



UNIVERSITY  
OF MINNESOTA

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**Associate Vice President for Institutional Engagement and Education Justice**

**University of Minnesota**

Minneapolis, Minnesota

**THE SEARCH**

The University of Minnesota (UMN) seeks an accomplished, innovative, and equity-driven leader to serve as Associate Vice President for Institutional Engagement and Education Justice. In this newly reimagined role, the Associate Vice President will play a pivotal role in implementing impactful education and training programs, and partnering across the University of Minnesota system to increase the sense of belonging and inclusion for all. In doing so, the ideal candidate will be a trusted partner in creating and maintaining an equitable and inclusive environment for the university community.

Reporting to the Vice President for Equity and Diversity (VPE&D) and collaborating with other senior academic and administrative leaders, the Associate Vice President for Institutional Engagement and Education Justice (AVP) will assist in the development and implementation of diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity initiatives that are in alignment with the University's strategic plan. This work will be carried out by the Office for Equity and Diversity (OED) and led by the VPE&D, reaffirming and nurturing a community and campus climate that values the "collective voice." The University of Minnesota understands that these efforts must extend beyond the walls of the institution and into the community that continues to hold the University as a leader around issues of diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity.

The AVP will have senior leadership responsibility for OED's Education Program and for the following units that engage issues of campus cultures and climate – the Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life (GSC), the Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence (MCAE), the Circle for Indigenous Nations, the newly created Sexual Misconduct Prevention Program and the Women's Center. As such, the ideal candidate will have a clearly defined record of leadership across multiple functionalities, a deep understanding of the role intersectionality plays in understanding diverse identities, and experience creating and implementing educational training programs and resources. This person will also serve as an innovative thought leader, a trusted collaborator, and an inspirational motivator for the University. This person will have a clearly defined praxis - a strong knowledge of the theoretical frameworks, as well as extensive practice - for advancing transformational diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity work.

The University has made equity and diversity a top priority. For this search, the University of Minnesota has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national search firm, to assist in this search. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed in confidence to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

The University of Minnesota was founded in 1851 and is an AAU and R1 public research university ranked among the world's most renowned institutions of higher learning and one of the most preeminent research universities in the United States. The University has scholars of national and international reputation and continues to advance discovery and innovation to improve the lives of Minnesotans and beyond. The flagship Twin Cities campus has the unique distinction of being both a globally engaged R1 institution and Minnesota's land-grant university. The Twin Cities campus is one of the few major land-grant research institutions situated in a major metropolitan area.

The University strongly embraces diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity and has made them central to its strategic planning across the entire system. The student population at the Twin Cities campus consists of 25% students of color, 10% international students, and 25% first-generation undergraduate students. The University ranks ninth nationally for students learning abroad and offers study abroad programs in more than 70 countries. In 2017, the Twin Cities campus received the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award from Insight into Diversity for the seventh consecutive year. Forbes ranked the University as one of the country's 20 best educational employers.

The University of Minnesota is considered to have one of the strongest and most active shared governance systems among large research universities. Faculty, students, and staff system-wide participate in University Senate governance. Shared governance provides an opportunity for diverse voices of the University community to participate in discussions and weigh in on many of the key issues facing the University. University Senate governance at the University of Minnesota is steeped in rich tradition. The umbrella body, the University Senate, was established in 1912 and consisted only of faculty members at that time. Students, faculty-like academic professionals, and staff were added subsequently. The [University Senate](#) now contains within it four senates: the [Faculty Senate](#), the [Student Senate](#), the [P&A Senate](#), and the [Civil Service Senate](#).

The University remains at the epicenter of social and racial discourse with traumatic murders of Black and Brown people at the hands of law enforcement, such as George Floyd in 2020, most recently Amir Locke, not far from campus. There is a shared commitment and heightened urgency around the need for this work at all levels of the institution. This is a pivotal moment for an innovative and collaborative leader to have a real impact at an institution committed to doing this difficult work. The University is driven by the conviction that diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity are inextricably linked to excellence and are essential if the university is to remain a preeminent voice for innovation.

The University has an annual operating budget of \$4.2 billion annually, generating an economic impact of \$9 billion for the Minnesota economy. The University, the state's sixth-largest employer, has over 27,000 faculty and staff; it enrolls 65,000 students from 130 countries, 52,000 on the flagship Twin Cities campus, and has over half a million alumni living around the world. The University of Minnesota has schools and colleges in biological sciences; liberal arts; dentistry; design; education and human development; food, agriculture, and natural resource sciences; law; engineering; medicine; nursing; public affairs; public health; and veterinary medicine. The University averages over \$1 billion in research expenditures annually, and its faculty and experts are considered amongst the best in their field, including the scholarship of diversity and equity. The University consistently advances the land-grant mission and is committed to integrating public engagement into the advancement of learning, research, and discovery.

The Twin Cities campus is in an economically vibrant region at the heart of an increasingly diverse Midwest, with 11 federally recognized Tribal nations; the largest urban Native American population in the country; a dynamic African American community; and growing African, Latinx, and Asian American populations. The Twin Cities has the largest number of people of Somali descent outside Somalia and the nation's largest urban Hmong population. Located on traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of Indigenous people, the university acknowledges its complex and layered history. The University is committed to ongoing efforts to recognize, support, and advocate for Native American Nations and peoples. The University continues to be dedicated to multiculturalism and equity in both education and employment. These core values are the foundation upon which the Office for Equity and Diversity was established. This office is located on the Twin Cities campus and works collaboratively across the system with diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity leadership on each of the five campuses—Twin Cities, Crookston, Duluth, Morris, and Rochester. Learn more about the unique distinction of each of the system campuses [here](#).

## LOCATION

The thriving University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus stretches more than 1,150 acres in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Nestled around the scenic Mississippi River, the Minneapolis campus sits under the shadow of a sparkling downtown skyline. The nearby St. Paul campus is home to rolling green space and historic architecture. As the largest city in Minnesota, Minneapolis is one of the most bikeable cities in America and is one of the country's best cities for public parks. Minneapolis also has a rich history of arts and theatre, and is home to twenty-two lakes, large ponds, wetlands, and lagoons. The city of St. Paul is also known for its festivals and culture hubs such as the East Side, one of the city's largest, most populous, and diverse districts.

## UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP

**Dr. Mercedes Ramírez Fernández** is the Vice President for Equity and Diversity at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Ramírez Fernández has more than 20 years of experience in higher education administration. She is recognized for her leadership on issues of diversity and campus climate at several

leading universities and specializes in higher education curriculum, institutional models that support student success, strategic enrollment management, and assessment. Dr. Ramírez Fernández served as the Richard Feldman Vice President for Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer at the University of Rochester, recruited to open the University's inaugural Office of Equity and Inclusion and to serve as the institution's first chief diversity officer. Prior to Rochester, she served as Associate Vice Provost for Strategic Affairs and Diversity at Virginia Tech. Dr. Ramírez Fernández earned a doctorate in Higher Education Management from the University of Pennsylvania, an MA in Counseling and Human Development from the University of Iowa, and a BA in Psychology with a concentration in Spanish Literature from the University of Puerto Rico.

## UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA'S CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

The University remains committed to fostering a welcoming community that values belonging, equity, diversity, and dignity in people and ideas. As a part of the [MPact 2025 Systemwide Strategic Plan](#), the university has continued to put forward efforts to further improve the sense of belonging and inclusion across the university system. Measures of positive engagement with the University for students, faculty, and staff are essential markers of organizational effectiveness and individual well-being, driving further success measures such as increased student and staff retention and overall productivity.

In a recent survey of students on the Twin Cities campus, 88.0% responded that they had a sense of belonging at the University of Minnesota, up 10 percentage points from 77.9% the previous year. Among AAU institutions participating in the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey in 2022, the University of Minnesota ranked the highest in having a sense of belonging on campus. Additionally, the percentage of incoming Fall 2022 freshman students who identify as BIPOC systemwide is the highest in recorded history at 31%, a nearly 10% increase in five years, and all campuses have seen an increase in the percentage of incoming undergraduate students who identify as BIPOC since 2017. The University also contracted with 300 Minnesota-based suppliers owned by women, BIPOC, or disabled persons last year, an increase of more than 20% from the previous year. These and other efforts speak to the university's commitment to creating an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment, and the AVP will be a trusted leader and partner in continuing this essential work.

## THE OFFICE FOR EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

The Office for Equity and Diversity is comprised of seven offices that work together and collaborate with faculty, staff, students, and administrators system-wide to serve and inform all members of the University community. As its mission, the OED increases access to higher education by advocating for University community members and emphasizing the importance of diversity in promoting learning and development at the University of Minnesota. This commitment to diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity is the shared responsibility of students, staff, and faculty and must be supported and guided by all levels of leadership.

It is the goal of OED to recognize that diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity should drive the decision-making process and remain at the helm of recruitment, retention, and supporting a diverse population at the University. The office is committed to social justice and the following values:

- Access and Inclusion
- Community
- Education and Learning
- Sustainable Transformation
- Accountability

OED is comprised of seven different offices, each working to fulfill the mission towards progress and trackable evidence within the equity and diversity sphere.

**Office for Supplier Diversity (OSD):** The Office for Supplier Diversity supports the integration of businesses owned by BIPOC, women, disabled persons, and other underserved businesses, into the University's supply chain.

**Office for Conflict Resolution (OCR):** The Office for Conflict Resolution addresses workplace conflict and misconduct matters through strategic consultations, mediations, facilitated dialogues, and a formal grievance process.

**Disability Resource Center (DRC):** The Disability Resource Center promotes access and reduces barriers for disabled persons through consultations, partnerships, and the interactive process for providing reasonable accommodations for disability.

**Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA):** The Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action responds to concerns of sexual misconduct, discrimination, and related retaliation through investigation and informal problem-solving

The Associate Vice President for Institutional Engagement and Education Justice will be responsible for:

**Education Program:** The Education unit within OED leads the **Equity and Diversity Certificate Program**. The Equity and Diversity Certificate helps participants develop tools necessary for advancing equity and diversity in all aspects of their personal and professional lives.

**Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life (GSC):** GSC fosters the improvement of campus climate for all University students, staff, faculty, alumni, and visitors by developing and supporting more inclusive understandings of gender and sexuality. It works to build communities that affirm and welcome, where people can be their whole selves and be embraced by an experience of acceptance.

**Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence (MCAE):** MCAE develops and fosters inclusive learning for undergraduates at the University through educational support programs and community engagement. It promotes a culture of achievement that values equity, diversity, excellence, and social justice.

**Circle of Indigenous Nations:** The Circle of Indigenous Nations is a student services office that works to recruit, retain, and graduate American Indian/First Nations/Alaska Native students. From orientation to graduation and beyond, we promote cultural values that help Indigenous students excel in all aspects of their journey here at the University of Minnesota.

**Sexual Misconduct Prevention Program:** The Sexual Misconduct Prevention Program was established to continue and build on the nationally recognized sexual misconduct prevention work of the President's Initiative to Prevent Sexual Misconduct (PIPSM). The Sexual Misconduct Prevention Program provides strategic coordination of the University's sexual misconduct prevention and response activities in partnership with University stakeholders systemwide.

**Women's Center:** The Women's Center advances equity for female-identifying people who are students, staff, faculty, and alumnae across identities. The center advocates for change and connection to information, scholarships, and organizations through leadership programs, events, workshops, and consultations.

There are also key programs and initiatives that OED offers:

**College-MADE.** The College-MADE (Multicultural Access, Diversity, and Equity) Initiative provides individual colleges with data-driven approaches to increasing representational diversity, improving campus climate, and creating partnerships to effect positive change.

**Community Outreach, Retention, and Engagement (CORE) Program.** The CORE program is a community-based initiative committed to empowering students, families, and communities with the knowledge to reach their educational goals.

**Diversity Community of Practice.** The DCoP is a grassroots community of faculty and staff who leverage personal and professional expertise to ensure the successful implementation of equity and diversity goals at the University of Minnesota.

**Institute for Diversity, Equity, and Advocacy.** IDEA is a research initiative that convenes scholars from the University of Minnesota and worldwide to collaborate across disciplines, departments, colleges, and campuses.

**North Star STEM Alliance.** The North Star STEM Alliance is a partnership of 16 Minnesota colleges and universities and two community organizations (the Science Museum of Minnesota and the Minnesota High Tech Association) committed to supporting underrepresented minorities in the STEM field.

## **THE ROLE OF THE AVP FOR INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION JUSTICE**

The Associate Vice President for Institutional Engagement and Education Justice will play a critical role in spearheading efforts and initiatives supporting a cohesive vision and operation of areas within their portfolio. These efforts will increase understanding across academic departments and administrative units on factors that impact achievement, particularly among individuals who come from marginalized communities, and will grow the capacity for more effective interactions. The work requires centering intersectionality.

Progress in these areas is effectuated in significant part by education, relationship-building, and community support, all of which are core OED functions. Programs must be grounded in scholarship, informed by data, and evaluated against measurable metrics over time to be effective. These metrics should contribute to the [University's MPACT 2025 system-wide strategic plan](#). Furthermore, the AVP will develop and implement rigorous and comprehensive assessment measures for all OED programs and initiatives across units.

Diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity work at the University of Minnesota can only be accomplished through strategic partnerships across the system and must progressively increase visibility year after year to be effective institutionally and systemically. Therefore, the AVP will act as a resource and partner for all UMN system campuses. Broadly, the position requires a high degree of DEI subject matter expertise, independent judgment, creativity, and interpersonal skill.

This appointee will frequently act on behalf of the Vice President and must represent the Office and the University competently in complex and rapidly changing contexts. To do so effectively, the AVP must be a clear and direct communicator who can collaboratively address challenges, consistently recognizing diverse and sometimes opposing viewpoints. As an essential member of the VPE&D's senior executive team, the successful candidate will demonstrate high emotional and cultural intelligence levels, an understanding and appreciation of shared governance processes and other forms of shared authority, and an ability to influence and lead others informally. The AVP will be able to concisely present a vision for the work of OED, both current and future, that is pragmatically grounded but also reaches for distinctive excellence. Accordingly, the AVP will function as both a scholar and a practitioner and will be as much a "doer" as a "thinker."



## KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT

### ***Partner with VP and other senior leaders in OED to advance inclusive excellence throughout the University community***

In conjunction with the VPE&D, the AVP serves directly as a resource for the University President, Provost, Chancellors, and other senior leaders across the system in articulating and implementing the University's diversity, inclusion, justice, equity, and campus climate goals. The AVP will accomplish this by promoting the University's internal and external goals in ways that reflect current theoretical models and scholarly understanding while presenting that knowledge in ways accessible to diverse audiences and constituencies.

While developing these tools, programming efforts, and initiatives, the AVP will successfully nurture relationships across the University of Minnesota system by working and meeting regularly with diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity leaders throughout the system campuses. This will provide an opportunity to develop practical tools, models, and resources for diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity planning and advancement that can be extended to other units, departments, and campuses to support and enhance local capacity and practices. By establishing appropriate metrics to evaluate the efficacy of institutional initiatives in achieving unit goals that directly support the University's system-wide strategic plan, the AVP will also be essential in contributing to and informing OED communications strategies.

### ***Provide leadership and partner across campus to provide impactful diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity engagement***

OED supports a welcoming campus climate in which all persons can do their best work. Toward that end, OED facilitates, sustains, and advances a culture that supports diversity, inclusion, justice, equity, and community by fostering dialogue, respect, and personal growth. The AVP will support this work in multiple ways, including supervising the OED Education and Campus Climate Initiatives Directors in their provision of educational programming and promotion of engagement opportunities. This leadership responsibility will assist in increasing the awareness and understanding of equity, diversity, and social justice work, as well as building initiatives that aim to effect positive culture and climate change throughout the institution.

### ***Institutionalize data-informed systemic efforts to improve the experiences of university faculty, staff, and students***

To measure progress and inform decisions on the University's diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity goals, data will serve as a critical metric for development. As such, the AVP will be trusted to use their leadership skills to develop data-based assessments to be used across the University of Minnesota system. The ideal candidate will have experience not only in developing data-measuring systems but also in successfully implementing systems across an organization. Under the leadership of the AVP, this data will then be used as a point of reference for creating initiatives



and measuring progress throughout the university.

***Recruit and support staff by providing leadership to multiple offices within the portfolio***

Several OED units provide education, advocacy, outreach, and support to students, staff, faculty, and community members to create a campus climate that fosters a sense of belonging for all. The AVP will provide senior leadership and support to the Directors and staff of the Education unit, Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life (GSC), the Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence (MCAE), Circle of Indigenous Nations, Sexual Misconduct Prevention Program and the Women's Center. The AVP will use a deep knowledge of intersectionality and diversity to help lead these offices as they support and advocate for the ever-changing needs of their students. Additionally, the AVP will provide leadership and professional development support for the Directors and staff of these offices to create and maintain a positive working environment.

**QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

The successful candidate will bring a spirit of innovation, a passion for creating diverse and inclusive environments, and a proven track record of leadership success. While no single candidate will have all the qualifications listed below, the search committee seeks candidates with a well-rounded combination of the following abilities:

**Essential Qualifications:**

- Master's degree and extensive experience related to contemporary issues of DEI with an emphasis on intercultural competence, education, culture formation, and evaluation.
- Extensive demonstrated experience in a large, decentralized workplace managing culture, campus climate, and diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity-related initiatives.
- Demonstrated experience working effectively with and across diverse communities, including and not limited to experience with people of color, underrepresented groups, and new immigrant populations; American Indians and other indigenous peoples; people with both apparent and non-apparent disabilities; women; people of various gender and sexual identities and expressions; and first-in family to attend college.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills, including the ability to communicate effectively and tactfully with all constituencies across the University and levels of the university administration.
- Demonstrated experience engaging complex, culturally responsive research and data-informed evaluation of equity and diversity programs/initiatives.
- Exceptional planning, analytical, and organizational skills.

- Experienced educator and trainer able to effectively deliver diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity training on multiple topics to diverse audiences that represent a range of awareness, knowledge, and skills.
- Program development experience, which demonstrates a recognition and promotion of all aspects of diversity in an inclusive way.
- Ability to work collaboratively with others and contribute to the efforts of a diverse team.
- Leadership includes cultural intelligence.

**Preferred Qualifications:**

- Advanced degree in relevant field.
- Experience in academic settings and developing learners' programming.
- Experience working closely with faculty and senior-level leaders and administrators.

**Applications, Inquiries, and Nominations**

Interested candidates must submit a letter of interest and a current resume or curriculum vitae to be considered for the position. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and application materials should be directed to:

Keight Tucker Kennedy, Partner

Alexis Ditaway, Associate

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-minnesota/associate-vice-president-institutional-engagement-and-education>

*The University of Minnesota shall provide equal access to and opportunity in its programs, and facilities, for employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, familial status, disability, public assistance status, membership or activity in a local commission created for the purpose of dealing with discrimination, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.*