

Associate Vice President for Reputation Strategy

Leadership Profile

Summer 2026



Executive Summary

The University of Alabama seeks an experienced, strategic and collaborative leader to serve as the next Associate Vice President for Reputation Strategy (AVP). The Associate Vice President for Reputation Strategy is responsible for protecting, strengthening, and advancing the institution's image and reputation.

The University of Alabama, part of The University of Alabama System, is located in the city of [Tuscaloosa](#) and is one of the nation's premier public universities, offering bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in more than 200 fields of study. UA's more than 1,000 acres of tree-lined pathways and state-of-the-art facilities are a source of inspiration for students, faculty and staff. UA is among the nation's fastest-growing flagship universities with more than 42,000 undergraduate, graduate and professional students. The Carnegie Foundation lists The University of Alabama as an R1 institution, placing it among the top doctoral research universities in the United States. UA employs more than 2,100 faculty and was recognized by Forbes magazine as one of America's Best-in-State Employers and Best Employers for New Graduates. Faculty members work closely with students, and many involve students at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels in basic and applied research. More details about the University, the campus environment, and vibrant community culture are available through the [UA Opportunity Profile](#).

The AVP will provide strategic oversight of issues management, crisis communications, and reputational risk. Working closely with leaders across the Division of Strategic Communications, this role will help shape narratives that advance institutional priorities, values, and long-term strategy. The AVP will partner with senior communications leaders and executive leadership to anticipate challenges, guide decision-making, and ensure coordinated, timely, and effective communications in high-stakes environments.

The AVP reports to the Vice President for Strategic Communications and works closely with the President, Legal, Government Relations, System leadership, and key members of the executive team. This role supervises the public relations strategist focused on issues management and the communications specialist responsible for open records, while also collaborating closely with senior leaders across the Division of Strategic Communications.

The successful candidate will bring demonstrated experience advising executive leadership in high-pressure, high-visibility, and high-impact situations, with a proven ability to lead cross-functional teams and manage sensitive, confidential matters with sound judgment and discretion. Prior management or supervisory experience is essential, along with exceptional strategic thinking, writing, and verbal communication skills. The AVP will exercise strong judgment in crisis leadership, leading with calm executive presence and credibility while navigating complex political dynamics through collaboration and influence across the organization.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy at the end of this document.

Role of the AVP for Reputation Strategy

The Associate Vice President for Reputation Strategy is responsible for shaping, advancing, and protecting the university's identity as a leading public research institution. Reporting to the Vice President for Strategic Communications and serving as a key member of the division's senior leadership team, the AVP will bring an enterprise-wide perspective to communications and engagement across UA's campus and close coordination with the UA System.

This is a defining moment for UA. With a new president and strong institutional momentum, the AVP will demonstrate sound judgment in crisis situations, bringing a calm, credible executive presence while navigating complex political dynamics through collaboration and influence across the organization.

The role demands a leader who can operate simultaneously as strategist, manager, advisor, and communicator – someone who can align decentralized teams, navigate a highly visible and politically complex environment, and translate institutional priorities into compelling narratives that resonate with all audiences. At its core, this is a reputation management and collaborative storytelling role: one that requires vision, diplomatic dexterity, and disciplined execution.

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

The AVP will bring deep experience handling sensitive, high-stakes issues within a complex higher education environment and a major institutional brand. This role requires hands-on expertise in public relations, crisis communications, and navigating political and media dynamics, with the credibility and confidence to advise senior leadership in moments of heightened visibility and risk.

As a trusted advisor, the AVP will work closely with the President, Vice Presidents, General Counsel, Provost, Deans, and other senior leaders, as well as UA System representatives, ensuring communications strategies are thoughtfully developed, clearly articulated, and aligned with institutional priorities. This leader will be an integrated member of the senior leadership team during issue management, offering sound counsel, presenting alternative perspectives when appropriate, and helping guide decision-making through complex and often rapidly evolving situations.

The AVP must be equally comfortable operating at both the strategic and executing levels, personally crafting messages, editing materials, and working directly with team members while also setting direction and overseeing broader communications strategy. This role supervises key staff supporting issues management and open records and collaborates closely with senior colleagues across the Division of Strategic Communications.

Responsiveness and availability are critical, as issues can arise at any time. The AVP is expected to be proactive, closely monitoring emerging issues, media coverage, and social media discourse to anticipate challenges before they escalate. This leader will help prepare faculty, staff, and institutional leaders with care and empathy, particularly in politically charged or sensitive situations.

Success in this role requires a leader who brings calm executive presence, sound judgment, and resilience in a high-stress environment. The AVP must demonstrate the ability to build trust and credibility up, down, and across the organization; manage confidential matters with discretion; and develop strong relationships at the campus and system levels. While confident in offering candid counsel and pushing back, when necessary, this leader will do so with humility, respect for institutional context, and a commitment to supporting final decisions once made.

At their core, the AVP will be a highly collaborative, team-oriented leader who values clear (and often over-)communication, strong relationships, and shared problem-solving. This role calls for someone who is comfortable

picking up the phone, sitting down with leaders, asking difficult questions, and bringing together diverse viewpoints to shape communications strategies that serve the institution with integrity, clarity, and purpose.

Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

UA seeks a seasoned, strategic communications leader with the experience, judgment, and presence to operate at the highest levels of a complex public research university.

Required Qualifications: The AVP will at minimum have a bachelor's degree in communications, public relations, journalism, strategic communications, or related field, with 15 years of progressive senior-level experience in strategic communications, reputation management, crisis communications, or issues management. Or, this leader will have master's degree in communications, public relations, journalism, strategic communications, or related field and 13 years of progressive senior-level experience in strategic communications, reputation management, crisis communications, or issues management.

Preferred Qualifications: Advanced degree in communications, public administration, higher education leadership, or a related field. Experience in higher education, healthcare, government, or another highly regulated, mission-driven environment. Deep familiarity with media relations, public affairs, and stakeholder engagement in crisis contexts.

The ideal candidate will bring the following skills and strengths:

- **Strategic and Visionary Leadership:** Excels at shaping and expressing a distinctive value proposition, aligning stakeholders around a shared narrative that strengthens market positioning, clarifies identity, and advances institutional reputation.
- **Enterprise Mindset:** Thinks and operates beyond silos, demonstrating the capacity to operate in a decentralized organization to manage reputational issues while advancing the interests of the entire university.
- **Executive Presence and Leadership Gravitas:** Possesses the experience, confidence, and judgment to engage effectively with senior leadership, board members, government officials, and external stakeholders, serving as a trusted advisor at the highest levels of the institution.
- **Reputation and Brand Strategist:** Demonstrates a proven ability to build, position, and protect a complex institutional brand, leveraging academic excellence, research strength, athletics, and public mission to address reputational risk while understanding the institution's visibility, affinity, and national standing.
- **Exceptional Storyteller and Communicator:** Translates complex institutional decisions and priorities into clear, compelling narratives that resonate with important audiences, while equipping internal leaders, particularly faculty and academic units, to communicate their impact effectively.
- **Crisis Leadership and Resilience:** Brings deep experience managing communications in high-pressure, high-visibility environments, with the ability to anticipate, navigate, and respond to ongoing critical incidents with composure, speed, and strategic clarity.
- **Politically Astute and Contextually Intelligent:** Understands the nuances of operating within a public institution in a complex political environment, demonstrating keen awareness of state and local dynamics while maintaining institutional integrity and nonpartisan credibility.
- **Collaborative Coalition Builder:** Excels at building trust across diverse constituencies, including the President, Vice Presidents, Deans, faculty, staff, and the UA System, while aligning priorities and decision-making while fostering a culture of partnership and collaboration.

- **Data-Informed and Digitally Fluent:** Leverages analytics, digital platforms, and emerging technologies to stay connected to inform strategy, measure outcomes, and continuously refine issues-related communications and marketing efforts in a rapidly evolving media landscape.
- **Diplomatic and Decisive:** Comfortable making difficult decisions, setting direction, and representing the institution while balancing frankness with diplomacy and respect for institutional culture.
- **Adaptable and Agile:** Thrives in dynamic environments marked by change, ambiguity, and competing priorities, demonstrating flexibility, responsiveness, and the ability to lead effectively through transition.
- **Authentic and Trust-Building:** Leads with transparency, consistency, and genuine care for the institution and its people, fostering credibility and strengthening relationships across the UA community.
- **Grounded in Public Mission:** Exhibits a deep appreciation and enthusiasm for the mission of a flagship public research university and is motivated by the opportunity to advance UA's role as a force for the public good.

Procedure for Candidacy

For more information about The University of Alabama and Tuscaloosa please visit the University's [Opportunity Profile](#)

All applications, nominations and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV or resume and a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile.

WittKieffer is assisting The University of Alabama in this search. The position will remain open until an appointment is made.

Application materials should be submitted using WittKieffer's [candidate portal](#).

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

Jenna Brumleve and Mercedes Chacón Vance

UA-AVPRS@wittkieffer.com

The University of Alabama is an Equal Employment/Equal Educational Opportunity Institution. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, genetic information, disability, or protected veteran status, and will not be discriminated against because of their protected status. Applicants to and employees of this institution are protected under Federal law from discrimination on several bases.