



## **Search for President ASSOCIATED COLLEGES OF THE SOUTH**

### **THE SEARCH**

Associated Colleges of the South (ACS), a membership organization of leading residential liberal arts colleges in the southeast, seeks an inspiring, innovative, and dynamic leader as its next president. Grounded in its mission to strengthen, promote, and showcase liberal arts education, ACS is committed to enhancing effectiveness, strengthening faculty and staff skills, and raising the collective visibility of its 16 nationally recognized member institutions. The president must support the organization's goal of sustaining and enriching the excellence of these institutions and maintain a foundational commitment to access and inclusion within liberal arts education.

In an era when there are open questions about the future role of a liberal arts education, where budgets are stretched, and effective solutions must be driven by collective action, ACS is poised to play a more prominent leadership role in American higher education. The 16 member institutions, represented by their combined 1,300 faculty and staff ACS members, are committed to ACS' mission and value the proposition and potential of the enterprise. They recognize that collaboration and cooperation afford greater academic and intellectual opportunities for students and faculty, greater efficiency in operations and administration, and new opportunities for innovation than could be offered at any single campus. The next president will have the privilege of supporting these 16 distinguished, yet distinct, institutions as the primary person charged with thinking explicitly and strategically about the collective.

This is an exceptional opportunity for an entrepreneurial and collaborative leader who has demonstrated experience creating change in complex and nuanced organizations. ACS is an organization through which member colleges and universities can create and build programs not possible on an individual basis and the potential exists to further elevate the standing of each of its member institutions. The next president will assess and implement the 2023 strategic plan for ACS and design and launch future strategic planning efforts; effectively manage existing programs and staff; understand and support the different needs of 16 distinct institutions; lead fundraising efforts geared toward program enhancement and collaboration; and promote the continuing importance of accessibility, diversity, and inclusion in liberal arts education in the 21st century. If successful, the next president will be instrumental in enhancing the experience of thousands of students, faculty, and staff.

A five-member search committee has retained the national executive search firm Isaacson, Miller to support this effort. Review of applications, nominations, and expressions of interest will begin immediately and continue on a confidential basis until an appointment is made. Applicants should send a cover letter and resume or curriculum vitae. Nominations, applications, and inquiries should be sent electronically and in confidence as instructed at the end of this document.

## **ABOUT ASSOCIATED COLLEGES OF THE SOUTH**

Incorporated in August 1991, ACS is a consortium of 16 liberal arts colleges in the southern United States. The organization's mission is to champion and enhance residential liberal arts education through collaborative projects among its 16 nationally recognized member institutions: Birmingham-Southern College, Centenary College of Louisiana, Centre College, Davidson College, Furman University, Hendrix College, Millsaps College, Morehouse College, Rhodes College, Rollins College, Sewanee: The University of the South, Southwestern University, Spelman College, Trinity University, University of Richmond, and Washington and Lee University.

### **Programs and Services**

ACS provides its member colleges and universities with a variety of programs and services, many of which demonstrate the difference collaboration can make for those involved. Supported by technology, ACS fosters connection and collaboration among faculty and staff across member colleges using, among other tools, a private web-based community site. The mission to connect and collaborate has been paramount in recent years as ACS colleges managed the dynamic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the surge of awareness and focus on systemic issues of racial injustice. Working collaboratively to discuss and tackle these major issues, along with other pressing issues in the higher education – and specifically the liberal arts college – landscape, has been crucial to the individual and collective success of ACS institutions.

ACS' programmatic work is driven by a central staff that helps to coordinate activity across several functional groups, including presidents, academic leaders, diversity officers, student affairs leaders, and enrollment, admissions, and finance professionals. ACS employees play different roles in these cross-campus collaborations and offer a variety of programs for faculty and staff that are intended to enhance the quality of the member institutions through professional development, structured learning opportunities, collaboration around common interests, and shared services.

### ***Summer Teaching Workshop***

Having celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> year this past summer, [the Summer Teaching Workshop](#) is a treasured one-week annual professional development workshop for qualified faculty of member institutions. It is a challenging and invigorating experience for capable faculty wanting to strengthen teaching performance, expand teaching techniques, and explore pedagogical issues. Participants receive actionable feedback on their instructional strategies and gather with faculty peers for plenary sessions and informal networking.

### ***Leadership Group and Networking Meetings***

ACS makes collaboration possible and effective for its members by organizing collaborative groups and providing and expanding a technical infrastructure to make meetings and other communication seamless. Many groups meet quarterly, and ACS staff work to ensure new staff and faculty at member institutions are introduced and welcomed to these supportive peer groups when they join a member school.

### ***Diversity and Inclusion***

ACS is committed to supporting member institutions in their collective and individual efforts to advance diversity and inclusion on their campuses and in their communities. ACS has an active group of member institution diversity and inclusion officers who work closely with ACS staff in the areas of teaching, recruiting faculty and staff, professional development, and promoting dialogue. Recent programmatic efforts include the Inclusive Pedagogy Workshop and the Virtual Community Read. Members also share resources including sample diversity strategic plans and outcomes from recent grant projects.

### ***Grant-funded Programming***

ACS actively seeks out sources of funding on behalf of its members and administers the resulting [grants](#). Grant themes are intended to strengthen each institution and the collective mission of all member institutions. Some recent themes include innovative instruction, collaborative curriculum, inclusive pedagogy, and diversity and inclusion broadly.

### ***Tuition Exchange Program***

Faculty or staff members of ACS member institutions whose children or dependents are also students at an ACS institution may be eligible to participate in the Tuition Exchange Program. The program allows the student or dependent to attend another ACS institution at a relatively low cost.

### ***Consortium Subscriptions, Memberships, and Purchasing Discounts***

ACS takes advantage of volume discounts on academic journals, data services, and program memberships, passing the discounted savings from the group rate back to participating member institutions. In addition, ACS is a consortium member of E&I Cooperative Services, which is the largest member-owned nonprofit purchasing cooperative serving educational institutions. The cumulative purchasing power of the 16 member colleges allows ACS to benefit from a wide range of supplies and services through E&I's contracts.

## **THE ROLE OF PRESIDENT**

ACS is an independent entity with an endowment of approximately \$3.5 million and an annual budget of just over one million dollars. It is run by the president and governed by the Board of Directors, which is comprised of the presidents of the 16 colleges. The Board of Directors approves the strategy, major initiatives, and overall budget for the organization. The president has three direct reports within ACS, including the Chief Financial Officer, the Program Officer for Faculty and Staff Programs, and the Program Director for the ACS Academic Fellows Program. In addition, ACS contracts with additional staff to support

its administrative and grant-specific projects.

The ACS president reports to the chair of the Board of Directors and partners with and serves the full Board in the execution of the vision and the strategic direction of the organization. The president works in collaboration with the Board to formulate the strategic direction of the ACS and to launch new initiatives that have been collectively identified.

In addition to the strategic work described above, the president provides coordination and advocacy for collaboration within the consortium and is responsible for running an organization that provides support in multifaceted ways for shared work taking place across the 16 member institutions. The president's main task is to model transformational leadership, actively listening to the needs of ACS members and advocating for those needs in pragmatic, yet creative ways. The president builds relationships with foundations and other funders, community members, and external groups to increase ACS capabilities and amplify its value. The president also oversees high-level operational activities.

### **OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENT**

The mission of a liberal arts education is to “liberate” the mind through the study of the arts and sciences, which allows students to excel in critical thinking, interdisciplinary and integrative approaches to problem-solving, team-building, communication, and management skills. As the public face of ACS, the president will advocate for liberal arts education and its importance in the 21st century. The president must have deep knowledge, understanding, and passion for the 16 member institutions while bringing fresh ideas and perspectives that will catapult them forward. The dynamic landscape faced by leading residential liberal arts colleges in the United States presents a variety of opportunities and challenges for the next president. The successful candidate will lead a small and nimble team in executing strategic priorities and innovating to address emerging trends impacting ACS member institutions.

### **Lead the development and implementation of a strategic and modern vision for ACS**

This position requires a leader with a thorough understanding of best practices in higher education and creativity to meet the challenges facing liberal arts colleges today. The next president will need to guide and advance the ACS in a clear and strategic direction that is aligned with member institution priorities and accounts for the fast pace of change in the modern world. This leader must have a foundational understanding of the mission and purpose of liberal arts colleges and be able to articulate their value, especially in the face of contemporary critiques. As a thought leader, the president should be able to provoke new ideas from constituency groups while credibly facilitating strategic discussions with academic administrators and faculty members across all 16 campuses, earning their respect.

### **Manage staff and oversee all programming, with an appreciation of recent operational shifts**

ACS is a different organization than it was five years ago. Faculty and staff from member institutions

previously gathered infrequently and in person for collaborative workshops and learning, but today, members of the ACS community convene more regularly, efficiently, and cost-effectively via virtual programming to share best practices and tackle issues that cut across the member institutions. The next president must think creatively about how to manage and ensure the efficacy of these programs in what is now a mostly virtual environment. The president will oversee all programming with an eye for cost effectiveness and an understanding of the collectively identified needs of all member institutions. This leader must bring strong organization and communication skills and proven accomplishments in building and managing talented teams. The president will motivate and inspire ACS staff and foster a culture of trust, empowerment, transparency, and excellence, while spurring collaboration in a remote environment.

### **Partner with the board to understand and support the needs of ACS member institutions**

The next president will be a collaborative leader who understands and champions the value of liberal arts education. This leader will serve as a creative convener and intellectual partner to ACS board members, who are the presidents of the 16 member institutions. A critical reason why ACS has been successful is that each of the member institutions is different from the others and has its own identity. The next president will encourage member institutions to work collectively across areas of difference to foster symbiotic relationships.

The next president must get to know each institution and be prepared to navigate the complexities of how these independent institutions operate. Understanding that each one faces its own challenges, the president will identify points of overlap and potential collaboration in finding ways to better serve the consortium. The president supports the member institutions by identifying and supporting effective coalitions brought together around shared goals and helps prioritize those initiatives that have the greatest value for all member colleges.

### **Advocate broadly for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging**

ACS was founded to support member schools in providing the best liberal arts education at the most affordable price available. This quest for excellence and affordability expands to encompass efforts to increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at and among member institutions. The president will maintain a foundational understanding of each institution's distinct history, while catalyzing connection to support ACS member institutions in their quest for greater diversity, equity, and inclusion on their campuses. There is an opportunity to support these efforts with ACS staff and across all levels of staff and faculty programming for member institutions. The president will be prepared and motivated to lead collaboratively in this reflective and progressive work and to respond to the social, political, and regulatory landscape that affects each institution in accomplishing these efforts.

### **Lead fundraising efforts and assess and enhance the current funding model**

The next president will have the opportunity to continue to strengthen the existing partnerships with external foundations and forge new relationships with other funding entities to secure new grants for ACS projects aligned with strategic priorities. As the leader responsible for the financial sustainability of the consortium, the president will regularly assess the organization's funding model and suggest enhancements for review by the governing board. This leader must be keenly aware of the varied needs of member institutions in this area and determine how to add value through programming, while working to balance cost-effectiveness and mission success.

### **THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE**

A wide range of prior roles provide evidence of the skills needed to succeed as the next president of the ACS. The president will need to be creative, innovative, nimble, and able to skillfully move between the strategic and operational needs of ACS. The search committee enthusiastically welcomes applicants from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences.

The following factors will be weighed in evaluating candidates for this important leadership role. While no single individual will possess all the desired experiences and qualifications, the successful candidate will not only maintain the confidence of the member institutions by personal qualities of integrity, forthrightness, and collegiality, but will also possess many of the following characteristics:

- The disposition of a leader who puts the needs of its 16 member institutions first and helps them each develop and perform as highly as possible
- Interest in and ability to tackle both the academic and administrative sides of ACS
- An ability to plan and act strategically and serve as a thought leader and partner
- Strong managerial skills and experience in the areas of human resources, budget and finance, and program administration
- Experience maintaining and cultivating relationships with foundations
- Outstanding diplomatic, negotiation, and communication skills, and the ability to represent complex and nuanced conversations accurately in multiple contexts
- Strong organizational and facilitation skills
- Demonstrated experience writing and administering grants
- Demonstrated support for diversity and inclusion, and an understanding of the need for multiple perspectives and backgrounds in an educational context
- Strong team- and culture-building skills, with a track record of creating a strong culture and community of support
- Experience leading faculty development and/or cross-institutional collaboration efforts
- Ability to inspire trust and build relationships with integrity
- A strong work ethic, high energy level, and ability to adapt to new challenges and ideas

- Comfort dealing with occasional ambiguity and lack of clarity
- Energy, persistence, patience, and a sense of humor
- A broad and lively intellectual curiosity

#### **TO APPLY**

ACS has engaged Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/associated-colleges-south/president>.

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