



Assistant Vice President for Leadership & Involvement
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

THE SEARCH

Southern Methodist University (SMU) seeks a creative, collaborative, and strategic leader to serve as its Assistant Vice President for Leadership & Involvement (AVP-LI). Reporting to the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, the AVP-LI will provide leadership for a portfolio that includes the Hunt Leadership Scholars Program, Principled Leadership, Parent & Family Programs, Student Center & Activities, Fraternity & Sorority Life, and Orientation & Transitions. This is an exceptional opportunity to shape the future of student engagement at a university experiencing significant momentum, where institutional leaders are committed to delivering an exceptional student experience and advancing a culture of leadership and engagement. The successful candidate will join a talented team and play a central role in helping students connect, lead, and thrive in one of higher education's most dynamic environments.

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 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-LI will have the opportunity to shape a vision for student engagement, leadership development, and community building while elevating some of the university's most visible and influential programs in a high-touch environment. The successful candidate will be an innovative and collaborative leader who thrives in a fast-paced, relationship-driven environment, is adept at navigating multiple stakeholders and competing interests, and brings the vision and courage to lead thoughtful innovation. Equally comfortable

engaging students, partnering with faculty and campus leaders, and supporting talented staff, this leader will leverage SMU's extraordinary momentum to create meaningful opportunities for students to connect, belong, lead, and flourish. Above all, the AVP-LI will be deeply student-centered, embracing regular and meaningful engagement with students and ensuring that the student perspective remains at the forefront of planning, decision-making, and program development.

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/minors 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 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-Snider 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 ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT FOR LEADERSHIP & INVOLVEMENT

The Assistant Vice President for Leadership & Involvement provides strategic leadership for student affairs programs and services that cultivate student engagement, leadership development, belonging, and an exceptional co-curricular student experience. The AVP-LI directly supervises 5 employees and oversees a staff of 14 and an operating budget of approximately \$3.4M, providing direction for Principled Leadership, the Hunt Leadership Scholars Program, Parent & Family Programs, Student Center & Activities, Fraternity & Sorority Life, and Orientation & Transitions. The direct reports of the Assistant Vice President are the Associate Director of the Hunt Leadership Scholars Program; the Program Specialist for Leadership Programs; the Director of Orientation & Transitions; the Director of Fraternity & Sorority Life; and the Director of the Student Center & Activities. Launched in 2026, Principled Leadership is a new part of the portfolio and in direct support of the new Institutional Strategic Plan: Mustang Charge. To find out more about the departments in the AVP-LI's portfolio, [click here](#).

Reporting to the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, the AVP-LI serves as a member of the Student Affairs senior leadership team and plays a critical role in advancing divisional and institutional priorities. The AVP-LI collaborates with campus partners to develop innovative engagement opportunities, foster a welcoming and inclusive campus community, and support student success and retention. As a visible and accessible campus leader, the AVP-LI will play an integral role in advancing the university's commitment to creating exceptional student experiences, a central pillar of SMU's strategic direction. The AVP-LI will work closely with colleagues across Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to ensure that co-curricular programs complement and enhance student learning, academic success, and student wellbeing.

The following areas are the essential functions of the Assistant Vice President for Leadership & Involvement role, though other duties and responsibilities may be assigned.

Leadership and Administration

Provide strategic leadership and operational oversight for the Hunt Leadership Scholars Program, Principled Leadership, Parent & Family Programs, Student Center & Activities, Fraternity & Sorority Life, and Orientation & Transitions. The Hunt program is SMU's signature undergraduate leadership development program, offering a distinctive and transformative experience for students committed to becoming exceptional leaders. Direct all aspects of program administration and service delivery, ensuring high-quality, student-centered programs and services. Lead personnel management activities, including recruitment, hiring, supervision, and performance management. Champion a culture of professional growth and continuous learning by mentoring staff, investing in professional development opportunities, cultivating future leaders, and fostering an environment where employees feel supported, challenged, and empowered to excel.

Strategic Planning and Student Engagement

Develop and implement strategic priorities, goals, and initiatives that align with the University's mission, strategic plan, and Division of Student Affairs objectives. Advance a comprehensive student engagement strategy that enhances student involvement, leadership development, community building, campus traditions, and a sense of belonging. Utilize assessment data, student feedback, and emerging trends to evaluate program effectiveness and identify opportunities for innovation and continuous improvement. Advance a "One Mustang Experience" that encourages students to build meaningful connections across organizations, programs, identities, and interests, ensuring that every student can find pathways to engagement and leadership regardless of their involvement entry point. Coordinate educational programs, training, and outreach efforts to ensure stakeholders understand and effectively engage with involvement opportunities and resources.

Campus Partnerships and Community Building

Foster a welcoming, supportive, safe, and inclusive campus environment that promotes belonging, engagement, leadership development, and connection to the University community. Collaborate effectively with partners across campus to enhance the student experience. Develop and maintain strong relationships with students, faculty, staff, alumni, families, and community partners. Serve as a collaborative bridge builder across the Division of Student Affairs, reduce duplication of effort, strengthen communication, and create seamless experiences for students. Partner closely with Academic Affairs and faculty leaders to ensure co-curricular experiences reinforce student learning, leadership development, retention, and academic achievement.

Budget and Resource Management

Provide stewardship of financial, physical, and human resources within the Leadership & Involvement portfolio. Develop, manage, and monitor annual operating budgets, ensuring responsible fiscal management, alignment with strategic priorities, and long-term sustainability. Evaluate resource allocation and identify opportunities to maximize operational effectiveness and program impact.

Student Organization and Event Support

Support the development and implementation of policies, procedures, and risk management practices related to student organizations, campus events, and fraternity and sorority life. Engage directly and authentically with students through regular participation in major campus traditions, leadership programs, signature university events, orientation experiences, student organization activities, and community-building initiatives. Build meaningful relationships with student leaders and organizations across campus, serving as a trusted advisor, mentor, and advocate for students.

Partner closely with Student Senate, fraternity and sorority organizations, leadership groups, and other student organizations to cultivate a vibrant and connected campus community.

Attend student organization programs, events, major campus traditions, and university functions as needed, including evenings and weekends. Provide oversight for large-scale university traditions, welcome programs, and campus-wide engagement and leadership initiatives.

Assessment and Organizational Effectiveness

Establish and monitor key performance indicators for departments within the portfolio. Utilize engagement data to identify emerging student engagement trends and develop innovative programming to meet evolving student needs. Balance a commitment to assessment and measurable outcomes with a strong focus on staff development, organizational health, student feedback, and continuous improvement. Employ assessment practices not only to measure impact, but also to inform decision-making, foster innovation, and support employee growth and effectiveness.

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. Support the implementation and realization of the Student Affairs mission, vision, and strategic plan.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT FOR LEADERSHIP & INVOLVEMENT

To be successful, the Assistant Vice President for Leadership and Involvement will address the following key opportunities and challenges:

Create Alignment Across a Dynamic Portfolio

The AVP-LI will have a unique opportunity to lead a portfolio that touches nearly every aspect of the student co-curricular experience, including leadership development, student activities, fraternity and sorority life, orientation and transitions, and the student center. While these areas share a commitment to student engagement and development, there are opportunities to create greater alignment,

collaboration, and strategic coherence across the portfolio. The successful candidate will be a connector who can foster a sense of shared purpose and help staff see how their individual contributions advance a larger vision for student engagement and success. Accomplishing this will require thoughtful relationship-building, clear communication, and the ability to balance the distinct identities and traditions of individual departments while creating a more integrated and collaborative approach to student engagement at SMU.

Success will also require fostering greater integration within the broader Division of Student Affairs, strengthening collaboration across departments, creating common language around leadership and engagement, and building shared ownership for the student experience. The AVP-LI will help unify institutional student engagement and community-building efforts and will ensure students experience a coordinated and cohesive approach to engagement and leadership development that advances a “One Mustang Experience.”

Enhance Engagement Across the Student Experience

SMU students are notably engaged, ambitious, and eager to lead. Approximately 42% of undergraduate students participate in fraternity and sorority life, making it a significant feature of campus culture, but only one of many pathways for involvement and connection. The AVP-LI will have the opportunity to strengthen a campus environment where every student can find community, develop meaningful relationships, and engage fully in university life. This leader will play a highly visible role in shaping the student experience by actively and meaningfully engaging students through leadership programs, signature campus traditions, major events, student organization activities, and informal interactions throughout campus. The AVP-LI should be energized by student engagement, eager to build authentic relationships with students, and committed to ensuring that student voices inform institutional decision-making.

As SMU continues to grow and evolve, the AVP-LI will help ensure that engagement opportunities remain accessible, welcoming, and responsive to the needs of all students, including those who may be less connected to traditional involvement channels. This work will require a visible leader who understands student culture, values belonging, and is committed to creating an exceptional student experience for every Mustang.

Drive Innovation Across a Portfolio of High-Impact Programs

The AVP-LI will oversee several of SMU's most visible and influential student-facing departments. Supported by talented staff and strong existing programs, the AVP-LI will have the opportunity to evaluate operations, strengthen alignment across the portfolio, and advance innovative approaches that enhance student learning, leadership development, and campus traditions. As SMU embarks on a new strategic plan and continues its upward trajectory, the AVP-LI will play a critical role in ensuring these programs evolve to meet emerging student needs while maintaining the high standards and traditions that define

the university experience. Success will require strategic thinking, effective change leadership, and a commitment to continuous improvement and organizational excellence.

Cultivate Relationships Across Campus

In a highly relational campus culture, success will depend upon the ability to build trust, foster collaboration, and connect across the university around a common vision for student success and engagement. The AVP-LI will maintain a regular presence at campus events, activities, and venues where students interact with the division to fully understand students' holistic needs, gather input from students not as highly engaged in student life, and create spaces for students' voices to be heard. Clear and transparent communication is expected to establish rapport with student leaders and institutional partners in creating a supportive and engaging environment for students.

Beyond the division, the AVP-LI will cultivate strong partnerships with institutional colleagues and other key stakeholders to create a more connected and seamless student experience. The AVP-LI will be a key partner to donors, alumni volunteers, parents, and university supporters whose engagement advances leadership programming, student success initiatives, and the broader mission of the university. The AVP-LI will work collaboratively across organizational boundaries, aligning co-curricular opportunities with institutional priorities and ensuring that student engagement is advanced through shared ownership and collective effort. The AVP-LI and their team will foster common language, shared goals, and stronger connections among leadership programs and initiatives throughout the institution, helping to establish a cohesive vision for leadership development and student engagement at SMU.

Inspire & Lead a Talented Team

The AVP-LI will inherit a talented and dedicated group of professionals who care deeply about students and are eager to continue aligning and elevating the impact of their work. The AVP-LI will cultivate an environment where staff feel supported, empowered, and inspired to do their best work — investing in professional growth, removing barriers, and fostering trust, transparency, and mutual respect. A coach and connector, this leader will strengthen team morale and promote a healthy, high-performing workplace culture. Accessible and authentic, the AVP-LI will model effective supervision through active listening, clear communication, and thoughtful accountability. The AVP-LI will be expected to create intentional pathways for professional development, succession planning, leadership growth, and career advancement for staff throughout the portfolio.

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-LI, including: fraternity and sorority life, student activities, orientation and family programs, or closely related areas.
- Experience developing and implementing strategic initiatives that advance student engagement, leadership development, belonging, retention, and student success.
- Knowledge of student organization administration, campus event management, risk management practices, and fraternity and sorority life programs and policies.
- Demonstrated success leading complex organizations, supervising professional staff, and fostering a culture of accountability, collaboration, and employee development.
- 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 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.
- Strong interpersonal skills, alongside strong communication and empathy skills.
- Demonstrated commitment to direct student engagement and a track record of building authentic, trust-based relationships with students and student leaders.
- Experience fostering cross-functional collaboration and creating alignment across complex organizations with multiple stakeholders and competing priorities.
- Evidence of success developing staff talent, leading professional development initiatives, and cultivating inclusive, high-performing teams.
- Experience partnering with alumni, donors, volunteers, families, and external stakeholders in support of student success initiatives and organizational priorities.
- Demonstrated ability to collaborate effectively with academic leaders and faculty to integrate co-curricular engagement and student learning outcomes.

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.

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