



Vice President for Communications



Position Description

October 2022

Job Summary

The University of Michigan (U-M), one of the world's preeminent research universities, is seeking its next vice president for communications (hereafter referred to as VPC). The VPC is the chief marketing and communications officer for the university's Ann Arbor campus.

Now operating in its third century, U-M continues its mission to serve the public through preeminence in creating, communicating, preserving and applying knowledge, art, and academic values. Currently, the main campus in Ann Arbor, comprised of 3,200 acres, has approximately 50,000 faculty and staff and an enrollment of 50,000 students, about a third of whom are in graduate and professional studies. U-M is consistently ranked among the top institutions of higher education globally with 110 graduate programs ranked in the top 10 nationally.

The VPC is a position of broad leadership for U-M, serving as an executive officer of the university reporting to the university's president. U-M seeks an outstanding, seasoned professional to provide creative and inspiring leadership to the division and to work collaboratively with the many constituencies of U-M. The position affords an exciting opportunity to make a major impact and is ideal for a candidate motivated by the desire to play a central role in advancing the academic reputation of one of the nation's top public institutions.

The University of Michigan: An Overview

U-M is one of the great public research universities in the nation and the world. Since the nineteenth century, it has served as a national model of a complex, diverse, and comprehensive public institution of higher learning that supports excellence in research, provides outstanding undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, and demonstrates commitment to public service and engagement.

U-M was chartered in 1817 by the Michigan territorial legislature and was initially located in Detroit. In 1837, after Michigan had been admitted to the Union, the State of Michigan renewed the charter and relocated the university to Ann Arbor, where classes were first held in 1841. Today, the main campus is located in Ann Arbor, 35 miles west of Detroit, with regional campuses located in the cities of Dearborn and Flint.

The university is governed by the Board of Regents of the university, consisting of eight members elected at large in biennial state elections, and the president of the university, who serves as an ex officio member. The regents serve without compensation for overlapping terms of eight years. According to the Michigan Constitution of 1963, the regents are responsible for "general supervision" of the institution and "the control and direction of all expenditures from the institution's funds." The regents meet periodically in formal public sessions as well as in informal sessions.

Santa J. Ono became the University's 15th president on October 14, 2022. Dr. Ono was previously president and vice chancellor of the University of British Columbia, and before that served as president of the University of Cincinnati and senior vice provost and deputy to the provost at Emory University. Dr. Ono is an experienced vision researcher whose pioneering work in

experimental medicine focuses on the immune system and eye disease.

U-M's position of excellence in higher education rests on the outstanding scholarly and creative contributions of its faculty and on the intellectual quality, vitality, and passion of its students — undergraduate, graduate, and professional. Its 19 schools and colleges, as well as its centers, institutes, and libraries, are nationally and internationally recognized. U-M is a founding member of the Association of American Universities (AAU).

U-M sustains top programs in the arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and engineering, and in all of the major professional schools. It is the home of one of the largest and leading academic medical centers in the world. U-M is also recognized for its outstanding interdisciplinary institutes and centers, such as the Institute for Social Research, the Life Sciences Institute, and the Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation. Overall, there are more than 3,000 tenured and tenure-track faculty on the Ann Arbor campus, and an additional 4,000 individuals in instructional and research faculty roles such as clinical instructional faculty, research faculty, lecturers, and supplemental instructional staff.

The Ann Arbor campus currently enrolls approximately 32,000 undergraduates and 18,000 graduate and professional students. Its undergraduate students come from Michigan as well as from all 50 states and from more than one hundred countries. Today, U-M has more than 600,000 living alumni around the globe. The campus is supported by approximately 29,000 staff members (not including the medical center staff).

The campus covers about 3,200 acres in and near Ann Arbor. Other holdings include about 18,000 additional acres in regional campuses, field stations, and other properties for research and teaching. In addition to classrooms, laboratories, and specialized research facilities, the university community makes use of a vast array of resources, including libraries, concert halls, art museums, and galleries, an arboretum, botanical gardens, and athletic and recreational facilities. The university calendar offers a prodigious diversity of events and activities. Many thousands of conferences, symposia, speeches, workshops, concerts, performances, recitals, films, readings, and athletic events take place each year. As well, over 1,000 clubs and organizations provide innumerable opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to take part in the university community.

As a public institution, the revenues and expenditures of U-M are maintained in accordance with the governmental accounting principles of fund accounting. The total operating budget for the Ann Arbor campus was over \$10 billion for fiscal year 2022, including almost \$6 billion for the university health system. For FY 2022, the budget for the academic operations of the Ann Arbor campus totaled approximately \$4 billion (for more detailed information on the university's finances, please reference the [university annual reports](#)). U-M operates in a relatively decentralized manner, employing a hybrid budget model consisting of responsibility center budgeting, incremental budgeting, and centralized/initiative budgeting.

As a public university, U-M is dedicated to service in the larger world. Faculty research addresses a large range of critical issues — health care, robotics, the environment, social interventions, education reform and improvement, poverty solutions, human mobility, and many others. By extending fundamental understandings and advancing technological innovations, university

scientists and engineers contribute to remarkable advances that are transforming life and contributing to building the economy of the state, region, and nation. University scholars in the humanities and the arts advance societal understanding around the most pressing and challenging problems facing the world today. Students take part in research alongside faculty in research labs, libraries, and community-based service and learning projects. The university collaborates with other universities, colleges, and K-12 schools, and provides research and other services for a variety of state and private agencies.

From its status as one of the first universities in the nation to admit women in 1870, to its historic defense of race-conscious admission policies at the United States Supreme Court in 2003, U-M continues to lead the way in making higher education accessible to all. In the fall of 2016, after a year of intense planning, U-M launched its five-year strategic plan for diversity, equity, and inclusion, which signified a renewed pledge for developing a diverse university community while creating an inclusive and equitable campus climate. In 2018, U-M launched the Go Blue Guarantee, a program for in-state students on the Ann Arbor campus that guarantees four years of free tuition for most undergraduate students from families with annual incomes of \$65,000 or less.

Office of the Vice President for Communications

The [U-M Office of the Vice President for Communications \(OVPC\)](#) is a full-service strategic communications and marketing group exclusively dedicated to promoting U-M. From helping recruit the next generation of Wolverines to providing media coverage of the faculty's latest research discoveries to building U-M's brand around the world, they partner with departments on all three U-M campuses to develop and share the Michigan story.

OVPC serves the U-M community through six collaborating areas:

- Communications Policy & Administration
- Digital & Social Media
- Executive Communications
- Internal Communications & Strategic Initiatives
- Marketing & Brand
- Media & Public Relations

More information on each of these areas can be found on the [OVPC website](#).

The Position

The VPC is an executive officer of the institution charged with enhancing U-M's reputation and visibility locally, nationally, and internationally; fostering long-term, positive relationships with all university constituents; working to position and differentiate U-M among leading institutions in higher education; working with the Board of Regents, President, and executive officers to set university policy on matters of communication and marketing; developing and implementing strategic as well as crisis communications plans; and providing leadership to expand the university's digital communications and social media engagement.

Responsibilities

- Serve as chief counselor to the President and other university leaders, including the Board of Regents, on all internal and external strategic communications, branding, marketing, and messaging.
- Work with senior university leaders to shape and communicate key messages related to the institution's highest priorities and key initiatives.
- Leverage and promote faculty, staff, and student accomplishments; deliver messages that advance university priorities; effect coherent institutional branding; and ensure the university is consistently portrayed as a high-caliber, high-integrity academic institution with global impact.
- Actively collaborate among faculty and other leaders on campus mechanisms to encourage faculty engagement with the media, and to promote a spirit among those employees of contributing to the university's national and global public reputation beyond the reputations of their campus units.
- Create and develop strategic, integrated communications strategies combining public relations, marketing, digital communications, and issues management elements.
- Lead and represent a staff of approximately 140 employees. Offices reporting directly to the Vice President for Communications include: Michigan News; Public Affairs and Internal Communications; the Freedom of Information Office; the Marketing Enterprise (Michigan Creative, Photography & Video); Michigan Social Media; Michigan Radio, the University's NPR affiliate; and Executive/Presidential Communications.
- Design strategic communications plans that will function in a large, complex, decentralized organization with varied priorities and stakeholders.
- Provide visionary leadership and manage all university-wide marketing and communications activities, including media relations, issues management, digital communications and social media, marketing, and brand management.
- Working across all university entities on the three campuses, collaborate with unit leadership to develop and deliver university-wide communications that affect overall institutional branding and reputation to advance a consistent and authentic portrayal of U-M.
- Ensure that university marketing and communications efforts help to build and sustain positive relationships with external constituencies, including the media, government, alumni, the local community, and the general public.
- Cultivate strategies and opportunities for U-M to contribute to the national discourse on research, teaching and learning, college affordability and access, and other matters that influence government and society.
- Provide visionary leadership for integrated, comprehensive, and strategic marketing and communications plans, working with communications professionals across the university, by coordinating shared goals, messages, issues management, branding, and reputation-building for schools and colleges, Government Relations, the Office of Development, the Alumni Association, the University of Michigan Health System, and the Athletics Department.
- Coordinate crisis management efforts involving both U-M as a whole and its individual units.

Priorities for the Role

The VPC will lead efforts to shape and implement communications strategies that support U-M's position as one of the world's leading public institutions of higher education and research. In this strategic leadership role, the next VPC will foster a proactive, long-term approach to the development and implementation of marketing and communication plans for U-M's institutional priorities. These plans will strategically inform, engage, and excite national, regional, and global audiences, including scholarly and research communities.

Required Qualifications

Given the breadth of the VPC's role and responsibilities, this challenging position requires visionary leadership, exceptional judgment, strong management skills, and a deep understanding of and commitment to the academic, research, and service missions of the University of Michigan.

Strong candidates will have a significant track record of senior executive communications experience and will have demonstrated creative, proactive, energetic, and inspired communications leadership in a complex organization. Candidates should demonstrate strategic thinking and have extensive experience managing highly productive teams and overseeing substantial budgets and operations. Candidates will be expected to be familiar with and comfortable deploying a wide range of leading edge communication tools and platforms. Extensive experience with higher education and deep knowledge and understanding of the academic mission is preferred.

The successful candidate will also possess the following qualities and competencies:

- Personal and professional ethics and integrity to the highest degree.
- Demonstrated understanding of and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Ability to lead effectively within a non-hierarchical, de-centralized, and highly collaborative campus community.
- Good political acumen with a keen sense of how and when to engage the participation of different constituencies and the ability to build productive alliances.
- Skill in working with all campus stakeholders in a climate of openness and transparency, integrity, trust, mutual respect, and collaborative problem solving.
- Understanding of and commitment to the academic, research, and service missions of a leading residential public university.
- Outstanding oral and written communications skills with an ability to speak to a variety of audiences, transform ambiguity into clarity, and articulate campus needs with persuasiveness and conviction; excellent listening skills; and the capacity and willingness to engage in intellectual debate and discussion.
- High degree of energy, initiative, and organization; self-confidence, creativity, and willingness to take risks and to develop and evaluate new programs with knowledge of national best practices, including the ability to use research, data, and assessment to guide decision-making.

- Demonstrated ability to work alongside colleagues, at all levels, respectfully and inclusively to foster a positive environment that promotes employee engagement and recognizes their contributions.
- Ability to model a commitment to personal growth and development, and to nurturing the talents of others through strong mentoring, coaching, and team building.
- Approachable, optimistic, and intellectually curious with personal warmth, generosity of spirit, a can-do attitude, and strong resilience in the face of criticism.

How to Apply

Inquiries, nominations, and applications are invited. Review of applications will continue until the position is filled, but for fullest consideration, applicant materials are encouraged to be submitted by Friday, December 23, 2022. Candidates should provide a resume or curriculum vitae and a letter of application that addresses the candidate's experience and qualifications relative to the responsibilities and requirements described. Candidate confidentiality will be respected to the highest degree allowable under the laws of the State of Michigan. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to Isaacson, Miller at www.imsearch.com/8849.

U-M EEO/AA Statement

The University of Michigan is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.