



Associate Vice President & Dean of Students
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

THE SEARCH

Southern Methodist University (SMU) seeks an experienced and dedicated student-centered leader to serve as its Associate Vice President and Dean of Students (AVP-DOS). Reporting to the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, the AVP-DOS provides strategic vision and executive oversight for a comprehensive portfolio that promotes student health, safety, wellbeing, advocacy, and success. This is an exciting time to join SMU and the Division of Student Affairs, as the institution continues its ascent towards excellence across the academic, research, teaching, and athletic enterprises, as well as ongoing enhancements to the overall student experience. SMU is experiencing growth and momentum, including expanding undergraduate, transfer, and graduate student populations, increasing national visibility, and the upcoming implementation of an ambitious new strategic plan. The AVP-DOS will play a central role in ensuring that student support systems and wellbeing initiatives evolve alongside the university's continued growth and rising national profile.

Founded in 1911, SMU is a private research university with a focus on global impact, educating more than 12,500 students (approximately 7,500 undergraduate and 5,000 graduate) studying across seven degree-granting schools. Now in its second century, SMU is broadly recognized for the ways it supports students, faculty, staff, and alumni to be ethical, enterprising leaders in their professions and communities. Over the last three decades, SMU has expanded its reach and reputation both nationally and globally, enrolling increasingly high-achieving students from all 50 states and more than 90 countries.

The Division of Student Affairs at SMU plays a central role in shaping a transformative student experience, fostering an environment where students are empowered to thrive academically, socially, personally, and professionally. Guided by a mission to create purposeful learning and leadership opportunities, the division partners across the university to support student success, wellbeing, engagement, and belonging. The collective work of student affairs cultivates the skills students need to become impactful leaders and “world changers.”

The AVP-DOS oversees areas central to ensuring the health, wellbeing, and safety of SMU students, including Student Conduct & Community Standards, Student Advocacy & Support, the Dr. Bob Smith Student Health Center, and Campus Recreation and Wellbeing Education. As a key member of the Student

Affairs senior leadership team, the AVP-DOS collaborates across the institution to address complex student needs, lead critical incident and crisis response efforts, ensure regulatory compliance, and advance divisional and university priorities. The AVP-DOS will also partner closely with SMU's schools to support students and ensure that student support resources, wellbeing initiatives, crisis response protocols, conduct and community standards, and student success efforts effectively serve the needs of both undergraduate and graduate populations.

The SMU community is highly engaged, collaborative, and inventive, and staff pride themselves on providing a high-touch student experience. The ideal candidate is a highly approachable leader who combines strategic thinking with a deep commitment to student wellbeing, fostering a culture where every student feels supported and empowered to succeed. They will bring demonstrated success leading complex student affairs teams, navigating critical incidents with confidence, and building strong partnerships across campus to address student needs. Most importantly, they will be a highly visible and engaged leader who uses their position, relationships, and influence to help students navigate challenges, access support, and succeed. They will combine decisive leadership, strong supervision, and a deep commitment to student wellbeing with an authentic desire to engage students directly, support talented staff, and advance both student success and the university's broader mission.

SMU has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this important search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

SMU began as a bold vision shared by the Methodist Church and civic leaders in Dallas. With a rapidly growing population, Dallas community leaders had high aspirations for success and recognized the need for a great University in their dynamic city. At the same time, Methodist officials seeking to expand the Church's mission of education sought to establish a new University in the Southwest. On April 17, 1911, the charter was signed, establishing SMU in Dallas. Four years later, in the fall of 1915, SMU opened as Dallas University with 456 students and 37 faculty members. The curriculum focused on liberal arts, theology, and music, and the campus consisted of two permanent buildings, one of which was Dallas Hall, named in honor of the city. While it has deep roots in the Methodist tradition, the University is nonsectarian in its teaching and is committed to open inquiry and academic freedom.

Since its founding, SMU has steadily gained a reputation as a top academic institution and is home to [seven degree-granting schools](#) offering 123 undergraduate degrees and 127 graduate and professional degrees: Edwin L. Cox School of Business, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, Dedman School of Law, Bobby B. Lyle School of Engineering, Algur H. Meadows School of the Arts, Perkins School of Theology, and the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development. Across the schools, 788 exceptional faculty and 1,739 dedicated staff and administrators work together to provide exceptional students with an intimate learning environment marked by an 11:1 student-faculty ratio. SMU's innovative, flexible undergraduate Common Curriculum builds a solid liberal arts foundation that

allows students to pursue multiple majors and experience different cultures, and delivers what employers want. SMU graduates greet the workforce with multiple competencies and global savvy.

SMU's 234-acre campus, known as the Hilltop, offers a distinctive collegiate environment that blends the intimacy of a traditional residential campus with the energy and opportunities of a major metropolitan area. Located just minutes from the heart of Dallas, the Hilltop features beautiful grounds, iconic Collegiate Georgian architecture, state-of-the-art academic and student facilities, and a vibrant residential community for approximately 3,000 resident undergraduate students. SMU has a first-year live-on campus requirement, typically in one of the eleven residential commons, which combines academic, residential, and social life. The campus serves as a dynamic setting for student life, with extensive opportunities for engagement, leadership, community building, recreation, and personal growth. SMU's location provides students with access to the cultural, civic, business, and professional resources of one of the nation's most dynamic cities while maintaining a strong sense of campus community and belonging.

SMU attracts a talented and increasingly diverse student body from across the United States and more than 80 countries, with more than half of undergraduates coming from outside Texas. SMU students demonstrate strong academic persistence and success. Approximately 93% of first-year students return for their second year, while 76% graduate within four years and 84% within six years. Student life is highly engaged, with students participating in a broad range of organizations, leadership opportunities, athletics, Greek life, community service, and arts and cultural activities, both on the Hilltop and throughout the Dallas community.

ABOUT THE DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Mission & Values

Student Affairs at SMU is committed to providing Mustangs with transformative learning experiences—rich, educational opportunities that allow students to put into practice the knowledge they gain in the classroom. The mission of SMU's Student Affairs is to create and support a robust student experience and forge strategic partnerships to best serve the entire SMU community. As educators and scholar-practitioners, the Division of Student Affairs creates purposeful learning and leadership opportunities for students to clarify and develop their knowledge, values, skills, and identities - challenging each to become a world changer.

In conjunction with SMU's philosophy of developing world changers through the vital foundation of a liberal arts education, the Division of Student Affairs has established [commitments](#) to direct how staff approach their work holistically, supporting students in the development of meaningful lives. These commitments are the overarching expectations for the work in this student-centered environment and are promises from staff to each other and to the student body at SMU. By embodying these commitments in both words and actions, the Division of Student Affairs strives to move the division forward, together.

Inaugurated in September 2025, [SMU President Dr. Jay Hartzell](#) and the SMU community are developing a new comprehensive University Strategic Plan. The Division of Student Affairs will shape a new plan of its own in close coordination with the institutional strategic plan. The Division of Student Affairs has a legacy of showcasing excellence, as demonstrated through annual [Impact reports](#).

Leadership

[Dr. K.C. Mmeje](#) serves as Senior Vice President for Student Affairs at SMU. In this executive administrative role, Mmeje provides strategic leadership for areas that directly impact a student's success and sense of belonging on campus. He was instrumental in advancing numerous capital projects that directly enhanced the student experience, including the multimillion-dollar renovation of the Hughes-Trigg Student Center, the construction of Thomas House, and the complete renovation of Smith-Perkins Hall and Virginia-Snyder Residential Commons. Additionally, Mmeje has championed student health and holistic wellbeing by expanding access to on-site and virtual medical and counseling services, bolstering health education initiatives, and adding dental services to the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center.

Mmeje received his bachelor's degree in sociology and Black studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara, his master's degree in higher education student affairs administration from the University of Vermont, and his doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Southern California. He completed Harvard Graduate School of Education's Institute for Management and Leadership in Education. Mmeje is the recipient of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students' 2013 Barbara K. Townsend Dissertation of the Year Award. He was named a NASPA Pillar of the Profession, received the SMU Student Senate Outstanding Administrator Award, and is a recipient of the "M" Award, the most prestigious award an SMU Mustang can receive.

ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT & DEAN OF STUDENTS

The Associate Vice President & Dean of Students provides executive leadership for student affairs programs and services that promote student health, safety, wellbeing, and success. The AVP-DOS directly supervises 5 employees and oversees a staff of 53 and an operating budget of approximately \$8.2M. The AVP's direct reports include: the Assistant Dean of Students & Director of Student Advocacy & Support; the Associate Dean of Student Life & Executive Director of Health Services; the Director of Campus Recreation & Wellbeing Education; the Director of Student Conduct & Community Standards; and the Assistant to the Associate Vice President & Dean of Students. The AVP-DOS provides strategic direction for Student Conduct & Community Standards, Student Advocacy & Support, the Dr. Bob Smith Student Health Center (including medical and counseling services), and Campus Recreation and Wellbeing. To find out more about the departments in the AVP-DOS's portfolio, [click here](#).

Reporting to the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, the AVP-DOS serves as a member of the Student Affairs senior leadership team and plays a key role in advancing divisional and institutional priorities. The AVP-DOS collaborates with campus partners to address complex student issues, leads crisis response efforts related to student wellbeing, ensures compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and represents the Senior Vice President and the Division of Student Affairs at university events, committees, and external engagements. The AVP-DOS also serves on the university's Emergency Operations Center team and is a key contributor to institutional emergency preparedness, crisis response planning, and business continuity efforts.

The following areas are the essential functions of the Associate Vice President & Dean of Students role, though other duties and responsibilities may be assigned.

Crisis Management and Student Support

Provide leadership in responding to complex student issues, critical incidents, behavioral concerns, student emergencies, and campus crises. Serve as a member of institutional care, threat assessment, behavioral intervention, emergency response, and crisis management teams, as appropriate. Serve as an active member of the university's Emergency Operations Center team and help lead institutional responses to emergencies and critical incidents. Participate in the Dean of Students on-call rotation and be available to respond to urgent situations that may arise during evenings, weekends, and holidays. Demonstrate exceptional crisis leadership through decisive decision-making, sound judgment, and calm execution under pressure. Communicate effectively with students, families, staff, senior leaders, and external stakeholders during times of crisis.

Leadership and Administration

Provide strategic leadership and operational oversight for Student Conduct & Community Standards, Student Advocacy & Support, the Dr. Bob Smith Student Health Center, and Campus Recreation & Wellbeing Education. Direct all aspects of program administration and service delivery to ensure high-quality, student-centered services that support student success, health, safety, and wellbeing. Lead personnel management activities, including recruitment, hiring, supervision, performance management, coaching, and organizational development. Manage teams with clear expectations, promote accountability, develop talent, and create an environment where staff feel supported, empowered, and connected to a shared purpose. Strengthen a culture of excellence and continuous growth throughout the division.

Strategic Planning and Organizational Effectiveness

Partner with departmental leaders to develop and implement strategic priorities, goals, and assessment plans that align with the University's mission, strategic plan, and Student Affairs objectives. Utilize data, assessment findings, industry trends, and student feedback to evaluate program effectiveness, identify emerging student needs, and guide continuous improvement efforts. Coordinate educational programs,

training initiatives, and resource awareness efforts regarding student support resources, behavioral intervention processes, student wellbeing, and related policies.

Student Engagement and Campus Partnerships

Foster a welcoming, supportive, safe, and inclusive campus environment that promotes belonging, engagement, and student success. Develop and maintain collaborative relationships with leaders across campus to address student concerns and advance institutional priorities. Serve as a visible, accessible, and engaged campus leader who actively meets with students, attends campus events, participates in university traditions, and maintains regular contact with student leaders and organizations. Leverage relationships and interactions to understand emerging student concerns, identify opportunities for improvement, and help students connect with appropriate resources and support systems. Balance direct student engagement with the complex responsibilities of institutional leadership, crisis response, conduct administration, and policy implementation.

Budget and Resource Management

Provide stewardship of financial, physical, and human resources within the Dean of Students portfolio. Develop, manage, and monitor annual operating budgets, ensuring responsible fiscal management, alignment with strategic priorities, and long-term financial sustainability. Evaluate resource allocation and identify opportunities for operational efficiencies, revenue enhancement, and service improvements.

Leadership Team and University Service

Serve as an active and engaged member of the Division of Student Affairs senior leadership team, contributing to divisional planning, policy development, assessment, and strategic decision-making. Represent the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs and the University at meetings, functions, committees, and community events, as assigned. Cultivate productive relationships with students, faculty, staff, alumni, families, community partners, and external organizations.

Compliance, Policy, and Risk Management

Provide oversight of the University's student conduct processes and related student support systems, ensuring compliance with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, including those enforced by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, and other regulatory agencies. Develop, implement, and continuously assess policies, procedures, and practices that promote student safety, welfare, due process, risk mitigation, and institutional accountability. Ensure compliance with healthcare regulations, professional standards, licensure requirements, and accreditation expectations.

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

To be successful, the Associate Vice President and Dean of Students will address the following key opportunities and challenges:

Serve as a visible, accessible, and student-centered leader

The AVP-DOS will intuitively understand students and engage with them as a core component of their leadership approach. A visible and relatable presence will be essential in understanding campus culture, building trust, and anticipating emerging student needs. Students and their families frequently turn to the Dean of Students Office for guidance, support, and problem-solving, requiring a leader who is approachable, responsive, and invested in meaningful engagement. The AVP-DOS leverages their institutional role, relationships, and influence to connect students with support, remove barriers when appropriate, facilitate solutions, uphold accountability, and ensure student concerns are heard and addressed. The AVP-DOS will be a regular and active presence throughout campus, intentionally placing themselves in conversation with students and fostering a culture in which students feel comfortable seeking assistance from the Dean of Students Office and Student Affairs more broadly. The AVP-DOS must balance care for students with institutional responsibilities, exercising sound judgment while helping students navigate challenges and thrive.

Foster and maintain a vibrant and safe community for all students.

The AVP-DOS will model skilled crisis leadership through the responsiveness and guidance of others engaged in crisis response. In a fast-paced environment where student issues can develop rapidly, the AVP-DOS must be responsive, decisive, and highly accessible. The successful candidate will foster a culture in which students feel safe reporting concerns, seeking assistance, and communicating openly with Student Affairs staff and university leaders. Among other responsibilities, the AVP-DOS will need to be an active presence during crises, advise executive leadership, lead and prepare crisis responders, and lead the university's behavioral intervention team. This leader must be skilled not just in responding directly to crisis but also in orchestrating response strategies, which often involve staff and campus colleagues. The AVP-DOS possesses expertise in matters of student affairs policy, procedures, and law. Experience leading complex crises and student behavioral situations and coordinating multifaceted institutional responses will be essential. This leader upholds institutional policies and due process and possesses the interpersonal skillset to effectively communicate and educate. They will apply their expertise in ways that are student-friendly and aligned with a holistic view of student wellness.

Shape the student experience during a defining period of change for SMU.

SMU is experiencing remarkable momentum and growth, marked by bold institutional leadership, growing national visibility, and the launch of a new strategic plan, which will directly inform the work of student affairs. The AVP-DOS will have an opportunity to ensure that student support systems evolve

alongside this trajectory and that the student experience remains at the center of institutional progress. The university is welcoming growing numbers of undergraduate, transfer, graduate, and professional students, creating new opportunities and expectations for student support, wellbeing services, and student engagement. As student needs continue to evolve, the successful candidate will help define what a contemporary, institution-wide culture of student support looks like at a highly engaged and high-achieving university, leveraging strong campus partnerships and a leadership team eager to innovate. This work will require balancing strategic thought with decisive action, navigating myriad expectations, addressing increasingly complex student concerns, and the institutional desire to foster ongoing creativity and excellence in student affairs work that supports undergraduate and graduate students.

Cultivate relationships and strategic partnerships across the community.

The Dean of Students is uniquely positioned to connect people, priorities, and resources across the university. With strong relationships already in place at SMU, the AVP-DOS will have an opportunity to partner closely with colleagues within student affairs as well as across SMU, including academic affairs, executive institutional leaders, campus safety, and advancement. The AVP-DOS will need to be skilled at engaging these and other partners, which include parents and families. SMU is a highly collaborative and fast-paced environment in which successful leaders build trust quickly, understand institutional dynamics, and help align interests around shared outcomes. The AVP-DOS frequently represents the Division of Student Affairs and must effectively represent the institution's and division's missions and goals. The ability to serve as a connector, champion, ambassador, and problem-solver will be critical to advancing student success. SMU is a highly relational, high-contact environment in which students and families have expectations for communication, responsiveness, and service. The AVP-DOS must thrive in this setting, building trust with students, parents, families, faculty, and staff while navigating sensitive concerns with diplomacy, empathy, and professionalism.

Lead a talented team of dedicated professionals.

The AVP-DOS will serve as a champion and consummate supporter of their team and the Division of Student Affairs. Through accessible and supportive leadership, ongoing engagement with staff, clear purpose, creativity, and transparency, the AVP-DOS will lead and develop a talented and deeply committed team of professionals. The AVP-DOS will bring strong organizational development and supervision skills and proven accomplishments in building and managing talented teams. From recruitment and onboarding to professional and organizational development, the AVP-DOS will champion exemplary workplace practices. As an experienced supervisor, this individual will bring and translate a deep understanding of the national landscape of student affairs at a thriving institution. The AVP-DOS will inspire and motivate both their direct reports and their teams and will build upon the division's commitment to its employees and the craft of student affairs. As the leader of a large and complex organization, the AVP-DOS will be expected to model exceptional supervisory practice, effectively manage performance, cultivate future leaders, navigate personnel challenges, and create a workplace culture characterized by accountability, growth, inclusion, and high performance.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The minimum educational qualifications include a master's degree in higher education administration, student affairs, counseling, or a related field. A terminal degree is strongly preferred. While no one person will embody all of the following, the successful candidate will bring many of the following professional qualifications, skills, experiences, and personal qualities:

- At least 10 years of progressively responsible leadership experience in student affairs in the areas directly related to the portfolio of the AVP-DOS, including: student conduct, student care and support, wellness, and/or crisis management.
- Significant experience leading institutional crisis response efforts, behavioral intervention processes, student conduct and accountability processes, behavioral intervention, and emergency management activities.
- Experience with student conduct systems and care teams.
- Familiarity with current and emerging issues in higher education, including mental health, Title IX, campus climate, and regulatory compliance.
- Exceptional communication, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement skills.
- Facility in analyzing data to develop and assess programs to drive change and innovation.
- Excellent interpersonal, presentation, and written communication skills, with the ability to engage effectively with students, families, alumni, donors, trustees, faculty, staff, and senior leaders.
- Experience serving as a spokesperson, public-facing representative, or participant in media-related communications during sensitive or high-profile situations.
- Experience navigating complex institutional environments and managing relationships with multiple stakeholders while balancing competing priorities and perspectives.
- Facility in analyzing data to develop and assess programs to drive change and innovation.
- High degree of accessibility and openness to students and demonstrated record of earning and maintaining the trust of the student body.
- Demonstrated experience working in a high-touch, service-oriented environment that requires frequent engagement with students, families, and campus partners.
- Proven ability to inspire, lead, support, and mentor a student affairs team of skilled and dedicated professionals, effectively manage talent, and develop processes for effective teamwork.
- Proven track record of effective fiscal and operational management.
- Demonstrated ability to build trust and credibility with students, families, faculty, staff, and institutional leaders in a highly relational and service-oriented environment.
- Demonstrated record of decisive leadership, sound judgment, and effective decision-making in complex and rapidly evolving circumstances.

THE DALLAS-FORT WORTH METROPLEX

The Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex offers something for everyone. The Metroplex offers a rare combination of professional opportunity, affordability, and quality of life that makes it an attractive place to build both a career and a community. As one of the nation's fastest-growing metropolitan areas, Dallas provides

access to a thriving economy, diverse industries, and a strong higher education ecosystem. Residents enjoy a relatively affordable cost of living compared to many major U.S. cities, along with vibrant neighborhoods, excellent dining, professional sports, arts and entertainment. With a greater Dallas population exceeding 6.8 million (the fourth largest and fifth-most diverse metropolitan area), the region has been identified by Forbes as one of five cities “poised to be the next Silicon Valley tech hub.” Dallas boasts the nation’s largest urban arts district, which consists of world-class museums and a luminous cluster of performing arts spaces. It is home to four professional sports teams and offers easy access to a range of outdoor activities throughout the region. With the Trinity River, White Rock Lake, almost 400 parks, and over 125 miles of urban hiking and biking trails, the city provides abundant opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, and it has been named one of the Greenest Cities in the world.

Living in Dallas means working with students from varied backgrounds while enjoying a welcoming, family-friendly community with year-round activities, cultural events, and abundant recreational opportunities. As one of America’s most connected cities, the region is home to the tenth most frequently traveled airport in the world. Located near the heart of a global center of commerce and culture, SMU is rich with opportunities for residents and visitors. As the Texas economy booms, the Metroplex continues to offer an incredible array of professional, personal, and educational opportunities.

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
Ivan Ceballos, Managing Associate
Alexis Lynton, Managing Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

SMU will not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, education activity, or admissions on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status. SMU’s commitment to equal opportunity includes nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. The Assistant Vice President for Access and Equity/Title IX Coordinator is designated to handle inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policies, including the prohibition of sex discrimination under Title IX. The Assistant Vice President/Title IX Coordinator may be reached at the Perkins Administration Building, Room 204, 6425 Boaz Lane, Dallas, TX 75205, 214-768- 3601, accessequity@smu.edu.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Southern Methodist 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 Southern Methodist University would supersede any conflicting information in this document.