



# Sacred Heart UNIVERSITY

Search for the VICE PRESIDENT FOR HUMAN RESOURCES  
SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY  
FAIRFIELD, CT

## THE SEARCH

Sacred Heart University (SHU) seeks a human resources professional with extraordinary people skills and cultural acumen to serve as its Vice President for Human Resources (VPHR). This role offers a distinct opportunity for a creative and entrepreneurial individual to lead a sophisticated and operationally strong human resources function within a progressive and rapidly growing University. Reporting directly to President John Petillo, PhD, and recognized as a vital partner to institutional success, the VPHR will provide strategic and operational leadership to all human resources functions for the University.

A national leader in shaping higher education for the 21st century, Sacred Heart University is a private, Catholic liberal arts institution in Fairfield, CT, with an international campus in Dingle, Ireland. One of the fastest-growing private doctoral institutions in the United States, SHU serves over 11,000 students and offers nearly 90 undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and certificate programs across six colleges and three schools. SHU stands out from other Catholic institutions as it was established and led by the laity. The contemporary Catholic University is rooted in the rich Catholic intellectual tradition and the liberal arts, and at the same time cultivates students to be forward thinkers who enact change—in their own lives, professions, and communities. SHU is home to the award-winning, NPR-affiliated radio station, WSHU, a Division I athletics program, and an impressive performing arts program.

As a highly visible and collaborative member of the campus community, the VPHR will provide leadership and direction to all facets of human resources management across the University. As a member of the President's senior leadership team, the VPHR directly participates in institutional planning and decision-making. The VPHR directs the University's HR Department and supervises a team of four, including the Associate Vice President for Human Resources, the Executive Director of HRIS & Compensation, the Executive Director for Title IX, and the Special Projects Coordinator, who also serves in an administrative support capacity to the VPHR. The VPHR will ensure that all HR programs and initiatives are integrated and effective in supporting the institution's overall mission, goals, and objectives while continuing to evaluate and respond to evolving needs. The successful candidate will bring a keen understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities inherent to human resources in a higher education context and how HR leaders can strategically drive institutional success.

Sacred Heart University has retained the national executive search firm Isaacson, Miller to conduct this important search and identify outstanding candidates. Please direct all confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## **SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY**

Sacred Heart University is a private institution founded in 1963 and set on a gorgeous 311-acre suburban campus. It was founded to provide the community with an affordable, quality education at a local Catholic university. From its outset, SHU bore the mark of innovation. Charting a new direction within American Catholicism, the University was the first institution of Catholic higher education in the United States to be led and staffed by the laity. This progressive mindset continues nearly 60 years later, with a community that welcomes all faiths and backgrounds and is committed to service and social justice.

Today, under the leadership of President John J. Petillo, PhD, signs of the University's growth and vibrancy are evident. Enrollment has risen from the original class of fewer than 200 undergraduate students to over 10,000 full-time and part-time undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students. Over the years, Sacred Heart has grown to become the second-largest independent Catholic university in New England. SHU's extraordinary and rapid expansion of its student population, physical footprint and facilities, academic programs, and research portfolio required growth in both size and complexity, but through it all, the university has maintained a tireless commitment to putting students first, teaching excellence, and inclusive excellence.

## **Academics & Faculty**

Firmly based in the liberal arts tradition while also being career-focused for today's marketplace, Sacred Heart's academic programs challenge students intellectually and personally. Steeped in the Catholic intellectual tradition, the curriculum inspires minds and launches dynamic careers in sought-after fields. SHU offers nearly 90 undergraduate, master, doctoral, and certificate programs, including online degree options, in six colleges and three schools:

- [College of Arts & Sciences](#)
- [Jack Welch College of Business & Technology](#)
- [College of Health Professions](#)
- [Dr. Susan L. Davis, R.N., & Richard J. Henley College of Nursing](#)
- [Isabelle Farrington College of Education & Human Development](#)
- [School of Communication, Media & the Arts](#)
- [School of Computer Science & Engineering](#)
- [School of Social Work](#)

SHU faculty are dedicated teachers, accomplished researchers, and recognized as experts in their fields. 333 full-time professors make the student-to-faculty ratio 16:1, with an average class size of 23.

### **Students and Campus Life**

SHU's total enrollment is 11,179 students. 6,532 are full-time undergraduate students, 428 are part-time undergraduate students, and 4,219 are graduate students. For the 2023-2024 academic year, students hailed from 43 states, the District of Columbia, two U.S. territories, and over 40 countries. Undergraduate admissions have become more selective in recent years, and the average academic profile of accepted students is trending upward. The Fall 2023 first-year class was selected from 14,284 applications; 81% of students in the class of 2027 graduated in the top half of their high school class, and the average high school GPA was 3.65.

In SHU's intentionally cultivated community, informed by Catholic values and defined by inclusion and support, students are nourished in mind, body, and spirit while preparing to make a difference in their community and the wider world. Since enrolling its first residential students in 1990, residential life at SHU has flourished. The University now has 12 residential areas, including gender-inclusive options, with approximately 91% of first-year students and 51% of all undergraduates residing in university housing. SHU also features a vibrant Greek Life, with 13 values-based fraternity and sorority chapters that engage more than 2,000 student members. Outside the classroom, students take advantage of over 100 social, academic, leadership, service, media, multicultural, and performing arts clubs and organizations and are actively engaged in community service.

Performing arts and athletics are central to the SHU student experience. The University offers a robust performing arts program in instrumental music, theatre arts, choir and dance, as well as a major in theatre arts and music. As an NCAA Division I institution, SHU Pioneers field 33 varsity athletic teams. Students can also stay active by participating in one of the University's 39 intercollegiate club sports teams.

### **Growing, Global Campus**

SHU's safe, thriving [main campus](#) in beautiful Fairfield, Connecticut, sits on 311 acres along the state's southwestern coast and is conveniently located between New York City and Boston. The Connecticut campus includes a University-owned golf course and [West Campus](#), the former General Electric world headquarters, which is home to many SHU STEM programs. SHU's Physician Assistant Studies program offers students hands-on clinical experience in a state-of-the-art medical setting on the [Stamford Hospital campus](#), and graduate education programs are located in a unique "learning lab" in [Griswold, CT](#). In addition to its presence in Connecticut, SHU has an international campus in [Dingle, County Kerry, Ireland](#) that offers students an interactive study abroad experience that emphasizes hands-on learning and full immersion.

## LEADERSHIP

### Dr. John Petillo, President

Dr. John J. Petillo was named president of Sacred Heart University in March 2011. Before that, he had served as interim president since October 2010 and dean of the University's Jack Welch College of Business & Technology since March 2009. Under his leadership, Sacred Heart has experienced unprecedented growth both academically and physically. During his tenure, the University has added or begun construction on approximately 10 new buildings, not including extensive renovations at the West Campus site that formerly housed GE's worldwide headquarters. In addition, the University has added the College of Education & Human Development, College of Nursing, and the School of Computer Science & Engineering, as well as many new programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The University has also greatly expanded international educational opportunities for students under Dr. Petillo. Read more about Dr. Petillo [here](#).

## THE ROLE: VICE PRESIDENT FOR HUMAN RESOURCES

The Vice President for Human Resources will provide strategic leadership and direction to all facets of human resources management as it pertains to employees in all components of the University and its divisions. As the leader of the University's Human Resources Department, the VPHR will direct the management of the department's many component activities, ensuring HR programs and initiatives are integrated and effective in supporting the institution's overall mission, goals, and objectives. Reporting directly to the President and as a member of the senior leadership team, the VPHR will directly and actively participate in institutional planning and decision-making.

The VPHR supervises a team of four, including the Associate Vice President for Human Resources, the Executive Director of HRIS & Compensation, the Executive Director for Title IX, and the Special Projects Coordinator, who also serves in an administrative support capacity to the VPHR.

Principal Duties and Responsibilities of the role include:

- Directs and oversees the management of the Human Resources function, ensuring that all services to university departments are effective, cohesive, and consistent with the needs and objectives of the various departments and the institution as a whole.
- Performs complex executive-level work in leading the division to develop, enhance, and implement programs and operations to meet the university's current needs.
- Embraces being open and attentive to listening and responding to the organization's changing needs; as the President's designee, resolves disputes concerning the application or interpretation of laws, policies, and procedures.

- Experienced human resources leader who is visible and approachable, interacting with the campus community regularly; possesses the creativity, flexibility, and resourcefulness to function effectively within the university culture.
- A working leader who values staff input and trusts in their expertise and ability to perform their job functions while fostering a team environment and continual professional development.
- A strategic partner with all members of the President's senior leadership team. VPs must develop positive work relationships with their senior peers to build trust and establish structures supporting one another's success. Work collectively and collegiately in the development of all university strategic initiatives.
- Provides strategic direction and oversight to the University's staff wage and salary programs; ensures regulatory compliance and competitive salary levels necessary to attract and retain qualified staff.
- Designs, establishes, and maintains an organizational structure and staffing to effectively accomplish the organization's goals and objectives.
- Directly participates in executive planning and decision-making for the division and the institution.
- Performs miscellaneous job-related duties as assigned.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES + CHALLENGES

The successful VPHR will address the following opportunities and challenges that are central to SHU's sustained success:

- **Serve as a partner and advisor to the President and senior leadership team to advance strategic, university-wide goals:**
  - Collaborate closely and proactively with the President and fellow senior leadership team members, building strong working relationships.
  - Engage actively in senior leadership discussion and debate, contribute meaningfully to institutional efforts, and recognize that the work of HR impacts the entire university.
  - Harness a creative and entrepreneurial approach rooted in organizational development best practices to advance university initiatives.
- **Actively participate in the SHU community as a visible and engaged senior leader:**
  - Be present and visible. Embody a culture of engagement by actively participating in campus life, making connections, building relationships throughout the University, and taking the time to listen, value other perspectives, and learn.
- **Promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:**
  - Partner closely with senior leaders to advance SHU's commitment to anti-racism, anti-oppression and diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging across the university.

- Advance equity-centered HR processes, policies, procedures, and trainings, and engage the community in events and programming that raise awareness of how DEIB is necessary for organizational excellence.
- **Develop comprehensive professional development and succession plans:**
  - Build robust and strategic succession planning by promoting existing leadership development programs and designing new training opportunities that identify and prepare SHU talent for future leadership opportunities, support employee growth, and promote an engaged and productive organizational culture.
- **Support faculty recruitment, retention, and tenure & promotion processes:**
  - Partner closely and collaboratively with Academic Affairs & the Office of the Provost to ensure that faculty recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and retention efforts are effective, equitable, and grounded in inclusive excellence principles. Ensure processes and procedures across the University are standardized to maintain consistent experiences and expectations while being responsive to differing needs and contexts across units, departments, colleges, and schools.
  - Assist and provide counsel to Academic Affairs & the Office of the Provost with the implementation of the University's revised tenure and promotion policies.
- **Evaluate human resources processes and procedures across the employee lifecycle:**
  - Assess and identify opportunities to improve processes and procedures, focusing on recruiting top talent, training hiring managers, and strengthening retention programs.
  - Utilize transparent and collaborative change management processes to plan for continuous improvement of human resources-related activities.
- **Ensure staffing and compensation structures stay abreast of institutional growth:**
  - Evaluate staffing needs on a regular basis, leveraging an institutional perspective and nuanced understanding of strategic organizational development to add, adjust, and redefine roles as needed.
  - Develop and oversee total compensation strategy, policies, structure, and philosophy, as well as the appropriate evaluation and promotional processes and equity structures to align with best practices and respond to rapid growth.
- **Lead and manage a strong HR team:**
  - Provide leadership and supervision to the talented HR Department, utilizing the institutional knowledge and expertise of seasoned members while providing mentorship and encouraging professional development and growth for all.
  - Cultivate a culture of creativity, transparent communication, flexibility, mutual respect, integrity, and shared accountability, motivating the team to continue to provide a high level of service to departments and units across the University.

## QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will hold a master's degree and bring at least 10 years' progressively responsible human resources leadership experience, ideally in a higher education context.

Additional knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes include:

- Prior leadership experience of a human resource office.
- Strong knowledge of federal and state of CT employment laws and regulations.
- Ability to analyze problems and develop creative solutions to complex human resource issues.
- Strong interpersonal and communication skills and the ability to work effectively with a wide range of constituencies in a diverse community.
- Knowledge of organizational development theory and practices.
- Skill in budget preparation and fiscal management.
- Skill in examining and re-engineering operations and procedures, formulating policy, and developing and implementing new strategies and procedures.
- Knowledge of contemporary principles of human resource management and public personnel practices.
- Ability to analyze and assess training and development needs.

## APPLICATIONS, NOMINATIONS, AND INQUIRIES

Confidential inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and letters of interest responding to the opportunities and challenges outlined above) should be sent electronically to the Isaacson, Miller executive search team via the link below.

Dan Rodas, Partner,  
Tim Lanigan, Senior Associate  
Amble Ryan, Senior Associate  
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/sacred-heart-university/vice-president-human-resources>

*Sacred Heart University is a space that respects and embraces differences, recognizes the unique contributions that individuals can make, and creates a community that maximizes the potential of all faculty and staff. As an equal-opportunity employer, we encourage applications from qualified candidates who reflect the wider world in which we live.*