



Dean of Faculty and Vice President of Academic Affairs
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

THE SEARCH

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC or the School), one of the world's premier institutions for art and design education, seeks an inspiring and collaborative academic leader to serve as its next Dean of Faculty and Vice President of Academic Affairs (dean of faculty). The dean of faculty will join the institution as it navigates a critical juncture in higher education more broadly and shapes the School's future priorities under its *FORWARD* strategic plan. With a legacy of advancing both the teaching and practice of contemporary art, SAIC's impact resonates across disciplines and around the world. The dean of faculty will represent and advocate for a robust and diverse community of tenure and non-tenure track faculty while shaping conversations around academic and programmatic offerings at SAIC. The School is defined by its groundbreaking educational model, one that eliminates traditional majors at the undergraduate level and empowers students to forge their own interdisciplinary paths.

SAIC's community of 3,100 degree-seeking students includes artists, designers, and scholars who challenge norms and redefine the boundaries of creative expression. The School's unique affiliation with the Art Institute of Chicago, the nation's second-largest fine arts museum, offers students unparalleled access to world-class collections and cultural programming. Complemented by cutting-edge facilities and deep-rooted partnerships with Chicago's educational, civic, and cultural institutions, SAIC provides a dynamic and richly resourced environment for artistic exploration and growth.

Reporting to the provost, the successful candidate will oversee the quality and coordination of SAIC's academic programs, research and professional practice activities, faculty enrichment, recruitment and retention efforts, and related administrative operations, in pursuit of maintaining SAIC's high standards of teaching, scholarship, and creative production. The dean of faculty will sustain a productive educational environment that engages the interests of faculty, students, alumni, and partners within and beyond the institution. In addition, the successful candidate should have significant administrative and budgetary experience, demonstrate innovative thinking, an inclusive approach to academic leadership, and possess a strong scholarly or artistic record of achievement meriting a tenured appointment as a full professor in a field appropriate to one or more of SAIC's departments.

SAIC has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this search. All applications, inquiries, and nominations, which will remain confidential, should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE

Founded in 1866 as the Chicago Academy of Design, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago is one of the oldest accredited independent art schools in the United States and the largest museum-based art school in the country. From its inception, the integration of a school *and* a museum has been central to its vision. [The Art Institute of Chicago](#) encompasses both the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the museum known as the Art Institute of Chicago. The Art Institute and SAIC were established by artists for artists, and since their founding have been pioneers in art and design education. Today, SAIC is internationally recognized for its excellence, and continues to uphold its legacy of artistic rigor and design innovation.

SAIC fosters a vibrant and intellectually engaged community in which curiosity, passion, critical thinking, and active debate are central to its institutional culture. Deeply rooted in both the School and the broader Chicago community, SAIC embraces the concept of the “citizen artist,” individuals who integrate their creative practice with the social, cultural, and political issues of our time to effect meaningful change.

Students

SAIC enrolls 3,098 students, including 2,530 undergraduates and 568 graduate students. The institution offers undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate programs to students from nearly 80 countries; twenty-three percent of the student population is international, and one quarter of SAIC's domestic degree-seeking students self-identify as people of color. Twenty percent of SAIC students are the first in their families to attend college. Approximately 24 percent of the student body is Pell Grant eligible. More than 90 percent of degree-seeking students receive some form of financial aid, reflecting the School's commitment to access and inclusion.

Academic Programs

SAIC's most popular undergraduate degree is the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio, which allows students to explore across 13 art and design disciplines or concentrate in specific areas such as art education or writing. The School's diverse [program offerings](#) include architecture, interior architecture, designed objects, historic preservation, art and technology studies, arts administration and policy, art education, art therapy and counseling, art history, theory and criticism, fashion design, film, video, new media and animation, ceramics, fiber and material studies, liberal arts, painting and drawing, performance, photography, print media, sculpture, sound, visual communication design, visual and critical studies, and writing.

SAIC's commitment to personalized, intensive instruction is made possible by its exceptional faculty and staff, including 146 tenured and tenure-track faculty, 658 non-tenure-track faculty, and 415 staff. With a

student-to-faculty ratio of 11 to 1 and average class sizes of just 13 students, the School ensures that each student receives individualized attention and mentorship. SAIC's faculty members are practicing artists, designers, and scholars who are recognized in their fields. They include many prominent painters, filmmakers, historians, sculptors, animators, web artists, graphic designers, theorists, sound artists, fashion designers, architects, philosophers, performance artists, photographers, and writers. These faculty members are leading voices in contemporary art and design discourse. Their dedication is matched by SAIC's staff, many of whom are practicing artists or experts in their disciplines, and who share a deep commitment to the School's distinctive mission.

The hallmark of an SAIC education is the interdisciplinary open curriculum. Instead of electing a major, each undergraduate student completes an individualized program of study pulling from the full curriculum, unbounded by disciplinary borders, with the [Academic Spine](#), a three-course sequence taken in students' second, third, and final year of study, serving as a curricular scaffolding structure for peer support and intensive faculty mentoring. While graduate students enroll in specialized degree programs, many of them also craft a cross-disciplinary experience. Assessment takes place through critiques conducted one-on-one with faculty, in small groups with fellow students, full-class discussions, and other settings. All students are graded credit/no credit. The assessment model fosters self-direction, encourages experimentation and risk-taking, and requires openness to the ideas of others, persistence, and resilience.

SAIC is accredited at the institutional level by the Higher Learning Commission. Specialized programs also maintain relevant disciplinary specific accreditation with the National Architecture Accrediting Board, the American Art Therapy Association, and/or the Illinois State Board of Education.

Strategic Plan

SAIC's new strategic plan, *Forward*, a three-year plan (2026 – 2029) directly confronts national higher-education challenges and builds on the School's legacy. Central to its design is a series of initiatives that enhance the curriculum and improve operational functions to better support the School's academic vision. SAIC *Forward* puts student outcomes front and center, focusing on recruiting talented students, creating clear career pathways, and enhancing support for its student artists and designers—from orientation through graduation and beyond.

The dean of faculty will serve as a key contributor to the implementation of SAIC's forthcoming strategic plan, ensuring alignment with institutional priorities and working with the faculty to advance initiatives that promote academic and operational imperatives.

Leadership

[Jiseon Lee Isbara](#) assumed the role of President in July 2024, becoming the School's 16th executive leader, the second woman, and the first first-generation immigrant to lead the institution. With nearly 25 years of experience in higher education in art and design as a faculty member and administrative leader, she brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to her role. Before joining SAIC, Jiseon served as the provost of Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles. During her tenure at Otis College, she led the development

and implementation of the school's strategic plan and operation, which resulted in enrollment growth, financial health, successful fundraising, and enhanced partnerships. Her leadership also promoted strong diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Previously, she held various roles, including tenure-track faculty and academic and administrative leadership positions at Oregon College of Art and Craft and East Carolina University. Throughout her 16-year administrative tenure, she continued to teach as a faculty member, demonstrating her commitment to education and student support.

As a practicing artist herself, she understands the transformational power of an art and design education. She earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in Fibers from Colorado State University and a Master of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Fibers from Ewha Womans University in Seoul, South Korea, where she was born and raised.

[Martin Berger](#) serves as the Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs. Martin first joined SAIC in 2018 as the Dean of Faculty and Vice President of Academic Affairs before his appointment as provost in 2019. As provost, Martin provides leadership and vision for the academic program, establishes budgetary priorities, and guides the implementation of SAIC's strategic plan. He oversees a broad range of academic and administrative departments, including academic affairs, student affairs, enrollment management, the Film Center, and the library and special collections.

Prior to joining SAIC, Martin served as Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Associate Campus Diversity Officer for Faculty at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Martin holds degrees in English and art history from Wesleyan University and earned his MA, MPhil, and PhD in American studies from Yale University.

Governance

Governance at SAIC is structured to support collaboration and institutional alignment. The President reports to the Board of Trustees, which oversees both the School and the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Institute of Chicago. The academic management of the School is delegated by the Trustees to the Board of Governors, whose President also serves as a trustee and sits on the executive committee of the Board of Trustees.

Faculty play a central role in SAIC's shared governance model, with the [Faculty Senate](#) serving as the primary representative body of the faculty. Composed of 11 members, and overseeing 11 standing committees, the Senate oversees the curriculum and provides critical input to the administration on tenure and promotion, instructional resources, exhibitions, and finances.

Student engagement actively contributes to SAIC's governance structure. Students participate in institutional decision-making through the Student Government, which includes four elected representatives and the Graduate Senate. Both groups are central for developing and maintaining open lines of communication between faculty and administrators, on the one hand, and students, on the other.

The Museum

The Art Institute of Chicago is an integrated institution that encompasses the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) museum as well as the school (SAIC). The museum collection provides a unique teaching, learning, and exhibition environment for SAIC students and faculty. As the second-largest art museum in the country, the AIC boasts an encyclopedic collection of fine art that spans 5,000 years of human experience. Its world-famous permanent collections of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and American paintings are complemented by diverse holdings in significant Old Master works, European and American decorative arts, Asian art, and modern and contemporary art. In 2009, the museum opened its Modern Wing, designed by Renzo Piano, which houses collections in 20th-century European art and contemporary art from after 1960, as well as temporary exhibition space and classrooms. The museum is a vital teaching site for the School, with both studio and academic courses routinely incorporating visits to the museum's galleries; furthermore, some museum curators teach courses for the School, and some visiting artists are shared between the School and museum.

City of Chicago

SAIC is located in the heart of Chicago, a city of extraordinary diversity, architecture, and public art. The third most populous city in the U.S., Chicago has one of the country's largest concentrations of working artists, designers, writers, and thinkers. SAIC sponsors a range of public programs that contribute to Chicago's rich cultural life and enhance the resources available for students. Creative and academic programs are offered to the public through Continuing Studies, including but not limited to adult continuing education and programs for youth, high schoolers, and schoolteachers. SAIC also hosts cultural events showcasing the School's artists, designers, writers, performers, and scholars; acclaimed and emerging visiting artists; and independent and international cinema at the School's Gene Siskel Film Center. More than one million people participate in SAIC programs annually.

ROLE OF THE DEAN OF FACULTY

With SAIC's deep connections to one of the world's greatest cities and museums, the breadth, independence, scope, and scale of the dean of faculty role is unique. The dean of faculty is the public, intellectual leader, and representative of the faculty. They guide critical campus conversations: how best to educate twenty-first century artists, designers, and scholars; the continuing value of art and design; how best to deepen the relationship between art, design, and emerging technology; defining the roles of research and practice in the institution; developing new partnerships within the city of Chicago; and ideating how SAIC will continue to innovate.

The dean of faculty manages a large budget of \$47 million in personnel costs and a \$5 million operating budget. They exercise budgetary oversight over the undergraduate division, graduate division, faculty affairs and faculty employment resources offices, academic departments, exhibitions department, visiting artist program, and fNews (student newspaper).

The dean of faculty joins a collegial community of professionals dedicated to a myriad of creative and scholarly practices and excellence in teaching. Reporting to the provost, the dean of faculty oversees a team that includes the dean of undergraduate studies, the dean of graduate studies, and the executive director of exhibitions. Additionally, the dean of faculty works closely with several elected faculty representatives, including the chair of the faculty senate, chair of faculty, faculty liaison, as well as with the senate's standing committees to ensure that the faculty's interests remain central to the development of academic initiatives.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DEAN OF FACULTY

Lead an engaged community of faculty

SAIC seeks a dean of faculty whose leadership style embraces and complements the organization's culture of engagement, communication, information-sharing, and shared governance. Critically important to the School's context are tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty recruitment and retention; promotion and tenure; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and the intrinsic importance of academic freedom. The dean of faculty will bring a demonstrated willingness to learn, consult, and incorporate feedback and insights from the campus community. Through these actions, the dean of faculty will be an advocate for and liaison to the entirety of the SAIC faculty, shining a light on their teaching, expanding opportunities for faculty development, and setting the tone for the community.

Serve as a trusted, strategic partner to various SAIC constituencies

While reporting to the provost, the dean of faculty will also serve as a strategic thought partner to the President, the President's cabinet, and other senior institutional and departmental leaders. The dean of faculty will be a voice for the faculty body, developing and implementing a vision for tenure- and non-tenure track scholars, educators, and artists at SAIC. They will lead and navigate institution-wide conversations around curricular offerings and the evolving needs of students in higher education today. Critically important will be the dean's ability to communicate this vision to the School's leadership and ensure alignment with institutional goals, such as the *FORWARD* strategic plan. The next dean of faculty must serve as a strategic financial steward, capable of converting institutional priorities into sustainable resource allocation models, managing complex operational budgets, and ensuring long-term fiscal health.

Support curricular priorities

National conversations around the value proposition of higher education, affordability, and return on investment as it pertains to student career outcomes are shaping how academic leaders and faculty are designing their curricula. Working in concert with the faculty, and in close partnerships with the deans of the undergraduate and graduate programs as well as department chairs, the dean will help ensure that the School offers a curriculum that is intellectually and creatively rigorous and provides strong post-graduate outcomes to students. While maintaining SAIC's unique academic learning environment, the dean of faculty will examine the need for expansion and consolidation of programs, as well as facilitate

interdisciplinary alliances and collaborations across SAIC to ensure that existing and future programs are pedagogically and artistically strong, grounded in clear plans for fiscal and infrastructure support, and sustained by a strategic, long-term plan for enrollment.

Foster a culture of belonging

The dean of faculty will prioritize and champion institutional and individual commitments to make SAIC a diverse, equitable, and just organization. Belonging will be further strengthened—beyond the dean’s office—through access and affordability, financial support, increased student support and wellness services, competitive compensation, and attention to physical accessibility. The dean will carry forward campus-wide initiatives and communicate in a variety of institutional settings the value and importance of this work and champion a learning environment in which everyone is welcomed and respected, and where the diversity of ideas and perspectives enriches both the experience and the outcomes for faculty, staff, and students.

Champion the work of SAIC across the community

The dean of faculty is an important external representative of the institution who serves as a thought leader and public advocate for the value of art and design education and the transformative role of art in society. The dean of faculty is expected to be an advocate for SAIC’s involvement in the community as a key facet of its mission, serving as a visible leader across campus, throughout Chicago, and beyond. They will connect with internal and external audiences to persuasively tell the story of SAIC’s successes and ambitions and to shine a light on the ways the School’s expertise, knowledge, and resources can contribute to the greater good of the community and beyond. Furthermore, they will help connect and promote the work of faculty, staff, and students across campus to external communities.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Experienced and talented academic administrator and leader: Highly knowledgeable about the current state and trends of higher education, the selected candidate will demonstrate a successful track record of leadership, management, and shared governance work at institutions of similar or greater complexity. An understanding of curricular development, design, and the outcomes different approaches can yield paired with the vision, imagination, and ability to successfully implement such ideas. Shrewd and astute budgetary management experience balancing and allocating budget lines is imperative.

Superior communication and relationship-building skills: Talent for inspiring enthusiasm, building consensus, hearing, listening, and consulting in a context of shared governance. Ability to communicate decisions and reasoning clearly, allowing the community to understand and feel invested in the future of SAIC. Social and political savvy; commitment to working with and engaging others. Ability to learn, evolve, and adapt when faced with unfamiliar challenges. Trustworthiness, a collaborative nature, excellent judgment, and a sense of humor. Visible effort and impact driving toward a more inclusive and just community of students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders. Cultural competency is a must.

Excellent leadership and management skills: A record of productive work in a complex and dynamic environment. Knowledge of how to translate ideas and convictions into outcomes; ability to act, agility and tolerance for ambiguity. A history of seeking and implementing best practices, with a data-informed approach. Proven effectiveness in building a team, working collaboratively, and leading others to success. Appreciation for the efforts, perspectives, and responsibilities of others. Experience in settings with collective bargaining units.

Commitment to artistic, creative, and academic excellence: Dedication to and informed understanding of art and design, and the practice, teaching, and research thereof. A recognition that art takes place in a larger cultural and communal context, and enthusiasm for community engagement. An ability to articulate the value of art and design in an ever-changing world. A record of achievement meriting a tenured appointment as a full professor in one of SAIC's departments. Professional engagement in the world of art and/or design is strongly preferred.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The expected salary range for this position is \$260,000 to \$275,000 annually. SAIC offers a comprehensive package of benefits including generous paid time off; paid holidays; medical, dental, and vision insurance; generous parental, caregiver, and medical leave benefits; competitive retirement plan (up to nine percent employer contribution); tuition remission and tuition exchange program; employee discounts; and complimentary general admission to participating cultural institutions.

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/school-art-institute-chicago/dean-faculty-and-vice-president-academic-affairs>

Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

Ben Tobin, Stephen Kalogeras, and Alaine Small
Isaacson, Miller

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