Search for the Dean of the Meadows School of the Arts
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

THE SEARCH

Southern Methodist University (SMU) seeks an innovative, collaborative, and ambitious leader to serve as the next dean of the Meadows School of the Arts (Meadows). 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 students) studying across seven degree-granting schools. In February 2025, SMU achieved Carnegie Research One (R1) classification, joining the ranks of the nation's top public and private research institutions.

Meadows brings together the visual and performing arts, design and technology, communications and journalism, arts management, and arts entrepreneurship within a single school—an unusually broad interdisciplinary ecosystem that few institutions can match. Bolstered by four decades of significant support from The Meadows Foundation, the School educates visual and performing artists, designers, creative technologists, media and communications professionals, and arts and cultural leaders, preparing them to make a lasting and transformative impact.

Meadows faculty are uniquely positioned to draw on the School's interdisciplinary strengths, SMU's standing as an R1 research institution, and the opportunities afforded by its location in Dallas to advance groundbreaking research, creative scholarship, and collaboration across fields. The School is also a leader in innovative outreach and community engagement, challenging students to make a difference locally and globally by forging connections among art, design, communications, entrepreneurship, and social change. As a convener for the arts, media, and creative industries in North Texas, Meadows fosters cross-disciplinary partnerships and contributes research and expertise that inform and advance these sectors.

Meadows is also home to the Meadows Museum, one of SMU's most significant academic and cultural resources, which houses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Spanish art outside Spain.

Reporting to the executive vice president and provost, the dean will be a key leader within the University, advancing the mission and ambitions of Meadows while making a compelling case for the essential role of the arts, design, and communications within a major American research university and beyond. The opportunity to lead Meadows is distinctive: few schools bring together such a broad range of disciplines within one academic community. The next dean will build on this foundation to shape the School's next chapter, deepen its connections across SMU, and expand its reach through partnerships in Dallas and beyond, drawing on one of the country's most dynamic arts, media, and cultural communities.

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

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 is home to 40 centers and institutes, spanning a wide array of interdisciplinary subjects and offering opportunities for scholarly research and writing, conferences, lectures, and symposia. They include the John Goodwin Tower Center for Public Policy and International Affairs, the William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, the Cary M. Maguire Center for Ethics and Public Responsibility, the Dedman College Interdisciplinary Institute, and the Caruth Institute for Entrepreneurship. The University is also home to the George W. Bush Presidential Center, which includes the presidential archives of the Bush Administration, a museum with permanent and traveling exhibits, and an independent public policy institute. Through its work, the Bush Center has impacted both SMU and the North Texas community in many ways, both big and small.

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 combine 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 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, with 76% graduating 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.

In April 2026, SMU launched the formation of The Dallas Office, a single coordinated point of access to connect Dallas to SMU and SMU to Dallas more intentionally. And in September 2026, SMU President Jay Hartzell announced the Mustang Charge, the institution's strategic framework and plan to position SMU as a nationally recognized research institution known for the relevance and excellence of its work and its application in the classroom and beyond. The vision is for SMU to be at the forefront of America's universities, winning in teaching, research, athletics, and the arts; delivering exceptional experiences; partnering with the Dallas community; and empowering well-rounded, principled leaders who are driven to tackle the world's most important challenges.

MEADOWS SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Formally established at SMU in 1969 and named in honor of benefactor Algur H. Meadows, the Meadows School of the Arts is one of the foremost arts, media, and communications education institutions in the United States and the largest school in terms of physical footprint at SMU. With continued significant support from The Meadows Foundation, the School educates visionary artists, scholars, and arts and communications professionals prepared to meet the demands of their professional careers.

Meadows offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in an uncommonly broad range of the arts and media—visual (art, art history, creative technology, design, and creative computing), performing (dance, music, and theatre) and communications (advertising; film and media arts; corporate communication and public affairs; and journalism)—as well as a preeminent program in arts management and arts entrepreneurship. Recently SMU Guildhall, a global leader in game development education, joined the Division of Design within Meadows and, under the dean's leadership, connected game development with the School's work in creative technology, design, and creative computation for both undergraduate and master's-level students. Many of the School's programs are nationally accredited by a variety of associations including the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), the National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD), and the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST).

Meadows is comprised of approximately 149 accomplished faculty members and 108 staff members who have made significant contributions to the arts in many ways. These faculty and staff work with around 1,103 students (roughly 819 undergraduate students and 284 graduate students). Determined to recruit the top students, the School's Meadows Scholars Program has enabled SMU and Dallas to compete nationally for the most talented and academically successful students in the arts and communications.

Students have outstanding opportunities for internships and collaborations on campus, in Dallas (a top-five media market and home to numerous Fortune 500 companies, offering students and faculty rich connections to advertising, fashion, film, journalism, and corporate communication as well as the arts), and in locales around the world, including through several study abroad programs. The Meadows Intern Fellowship Program subsidizes paid internships that are reserved exclusively for Meadows undergraduate students at Dallas-based arts, communication, and media organizations. Additionally, the Spaht Family Immersion Fund is available for students to apply for to take advantage of immersive opportunities that require travel and focused study on creative and/or scholarly work. And through the Meadows Prize, two pioneering artists are selected to do a four-to-eight-week residency in Dallas, in addition to receiving a $25,000 stipend.

Meadows contributes to life on campus for its students in several ways through student organizations, community engagement, and academic and professional development opportunities. Through student performances, art exhibitions, film screenings, artist lectures, and master classes, Meadows offers a wide variety of on-campus cultural experiences for majors in the School and for lovers of the arts. Student media, including The Daily Campus, SMU-TV, and Look magazine, provide students with hands-on experience in reporting, broadcasting, and storytelling.

For more information on Meadows' facilities, see Appendix I.

ROLE OF THE DEAN

Reporting to executive vice president and provost Rachel Davis Mersey, the dean will serve as the School's chief academic and administrative officer and provide leadership for its academic, artistic, financial, and operational priorities. Working within a shared governance structure and in partnership with the executive council, faculty, staff, students, and University leadership, the dean will guide Meadows through its next chapter while further integrating the School into the broader life and ambitions of SMU.

The dean will be strongly committed to scholarly, creative, and professional achievement and to the success of Meadows' students, faculty, and staff. An experienced and collaborative administrator, the dean will bring the judgment to make difficult decisions and tradeoffs, manage change effectively, and earn the trust and respect of the Meadows community. The dean will oversee 23 direct reports, which include the dean's executive council, director of the Meadows Museum, and director of SMU DataArts, as well as a close to $30 million operating budget.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DEAN

To ensure the continued growth, impact, and distinction of the Meadows School of the Arts, the dean will be empowered to address several key opportunities and challenges:

Develop, communicate, and execute a strategic vision for Meadows' continued growth and success

With the completion of the School's self-study, the incoming dean will have the opportunity to articulate a compelling vision for Meadows that builds on its considerable strengths while establishing clear priorities for its future. Working collaboratively with faculty, staff, students, the executive council, and University leadership, the dean will align the School's strategic priorities with *Mustang Charge* and ensure that the arts, design, and communications have a strong voice in broader University planning and decision-making. Recognizing the distinct cultures, needs, and resource demands of the School's diverse disciplines, the dean must navigate competing priorities, make thoughtful and strategic decisions about investments, and effectively communicate the value and contributions of Meadows to senior leadership and other key constituencies.

The dean will emulate and champion the highest standards of scholarly, creative, and professional achievement while ensuring that Meadows continues to deepen its integration into the broader intellectual and academic life of SMU. In developing their vision, the dean will be passionately committed to the student experience, ensuring that curricular and co-curricular experiences adequately prepare students for their future careers and artistic endeavors post-graduation.

Grow and refine programs with an eye towards interdisciplinary collaborations within and outside Meadows

The breadth of disciplines within Meadows is an unusual and important strength. The dean will bring a genuine appreciation for fields beyond their own discipline and work with faculty and academic leaders to strengthen the School's academic and research programs, identify opportunities for collaboration, and ensure that its offerings continue to serve students well. The dean will create stronger connections across Meadows' disciplines and organizational boundaries, encouraging collaboration while respecting the distinct cultures, practices, and needs of its varied fields. The dean will also champion opportunities for Meadows to foster interdisciplinary collaborations with other schools throughout SMU, bridging the gap between academic disciplines campus wide.

Building on the strength of fashion media and recent additions such as game design and development and human-centered design, while also paying close attention to programs with enrollment challenges, the dean will evaluate and incentivize opportunities for new and evolving interdisciplinary programs, including at the intersection of AI, emerging technology, media, and the arts. At the same time, disciplined program assessment will be important. The dean will work with faculty to understand areas of strength and demand, strengthen high-performing programs, make thoughtful decisions regarding lower-demand offerings, and direct resources toward promising areas of opportunity. The dean will also look to alumni

and their post-graduation experiences as an important source of insight into curriculum, career preparation, and the student experience.

Ensure the financial stability and growth of the Meadows School of the Arts

The dean will be responsible for the sound financial stewardship of Meadows, including its budget, resource allocation, and long-term financial planning. Working closely with University leadership and the executive council, the dean will align resources with strategic priorities and be prepared to make difficult choices about where Meadows should invest, sustain, grow, or redirect resources. This will require strong financial acumen as well as transparent communication about the decisions and tradeoffs necessary to position the School for long-term success.

Philanthropy will be an important part of that work. In partnership with the Meadows Office of Development and SMU's Office of Development and External Affairs, the dean will help shape a comprehensive fundraising strategy and enthusiastically engage donors, alumni, foundations, and other partners. The dean should be committed to traveling, developing relationships, articulating Meadows' ambitions, and making a compelling case for support. Resources will be particularly important to sustaining areas of existing strength, pursuing new priorities, improving facilities, and recruiting and retaining outstanding students, faculty, and staff.

Build a cohesive faculty and staff culture

Meadows' faculty and staff are central to the School's success, and the next dean will inherit a community that has and will continue to benefit from visible, accessible, and transparent leadership. The dean will oversee the recruitment and retention of outstanding faculty and staff and support their continued professional, scholarly, and creative development. Working within a shared governance structure, the dean will continue to foster an environment of trust, accountability, and shared purpose, ensuring open communication around strategic priorities, finances, and significant decisions affecting the School.

Modernize and improve Meadows' physical infrastructure and facilities

The quality and functionality of Meadows' physical spaces are important to its teaching, research, creative practice, and ability to recruit outstanding students, faculty, and staff. The dean will work with faculty and staff to assess needs across the School, optimize the use and allocation of existing spaces, and establish clear priorities for deferred maintenance, improvements, renovations, and future investments.

Given competing demands for resources, the dean will need to make a strong case for Meadows' facilities priorities to University leadership and work closely with advancement, donors, and other potential funding sources to secure support. The goal will be a thoughtful, long-term approach to physical infrastructure that serves the varied needs of Meadows' disciplines and meaningfully strengthens the student, faculty, and staff experience.

Champion the continued growth and impact of the Meadows Museum

The Meadows Museum is one of SMU's most distinctive academic and cultural assets. It is home to one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of the art of Spain. The dean will be a key advocate for the Museum within the School, the University, and the Dallas community. Of particular importance will be working with Museum leadership to both strengthen existing and develop new partnerships that more fully integrate the Museum into academic life at the University, whether through learning, wellness, social, or research opportunities for students, faculty and staff, or new audiences in Dallas and beyond.

Enhance the visibility of Meadows in Texas and across the nation while placing particular focus on strengthening external engagement within the Dallas community

The dean will serve as the chief spokesperson and a highly visible ambassador for Meadows, communicating the value of the School and its disciplines to University leadership, alumni, donors, and external stakeholders. While continuing to strengthen Meadows' state and national profile, the Dean must also deepen the School's relationship with Dallas and its arts, cultural, media, business, and civic communities, closely partnering with the new Dallas Office to do so. Experiential learning will remain central to a Meadows education. The dean will seek opportunities to expand internships, partnerships, and other forms of hands-on learning that connect the classroom, studio, and media production to professional practice in Dallas and beyond. The next dean should see Dallas not simply as Meadows' location but as an important extension of its educational mission and a source of opportunity for the School and its students.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The following experiences, leadership characteristics, and abilities are desired, understanding that no single candidate will have all the ideal characteristics:

- A terminal degree and demonstrated experience in teaching, research, and service appropriate to appointment to the rank of a tenured full professor in one of the areas of study at the Meadows School of the Arts.
- A deep and clearly demonstrated commitment to the visual, performing, and communication arts, as well as the design and technology fields; a track record of interdisciplinary engagement.
- An understanding of the intersection of AI and emerging technology with the visual, performing, and communication arts as well as the design and technology fields.
- Significant leadership and administrative experience in a large, complex organization that values shared governance; strong management skills including stewardship of fiscal and human resources; and a proven ability to lead transparently, fairly, collectively, and responsively.
- An understanding of the needs of students, faculty, and staff, and the ability to effectively navigate the complexity of a large university.

- Demonstrated success developing and enhancing external partnerships at the local, state, and national levels; an ability to understand the variety of constituents that the School and SMU serve.
- Demonstrated success in building and launching programs, co-curricular learning experiences, and revenue streams to support a unit's ongoing success.
- Proven ability to encourage, develop, and evaluate teaching, scholarly research, and creative activity across a school spanning the arts, design, and communications, with a commitment to interdisciplinarity.
- The ability to work cooperatively and effectively with administrators, faculty, students, staff, and other external constituencies; an appreciation and understanding of the need for collaboration and synergy among these groups to make critical and data-driven decisions on academic priorities and the allocation of resources.
- Participation in facilities, capital planning, and/or deferred maintenance-related projects.
- The ability to lead strategic, large-scale fundraising initiatives, including capital campaigns, that align with the short- and long-term goals of the School and University to secure principal and leadership gifts to advance arts, media, and communications education and research.
- Success in building and managing cohesive and vibrant teams, with an informed grasp of key issues affecting faculty and staff recruitment, retention, professional development, and promotion.
- Strong interpersonal, oral, and written communication skills. Innovative and creative problem-solving, along with a willingness to take risks.

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. The city has 24 Fortune 500 headquarters, the fourth-largest concentration in the country, and 49 Fortune 1000 headquarters. 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.

As of 2025, Dallas-Fort Worth has 8.48 million residents, making it the fourth largest and fifth-most diverse metropolitan area. *Forbes* has identified Dallas as one of five cities "poised to be the next Silicon Valley tech hub." Dallas boasts the nation's largest urban arts district, which was founded in 1983 on 68 acres and has since grown to 118. It consists of five world-class museums and 12 theater spaces, including the Dallas Museum of Art, the Perot Museum, and the AT&T Performing Arts Center. *USA Today's* 10 Best called it "the largest contiguous urban arts district in the nation."

Dallas also has strong ties to the fashion industry. The Dallas Market Center, founded in 1957, has four buildings and more than 5 million square feet, drawing about 75,000 buyers from all 50 states and 85 countries. Beginning in 2025, Texas has made $1.5 billion in a film and TV incentive program available, which will allocate $300 million to the program every other year through 2035. The incentive is slated to provide great economic opportunities across the state and work to showcase Texas in a positive light. Dallas-Fort Worth is also 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: https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/southern-methodist-university-meadows-school-arts/dean

Courtney Wilk-Mandel, Partner
David Grimes, Senior Associate
Cara Myers, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

SMU is an equal opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or other characteristics protected by state or federal law.

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.

APPENDIX I

Meadows School of the Arts Facilities

SMU DATA ARTS: SMU Data Arts is a research center that is the result of a 2018 merger between Data Arts and the National Center for Arts Research (NCAR) and is housed within the Meadows School. The center provides data-driven insights for the agencies, funders, and organizations shaping arts and culture across the country. It specializes in identifying trends affecting cultural organizations, assessing vibrancy across the arts ecosystem, and illuminating barriers to access and inclusion in all areas of culture.

JACK AND NANCY HAMON ARTS LIBRARY: The Hamon Arts Library at SMU supports the Meadows School of the Arts with a collection that holds more than 247,000 items relating to the visual and performing arts. Hamon is home to the Jerry Bywaters Special Collections and the G. William Jones Film and Video Collection.

MEADOWS MUSEUM: The Meadows Museum is one of the most important chapters of the Meadows school story. After Algur Meadows made a gift of his Spanish art collection to SMU, it became one of the most significant academic resources of the University and is now considered one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Spanish art outside of Spain. With works dating from the 10th to the 21st centuries, the internationally renowned collection presents a broad spectrum of art covering a thousand years of Spanish heritage and includes masterpieces by some of the world's greatest painters, including El Greco, Velázquez, Ribera, Murillo, Goya, Miró and Picasso. Inaugurated by His Majesty Juan Carlos and Her Majesty Sofia of Spain, the museum remains an important cultural and educational institution and one of the Meadows School's and SMU's most important assets.

OWEN ARTS CENTER: The Owen Arts Center was designed by architect George L. Dahl and consists of three main buildings: the Mudge Art Building, the Forbes Music Building and the Ruth Sharp Collins Drama Building which are home to academic departments, administrative offices, as well as art, performance, and rehearsal spaces. Public performance spaces within the Owen Arts Center include Caruth Auditorium, Bob Hope Theatre, Greer Garson Theatre, Margo Jones Theatre, O'Donnell Lecture-Recital Hall, Sharp Studio and Taubman Atrium. Art spaces include the Doolin Gallery and the Free Museum of Dallas.

POLLOCK GALLERY: The Pollock Gallery plays a significant and valuable academic role in the University's learning environment. Over the years, exhibitions organized and curated by the gallery have provided students, faculty, staff and the general public with opportunities to experience a well-considered and wide array of works of art from different artists, time periods and cultures. Sharing this resource with other academic institutions is achieved through the scholarly production of publications, gallery talks, and symposia.

UMPHREY LEE CENTER: The Umphrey Lee Center is home to four award-winning Meadows School communications divisions: Advertising, Corporate Communication and Public Affairs, Journalism and Film & Media Arts. The Temerlin Advertising Institute, one of the nation's only endowed collegiate advertising programs, is also located in this building. Amenities include a focus group facility, graduate seminar room,

computer lab, creative suite, and “Praxis” lab where the National Student Advertising Competition team develops campaigns. The Division of Journalism features a state-of-the-art newsroom, a broadcast studio with a control room and green room, conference rooms, and classrooms outfitted with Apple computers at every desk. The Division of Film & Media Arts is located on the lower level. Amenities include a fully stocked equipment room, including HD, digital, and analog cameras; dollies; lights; and more, as well as a computer edit lab and a newly renovated audio and Foley recording studio.