



Caltech

Search for the Associate Vice President, Student Life
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, CA

THE SEARCH

The California Institute of Technology (“Caltech” or “Institute”) seeks an experienced and highly collaborative student affairs professional to serve as associate vice president of student life (AVPSL). The AVPSL will be the senior most Institute staff member responsible for a comprehensive student experience portfolio delivered to approximately 1,000 undergraduate and 1,400 graduate students. The AVPSL joins Caltech at a unique inflection point with a deliberate organizational effort to elevate and enhance the overall student experience. The AVPSL will be the first professional staff member to hold the associate vice president position within the Institute, poising the AVPSL to innovate collaboratively and shape best student affairs practices. This is a tremendous opportunity for a dynamic, ambitious professional with a deep commitment to shared governance and expertise in understanding student development in a residential research institute.

Caltech is small and prizes excellence and ambition. Its size creates an unparalleled three-to-one student-faculty ratio on campus. Its extraordinary 323 professional faculty and their students are expanding their understanding of the universe and inventing the technologies of the future, with research interests from quantum science and engineering to bioinformatics, from human behavior and economics to energy and sustainability, and ultimately, the nature of life itself. There are extraordinary opportunities in research and STEM leadership, as well as classroom learning, resulting in one of the most rigorous and intense educational experiences in the American academy. The contributions of Caltech's faculty and alumni have earned national and international recognition, including 47 Nobel Prizes.

Reporting to the Vice President and Faculty Dean of Students (VPFDS), with dotted-line reporting to the president, and serving as a liaison with the Student Experience committee of the Caltech Board of Trustees, the AVPSL will oversee approximately 90 staff in twelve units in the student affairs division, including areas related to health and wellness, extra- and co-curricular activities, advising, and the residential experience.

The AVPSL joins a small and responsive student affairs leadership group that also reports directly to the VPFDS: the faculty dean of graduate studies, the faculty dean of undergraduate studies, the lead for finance and operations, and the dean of undergraduate admissions. The AVPSL provides strategic and

operational guidance to foster co-curricular student life equal in caliber and creativity to Caltech's academic and research experience and to promote an environment of inclusion and belonging for all students throughout their Caltech experience.

The AVPSL will develop an enhanced vision for Student Life at Caltech and a strategic plan to see it actualized. Integral to the AVPSL's success is the ability to build and maintain strong, collaborative relationships with colleagues in the VPFDs office, colleagues across campus, academic leaders, Institute senior leadership, trustees, student leaders, families, and alumni to ensure the overall success and well-being of Caltech's student body.

The AVPSL, working collaboratively, will: (1) foster and develop innovative, responsive programs that enhance student success and student engagement, build community, ensure wellness and well-being, and cultivate personal development; (2) review and update relevant student-related policies to ensure the best co-curricular experience for all students and to ensure compliance with federal, state, and local regulations, and Institute policies; (3) supervise and develop a talented, diverse, collaborative, and success-oriented group of student affairs professionals; (4) engage calmly and confidentially when student-related crises arise; (5) provide guidance to student leaders and other students engaging in leadership activities across campus; (6) represent the VPFDs as needed, (7) serve as the liaison to the Student Experience Committee of the Caltech Board of Trustees.

Caltech has retained [Isaacson, Miller](#), a national executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important search and to help identify outstanding candidates. As directed at the end of this document, all inquiries, applications, and nominations should be directed to the search firm in confidence.

CALTECH

Founded in 1891, Caltech holds a unique place in American higher education as a small residential institute with profoundly impactful research. Caltech is home to nearly 400 faculty. Many Caltech faculty are international scholars (i.e., non-US citizens, non-US permanent residents) from around the world who come to the United States for teaching, research, collaboration, and other purposes. A diverse group of professionals includes visiting scientists, professors, artists, scholars, postdoctoral fellows and associates, lecturers, instructors, research associates and scientists, and tenure-track faculty. Caltech also employs approximately 3,000 staff members in a variety of non-faculty roles: administrative, clinical, support, and service. Employees provide ongoing support for the work of faculty and the educational mission for students.

The strong sense of community at Caltech nurtures and develops fiercely loyal alumni who treasure their experiences on campus. The [Caltech Alumni Association](#) is composed of approximately 24,000 living alumni, of whom 17 are Nobel Laureates.

The Institute manages the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) for NASA, owns and operates large-scale research facilities, and co-founded and co-manages the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) with MIT. Thus it offers students unique access to some of the most sophisticated labs for exploration of the earth and solar system.

Caltech is located in Pasadena, California — a vibrant and culturally rich city of 140,000 at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains that boasts sunshine year-round. Caltech's 124-acre campus is 10 miles Northeast of downtown Los Angeles and 27 miles from the ocean.

Leadership

[Dr. Thomas Rosenbaum](#) is the ninth president of Caltech. He is a professor of physics and an expert on the quantum mechanical nature of materials, conducting research at Bell Laboratories, IBM Watson Research Center, and the University of Chicago, where he served as Vice President for Research and for Argonne National Laboratory and then provost, before moving to Caltech in 2014. He received his bachelor's degree in physics with honors from Harvard University and a PhD in physics from Princeton University.

[Dr. Kevin Gilmartin](#) was appointed dean of undergraduate students in 2016 and is currently the Vice President and faculty dean of students. Dr. Gilmartin is the William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of English. He has been on the faculty at Caltech since 1991 and earned his undergraduate degree in English from Oberlin College and his master's and doctoral degrees in English from the University of Chicago.

Students

Admission to Caltech is highly competitive. For the graduating class of 2026, Caltech received 16,626 applications and admitted 2.7 percent of those students. The average SAT scores for the class of 2026 are 760 in verbal and 800 in math; the average ACT composite score is 36. On average, the first-year retention rate is 97 percent, and the six-year graduation rate is 93 percent. During the 2023-2024 academic year, Caltech enrolled approximately 2,400 students, approximately 1,000 undergraduates and 1,400 graduate students. The undergraduate population was 50 percent female, and 34.5 percent self-reported as being from underrepresented U.S. minority groups.

Almost all Caltech students, both graduate and undergraduate, engage in research. About 90 percent of undergraduate students complete research with a faculty member prior to graduation. Through co-curricular opportunities and experiences, including more than 100 [student-led clubs and organizations](#), events, cross-cultural education, civic engagement, and leadership development, students gain invaluable skills and experiential knowledge that they will continue to develop during their time on campus and beyond as future leaders.

At Caltech, athletics is an extension of the academic enterprise. Caltech athletes are students first, and in the last 10 years, the average GPA of Caltech's NCAA Division III student-athletes has mirrored the general

student-body average. Athletes also make up a robust portion of the student body, as nearly 301 students participate in varsity sports, 170 of whom are male and 131 are female.

Caltech's unique [House](#) system consists of eight distinct residential communities that catalyze many of Caltech's social and cultural traditions. The House system is a community living model that benefits from a distinctive model of shared governance that brings together faculty, students, and staff. This system has led to residences with unique histories, cultures, traditions, and personalities that are treasured by current students and alumni alike. While the House system remains the most popular living opportunity for undergraduates, in recent years, many students have opted for their own community experience in the Marks/Barun and Bechtel residences, some of which are newly constructed and offer single rooms and suites.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and assessment are central to Caltech's institutional identity and mission. The Institute prides itself on fostering an inclusive environment where a diverse student population can thrive. Students come from 82 countries and 50 states. The new AVPSL will partner closely with the [Center for Inclusion & Diversity's](#) assistant vice president for diversity, equity, inclusion, and assessment to assess and implement diversity initiatives that address the Institute's needs and create an inclusive and equitable campus community for all students.

STUDENT AFFAIRS AND THE ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT, STUDENT LIFE

Student Affairs, comprised of 13 departments, at Caltech supports the educational mission of the Institute through co-curricular experiences and service offerings that encourage the development of students as engaged leaders. With a deep commitment to the growth and development of each student, Student Affairs staff members promote well-being, encourage personal integrity, foster a sense of individual responsibility and accountability, and provide services and support to position students for academic success. The Caltech experience is rigorous, and Student Affairs supports the campus community by providing support and initiatives to listen, guide, and assist whenever students need help.

More information about Student Affairs can be found [here](#).

The Associate Vice President, Student Life plays a vital role in providing strategic direction and seasoned leadership for the following direct reporting areas:

- Accessibility Services
- Athletics, Physical Education, Recreation
- Institute CARE Group
- Case Management
- Career Advising and Experiential Learning
- Counseling Center
- Fellowships, Advising, Study Abroad

- Health Center
- Occupational Therapy
- Performing and Visual Arts
- Registrar
- Student and Family Experience
- Student Campus Activities

The AVPSL is accountable for working with the Student Affairs leadership team (the faculty dean of graduate studies, the faculty dean of undergraduate studies, the lead for finance and operations, and the dean of undergraduate admissions) to set organizational direction, including professional development, leadership development, budget development and management, issue identification and resolution, communications, and accountability to the goals of Student Affairs. They will help foster a best-in-class residential living and learning experience in collaboration with faculty and staff. They will ensure accountability and senior leader-level commitment to a well-integrated residential life system, program management, policy development, staff and recruitment, orientation, and ongoing support. The AVPSL will also serve on committees and working groups as requested and perform additional duties as appropriate.

As part of the Student Affairs leadership team, the AVPSL participates in setting the mission, strategy, and objectives for Student Life. In addition to a highly collaborative working relationship with faculty, the AVPSL will interact with campus stakeholders such as the Board of Trustees, parents, campus security, human resources, communications, external relations, and general counsel.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT, STUDENT LIFE

The AVPSL will join a senior team engaged in transformative, institutional change that will continue to lead Caltech into the 21st century. The Institute is deeply committed to offering a student experience that matches the quality of academic experience for which Caltech is well known. As a result, the Institute has made recent investments in Student Affairs, including health and wellness. Last year, the Institute invited a visiting team of accomplished academic leaders and student affairs professionals from MIT, Carnegie Mellon, University of Chicago, and others to evaluate current strengths and opportunities in the Student Life experience. The AVPSL position was created following the visiting committee's recommendations.

Working closely with the Student Affairs leadership group led by Vice President Kevin Gilmartin, the new AVPSL will secure student life as a focal component of the student experience at Caltech, leading by setting a personal example of what it means to value, build, and sustain diverse and inclusive communities in residential college settings.

The primary opportunities and challenges for the Associate Vice President, Student Life include the following:

Serve as a creative, strategic, and visionary leader of the Division of Student Life

The AVPSL will be responsible for working collaboratively with faculty and senior leadership to envision and execute the Institute's next strategic goals. This leader will document and assess existing programs and offerings across the Student Affairs division to ensure they meet today's student needs. This leader will ensure continuity in the student experience, setting and implementing a strategic vision that will guide students to take full advantage of advising, career development, counseling, and the full suite of Student Affairs offerings.

Support a student body with changing needs

The next AVPSL will develop creative solutions to anticipate the changing social and academic needs of this generation of college students. Caltech is facing many of the same challenges as students at other top residential universities and colleges, including maneuvering the social impacts of the pandemic and navigating an increased demand for mental health services, a demand that was already growing before 2020. The Institute must also ensure it is an inclusive environment for a sizable population of neurodiverse students. This leader will continue to grow and support the Institutes' Counseling Center and education and training programs to direct students to helpful resources.

The AVPSL will also work with students, faculty, and divisional staff to promote an active yet safe social life for students, adhering to the Institute's regulations and California's legal requirements. It is imperative that this leader demonstrate a commitment to current compliance issues and best practices in Student Affairs and an understanding of student development theory.

Lead a talented team in a collaborative organization

The AVPSL leads the recruitment, management, and retention of Student Affairs staff. As an exceptional manager, this person will have exemplary organizational development skills and a track record of building and sustaining a culture of excellence, collaboration, inclusion, and innovation.

Like at most residential colleges, Student Affairs staff worked valiantly during the pandemic to develop and maintain connections with students. As students crave more engagement, mental health support, and intellectual guidance, Student Affairs is working creatively to foster and support more collaborative and enriching experiences for all Caltech students. As a unifier and community builder, the AVPSL will help Student Affairs staff and significant partners across campus understand their interconnected role in nurturing student success and thriving.

Be a highly visible advocate for students

The AVPSL will be highly visible, interacting openly and genuinely with students and rapidly developing relationships across campus. Caltech is an intimate community that requires the AVPSL to be

approachable to maintain trust and respect as the students' leading advocate. The students of Caltech are bright and energetic, have a wide range of interests, and are involved at all levels of campus, including athletics and identity-based organizations, groups, and activities. The AVPSL will be a student supporter, advocate, and adviser who finds meaning and satisfaction in facilitating student development. The AVPSL will advance and encourage collaboration and discourse across campus.

Support Caltech's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and assessment to achieve and sustain excellence

The AVPSL will embody Caltech's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and assessment both as a personal value and professional priority. They will provide leadership support to various committees related to Student Life initiatives and residential living policies (e.g., welcome week, living community event registration protocols). Additionally, as needed, the AVPSL will serve on committees related to bias response, DEI, and other Student Life and Institute initiatives. The AVPSL will elevate this commitment in their leadership and oversight of residential and community life, ensuring that student communities feel the Institute's commitment.

Enhance programs, events, and leadership development that reflect best practices in residence life

Along with campus partners, the AVPSL will execute a vision and strategy for leadership programming that contributes to a robust living-learning environment. They will provide direction and champion leadership programming for student leaders, ensuring a comprehensive living-learning environment that is enriching and vibrant for students, honoring House traditions, and working collaboratively with students and other House leadership to cultivate a welcoming, safe, and happy living community. The AVPSL will co-lead and implement large-scale programs) with campus partners.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Accordingly, the next AVPSL will bring many of the following professional qualifications, skills, experience, and personal qualities to the position:

- At least seven years of senior-level student affairs administrative experience in a research-intensive postsecondary institution.
- Advanced degree in postsecondary administration, STEM, Student Affairs, or related field is required.
- A passionate commitment to the education, development, and empowerment of young people, the ability to set boundaries without being rigid, and the ability to be a strong student advocate and compassionate mentor who demonstrates a willingness to spend time supporting student activities and interests.

- Excellent leadership skills; must be a hands-on manager who is effective in professional development, community building, strategic planning, goal setting, negotiation, and financial management, and has the ability to conceptualize, articulate, and implement a vision for Caltech that is consistent with the Institute's mission and culture.
- An understanding of, appreciation for, and commitment to the mission of a residential research-intensive STEM institution. Sensitivity to the roles that different constituencies play in the implementation of the Institute's mission and a strong level of comfort in working with each. This includes deep understanding and respect for faculty and student governance.
- Demonstrated knowledge of legal and compliance matters related to postsecondary administration required.
- Good political acumen with a strong sense of how and when to engage the participation of different constituencies.
- Excellent listening skills, approachable, optimistic, intellectually curious, with personal warmth, generosity of spirit, a can-do attitude, strong resilience, and a good sense of humor.
- Confident, flexible, creative, and willing to take risks and pilot and evaluate new programs.

COMPENSATION RANGE: \$310,000 - \$330,000 annual

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/california-institute-technology/associate-vice-president-student-life>. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

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Caltech is an equal employment opportunity and affirmative action employer and will, whenever possible, actively recruit and include for employment members of underrepresented minority groups, females, disabled veterans, other eligible veterans, and otherwise qualified persons with disabilities. Caltech will hire, transfer, and promote based on the qualifications of the individual to ensure equal consideration and fair treatment of all.