



Associate Vice President and Dean of Students
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

THE SEARCH

[Duke University](#) seeks a seasoned, innovative student affairs leader to serve as the next Associate Vice President and Dean of Students (AVP/DOS) within the Division of Student Affairs. This leader will be responsible for visionary and operational leadership across a broad portfolio of departments and initiatives that foster belonging, engagement, and holistic development for Duke's diverse student body.

Duke enrolls approximately 6,500 undergraduate and 10,950 graduate and professional students. The Division of Student Affairs supports Duke undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, and engages tens of thousands of visitors, families, and members of the Duke community every year. With 27 departments and an operating budget of \$163M, Student Affairs plays a central role in advancing the university's mission by supporting student health, well-being, belonging, and co-curricular development and by fostering a campus culture grounded in respect, inclusion, and engagement.

Reporting to the Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA), the AVP/DOS is a central leadership figure within the division and plays a critical role in shaping the student experience at Duke. This leader will work in close partnership with the VPSA to translate divisional priorities into outcomes, foster alignment across a complex institution, and ensure that the student affairs initiatives are coordinated, responsive, and grounded in the university's academic mission. The AVP/DOS will be a collaborative strategist, a trusted student advocate, and a visible campus leader who operationalizes the division's mission. The AVP/DOS will oversee 6 direct reports that encompass 10 departments.

Duke University has retained the services of Issacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important search. All inquiries, applications, and nominations should be directed in confidence to the search firm, as indicated at the end of this document.

DUKE UNIVERSITY

Duke University, a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities (AAU), is a global, research-intensive institution enrolling approximately 6,500 undergraduate and 10,950 graduate and

professional students. The university has a network of over 200,000 alumni, employs more than 4,250 regular-rank faculty, and has approximately 48,000 staff (including the Duke University Health System), making it one of the largest private employers in North Carolina. Guided since 1859 by the motto *Eruditio et Religio*, or “Knowledge and Religion,” Duke University continues to evolve and is strengthened by its inclusive community, which welcomes individuals of all backgrounds.

Duke consists of the following colleges and schools: Trinity College of Arts & Sciences; School of Law; Divinity School; Graduate School; School of Medicine; School of Nursing; Pratt School of Engineering; The Fuqua School of Business; Nicholas School of the Environment; and Sanford School of Public Policy.

Duke consists of both a world-renowned academic teaching and research institution and a world-class patient care organization. Duke is a financially strong, growing institution. The university’s endowment was \$12.3 billion as of June 30, 2025.

For additional information, please visit duke.edu.

Location

Duke’s home campus spans 8,600 acres in Durham, North Carolina, a vibrant small city that has become an entrepreneurial hotbed and a cultural center with a population exceeding 304,000. The city is a two-hour drive from the beach and a three-hour drive from the Blue Ridge Mountains. Duke’s proximity to the Mid-Atlantic Region, and in particular to Washington, D.C., provides easy access to federal funding agencies, policymakers, and many other collaborators who advance the research and education missions. The area is served by a convenient international airport, approximately twenty minutes from campus.

Duke is situated in the heart of the Research Triangle with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina Central University, and North Carolina State University nearby. These institutions are public research universities with exceptionally strong science and engineering programs that provide a myriad of opportunities for collaboration and partnership. Partnerships include the Duke University Marine Lab in Beaufort, South Carolina, and Duke Kunshan University in Jiangsu province, China.

THE DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

[The Division of Student Affairs](#) supports over 16,000 Duke undergraduate, graduate, and professional students and engages tens of thousands of visitors, families, and members of the Duke community every year. With [27 departments](#) and an operating budget of \$163M, Student Affairs plays a central role in advancing the university’s mission by supporting student health, well-being, belonging, and co-curricular development and by fostering a campus culture grounded in respect, inclusion, and engagement. The primary job of the division is to ensure that Duke students have the resources and support they need to arrive at their classes and laboratories ready to engage in critical thinking and learning each day, while also gaining skills and insight about themselves and the world.

Guided by the principles of meaningful inclusion, strategic collaboration, health, wellness, and safety, continuous growth and skill development, and professionalism, mutual respect, and trust, the vision of Duke Student Affairs is that students will:

- Graduate with integrity and purpose, focused on near-term goals and capable of adjusting to both opportunity and adversity
- Care about themselves and others
- Develop the skills and judgment to navigate their journeys, both individually and collectively

Starting in 2021, [QuadEx](#) began as a reimagined residential structure, with innovative signature programs, and a campus-wide commitment to student belonging. Each Quad serves as the foundation for students to connect with one another and with Duke's many resources throughout their four years. This inclusive living and learning model builds upon the history, values, and spirit of Duke to enhance and integrate the social, residential, and intellectual lives of undergraduate students.

The vision for excellence in Student Affairs also extends to the broader Duke community, which is enhanced by the division's variety of outstanding services and operations for students, faculty, staff, alumni, families, and guests of the University.

Leadership

Mary Pat McMahon is the vice provost and vice president of student affairs. McMahon is a proven leader in student affairs and is committed to student development, team leadership, and building strong community, academic, and student partnerships. Before coming to Duke in July 2019, McMahon was dean of student affairs at Tufts University's Schools of Arts and Sciences and Engineering. There, she was broadly responsible for fostering meaningful growth and connection in students' co-curricular experiences and coordinating developmental, leadership, and health and safety resources for students.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Yale University and a Master of Science degree in history of international relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT & DEAN OF STUDENTS

Reporting to the Vice Provost/Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA), the Associate Vice President/Dean of Students (AVP/DOS) is a highly visible and vital member of the Student Affairs senior leadership team. The AVP/DOS will have 6 direct reports: Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, Senior Associate Dean for Accountability and Care, Associate Dean of Students of Graduate and Professional Student Services, Senior Associate Dean of Students for QuadEx, Senior Associate Dean for Residential Life, and the Senior Associate Dean of International Students. Within their portfolio, the AVP/DOS leader will oversee the following key units: [DukeReach](#), [International Student Center](#), [Student Conduct and Community Standards](#), [Graduate and Professional Student Services](#) Off-Campus programs, On-call system and risk discernment and intervention, [New Student Programs & Family Programs](#), [Housing & Residential Life](#),

[Quad Ex](#), [Time Away](#), [Veterans' Programs](#), [Student Involvement & Leadership](#), and co-convene the University's Student Behavioral Assessment Team.

As the deputy to the VPSA, the AVP/DOS will work in concert with other members of the student affairs leadership team to sustain a holistic, innovative, and nationally renowned student experience for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. Given the breadth of Duke's co-curricular offerings, the Dean is responsible for integrating a holistic student services model across the university's campus via programming, training, support, services, interventions, and intentional collaborations and partnerships with academic, administrative, student, and community leaders.

In this role, the AVP/DOS brings steadiness, credibility, and presence to moments of complexity and ambiguity, impacting individual students and the broader student community. The AVP/DOS is responsible for representing current and future student needs as the institution navigates competing priorities and a time of great change in higher education. The AVP/DOS leads in the design and implementation of a shared understanding of student development, learning, and community standards across constituencies, and helps frame clear and consistent expectations for designing a student experience focused on growth, challenge, and engagement in partnership with faculty and campus leaders. By ensuring iterative, highly relational communication to engage key faculty, academic leadership, and campus partners, the AVP/DOS ensures that the student experience is guided by coherence, purpose, and consistency, and aligned with Duke's mission of teaching, research, and excellence at all degree levels.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT & DEAN OF STUDENTS

Serve as a strategic and operational thought partner to the VPSA.

Act as a trusted collaborator and advisor, translating vision into actions that ensure delivering the highest quality student experience. Serve as the ambassador of the student experience with students, faculty, and staff. Balance humility, adaptability, and collaboration with the confidence to set direction, make decisions, and hold firm when needed.

Maintain a visible, student-centered presence across campus.

Be consistently present and accessible to students across undergraduate, graduate, and professional student populations. Serve as a credible advocate for students' needs and perspectives, with a strong understanding of campus climate and student experience.

Create partnerships that enhance student engagement and responsibility for a vibrant campus community.

Consistently engage student governance groups in sustaining a shared governance model that is collaborative and cooperative and aligns with the goals of self-governance, individual and organizational

leadership development. Frame the student conduct process to focus on both student growth and accountability.

Enhance and strengthen the relationship between student affairs and academic affairs.

Create intentional partnerships with faculty, advising, and academic affairs more broadly, so that there is better communication and understanding about student affairs. Build durable bridges among student affairs, academic leadership, faculty governance, advising, and academic units. Improve communication, shared understanding of student support processes, and collaboration around student well-being, conduct, and academic success.

Advance an inclusive and cohesive student community.

Foster a sense of belonging across a diverse student body. Elevate and better coordinate support for graduate and professional students, ensuring resources are clearly communicated, appropriately tailored, and responsive to evolving needs.

Support and strengthen student affairs staff.

Lead and support a highly dedicated staff emerging from a period of significant change. Clarify roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structures; reduce reliance on informal relationships; strengthen cross-training, onboarding, and accountability; and invest in staff development, morale, and retention.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no single candidate will have all of the qualifications, Duke University seeks candidates with a well-rounded combination of the following qualifications and characteristics:

General Qualifications

- An advanced degree in higher education administration, student affairs, or an academic discipline in the arts and sciences
- At least eight to ten years of progressively responsible leadership experience in student affairs or a related area, engaging undergraduate and/or graduate and professional student populations

Job-Specific Skills and Competencies

- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Demonstrated ability to build strong, collaborative partnerships with university stakeholders, including academic and faculty leaders, student leaders, community representatives, and other internal and external partners
- Commitment to facilitating growth and continuous learning across a complex workforce

and with a diverse and global student population

- Proven ability to lead data-driven, holistic organizational change and generate momentum to achieve common goals and foster innovative program development
- Demonstrated experience leading or overseeing complex student care, conduct, and crisis response, and a clear track record of fostering accountability and ongoing development for individual students and the broader student community
- Demonstrated success in performance management of senior managers and of highly functional teams, track record of outstanding innovations, and effective utilization of assessment
- Demonstrated commitment to the fostering of a diverse and inclusive student community
- Able to juggle competing demands and set priorities, make continuous progress toward strategic goals
- High degree of accessibility and openness to students, and a demonstrated record of earning and maintaining the trust of the student body
- A demonstrated record of earning and maintaining the trust of faculty and significant experience in collaboration with faculty and academic leaders
- A strong commitment to enhancing the student experience

Preferred Qualifications

- A doctorate in higher education, student affairs, or a related field
- Ten to fifteen years of progressively responsible leadership experience in student affairs or a related area
- Experience in highly selective, residentially focused campus communities
- Experience in addressing the needs of graduate and professional students

Preferred Skills and Competencies

- An understanding of the differences and commonalities that will be necessary for student engagement that serves both undergraduate and graduate students.
- Experience engaging with and coordinating with fraternal organizations, student clubs, and organizations
- Demonstrated experience leading strategic initiatives and programs working with student organizations and student leaders
- Experience in serving as a visible, responsive crisis management leader during crisis incidents at the individual and institutional levels, and a strong skillset in shepherding thoughtful community engagement and responsive campus support in moments of disruption/inflection
- Operational expertise as demonstrated by effective policies and procedures that are well-communicated

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](#).

Keight Tucker Kennedy, Managing Partner
Arianna Williams, Senior Associate
Alexis Scott, Managing Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

Duke is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer committed to providing employment opportunity without regard to an individual's age, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, (including pregnancy and pregnancy-related conditions), sexual orientation, or military status.

Isaacson, Miller, and Duke University are committed to creating an inclusive environment and welcome applications from candidates with disabilities. If you have any accommodation or access needs, we are happy to provide reasonable accommodations.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Duke University. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by Duke University would supersede any conflicting information in this document.