



General Counsel  
Georgia State University  
Atlanta, Georgia

## THE SEARCH

Georgia State University invites applications and nominations for the position of General Counsel, an exceptional opportunity to serve as the chief legal officer of one of the nation's leading urban public research universities. Reporting to the President, the General Counsel will play a central leadership role in advancing Georgia State's mission, guiding complex institutional decision-making, and supporting a dynamic academic community deeply embedded in the civic and economic life of Atlanta.

As a member of the President's senior leadership team, the General Counsel serves as a trusted advisor on a wide range of legal, regulatory, and strategic matters affecting the governance, administration, and operation of a large R1 public university. The role requires a thoughtful, solution-oriented legal leader with the judgment and credibility to navigate a complex public institutional environment while protecting the university's academic mission and values.

The General Counsel leads the Office of Legal Affairs, managing a team of nine attorneys who provide legal services across the university and its affiliated organizations. The scope of the role spans the full range of higher education legal issues, including academic and student affairs, employment and governance, contracts and transactions, compliance, research, intellectual property, real estate and facilities, athletics, and engagement with the University System of Georgia.

Georgia State seeks a General Counsel who combines strong legal acumen with calm, collaborative leadership; who exercises sound judgment in assessing and managing institutional risk; and who is

energized by the mission of a public, urban university dedicated to access, student success, and community impact. This is a distinctive opportunity for a senior legal leader to contribute meaningfully to the continued success and evolution of a nationally recognized institution at a pivotal moment in its growth.

Georgia State has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this recruitment. Confidential inquiries, nominations and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## ABOUT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Georgia State University is a leading urban public research university and an R1-designated institution within the University System of Georgia. Founded in 1913, Georgia State is located in the heart of downtown Atlanta and operates across six campuses throughout the metropolitan area including the J. Mack Robinson School of Business Buckhead location. With more than 53,000 students drawn from across the United States and around the world, Georgia State is one of the nation's largest and most diverse public universities and plays a central role in the civic, economic, and cultural life of Atlanta and the State of Georgia.

Georgia State is nationally recognized for its academic quality, innovation, and commitment to student success. *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked Georgia State the No. 1 public university in the nation for undergraduate teaching for multiple consecutive years and consistently places the university among the most innovative public institutions in the country. Georgia State has become a national model for improving graduation and retention outcomes, demonstrating that an access-oriented public research university can deliver excellence and equity at scale.

Academically, the university offers nearly 300 degree programs across 12 colleges, schools, and institutes, ranging from associate to doctoral and professional degrees. Georgia State's research enterprise has expanded significantly, supported by sustained growth in externally funded research and interdisciplinary scholarship that addresses pressing social, economic, and policy challenges. As one of only four R1 institutions in Georgia, the university plays a critical role in the state's research and innovation ecosystem.

Georgia State's identity is deeply intertwined with its urban setting. Its campus footprint and partnerships extend throughout downtown Atlanta and across the metro area, reflecting an institutional philosophy that views the university as part of the city rather than apart from it. The university maintains close relationships with local and state government, nonprofit and cultural organizations, and private-sector partners, and its continued growth through real estate development and adaptive reuse has made it a catalyst for economic mobility, workforce development, and community engagement.

As a public institution governed by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia and subject to state and federal oversight, Georgia State operates within a governance and regulatory environment

that is both complex and highly visible. This context shapes the work of the General Counsel, who plays a critical role in supporting the university's mission, protecting its interests, and enabling its continued success.

### **President M. Brian Blake**

Dr. M. Brian Blake became Georgia State's eighth president in June 2021. As president, Dr. Blake introduced a strategic vision for Georgia State that emphasizes four pillars: Identity, Placemaking, & Belonging, Innovating Research, Scholarship, & Creative Activity, Student Success 2.0, and Beyond College to Career. Georgia State's strategic plan, "The Blueprint to 2033 – Our Place, Our Time," sets a path for the university to continue to enhance its academic excellence and student success, scholarship and creativity, and campus vibrancy.

During Dr. Blake's tenure, Georgia State has set several new milestones. With its increasing reputation, the university received the largest number of applications ever for admission to its Fall 2023 entering class. In the same year, the research enterprise exceeded \$200 million in sponsored awards – the highest in history. Dr. Blake oversaw the acquisition of more than \$60 million in government support for a new 120,000 square foot Research Tower that will open in 2026. In FY22, the university also raised a one-year amount of more than \$107 million in philanthropic gifts for the first time in history. An advocate for campus experience, Dr. Blake is leading the effort to establish new interconnected green spaces and enhanced facilities to activate the center of Georgia State's downtown campus.

Prior to Georgia State, Dr. Blake had over 25 years of faculty and administrative experience across five comprehensive research universities, including serving as provost at George Washington University and Drexel University, dean at the University of Miami, and associate dean for research at the University of Notre Dame. During the first 10 years of his academic career, he was professor and later department chair of computer science at Georgetown University. Dr. Blake serves on the Board of Directors for Grady Memorial Hospital Corporation, Metro-Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, Junior Achievement of Georgia, and the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau.

### **ABOUT THE OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

The Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) serves as the in-house legal office for Georgia State University and provides legal counsel to the university, its units and departments, and affiliated cooperative organizations, including the Research Foundation, Georgia State Foundation, Athletic Association, and Alumni Association. OLA advises administrators, faculty, and staff on a wide range of issues affecting the management and operation of the institution.

The mission of OLA is to deliver professional-quality legal services that support sound institutional decision-making in all areas of instruction, research, and service. The office works to minimize legal risk and cost, reduce litigation exposure, and ensure compliance with applicable state and federal laws, as well

as university and system policies and procedures. In fulfilling this mission, the office is committed to acting with integrity, sound judgment, and a deep understanding of higher education law and governance.

Led by the General Counsel, OLA is an integral partner to senior leadership and the campus community, addressing matters that range from faculty and student affairs to contracts, real estate, research oversight, intellectual property, compliance, and athletics. The office plays a central role in advancing the university's mission while helping navigate the legal and regulatory complexities inherent in a large, urban, public research university.

## ROLE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL

The General Counsel reports to the President of Georgia State and serves as the university's chief legal officer. As a member of the President's leadership team, the General Counsel provides legal counsel and strategic advice to the President, senior leadership, and the campus community on a broad range of matters affecting the administration, governance, and operation of a large public research university. The General Counsel leads and manages the Office of Legal Affairs, supervising a team of nine attorneys who deliver legal services across the institution and its affiliated organizations. Responsibilities span the full spectrum of higher education legal issues, including academic and student affairs, employment and governance matters, contracts and transactions, research and compliance, intellectual property, real estate and facilities, athletics, and coordination with the University System of Georgia and external counsel as appropriate.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE GENERAL COUNSEL

### **Serve as a trusted advisor to the President and senior leadership**

The General Counsel is a key member of the President's cabinet and one of the President's closest advisors, providing counsel on matters that affect the institution's strategy, reputation, risk posture, and long-term health. This role requires the confidence and credibility to advise senior leaders during moments of complexity and urgency, as well as the discretion and judgment to navigate sensitive issues involving faculty, staff, students, donors, athletics, and external stakeholders.

The General Counsel must be able to protect the university's academic mission and values while helping leadership make informed decisions that balance legal risk, public accountability, and institutional priorities. Calm, level-headed leadership; moral clarity; and the ability to serve as a steady counselor in times of crisis are essential.

### **Provide high-quality legal services to a complex and evolving university, including athletics**

Georgia State's breadth of academic programs, research activity, student life, and auxiliary operations requires a General Counsel who is a true generalist with an appreciation for the complexity and nuances of higher education. Core areas of responsibility include student, staff, and faculty conduct; shared

governance; promotion and tenure; labor and employment; academic freedom and First Amendment issues; compliance; contracts and transactions; research oversight; intellectual property; foundation and donor relations; real estate; and institutional risk management. The General Counsel also will lead the selection and oversight of outside counsel on special matters and coordinate with the attorney general of Georgia on litigation.

Athletics presents a particularly dynamic and evolving area of legal work, with NIL developments, revenue-sharing arrangements, licensing, sponsorships, and brand-related contracts all requiring close attention. The General Counsel must partner effectively with athletics leadership to provide guidance in an evolving legal landscape, ensuring compliance while supporting the university's competitive and reputational goals.

Across all areas, the General Counsel is expected to be responsive, accessible, and solution-oriented, encouraging early consultation, prioritizing preventative counsel, and helping campus partners navigate complexity without defaulting to unnecessary constraint.

### **Work effectively within the University System of Georgia and broader public governance structure**

Georgia State operates within the University System of Georgia, and the effectiveness of the General Counsel depends in part on strong, collaborative relationships with system-level legal leadership, peer institutions, and external governmental entities. The General Counsel must understand system policies, governance structures, and escalation protocols, while exercising sound independent judgment on campus-specific matters. The General Counsel will work collaboratively and in regular communication with the USG Office of Legal Affairs and the Attorney General's Office, which manages litigation as well as selection of outside counsel

This role requires an ability to navigate the realities of a public university system, including system-wide policies related to student conduct, faculty matters, and campus expression. The General Counsel must be adept at coordination, communication, and diplomacy, knowing when to consult, when to lead, and how to represent Georgia State's interests clearly and effectively within a broader system context.

### **Lead and manage the Office of Legal Affairs with clarity, trust, and continuity**

The General Counsel is responsible for leading the Office of Legal Affairs, which serves the entire university as its in-house legal resource. Following the long tenure of a respected General Counsel, the next leader will be tasked with maintaining continuity while strengthening the office's structure, communication, and capacity.

Key priorities include managing and mentoring a team of attorneys with varied areas of focus, ensuring clear lines of responsibility, avoiding silos, and reinforcing a culture of professionalism, responsiveness, and service. The General Counsel must be a visible and supportive leader, investing in people, building

trust across campus, and ensuring the office remains a reliable, mission-aligned partner to the university community.

## QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

- A Juris Doctor from an accredited law school and admission to the State Bar of Georgia in good standing or the ability to apply to be so admitted within one year.
- Significant, progressively responsible legal experience, ideally in higher education, government, or another complex, highly regulated organization.
- Broad legal expertise relevant to a public research university, such as governance, employment and labor matters, contracts and transactions, compliance, risk management, real estate, research, intellectual property, or athletics.
- Experience overseeing or advising on litigation matters within a complex organizational environment is preferred.
- Demonstrated ability to serve as a trusted advisor to senior leadership, providing clear, practical, and balanced counsel.
- Leadership experience managing professional staff and fostering a collaborative, service-oriented culture.
- Personal qualities including sound judgment, integrity, calm demeanor under pressure, strong interpersonal skills, and a solution-oriented approach aligned with the mission of a public university.

## APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. For best consideration, full applications should be received by June 20, 2026. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/georgia-state-university/general-counsel/>.

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