure preparation.

## STUDENTS

Fisk University attracts motivated, diverse, and values-driven students who are drawn to its rich legacy and deep commitment to the HBCU tradition. Many students describe their connection to the university with the phrase, "Fisk chose me." As of Fall 2024, Fisk reported a total enrollment of 1,058 students, including 374 First-Time Freshmen, 660 Continuing Undergraduate students, and 24 First-Time Professional or Graduate students.

Approximately 80% of students live on campus, and about 85% receive some form of state or federal financial aid. Around 35% of undergraduates are Tennessee residents, while the remaining 65% represent 36 states and several countries. International enrollment has recently risen to 12%, with the largest representation coming from Nepal and Nigeria.

Fisk boasts a vibrant culture of student leadership and engagement. With more than 30 student organizations spanning professional, international, religious, academic, Greek life, and special interest groups, leadership is a defining characteristic of the student body. These organizations inspire one another through a shared commitment to achievement, civic engagement, and service. The Student Government Association (SGA) plays a central role in fostering communication, advocacy, and leadership across campus, actively collaborating with Trustees and senior administrators to champion student interests. A cornerstone of campus tradition, the world-renowned Jubilee Singers connect students to Fisk's rich musical heritage. Fisk students also carry a proud legacy of activism and involvement, taking ownership of university life and contributing meaningfully to the institution's growth and vitality.

## GOVERNANCE & FINANCES

Fisk University's bylaws mandate governance by a Board of Trustees comprising up to 35 members. This includes three alumni trustees, two faculty trustees, and two student trustees. The remaining trustees are notable business, academic, and civic leaders, primarily from outside the Metropolitan Nashville area. Currently, the board has 16 members.

Trustees may serve no more than two consecutive four-year terms, with a mandatory one-year break before reappointment. Reappointment is not automatic; trustees must demonstrate engagement with the Board, the University, and its constituents and meet all responsibilities and expectations set by the Board. Additionally, all trustees are required to substantially contribute to the University, including, but not limited to, financial contributions.

The Board of Trustees is organized into the following standing committees: the Executive Committee, Academic Excellence & Student Engagement, Financial Strength (including its Facilities Subcommittee), Audit Committee, Development Committee, Strategy Committee, Nominating & Corporate Governance Committee, and the Investment Committee.

The Board meets three times annually: in the first week of October, the first week of February, and between April and June, depending on the Commencement Date and other scheduling considerations. Committees may also meet outside of these regular board meetings, either in person or virtually.

Fisk's total endowment stands at \$41 million as of the end of the 2024 fiscal year. The projected university operating budget for FY2025- 2026 is approximately \$42.5 million. The projected operating budget for the Division of Academic Affairs for FY2025- 2026 is approximately: \$13.6 million.

## LOCATION AND CAMPUS

Nashville, TN, is a dynamic city with a distinctive southern charm, recognized as one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the United States. It serves as the hub for state government and business, encompassing sectors such as healthcare and education, and is renowned as the national headquarters for gospel and country music. The city and its surrounding counties host the corporate headquarters of prominent companies, including Hospital Corporation of America, Asurion, Oracle, Bridgestone Americas, and Nissan North America.

Strategically located in the Midwest, Nashville is a key transportation hub, facilitating convenient and cost-effective travel to both domestic and international destinations via car or the Nashville International Airport. With 28 institutions of higher education, Nashville fosters a vibrant intellectual and academic environment. The city is also known for its numerous churches and has a history of progressive and responsible metropolitan governance.

Downtown Nashville boasts a rich array of music, concerts, restaurants, and professional sporting events, featuring the NFL's Tennessee Titans and the NHL's Nashville Predators. The tourism industry is thriving,

complemented by a robust arts and entertainment scene. Additionally, Nashville is home to three other Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): Meharry Medical College, Tennessee State University, and American Baptist College, which enhance the educational, professional, and spiritual opportunities available to students.

## THE ROLE

The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, reporting directly to the President, serves as the University's chief academic officer and a key member of the President's Executive Cabinet. As the primary advocate for and architect of the University's educational mission, the Provost provides strategic leadership for teaching, learning, scholarship, and research across all academic units.

In this role, the Provost oversees academic planning, curricular innovation, and the development of academic facilities. Responsibilities also include university-wide oversight of undergraduate and graduate education, accreditation, enrollment, and co-curricular initiatives. The Provost leads the academic budgeting process in consultation with the President and the Vice President for Finance, ensuring alignment between academic priorities and financial planning. The Division of Academic Affairs operates with an annual budget of approximately \$13 million.

The Provost provides strategic oversight for the Division of Academic Affairs and directly supervises the Deans of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and Graduate Studies. Additionally, the Provost is responsible for the oversight of accreditation, faculty initiatives, research, online learning, the W.E.B. Du Bois Honors Program, and the John Lewis Center for Social Justice & Race Relations Institute.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

**Recruit and retain faculty in a teaching and research environment, ensuring academic quality and distinction.**

In collaboration with the executive leadership team, the Provost will lead efforts to recruit, retain, and support the continued professional development of exceptional faculty aligned with Fisk's mission and priorities. Drawing on the strength of the University's shared governance and its commitment to innovative excellence, the Provost will strengthen Fisk's competitive position and ensure its ability to attract and retain top academic and staff talent.

Working closely with academic deans and the Associate Vice President for Research and Sponsored Programs, the Provost will incentivize research, promote interdisciplinary collaboration, and expand professional development opportunities, while also cultivating a diverse pipeline of future academic leaders through mentorship and leadership development pathways for faculty aspiring to academic affairs administration.



### **Champion Innovation and Excellence in Academic Leadership**

As the chief academic officer, the Provost will be an innovative and strategic leader with a clear academic vision. In collaboration with university stakeholders, the Provost will foster a culture of academic excellence, student success, and research distinction, while building partnerships that advance institutional goals.

The Provost will advocate for faculty and students by strengthening and expanding academic programs, with a focus on growing graduate education and online learning to meet evolving needs. A key priority will be advancing curricular and pedagogical innovation by identifying emerging disciplines to ensure students are prepared for the future.

In partnership with the President and faculty, the Provost will shape the university's future by championing collaboration, innovation, and academic distinction, as well as by forging strategic partnerships across Nashville and beyond to position Fisk for long-term success.

### **Ensure that data-driven decision-making is embedded in academic strategies to advance student success.**

Recognizing the vital role of co-curricular engagement in shaping a vibrant university community, the Provost will champion a culture of evidence-based decision-making by implementing robust systems for data collection and analysis to inform academic strategies that drive student success. This requires fostering a deep institutional understanding of the role of accrediting bodies and the importance of both qualitative and quantitative assessments in shaping and refining curricula. With a forward-looking mindset, the Provost will lead the development of academic strategies that anticipate the evolving landscape of higher education, ensuring that undergraduate and graduate offerings, including liberal arts, STEM, stackable credentials, and faculty qualifications, are aligned with future workforce needs and learner expectations.

### **Align academic vision with fiscal responsibility and institutional strategy.**

The Provost will work closely with the senior leadership team and other academic leaders to ensure that Fisk's internal and external stakeholders are involved in strengthening shared governance and cultivating a cohesive academic community. As the University's chief academic officer, the Provost will make strategic, and at times difficult, decisions regarding academic programs, resource allocation, and budgeting, while empowering academic leaders and advancing the institution's mission.

In partnership with the President and the Vice President for Finance, the Provost will ensure sound financial stewardship by aligning academic priorities with sustainable budgeting practices. A strong commitment to inclusive collaboration and a clear understanding of the Board of Trustees' role will be essential in guiding the University's long-term success.



## QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no one candidate will bring all of the skills and experience sought, the ideal candidate would bring the following:

- An earned doctorate in an academic discipline, with a distinguished record of scholarship and teaching experience appropriate for appointment as a tenured full professor.
- A proven track record as a distinguished scholar and effective academic leader, with demonstrated administrative, strategic, and collaborative leadership skills.
- A strong commitment to advancing research and teaching excellence across the University.
- A deep appreciation for collaborative decision-making and the ability to foster synergy among diverse groups to set academic priorities and allocate resources effectively.
- The capacity to make principled, academically sound decisions, even in challenging circumstances, while empowering faculty and administrators and prioritizing the University's best interests.
- A solid understanding of university financial operations, including experience in budget development and resource management, in close consultation with the Vice President for Finance and the President.
- Innovative leadership with a clear focus on supporting faculty development and student success.
- Exceptional communication and interpersonal skills, with the ability to build and sustain strong relationships with internal and external stakeholders.
- Awareness of the evolving academic landscape and the unique challenges facing higher education institutions, particularly private HBCUs.
- A deep respect for and understanding of Fisk University's mission, culture, and historic legacy.

## APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the search process is completed. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

Keight Tucker Kennedy, Managing Partner

Ernest Brooks, Partner

Lehman Robinson, Associate

Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/fisk-university/provost>

*Fisk University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. All persons will be offered employment and promotion on the basis of qualifications and capabilities without regard to race, religion, sex, national origin, qualified ADA recognized disability, or veteran status. In addition, the University sponsors and encourages an environment of affirmative action toward equal opportunity in all divisions affecting the recruiting, hiring, and promotion of employees at all levels.*