



Chief Operating Officer
Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER)
School of Education, University of Wisconsin–Madison

THE SEARCH

The Wisconsin Center for Education Research (“the Center” or “WCER”), housed in the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), invites applications for the role of Chief Operating Officer (COO). WCER seeks an experienced, collaborative, and mission-focused professional who can lead and implement organizational change in one of the nation's largest and most influential education research centers. The COO will play a critical role in advancing WCER’s mission to partner with schools in combatting persistent inequities in our education system and to creating learning environments where all students can build on their strengths and fully engage in their learning.

Building on its over 50-year history to improve teaching and learning, the Center is in the midst of an exciting and direction-setting transition to better align people, process, and purpose to advance its mission. Under the leadership of a dynamic Director who was appointed in July 2020, WCER has committed to amplifying its mission through an ambitious vision to grow its research funding footprint, expand its portfolio of products and services that support educators and learners, and enhance service delivery to the projects and researchers that call the Center home. At the core of this renewed and compelling vision is a commitment to affirming and integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) throughout its work. WCER is dedicated to being a workplace in which colleagues of color can thrive and bring their true selves. WCER is also committed to operating as a learning organization, one that embeds a culture of learning and continuous improvement in all its operations. WCER relies on evidence and data to make decisions and establish equitable, transparent processes that advance its mission and uphold its values.

Reporting to the Director of WCER, and working in tandem with the Center’s Deputy Director, the new COO will play a central role in shaping the Center’s organizational strategy. Drawing on a proven track record of leading and implementing organizational and culture change, as well as a core belief in the role of education to change the world, the COO will unite the various service units within WCER with a cohesive vision for providing consistently excellent service to the Center’s project leaders. The COO will spearhead efforts to reimagine business processes and administrative functions to raise the standard of support and unlock the full potential of the Center’s research. The COO will direct the budget and oversee the organization’s long-term financial health, and will serve as a culture change leader, integrating DEI, high-functioning decision making, purposeful collaboration, strategic planning, and project prioritization at all levels of the organization. The COO will be a key figure in ensuring the Center delivers on these aspirations, and sustains and extends WCER’s position as the preeminent center for research on today’s

most pressing educational challenges.

The ideal candidate will be a versatile leader with an entrepreneurial approach to problem solving, the ability to bring others in, and along, and confront challenging decisions. The successful candidate will be an equity-oriented, process-minded leader and bring deep experience leading the operations of a complex organization. They will have an understanding of grant processes as well as operations that support paid services, external consulting, and revenue generating products, ideally in the context of PreK to graduate education. They will have a track record of creating the systems and processes that put strategy into action, and of creating and leading teams, mentoring and developing colleagues, and working in a collaborative and diverse environment.

UW-Madison has retained the national search firm Isaacson, Miller to assist in this important search. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Founded when Wisconsin achieved statehood in 1848, UW-Madison is the flagship campus of the University of Wisconsin System. The 938-acre main campus, located on the shores of Lake Mendota, includes four National Historic Landmarks. A major contributor to Wisconsin's economy, the University is the largest employer in the state, with over 24,232 faculty and staff.

UW-Madison is generally recognized as one of the top public research universities in the country. The university is organized into 13 schools and colleges, which enrolled 33,506 undergraduate and 14,426 graduate, special, and professional students as of fall 2021. Its comprehensive academic program offers 125 undergraduate majors, along with 158 master's degree programs and 109 doctoral programs. UW–Madison is also categorized as a Doctoral University with the Highest Research Activity in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Wisconsin is a founding member of the Association of American Universities. Twenty Nobel laureates, two Fields medalists, and 41 Pulitzer Prize winners have been associated with UW–Madison as alumni, faculty, or researchers. Additionally, as of 2018, the current CEOs of 14 Fortune 500 companies were UW–Madison graduates, the most of any university in the United States.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

The School of Education and many of its programs are widely regarded as being among the very best in the nation. The people and units that make up the School are addressing some of society's most critical needs – from challenges in education at all levels, to issues in health and other human services – while also contributing to quality of life through the arts.

The School is home to 10 academic departments, a diverse range of research projects, and an array of outreach efforts. In addition to several core education programs, about half of the School's students are enrolled in fine art, dance, counseling, occupational therapy, and exercise science programs. The School also houses several service units that serve the School and the broader community.

The UW-Madison School of Education is consistently ranked one of the top schools of education in the nation. In the 2021 edition of *U.S. News & World Report's Best Education Graduate Schools* ratings, the

School maintained its standing as one of the highest-ranked schools of education in the nation, public or private. UW–Madison’s School of Education is number five overall, trailing only Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of California-Los Angeles, and New York University.

The School of Education’s departments include the following:

- Art
- Dance
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
- Educational Policy Studies
- Educational Psychology
- Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education
- Counseling Psychology
- Kinesiology
- Theater & Drama

Nine of the School of Education’s specialty programs are ranked among the top ten in the nation. As of fall 2021, the School of Education enrolled 1,617 undergraduate students and 1,163 graduate students. The School of Education also employed over 153 full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty, 77 FTE academic instructional staff, 370 FTE academic staff, 50 FTE university staff, 23 FTE limited term employees, 9 FTE post-degree trainees (postdocs), and 136 FTE graduate assistants as of the fall 2020 payroll. For more information about the School, please visit: <https://www.education.wisc.edu/>

THE WISCONSIN CENTER FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH

The Wisconsin Center for Education Research is one of the most productive and respected education research centers in the world. It has helped scholars and practitioners develop, submit, conduct, and share grant-funded education research for more than 50 years and has attracted more than \$800 million to UW–Madison in grant funds since its founding. WCER also serves as an incubator for advances in education policy and practice and provides services and resources for UW–Madison researchers, graduate students and their collaborators, as well as educators, funders, and communities in Wisconsin and around the world.

WCER is a large center with approximately 140 grant-funded projects, 65 affiliated faculty members from the School of Education and other units across campus, 250 academic staff, 100 graduate students, and 26 university staff. The faculty and academic staff are supported by a team of more than a dozen full-time professionals in the business office who are dedicated to working with principal investigators to develop, submit, and manage grant proposals and projects. WCER is also supported by communications professionals, as well as an office of technical services that provides technology and creative services to WCER researchers.

WCER is also home to a number of projects that produce revenue-generating products and provide services to customers including schools, districts, and educational bodies around the world. The largest of these “fee-for-service” projects, WIDA, provides language development resources to those who support the academic success of multilingual learners. WIDA offers a comprehensive, research-based system of language standards, assessments, professional learning, and educator resources that are used by 41 domestic states and territories and more than 400 international schools throughout the world.

WIDA generates \$70 million per year and provides over half of WCER's revenue.

In addition to WIDA, WCER houses a number of other fee-for-service projects, such as the Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER); the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL); the Field Day Lab; the Center for Research on Early Childhood Education (CRECE); the Rural Education Research and Implementation Center (RERIC); the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN); the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC); and Wisconsin's Equity and Inclusion Laboratory (WeiLab), which conducts research on how to best promote equitable and inclusive learning and work environments in higher education.

LEADERSHIP

Courtney Bell, Ph.D.

Courtney Bell assumed the Directorship of WCER on July 1, 2020. Bell came to this role after serving as Principal Research Scientist at the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the world's largest private nonprofit educational testing and assessment organization. While at ETS, she co-led the conceptualization, launch, and development of the Understanding Teaching Quality Center, which supports research and development related to measuring various aspects of teaching. A former high school science teacher and teacher educator, her research looks across actors in the educational system to better understand the intersections of research, policy and practice.

Bell is noted for her work on a groundbreaking OECD study to deepen the understanding of teaching and learning at an international scale. Covering eight countries and economies, the study offers a window into a rich variety of classroom settings, pedagogical traditions, system-level policies, and student achievement levels at a global level. The study examined aspects of teaching related to student learning and non-cognitive outcomes, observed and documented teaching from participating countries, explored how various teaching practices are inter-related, and how contextual aspects of teaching are related to student and teacher characteristics. The study is recognized as an important resource for policymakers, researchers, and teachers to understand teaching within different countries, and compare patterns between them.

THE POSITION

The new COO will join WCER at a time of vibrant change. There is increased enthusiasm among researchers and Center staff about opportunities for growth, improved efficiency, and enhanced service delivery to advance WCER's educational research mission. In this context, the COO will oversee daily operations and administration across the following units: communications services, technical services, financial services, client services, and human resources, for a total team of approximately 40 staff. The COO will have strategic and operational responsibility for WCER's growing staff, national and international programs, and execution of the Center's plans for continued growth. As a member of a tightly knit senior management team, the COO will serve as a trusted partner to WCER's Director and will exercise organizational leadership to fulfill the Center's ambitions. To be successful in this role, the COO will bring a steadfast commitment to WCER's values of Innovation and Excellence, Equitable Education, Affirming and Increasing Diversity, Healthy Workplace, and Partnering Across Differences.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

The WCER COO will inherit an organization with a strong international reputation and a track record of success in attracting top scholars with innovative ideas. As the research funding landscape evolves, WCER will need to adapt to retain and enhance its preeminence in education research. To be successful in that endeavor, the new COO will be expected to address the following opportunities and challenges:

Articulate and implement a strategic vision

WCER has undertaken a process to reimagine all aspects of the Center's operations, including business processes, administrative procedures, and staff reporting lines. At the heart of this process is a commitment to integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into the Center's daily operations. The Center has made a robust and thoughtful start to this work and the COO will lead efforts to create an infrastructure that sustains and operationalizes DEI in all aspects of WCER's work. The COO will lead the charge to communicate strategic plans to staff and other stakeholders and will also serve as a thought leader to identify opportunities for innovation and excellence in service delivery to Center stakeholders. With a commitment to equity, justice, and inclusion, the COO will advance the Center's ability to cultivate support from key funders, secure high value research grants, and foster an entrepreneurial approach to expanding its research and fee-for-service portfolios.

Redesign internal processes and procedures to achieve service efficiency, innovation, and excellence

With an expanding and increasingly complex portfolio of fee-for-service and grant projects, the COO will bring a systems approach to their work, ensuring that Center resources and staff are structured to maximize expertise and capacity. The COO will engage in this work through an equity-minded lens and will reimagine internal processes and procedures to not only support the Center's growth aspirations but also uphold the values that empower the work and people of WCER. The COO will design the business planning process in WCER service units, including supporting the development and implementation of best practices that promote collaboration, mutual respect, and transparency. Current processes are not well matched to the Center's ambitions, resulting in uneven service delivery to principal investigators and other project leaders. The COO will drive transformational process improvement and change management that enables WCER to achieve its short-term and long-term goals and advances its work to reverse imbalances and injustices in education.

Inspire a culture of outstanding service and support

The COO will inspire a service-oriented culture that enhances responsiveness to all stakeholders, rewards service alongside technical compliance, and recognizes the importance of diverse backgrounds and expertise as key factors to improving the quality of the Center's work. The COO will identify opportunities to differentiate transactional from transformative work. The COO will cultivate an environment that directs staff energy and creativity in support of research that advances equity in educational systems, improves educational outcomes for diverse student populations, and impacts education policy to enhance learning from a DEI perspective. Project PIs and research teams will have confidence in the Center's ability to provide them with comprehensive administrative and business operations support for the lifecycle of their grant, from application submission through project startup, staffing, research, reporting, results, closure, and award renewal.

Ensure the long-term financial health of the Center

Grant processes are complex, and the new COO will need to unify accounting and grants management systems to ensure an accurate and transparent financial picture of the projects housed at WCER. The COO will be data-oriented and will support researchers and project administrators in developing budgets and financial forecasts over the life of their projects. The COO will develop and monitor budgets for WCER and service units for which they are responsible. They will oversee the Center's overall financial health with an eye to achieving a funding balance that optimizes growth and enhances the financial position of WCER.

Cultivate collaborative relationships and an atmosphere of learning and continuous improvement

The new COO will be committed to organizational and individual learning that advances the Center's DEI commitments and fosters a culture of continuous improvement across the organization. The COO will lead and coach staff, providing frequent contact and feedback to promote high-performance and a shared understanding of best practices both within and across service units. The COO will facilitate opportunities for cross-training and professional learning, and will implement retention practices to promote belonging, job satisfaction, and future goal planning. The COO will also collect and use data to monitor progress against strategic planning goals.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The successful candidate will hold a master's-level degree, preferably in education, business, management, or a related field. Candidates with a terminal degree are encouraged to apply. The ideal candidate will possess many of the following professional experiences and personal characteristics:

- Tested and proven track record of leadership experience, preferably in an educational services or research setting;
- A demonstrated record of advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace;
- A deep commitment to the values and mission of WCER;
- Experience as a leader in a mission-driven organization charged with increasing both impact and scale;
- Excellence and resilience in change leadership and a seasoned capacity and inclination to coach and develop high-performing teams;
- Experience creating processes and teams to achieve revenue and grant goals;
- Demonstrated ability to delight clients, simultaneously tending to compliance;
- Excellent professional judgment managing change and conflict resolution;
- Experience in strategic planning, human resources, and finance;
- Awareness of technologies and systems that support efficient business operations;
- Knowledge of the research and development process, ideally in the social sciences;
- Understanding of the culture of higher education either through direct experience in a university or through partnerships;
- Superb communication and interpersonal skills.

TO APPLY

Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be sent in strict confidence to:

Lisa Savereid, Partner
Afi Tettey-Fio, Senior Associate
Isaacson, Miller
www.imsearch.com/8723

The University of Wisconsin System will not reveal the identities of applicants who request confidentiality in writing. See Wis. Stat. sec. 19.36(7). Candidates who are selected as finalists will be invited for campus interviews and their names will be announced publicly.

The University of Wisconsin is an Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer. We promote excellence through diversity and encourage all qualified individuals to apply.

If you need to request an accommodation because of a disability, you can find information about how to make a request at the following website: <https://oed.wisc.edu/disability-accommodation-information-for-applicants/>

Employment will require a criminal background check. It will also require you and your references to answer questions regarding sexual violence and sexual harassment.

The Annual Security and Fire Safety Report contains current campus safety and disciplinary policies, crime statistics for the previous 3 calendar years, and on-campus student housing fire safety policies and fire statistics for the previous 3 calendar years. UW-Madison will provide a paper copy upon request; please contact the University of Wisconsin Police Department.