Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute
Search for the Executive Director
Grand Valley State University
Muskegon, MI

THE SEARCH

The Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute (AWRI) at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) — a pioneering research institute located on the shore of Muskegon Lake, an estuary of Lake Michigan — seeks an executive director to continue its traditions of scholarly excellence, enduring impact, and innovative education. With a mission to integrate research, education, and outreach to enhance and preserve freshwater resources, AWRI plays a vital role in addressing a myriad of water-related issues with important implications for the region and the planet. Reporting to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the largest college at GVSU, the executive director will lead a talented and diverse team of federally funded researchers and serve as a convener and advocate for the institute and its work at the university, community, and national level.

Since its founding nearly 40 years ago, the Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute has been at the forefront of water science scholarship, application, and education. AWRI's state-of-the-art research infrastructure, explicit and direct engagement with people and place, and its dedication to training the water resources leaders of tomorrow have made it an invaluable resource for West Michigan's dynamic coastal communities. Over four decades, it has grown into a nationally recognized education and research facility with strong endowments, global scholarly stature, a fleet of research vessels, over 48,000 square feet of dedicated space to conduct its work, and designation as a member of the National Association of Marine Laboratories. AWRI also stands as the only educational institution on the eastern shores of Lake Michigan dedicated to the study of aquatic ecosystems and serves as a key player in providing research opportunities for GVSU graduate and undergraduate students with its well-equipped aquatic science facilities. In the face of ever more visible challenges to ecosystem health and public higher education, the opportunities provided through AWRI make significant contributions to the fostering of healthy ecosystems and economies across the state of Michigan, the Midwest, and beyond.

Working with the provost, dean, scientific advisory board, faculty, staff, and AWRI's deeply engaged external partners and supporters, the executive director will grow the institute's standing as a leader in applied water research, training the next generation of aquatic and environmental science professionals to contribute to an emerging blue economy in Muskegon and the state. They will accomplish this by growing the institute's research portfolio, collaborating across GVSU, maintaining AWRI's leadership as a community supporter and resource, and expanding its educational offerings to a larger, more diverse group of future water science scholars.

Grand Valley State University has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of the executive director. To inquire, nominate, or apply, please visit the search page. Further detail is available at the end of this document.

ROBERT B. ANNIS WATER RESOURCES INSTITUTE

Formally designated as an institute in 1986 and rededicated to its namesake in 1999, the Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute (AWRI) is a multidisciplinary research institute located in Muskegon, Michigan. It sits within GVSU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) and is a direct reflection of the university's long-held commitment to serving its West Michigan community. Its mission is to integrate research, education, and outreach to enhance and preserve freshwater resources, particularly in the Great Lakes region. Its status today as a formal academic unit, a research powerhouse, and a beloved community builder and supporter is the product of nearly 40 years of work. This work was put into motion when Donald J. Angus, an Indianapolis businessman with family ties to West Michigan, donated his 45-foot diesel-powered yacht to be used as a floating classroom. In the years since, AWRI has grown from a scientific consulting group to an academic research and innovation engine. Today, its work is undertaken by a team of 11 principal investigators who serve as tenured AWRI faculty, mentoring students in master's programs and teaching undergraduate courses, primarily in the Biology department. Additional personnel include some 50 technicians, administrative support staff, vessel instructors, boat captains, and deckhands. Its team works across the institute's impressive facilities, comprising the Lake Michigan Center (LMC), the Robert B. Annis Field Station, and AWRI's LEED-certified boat house, which stores the institute's fleet, including two research vessels, five trailered boats, and three vehicles. Through a balance of teaching, scholarship, and community building over the past 38 years, AWRI has earned its place as a jewel in the crown of GVSU, the Great Lakes Region, and beyond.

Community Outreach

AWRI's formal designation as an institute in 1986 was precipitated by the recommendation of a task force to include public engagement as a critical avenue in supporting the study and preservation of freshwater resources. From the very beginning, AWRI's work focused both inside and outside the walls of GVSU.

In addition to the education of undergraduate and graduate students, AWRI offers unique educational opportunities to K-12 students. Made possible by AWRI's two research vessels that provide educational

cruises, the R.B. Annis Educational Foundation Classroom, and an endowment to heavily subsidize accessibility costs, AWRI provides hands-on learning opportunities to over 4,000 students annually, and its vessel program is one of less than 10 onboard science learning programs in all of the Great Lakes. In support of statewide educational efforts, AWRI's environmental education curriculum incorporates Michigan Environmental Education Curriculum Support (MEECS) modules, but educational opportunities are not limited to students. AWRI offers professional development workshops for educators, providing training under NASA's GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) Program, and serving as the host institution for Project WET (Water Education Today) within the State of Michigan.

Community Leadership

AWRI's work reaches beyond basic science to solve important real-world problems. For example, AWRI was the scientific leader in the transformation of Muskegon Lake from a severely impaired water body to a healthy and vibrant haven for wildlife, recreation, and commerce. This transformation was celebrated in a short documentary, Back from the Brink. In response to the growing threat of plastic and litter in West Michigan beaches and waterways, AWRI partnered with the Council of the Great Lakes Region to use their $1 million donation from Meijer to finance the purchase of two semi-autonomous machines, which are harbored at AWRI, to collect plastics from land and water. That is one example of the community involvement carried out by AWRI, a collaborative effort to combat the impact of an estimated 22 million pounds of plastic that enter the Great Lakes annually.

Research + Education

Research at AWRI spans a variety of areas including aquatic chemistry, toxicology, molecular ecology, watershed and wetland ecology, limnology, remote sensing, microbial ecology, fisheries, and eutrophication, with the unifying goal to protect and preserve water. Research is led by 11 principal investigators who are full-time faculty and participate in the research mentoring of undergraduate students and in the delivery of courses, as well as major advisors to graduate students obtaining their M.S. in Biology with an emphasis in Aquatic Sciences or M.S. in Water Resource Policy. The work done by the faculty and students is of the highest scientific caliber and results in a steady stream of publications (25-30 peer-reviewed papers per year) and grants, contracts, and endowment earnings totaling nearly $6 million in annual expenditures. Focusing on a Masters terminal degree program, graduate students report an extremely positive experience, citing a unique investment in their entrepreneurial training and experiential learning. Many of these students go on to pursue careers in applied research at state and federal government agencies such as EGLE, EPA, state Forestry Service, and various NGOs. Undergraduate students also benefit from access to summer internships, made possible with funding from grants won by AWRI faculty and aligned with GVSU's reputation as a teaching-centered undergraduate institution.

A particular point of pride for AWRI's scholarly enterprise is the buoy-based observatory in Muskegon Lake. The project is funded by US EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, NOAA-Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, the University of Michigan-Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research,

the Community Foundation for Muskegon County, the Consumers Energy Foundation, the Edison Innovation Foundation, and the NASA Michigan Space Grant Consortium. While its primary purpose is to understand and manage water quality in the lake, its data is openly accessible. In a similar vein of public service, AWRI and GVSU's Cell and Molecular Biology Department have worked with area health departments since 2021 to test and detect genetic markers of the COVID-19 virus in wastewater, and AWRI has had a 15+ year partnership with Public Health Muskegon County for the Lake Michigan and inland lakes beach monitoring program.

Leadership and Governance

AWRI has been under the guidance of Interim Director Dr. Mark Luttenton since August 2022 following Dr. Alan Steinman's 21 years at the helm. Dr. Steinman was hired with the explicit mission to strengthen the research arm of the institute. Under his leadership the institute staff grew from 15 to 70, its footprint grew from one building to three, and it became an official academic unit in 2008, affording its researchers the opportunity to become tenure track faculty.

The executive director benefits from partnership with a four-member Science Advisory Board composed of internationally renowned scientists and practitioners whose aim is to understand the AWRI/GVSU culture, role, and its programs and provide a tri-annual report outlining the institute's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges and recommendations for the future.

THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Reporting to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the executive director will lead a talented faculty and staff of 19, manage an operating budget of $1.9 million, and steward an endowment of $12 million. The executive director will set the institute's strategic direction to ensure its faculty and staff thrive and its strengths are sustained and grown. The executive director will uphold AWRI's storied history of integrating research, education, and outreach, and will ensure that each pillar is supported to the benefit of its counterparts. This leader must be a scientific thought leader who will serve as the public face of the institute, engaging with the local and scientific community, and advocating for the mission and work of AWRI.

The executive director will collaborate with the CLAS dean to build relationships with campus leaders to jointly hire faculty to enhance teaching and scholarship in water science while growing AWRI's impact. The executive director will leverage the institute's resources, rich history, stellar facilities, and passionate community of scholars, students, staff, and donors to chart a vision for the next chapter of AWRI's evolution.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Define and execute on a shared vision for AWRI that adheres to its highest traditions and fulfills its most ambitious aspirations

The executive director will have the opportunity to strengthen the position of AWRI as a leader in water science while preserving the history and spirit that define the AWRI community. To build toward the future, they will support the execution of the current strategic plan and identify future strategies to remain nimble within an ever-changing landscape. This will require a consultative approach and continuous innovation around ways to best position AWRI within CLAS, GVSU, and the greater water science community. The executive director will inherit a strong foundation of existing programming to steward and strengthen. In furthering the work of the institute, the executive director will ensure structures and processes are both effective and sustainable.

Foster university-wide collaboration in pursuit of academic synergies and greater name recognition

AWRI has grown organically and enjoys a level of autonomy that has allowed it to develop as a unique and nimble institute, and it has thrived thanks to its unique mission and entrepreneurial mindset. It has the potential to further develop, weaving a stronger network with the many research and education initiatives across the university focused on sustainability and climate change. The executive director will champion collaboration with GVSU's eight colleges that are home to faculty with specialties in fisheries and aquatics, economics and environmental policy, geology, geography, sustainable planning, and more. Of note, GVSU is separating the School of Computing from the Padnos College of Engineering and Computing and creating a new and separate college. The college will focus on computing and advanced technology, making greater engagement of engineering and computing faculty in sustainability related projects and collaborations with AWRI possible. An initiative in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to hire five new faculty with expertise related to Society, Technology, and the Environment will provide additional avenues for collaboration. A similar cluster was hired in the 2022-2023 academic year around the theme of aquatic restoration.

Strengthen the breadth and depth of AWRI's research and funding portfolio

The last 20 years have seen AWRI expand its funding portfolio from smaller, localized contracts to larger, more competitive, federally funded grants from institutions like the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

The executive director will build upon this foundation and pursue additional research funding. For example, Muskegon Lake is one of two dozen estuaries in West Michigan which join Lake Michigan. As such, the institute has opportunity to pursue a National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) designation, which could allow it to compete for additional NOAA funds. By encouraging cross-GVSU

collaborations and pursuit of aspirant grants, the executive director will help open doors to funding associated with large-scale integrative research projects that are not accessible to single PIs and single discipline projects. New programs, such as the M.S. in Water Resource Policy, will attract and engage students and could result in additional resources, research avenues, and impact.

Advance AWRI's legacy of community engagement and service

AWRI was founded on the principles of community outreach and education, and its success depends upon the next leader's dedication to sustaining and building upon its mutually beneficial relationship with Muskegon and the greater West Michigan region. Through its habitat restoration and environmental monitoring work, AWRI has become a vital resource to the region. In turn, the West Michigan community has supported AWRI with generous gifts from a broad base of donors including individuals, corporations, and foundations. This support is instrumental in advancing the institute's mission, funding a number of endowments that allow for the success of research activities, student internships, and the vessel outreach program. Long-standing relationships and new opportunities through initiatives such as the neighboring Muskegon Innovation Hub will allow a creative and energetic executive director to build upon this history of community engagement.

The executive director will be the face of AWRI and a highly visible community member, seeking opportunities to engage with individuals and organizations, continuing the institute's proud history of being a trusted source of information for the betterment of the people, organizations, and businesses of West Michigan.

Expand access to educational opportunities

Efforts to grow AWRI's educational footprint should be pursued both within GVSU and in the greater community. While the institute does employ several undergraduate summer interns, there is potential for greater engagement with the undergraduate population that could result in a stronger, more diverse pipeline of graduate students. AWRI is working to expand research opportunities available to undergraduate students whenever possible, with a specific focus on engaging underrepresented students. They have also created internships with local community colleges to invite students from underrepresented backgrounds to work at AWRI. Additionally, the institute has worked to expand its connection to Muskegon public schools and other local populations historically underserved by science education.

THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE: QUALIFICATIONS

- An outstanding scholar with a commitment to world-class scientific research and an appreciation of real-world application; established record or clear evidence of excellence in mentorship around grant funding and other markers of research stature;
- A doctoral degree or equivalent combination of training and experience in any area of water

resources;

- An experienced administrator and strategic leader;
- A public-facing, community-engaged scientist with the ability to translate science to diverse audiences;
- A highly skilled collaborator with the ability to nurture existing relationships while identifying opportunities to build new bridges across the university, region, state, and nation;
- An experienced fundraiser with knowledge of diverse avenues to grow institutional support;
- A committed teacher-scholar with an appreciation for both undergraduate and graduate education and research;
- A demonstrated record of results advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion;
- Management skills to inspire and motivate staff, instill trust, and lead change;
- Financial acumen and evidence of fiscal leadership in setting budgets and priorities as well as assessing organizational risk;
- Ability to provide decisive leadership while receiving insight and advice from diverse stakeholders.

TO APPLY

Grand Valley State University has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist the Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute Executive Director Search Committee in its identification and review of candidates. All inquiries, nominations, and applications may be sent in confidence to: https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/grand-valley-state-university-robert-b-annis-water-resources-institute/executive

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Grand Valley State University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer and actively works to enhance its diversity.

APPENDIX

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

Established by the Michigan legislature in 1960 and 12 miles west of Grand Rapids, Grand Valley State University began as a small college dedicated to the ideals of a liberal education. The start-up was financed by a cadre of entrepreneurs, notably William Seidman, who believed West Michigan would only thrive with a university devoted to raising the region's educational and cultural engagement. Sixty years later, Grand Valley has exceeded all of its founders' expectations: it has evolved into a comprehensive, selective, public university that provides a wide array of fully accredited academic programs, all the while continuing to place a high value on liberal education, teaching, student success, research, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Grand Valley attracts more than 22,000 students with its high-quality programs, state-of-the-art facilities, and vibrant campus life. The university offers 100 undergraduate and 43 graduate degrees across eight colleges.

Grand Valley enjoys exceptionally close ties to its community that have led to countless opportunities for external collaborations and resources. Not only are Grand Valley's main campuses located close to Lake Michigan, amidst the natural beauty of West Michigan, they are also situated in one of the most dynamic economic areas of the state. The university is in the center of a metropolitan area with a population of nearly 1.1 million, supporting a strong industrial base as well as rich cultural and recreational opportunities.

The university has campuses in Allendale, Grand Rapids, and Holland, as well as centers in Muskegon, Traverse City, and Detroit. Grand Valley's main campus is situated on 1,322 acres 12 miles west of Grand Rapids in Allendale. The 65-acre Robert C. Pew Campus is located in the heart of Grand Rapids and includes the colleges of engineering and computing, education and community innovation, and business. The 14.5 acre Health Campus anchors the east end of Grand Rapids' "Medical Mile," so named for the concentration of hospitals and medical schools and houses the colleges of health professions and nursing. The Meijer Campus in Holland offers evening, accelerated, hybrid, and online coursework to area students.

Grand Valley State University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is a vibrant academic hub committed to fostering intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. Located in Allendale, Michigan, CLAS offers a diverse array of undergraduate and graduate programs spanning disciplines such as humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and mathematics. Beginning in Fall 2025, CLAS students are guaranteed five experiential learning opportunities, fulfilling the Reach Higher 2025 promise of an empowered education, and ensuring career readiness. With dedicated faculty members, state-of-the-art facilities, and a supportive learning environment, CLAS prepares students for success in an ever-evolving global landscape while instilling a lifelong passion for learning and a commitment to social responsibility.

Leadership

Appointed in 2019 as the university's first female president, Dr. Philomena V. Mantella, has expanded programs at GVSU aimed at non-traditional and underrepresented students. This led to GVSU welcoming its largest and most diverse incoming class ever in the fall of 2023. Dr. Mantella's commitment to growth and disruption is at the core of her work to redefine what higher education is for the public good. She is focused on education's fitness for the future, equipping graduates with the competencies and mindset to succeed in the dynamic knowledge economy. This includes the creation of a number of unprecedented partnerships with the business community, the development of a national alliance to give underrepresented student voices a say in their education and the breaking down of barriers to increase access to higher education for all adult learners.

Before joining GVSU, Dr. Mantella worked at public and private institutions in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Michigan. She earned a Ph.D. in college and university administration from Michigan State University and master's and bachelor's degrees from Syracuse University.

Dr. Fatma Mili, appointed in July 2022, is the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. Prior to GVSU, Dr. Mili served as the Dean of the College of Computing and Informatics at UNC Charlotte where she led a five-year period of growth in enrollment, retention, research, and broadening participation. Her distinctive impact at UNC Charlotte centered around instilling a culture of equity and embracing responsibility for the social and ethical impact of technological education, research, and products. Before her deanship at UNC Charlotte, she was at Purdue University where she led one of Purdue's "Big Moves" that transformed curriculum pedagogy at the College of Technology and led to its transformation into Purdue Polytechnic.

Dr. Mili has deep Michigan roots. She started her academic career at Oakland University in the School of Computer Science and Engineering. Her research was in the areas of formal methods, intelligent systems, and nature inspired adaptive systems and was funded by federal agencies as well as industrial partners.

Dr. Jennifer Drake is Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the academic home of the Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute. Dr. Drake received her Ph.D. in English the from State University of New York at Binghamton. She earned the rank of Professor in the English Department at the University of Indianapolis and has served in a wide range of posts including at the University of Indianapolis as the Founding Director of the Woodrow Wilson Indiana Teaching Fellowship Program and Dean of the Shaheen College of Arts and Sciences. Most recently she served as Provost and Vice-President for Student & Academic Life at The Evergreen State College (2017-2020).

In her work, Dr. Drake has prioritized enhancing student engagement and success; creating and sustaining strong academic programs; supporting faculty and staff professional development; promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion; collaborating with community partners; and ensuring accountability to stakeholders.