

**Southwestern University  
Vice President  
for Finance and Administration**

Position Profile  
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## ***The Opportunity***

[Southwestern University](#), a preeminent independent liberal arts University in Texas founded in 1840 and ranked number 83 in the [2025 U.S. News & World Report best liberal arts colleges list](#) and number 2 among liberal arts schools in Texas, is starting a national search for its next Vice President for Finance and Administration (VPFA). Southwestern has 1358 students, a budget of \$74M and an endowment of \$377M. Reporting directly to the President and a key member of the Cabinet, the VPFA is the chief financial and administrative officer of the University, providing strategic guidance and recommendations on both strategy and operations to the President, the senior staff, and the Board of Trustees in aligning, setting, and achieving the mission, goals and objectives of the University. The VPFA exercises management and administrative direction over all finance and business operations, facilities and real estate development, human resources, public safety, and technology. The VPFA must be willing and able to get into the weeds as well as manage these areas. The VP serves (or assigns designees to serve) as administrative liaison to various committees of the Board of Trustees including Fiscal Affairs, Audit, Compensation, Facilities Planning, and Investment.

## ***Southwestern University***

As a selective, independent national liberal arts university founded in 1840, the first University in Texas, Southwestern prides itself on providing its students with distinctive, high-impact learning experiences designed to foster intellectual and personal growth. The University enjoys a reputation for academic excellence and for a distinctive curriculum and cocurricular experience that encourages students to make connections through a special focus on incorporating perspectives from multiple disciplines and experiences. Southwestern is included in [The Princeton Review's 2025 Best 390 Colleges Guide](#) and is recognized as #2 in the nation and #1 in Texas for Best Career Services. This achievement is reflected in the success of our graduates, with 95% employed or enrolled in graduate school within 10 months of graduation and a remarkable 100% acceptance rate for students who applied to medical school in 2023. Further accolades include being named a 2024–2025 College of Distinction, a recognition that underscores Southwestern's dedication to hands-on learning, strong student-faculty relationships, and outstanding student outcomes.

The University is guided by its [Core Purpose, Mission, and Core Values](#): fostering a liberal arts community whose values and actions encourage contributions toward the well-being of humanity. Southwestern maintains a historical affiliation with the United Methodist Church. However, trustees are nominated by the SU Board of Trustees, and neither the University nor any of its assets are owned or controlled by the United Methodist Church.



## Leadership - Dr. Laura Skandera Trombley



Dr. Laura Skandera Trombley is the visionary 16th President of Southwestern University and its first female President. In her inaugural year she led the development of a five-year tactical plan that has already resulted in many key improvements on campus ranging from student recruitment, advising, and retention to major upgrades in student recreational, dining, and housing amenities. She also led the development of a master plan that is transforming the campus with multiple enhancements to the built environment.

She led the University in a successful \$80 million bond issuance that is helping to fund more than \$120 million in improvements to the campus, including two new mixed-use residence halls, a new welcome center, a new mixed-use athletics complex, and a major remodeling of historic Mood-Bridwell Hall. She is also leading the University in developing a one-of-a-kind liberal arts community on more than 500 acres of land adjacent to the SU campus. During the past two years Dr. Trombley has welcomed two of SU's largest-ever incoming classes, while graduates from 2022 reported that 98% of them were employed, in graduate school, or volunteering. Under her leadership SU has also seen its rank rise dramatically among the best liberal arts institutions in the nation, while also being recognized as a top school for advancing the social mobility of recent graduates and serving the most economically diverse student body in the state of Texas.

Prior to joining Southwestern Dr. Trombley served as the President of the University of Bridgeport. Under her leadership *U.S. News & World Report* ranked the University of Bridgeport for the first time among the top 381 national universities. She is also President Emerita of Pitzer College, where she served for 13 years, and The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Previously, she served as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

A tenured professor in SU's Department of English, Dr. Trombley is the author of five books and is widely recognized as one of the most distinguished Mark Twain scholars in the world. A recipient of many awards for her scholarship, Dr. Trombley was recognized by *The Mark Twain Journal* as a legacy scholar in 2019 for her efforts in rehabilitating the intellectual reputations of the women who surrounded Mark Twain. In 2017 she won the Louis J. Budd Award for her contributions to Mark Twain studies.

Dr. Trombley graduated summa cum laude with a Master of Arts in English from Pepperdine University. She received her doctorate in English from the University of Southern California.

## Mission

Southwestern University is committed to undergraduate liberal education involving both the study of and participation in significant aspects of our cultural heritage, expressed primarily through the arts, the sciences, the institutions, and the professions of society. As a teaching-learning community, Southwestern encourages rigorous inquiry and scholarship, creative teaching, and the expression of free human life. The University seeks to involve the student in finding a personal and social direction for life, developing more sensitive methods of communication, cultivating those qualities and skills that make for personal and professional effectiveness, and

learning to think clearly and make relevant judgments and discriminations.

## Core Values

- Cultivating academic excellence.
- Promoting lifelong learning and a passion for intellectual and personal growth.
- Fostering diverse perspectives.
- Being true to oneself and others.
- Respecting the worth and dignity of persons.
- Encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good.

## Academics and Faculty



Southwestern University includes the Brown College of Arts and Sciences, the Garey School of Natural Sciences, and the Sarofim School of Fine Arts. It is proud to have chapters of the Phi Beta Kappa and Alpha Chi honor societies and the Omicron Delta Kappa national leadership honor society. All tenured or tenure-track faculty hold a doctorate or the highest degree in their respective fields. With a student-to-faculty ratio of 11:1 and an average class size of 16, student-faculty collaborative research and publications are common. The Southwestern faculty numbers 117 full-time members and 40 part-time faculty. The faculty are talented teacher-scholars who are committed to creating a learning environment that is focused on preparing students to succeed in an ever-changing and dynamic society.

The University offers the following degrees: Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science in Education, Bachelor of Music, and Bachelor of Fine Arts. The University does not offer graduate degrees. Its largest majors are Business, Kinesiology, and Psychology but the University has many other [majors and minors](#). The [Paideia](#) program, which is integral to the SU experience, is an interdisciplinary approach to education designed to develop the intellectual practice of identifying connections between the fundamental questions and ideas that shape our world.

A major emphasis encourages students to venture off campus to participate in several types of learning experiences. Nearly one-third of students [study abroad](#). A London experience is available each fall, along with summer programs in locations such as Argentina, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Perú, and Spain. SU students have access to universities around the world through the International Student Exchange Program. In addition, Southwestern offers opportunities for semesters in New York City (arts) and Washington, DC (politics), as well as internships, both domestic and abroad.

## Enrollment

The University currently has an enrollment of 1358 students, all of whom are undergraduates. Over the last few years, the University has recruited the most diverse and academically talented classes in its history. Approximately 39% of the fall 2024 incoming class are from underrepresented groups, 30% of whom are Hispanic and 27% receive Pell grants. Fifty-six percent of the students are female, 87% are from Texas while the remainder come from 33 states and 16 countries. For the class of 2024, the University accepted 43% of its applicants and had a yield of 14%. 72% of its students live on-campus. SU has a first to second year retention rate of 81%, a four-year graduation rate of 60% and a six-year graduation rate of 73%.

## Student Life and Athletics

The University has more than 60 student organizations offering a broad range of activities. It offers a variety of student residences and has four fraternities and six sororities.

[Southwestern's student-athletes](#) (*Go, Pirates!*) compete in NCAA Division III basketball, cross-country, golf, lacrosse, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, and track and field for men and women; men's baseball and football; and women's softball and volleyball. Southwestern teams are members of the Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference (SCAC), along with Austin College, Centenary College, Colorado College, University of Dallas, Johnson & Wales, St. Thomas, Schreiner University, Texas Lutheran University, and Trinity University. The football team and the men's lacrosse team are affiliate members of the Southern Athletic Association, whose core members include Berry College, Centre College, Hendrix College, Millsaps College, Oglethorpe University, Rhodes College, and the University of the South. For those looking for less official (but still competitive) activities to choose from, there are 22 [intramural sports](#) and two club sports: SU Cheerleaders and SU Dancers. Southwestern also offers an Outdoor Adventure program that involves students in activities ranging from caving and mountain climbing to kayaking and paddleboarding. The program's reach is international, as it took a group of students to Mt. Kilimanjaro in January 2024.



## The Campus and its Facilities

Situated on the northern edge of the Austin metro on 701 beautiful Central Texas acres, Southwestern is ranked the largest landowner of all private higher education institutions in Texas. As *Princeton Review's* number one university in Texas for green colleges, Southwestern cares for the land through sustainable practices, including LEED Gold-rated buildings, a campus

powered by 100% renewable energy, and athletic fields nourished by recycled water. SU is a signatory to the [College and University Presidents Climate Commitment](#).

Look around the Southwestern campus, and you'll see building activity everywhere, with more than \$120 million worth of projects underway. Historic Mood-Bridwell Hall is undergoing a \$19 million renovation that will bring this landmark building into the 21st century while honoring its colorful past. The McCombs Campus Center has a new look top-to-bottom, with remodeled ballrooms, a refurbished Bishop's Lounge, and the remarkable transformation of the Servedy and Commons, where the food-service provider Aramark has invested more than \$3 million to make these spaces more functional and inviting. Last summer, a new campus store opened on the first floor of McCombs. The A. Frank Smith Library Center also saw renovations, enhancing Distinctive Collections and creating a Learning Commons for centralized academic tutoring. Additionally, construction has begun on two new residence halls and a welcome center, with plans for a new multipurpose athletics facility and stadium nearing completion. Despite all of this construction and renovation, the campus has significant deferred maintenance issues.

Also underway is the *Southwestern University 560* development, a physical embodiment of liberal arts values, bringing to life the principles of connection, human development, and creativity through art, design, programming, and a pedagogical approach infused into every aspect of its planning. Encompassing 560 acres contiguous to the main campus, this development reflects Southwestern's commitment to enhancing quality of life while fostering experiential and lifelong learning opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and neighbors.

The *Southwestern University 560* solidifies Southwestern's standing as a national leader in higher education and intentional development. This legacy project is designed to: establish a sustainable, living and learning community; foster business innovation and economic development; create a vibrant destination celebrating the culture of the liberal arts; support the visual and performing arts; and, elevate Southwestern's national brand and identity.

Through environmentally and economically sustainable housing, retail, industry, and green spaces, the [Southwestern University 560](#) meets the challenges of rapid urbanization in Central Texas with strong values to guide its actions. This is a place where creative synthesis and bold ideas will drive a new kind of growth—one that leaves a lasting impact for generations to come.

## **Finance and Fundraising**

Southwestern has had several years of balanced budgets. The [endowment](#), as of the end of the Fiscal Year 2024, was \$377 million. The FY 2024 operating budget was \$74 million. Student revenues accounted for 58% of its total revenues with endowment income accounting for 21% and gifts 11%. SU raised \$13.8M in FY 2024 of which \$4.7M was for the annual fund. The FY 2025 goal is \$11.1M with \$2.5M for the annual fund. The University has \$105M in debt and has been taking an endowment draw slightly above 5% in recent years. Moody's has given the University an A3 rating.

For 2024–2025, student tuition and fees totaled \$53,288. The average room rate is \$8,276, and meal plans average \$6,796. The University's tuition discount rate is 58%. Almost every Southwestern student receives some institutional grant aid.

Southwestern University hosted the public launch of [\*THRIVE: The Campaign for Southwestern University\*](#) in April 2023 and announced \$12 million committed toward the \$150 million goal. The past Fall, we successfully reached our goal and plan to celebrate this Fall. The campaign's focus on student success includes significant philanthropic investments in financial aid, high-impact experiences, academic advising, career and professional development, and enhancing co-curricular experiences. The emphasis on academic excellence inspires support for faculty positions, faculty development/scholarship/creative works, and academic departments/programs. The physical campus is being transformed through support for the renovation of Mood-Bridwell Hall, upgrades to several athletic facilities, and the construction of a new Welcome Center, a first-year residence hall, and a sophomore residence hall. Lastly, contributions to the Southwestern Annual Fund and various current-use restricted gift accounts are elevating the Southwestern experience for all students.



Video | THRIVE: A Campaign for Southwestern University

A major factor in strengthening the financial picture of the University is fundraising. In recent years, it has been at an all-time high. At this point, the campaign has funded 12 newly named chairs and professorships that have been awarded to Southwestern faculty, hundreds of new scholarships and high impact experiences for students, a substantial expansion to the Center for Career and Professional Development, philanthropic funding for the Residential Life Experience, and multiple capital renovation projects across campus.

Not included in the campaign total is an additional cash gift of \$15 million to the endowment to support academic programming, financial aid, and other priorities, including funding to underwrite high-impact experiences for 32 Garey Scholars; up to eight annual mid-cycle sabbatical semesters for tenured faculty; need-based financial assistance for students; and five endowed chairs in the natural sciences.

## Georgetown, Texas

Located in [Georgetown, Texas](#) the [fastest growing city in America](#), Southwestern University provides the best of both worlds: a historic campus in a picturesque town with convenient access to all the city of [Austin](#) has to offer. Voted the most beautiful town square in Texas, Georgetown has a population of 90,000 and its city center is within walking distance of the campus, as are beautiful and safe walking trails along the San Gabriel River. SU is surrounded by major companies like Apple, Google, Samsung, Dell, and Tesla. This prime location integrates Southwestern into a vibrant marketplace, redefining the liberal arts for the 21st century. Georgetown is just a 35-minute drive from Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, which



offers nonstop service to many major U.S. and international cities. The Austin metro area also boasts a thriving creative community of musicians, filmmakers, and designers, and hosts renowned events like [Austin City Limits](#) and [South by Southwest](#), a festival celebrating film, music, and interactive media.

Georgetown's location along I-35 is a major draw for businesses that rely on access to major U.S. highways for distribution and transportation. Not to mention, Georgetown is located within [200 miles of Houston, the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and San Antonio](#), making Texas's major cities highly accessible in all directions.

### ***The Position – Vice President for Finance and Administration***

Reporting directly to the President and a key member of the Cabinet, the VPFA is the chief financial and administrative officer of the University, providing strategic guidance and recommendations on both strategy and operations to the President, the senior staff, and the Board of Trustees in aligning, setting, and achieving the mission, goals and objectives of the University. The VPFA serves as the Chief Financial Officer of the University, providing executive level direction and guidance to the President of the University and to the Board of Trustees. The VPFA exercises management and administrative direction over all the finance and business operations, facilities and real estate development, human resources, public safety, and technology. The Vice President must be willing and able to get into the weeds as well as manage these areas. The VP serves (or assigns a designee to serve) as administrative liaison to various committees of the Board of Trustees including Fiscal Affairs, Audit, Compensation, Facilities Planning, and Investment.

The VPFA has a substantial impact on the success of the University by developing strategies for balancing the operating and capital budgets, assessing the return on investment of various initiatives, managing funding issues, containing costs, investing and maximizing endowment funds, planning for the resource needs of technology, finance, facilities and capital projects, and collaborating with the VPs of Institutional Advancement and Enrollment Management to maximize revenues.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

#### **Develop a Budget Process and Budget Models**

The new VPFA must develop a budget process which is inclusive and allows budget owners to access their data and be held accountable. The Vice President must develop budget models and provide budget projections and robust forecasting tools to evaluate various scenarios moving forward over the next three to five years which provide appropriate information for the President and the Board of Trustees to assess different strategies.

#### **Develop a Plan to Fund the University's Deferred Maintenance and Improve Facilities Operations**

The VPFA must develop a plan to eliminate the extensive deferred maintenance that the University has while maintaining balanced budgets. The VP must get a team in place that can provide the appropriate oversight of all the projects while handling the day-to-day facility needs in a way that is responsive to and meets the needs of the campus users.



### **Ensure Efficient, Cost-Effective Operations of the University**

The VPFA must assess all of the University's systems and processes to see where improvements can be made to increase productivity and service in a cost-effective manner. The VP should work collaboratively to make these changes with appropriate colleagues many of which will require improvements in the use of technology including improvements to the current ERP system and the chart of accounts. Many of the paper processes which exist should be eliminated. This will require someone who is adept at change management as many of the University's systems and processes have been in place for a long time and there is likely to be resistance to change.

### **Implement SU560**

The VPFA must work with the President to implement the vision of SU 560. This will include developing the appropriate partners and funding model to support the University in a manner consistent with its mission.

### **Develop a Team**

The VPFA should work with their staff to develop a strong and supportive team in the division. Siloes should be eliminated and staff should be mentored and developed.

### **Establish Trust and Communicate Effectively with the Campus**

The VPFA must be able to gain the trust of the board and the campus by communicating accurately, clearly and effectively with all constituencies about finance, facility, and technology issues. They must be able to educate the campus about the implications of various alternative strategies in a clear and transparent manner which promotes understanding and support for the University's direction and gains faculty and staff understanding and support for the decisions that are made.

### **Increase Existing Revenue and Develop New Sources of Revenue**

The VP should partner with the VP for Strategic Recruitment and Enrollment to maximize net tuition revenue; with the VP of Student Life to facilitate increasing the net revenue provided by auxiliaries and other programs, and with the VP for University Relations to help in fundraising activities. The VPFA needs to partner with the VP for Academic Affairs to provide the appropriate incentives and infrastructure for faculty and staff to develop new programs which can provide the University with additional revenue. The VPFA needs to be strategic and explore all avenues to make the University fiscally strong. The VP needs to have an entrepreneurial spirit and explore new partnerships with University leaders. They need to be able to assess the return on investment of various alternative opportunities and be willing to take measured risks and to negotiate complex deals.

### **Qualifications and Characteristics of Successful Candidates**

The Vice President for Finance and Administration needs to be a very competent financial person who has experience with real estate development, major construction projects, debt financing and complex negotiations. They need to understand accounting, GAAP financials and ERP systems. They should be a leader who is collaborative and entrepreneurial and is adept at change management. They must be able to say no when appropriate and they must have a thick skin, strong spine, and be a good manager/mentor to build their own team. They need to be able

to delegate and be able to work in an ambiguous environment; they must be willing to take some risk. The VPFA needs to be able to adapt to changing priorities; be able to make decisions fairly quickly and be open to changing course if necessary. They should be a good listener and be direct and honest.

The successful candidate will demonstrate unquestioned integrity, be an outstanding communicator, a strategic thinker and possess strong and effective interpersonal skills that engender trust and cultivate collaboration. They will be respectful of others, will value diversity and inclusion and will have a positive attitude. The new VPFA will be an exceptional financial and administrative leader with superior analytical and management skills and a willingness to explore new and creative opportunities for ensuring the University's financial health. The successful candidate will be an excellent manager, be adept at managing multiple priorities simultaneously, be willing to think outside the box and take prudent risks. The new VPFA must possess a keen understanding of the higher education landscape and the challenges it is currently facing. The new VPFA will be able to understand and negotiate complex financial transactions and have the ability to achieve goals using influence and negotiation skills. The successful candidate will have the fortitude to make difficult choices when necessary and the ability to convey decisions with clarity. They will be involved in the appropriate professional organizations.

The new VPFA will be knowledgeable about the critical areas in the portfolio and will have experience working with boards of trustees. They will have at least ten years of progressively increasing experience in finance, facilities and administration and in managing a large staff with diverse responsibilities with at least some of the experience in higher education. A bachelor's degree is required, and an MBA or other advanced degree is preferred.

### **Nomination and Application Process**

Nominations and applications are invited for this position. Review of applications will begin immediately, and candidate material received by March 31, 2025 will be assured full consideration although recruitment will continue until an appointment is announced. Applications (including a cover letter and resume) must be uploaded to: <http://lapovsky.hiringthing.com>. Lapovsky Consulting is assisting Southwestern University in this search. For nominations, questions, or additional information, please contact:

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