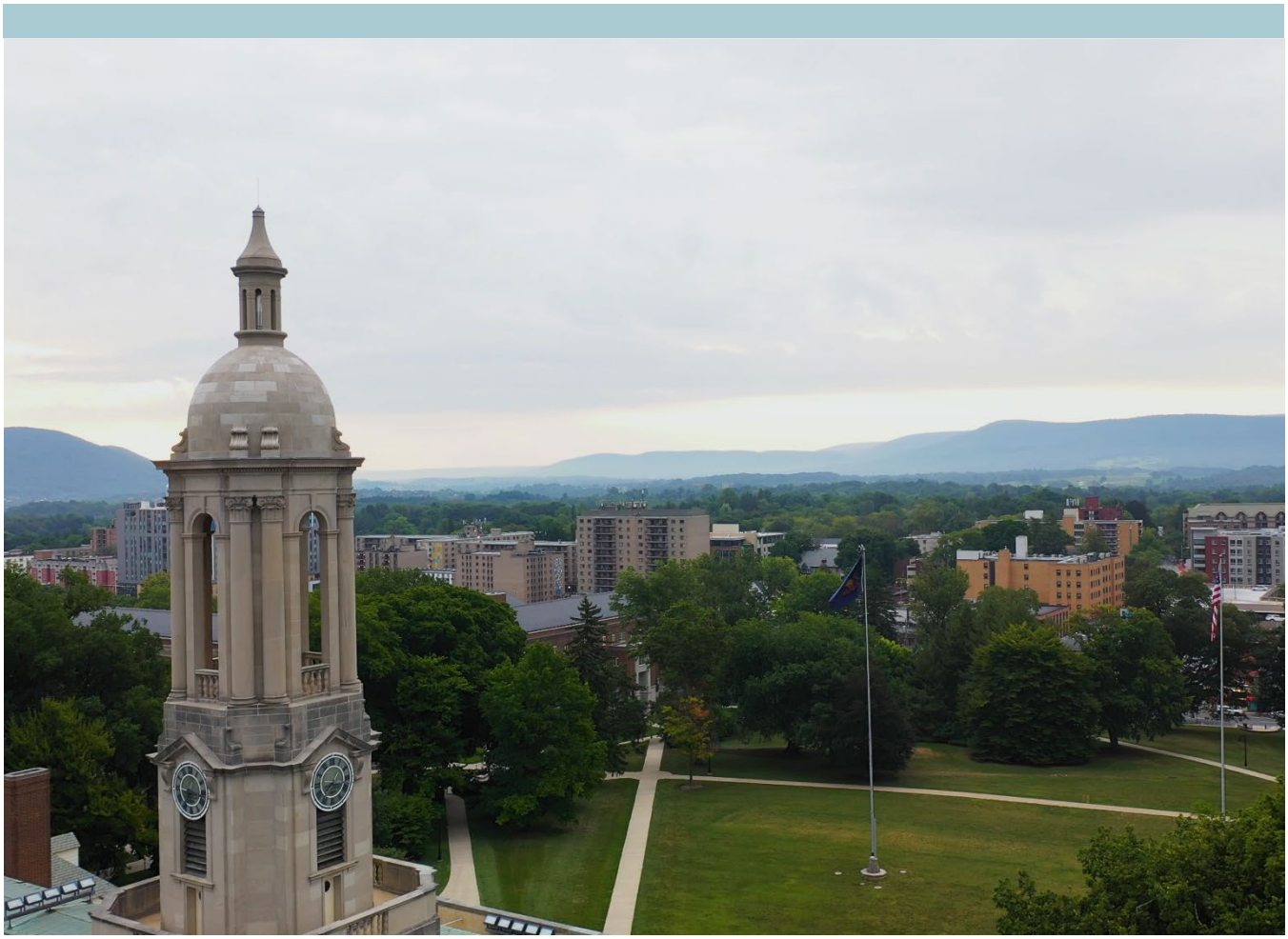
PennState

Senior Vice Provost for Student Success

Leadership Profile

Fall 2026



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Executive Summary

Penn State seeks a visionary, collaborative, and results-oriented leader to serve as its inaugural Senior Vice Provost for Student Success (SVPSS).

Founded in 1855, Penn State fulfills its land-grant mission through teaching, research, and public service that benefit the citizens of Pennsylvania. In partnership with industry, education, government, and agriculture, the University leads in research, learning, and engagement—driving innovation, inclusion, sustainability, and global impact. Under President Neeli Bendapudi's leadership, Penn State operates as a comprehensive, global institution with a university-wide budget of approximately $11.1 billion, a $5.2 billion endowment, and 33 million square feet of infrastructure spanning more than 2,100 buildings—including housing, utilities, and public safety services. As Pennsylvania's largest non-governmental employer, Penn State has a presence in all 67 counties. With more than 86,000 students across multiple campuses and its top-ranked World Campus, Penn State is a digitally advanced, geographically distributed university. Its research expenditures have steadily grown, fueling innovation and economic development. Recognized by the Carnegie Foundation as a top-tier research university, Penn State prepares globally minded leaders.

This newly created position represents a transformative opportunity to shape the future of student success at Penn State. Reporting directly to Executive Vice President and Provost Fotis Sotiropoulos, the SVPSS will serve as the University's chief strategist for student success, responsible for advancing a comprehensive, institution-wide vision that enhances student persistence, retention, graduation, career readiness, experiential learning, and post-graduate success, while also preparing students for civic engagement. The SVPSS will provide leadership for key student success functions while collaborating closely with leaders across academic and administrative units, the Commonwealth campuses, and the colleges to create a more integrated and effective student success ecosystem. The SVPSS will lead the new Office for Student Success, a central coordinating hub that will bring together existing and new student success functions.

At a pivotal moment in the University's evolution, Penn State is making student success a strategic institutional priority and seeks to become a national model for student success at scale. Serving one of the nation's largest and most complex student populations across the University Park campus, the Commonwealth campuses, and World Campus, the University is creating this role to develop a more coordinated, data-informed, and outcomes-oriented approach to supporting student achievement and flourishing. The SVPSS will lead the development and implementation of a comprehensive, university-wide student success strategy, establish a shared framework and measurable goals, strengthen accountability for student outcomes, and foster deeper collaboration among key partners. That framework will emphasize on-time graduation, education for democracy and civic engagement, and structured academic pathways that give students clearer routes to degree completion. By aligning efforts across organizational and geographic boundaries while honoring the unique strengths of Penn State's campuses and colleges, the SVPSS will help ensure that all students have equitable access to the resources, experiences, and opportunities necessary to succeed academically, personally, and professionally.

The successful candidate will be a highly visible and influential leader with a demonstrated record of driving meaningful change in complex organizations. Possessing a deep commitment to students and an appreciation for the unique opportunities and challenges of a multi-campus, land-grant institution, the SVPSS will bring strategic vision, strong relationship-building skills, and a demonstrated ability to translate ambitious goals into measurable outcomes. This role offers a rare opportunity to shape a newly created leadership position, influence the future of higher education at one of the nation's premier public universities, and make a lasting impact on the lives and success of generations of Penn State students.

While the position is open to candidates from a variety of professional backgrounds, Penn State is open to considering a tenured faculty appointment for candidates whose academic credentials, scholarly accomplishments, and experience support such an appointment, consistent with university policies.

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

Role of the Senior Vice Provost for Student Success

Reporting directly to the Executive Vice President and Provost, the Senior Vice Provost for Student Success (SVPSS) will serve as Penn State's chief strategist for student success, providing visionary leadership for a comprehensive, institution-wide effort to improve student persistence, retention, graduation, career readiness, post-graduate success, as well as preparation for civic engagement. Created as a cornerstone of the University's commitment to student achievement and flourishing, this inaugural role will be responsible for advancing a coordinated, data-informed, and outcomes-focused student success ecosystem that spans Penn State's academic, co-curricular, and support environments. The SVPSS will lead a new Office for Student Success, which will serve as the central coordinating hub for existing and new student success functions and oversee an integrated portfolio spanning enrollment through graduation. The office, which is still being fully constituted, will bring together units from across Penn State and is projected to have a budget of approximately $20 million.

As a senior member of the Provost’s leadership team, the SVPSS will be charged with transforming a collection of strong and longstanding student success initiatives into a more integrated, coordinated, and scalable enterprise. Serving as a trusted adviser to vice presidents, vice provosts, chancellors, deans, academic and faculty leaders, and staff across the University, this leader will establish institution-wide goals and accountability measures; align strategy, policy, and practice; develop a more cohesive student success infrastructure; and champion the use of data, analytics, and emerging technologies to support proactive decision-making and improve student outcomes.

Penn State's scale, complexity, and land-grant mission present both extraordinary opportunities and unique challenges. The SVPSS will serve as a connector, convener, and catalyst, bringing together diverse stakeholders across a distributed, multi-campus institution to create a more consistent and equitable student experience while respecting the distinctive needs of individual colleges, campuses, and undergraduate and graduate student populations. This leader will foster collaboration, strengthen communities of practice, and ensure that responsibility for student success remains a shared institutional commitment rather than the work of any single office or division.

The SVPSS will lead efforts to ensure that every Penn State student graduates with the knowledge, experiences, support, and opportunities needed to succeed in an increasingly complex and AI-enabled world. By advancing equitable outcomes, expanding access to experiential learning, strengthening advising and student support systems, and promoting a culture of accountability and continuous improvement, the SVPSS will play a central role in positioning Penn State as a national model for student success at scale.

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

Penn State has established student success as a strategic institutional priority and created this new role at a pivotal moment for the University. The Senior Vice Provost for Student Success (SVPSS) will have the opportunity to shape a coordinated, data-informed approach to student success, strengthen collaboration across the institution, and help position Penn State as a national leader in student outcomes and student flourishing.

The Senior Vice Provost for Student Success is expected to:

Define and Advance a University-Wide Student Success Strategy

The SVPSS will lead the development of a clear, institution-wide framework for student success that aligns the efforts of colleges, campuses, and administrative units around common goals and measurable outcomes. This leader will help Penn State establish a shared definition of student success that encompasses academic

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achievement, persistence, and on-time graduation, career readiness, and educating students for democracy and civic engagement.

Working closely with university leadership and stakeholders across the institution, the SVPSS will translate strategic priorities into actionable plans, establish meaningful benchmarks, and ensure that student success efforts move beyond aspirations to demonstrable results. Emphasis will be placed on improving retention and graduation outcomes, closing persistent equity gaps, and preparing students for success in a rapidly changing world.

Champion Success Across Penn State's Multi-Campus Community

As a land-grant institution with a distinctive multi-campus structure, Penn State serves students with varied backgrounds, aspirations, and educational pathways. The SVPSS will ensure that student success strategies reflect the diversity of student experiences across the Commonwealth and are informed by the needs of both University Park and the Commonwealth Campuses.

This leader will work to identify and address barriers that disproportionately affect specific student populations, support campus-specific innovation, and promote the sharing of effective practices throughout the institution. By balancing institution-wide goals with local flexibility, the SVPSS will help create a more consistent and equitable student experience while honoring the strengths and distinct missions of Penn State's campuses and academic communities.

Build a Connected Student Success Ecosystem

Penn State's size, complexity, and distributed structure present a unique opportunity to strengthen coordination across the many individuals and units that contribute to student success. The SVPSS will serve as a convener and connector, fostering collaboration among academic units, student affairs, the graduate school, enrollment management, financial aid, and other key partners.

A key priority will be strengthening the connections between student support services embedded within academic units and university-wide functions such as academic advising, career services, and enrollment management, ensuring that students experience coordinated guidance, consistent information, and seamless referrals across the institution.

This leader will help create an integrated network of support that clarifies roles, strengthens partnerships, and leverages expertise wherever it exists across the institution. The successful candidate will establish effective governance structures, communities of practice, and cross-functional partnerships that promote alignment while helping individual units address their specific challenges and enact unit-specific strategies.

Strengthen Data-Informed Decision Making and Accountability

The SVPSS will lead efforts to develop a more cohesive and actionable student success data strategy. Penn State possesses significant information and analytic capabilities across multiple systems with the opportunity to address stakeholder needs for greater integration, accessibility, and consistency in how data are used to support students and inform decision-making.

This leader will work collaboratively to establish common metrics, enhance the availability of timely and actionable data, and develop tools that allow faculty and staff to proactively identify and support students to mitigate equity gaps. A central priority will be getting useful data into the hands of colleges, campuses, academic units, programs, and faculty in ways that are accessible, relevant, and actionable. The SVPSS will also support the use of data to inform academic planning and help the University better align instructional offerings and student support with student needs and demand. Equally important, if not more so, the SVPSS will foster a culture of accountability and collaboration by helping individual units address their specific challenges and enact unit-specific strategies to measure progress, evaluate interventions, scale successful practices, and focus resources on strategies that demonstrably improve student outcomes.

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Enhance Navigation, Advising, and Student Support Systems

Students often encounter a complex network of resources, services, and processes as they navigate their Penn State experience. The SVPSS will lead efforts to create a more coordinated and student-centered support ecosystem that helps students access the right academic resources at the right time.

Working across advising, student support, financial aid, career development, and related areas, this leader will seek opportunities to improve communication, strengthen referral pathways, reduce barriers, and create more seamless student experiences. The SVPSS will also lead efforts to implement consistent advising standards and best practices across the University, ensuring that students receive high-quality, reliable, and appropriate guidance regardless of college, campus, or program. The SVPSS will also advance structured academic pathways that provide students with clearer routes to timely degree completion. Attention will be given to critical transition points, including the first year, campus-to-campus transitions, transfer pathways, and other moments that significantly influence student persistence and success.

Expand Access to High-Impact Learning and Career Readiness Opportunities

The SVPSS will partner with colleges, campuses, and academic and co-curricular units to broaden student participation in experiences that contribute to academic achievement, personal development, and post-graduate success. These opportunities may include internships, undergraduate research, global experiences, leadership development, service learning, and other high-impact educational practices.

The successful leader will work to identify successful models already emerging across Penn State and help scale them where appropriate, ensuring that students across locations, academic programs, and backgrounds have equitable access to, and benefit from, transformative opportunities. This effort will be closely connected to career readiness and the institution's commitment to preparing graduates for meaningful careers, engaged citizenship, and lifelong success.



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Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

Penn State seeks in its inaugural Senior Vice Provost for Student Success a visionary, collaborative, and results-oriented leader with many of the following professional qualifications, experiences, and personal characteristics. The University seeks candidates with substantial experience engaging the academic enterprise and advancing student success in close partnership with faculty, staff, and academic leadership. While the position is open to candidates from a variety of professional backgrounds, Penn State is open to considering a tenured faculty appointment for candidates whose academic credentials, scholarly accomplishments, and experience support such an appointment, consistent with university policies.

- **Leadership and Vision:** A strategic, highly respected leader with the intellectual breadth, credibility, and leadership presence to advance a bold vision for student success across one of the nation's largest and most complex public research universities. Demonstrated ability to lead transformative initiatives, inspire a shared sense of purpose, and unite diverse constituencies around common goals. A systems thinker who can articulate a compelling vision and translate strategy into measurable outcomes and sustained impact.

- **Commitment to Student Success:** A deep and authentic commitment to student achievement, access, belonging, and holistic development. Demonstrated success advancing initiatives that improve student persistence, retention, graduation rates, career readiness, and post-graduate outcomes. A clear understanding that student success is a shared institutional responsibility encompassing academic success, personal growth, experiential learning, well-being, and preparation for engaged citizenship.

- **Collaborative Leadership:** Exceptional ability to build partnerships and lead through influence in complex organizational environments. Experience working effectively across academic units, student affairs, enrollment management, colleges, campuses, and administrative units to foster alignment, build consensus, and advance shared priorities. A bridge builder who values diverse perspectives, develops trust quickly, and brings people together to accomplish ambitious goals while driving meaningful action.

- **Institutional Agility:** Experience navigating complex institutional environments, ideally within large, public, research-intensive, and/or multi-campus universities. Demonstrated ability to work across organizational boundaries, engage diverse stakeholders, and adapt strategies to varying student populations and campus contexts. An understanding of a land-grant institution and a broad-access mission is highly desirable.

- **Management and Organizational Leadership:** Demonstrated success leading complex organizations, large teams, and multifaceted portfolios. Experience building high-performing teams, developing talent, managing resources effectively, and creating cultures of accountability, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Ability to balance strategic leadership with operational excellence while navigating competing priorities and organizational complexity.

- **Strategic Planning:** Demonstrated ability to lead large-scale institutional change, establish clear priorities, and implement initiatives with measurable impact. Experience developing and executing strategic plans, managing change in complex environments, and moving organizations from vision to action. A record of delivering results while balancing institutional priorities and stakeholder interests is highly desirable.

- **Data Fluency and Analytical Capacity:** Demonstrated ability to leverage data, analytics, and evidence-based decision making to improve student outcomes and inform institutional strategy. Experience using key performance indicators, predictive analytics, and assessment tools to evaluate initiatives, identify opportunities, and support continuous improvement. Ability to translate complex data into actionable insights for diverse audiences. Familiarity with AI-enabled technologies is highly desirable.

- **Commitment to Equity, Access, and Belonging:** Demonstrated understanding of the importance of educational access, student belonging, and equitable outcomes. Experience supporting a wide range of student populations and addressing barriers to student success through institutional policy, practice, and collaboration.

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- **Personal Qualities:** An individual of integrity, authenticity, empathy, and sound judgment. An effective listener and communicator who values transparency, collaboration, and service. Demonstrated intellectual curiosity, resilience, humility, and a willingness to engage challenging issues with optimism and determination.
- **Academic Credentials:** An earned doctorate or equivalent terminal degree is required.



About The Pennsylvania State University

Founded in 1855, The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) is one of the world's premier research universities and a driver of economic growth and prosperity for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Led by President Neeli Bendapudi and Executive Vice President and Provost Fotis Sotiropoulos, the University embraces its mission of teaching, research, and service with a focus on fulfilling its land-grant mission in a 21st-century context.

With campuses throughout Pennsylvania and an online World Campus, Penn State is a strong economic engine across the commonwealth, contributing over $15.8 billion annually to Pennsylvania's economy and supporting nearly 11,000 jobs. Penn State's research and development expenditures have increased steadily during the past decade, contributing to the Pennsylvania economy through innovation and technology transfer. Federal dollars for research and development have increased substantially during the past 10 years. Likewise, private sector-sponsored research continues to trend upward.

Granted the highest rating for research universities by the Carnegie Foundation, Penn State prepares students to be leaders with a global perspective.

Information about Penn State can be found at psu.edu.

- Mission and Values
- Strategic Plan
- Facts and Rankings
- Research

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Leadership



Fotis Sotiropoulos, Ph.D., Executive Vice President and Provost

Fotis Sotiropoulos is the Executive Vice President and Provost of The Pennsylvania State University. Reporting directly to the President, Dr. Sotiropoulos serves as the University's chief academic officer, overseeing all colleges, campuses, and academic support units. He works closely with university leadership, faculty, staff, and students to set academic priorities and advance Penn State's mission of excellence in education, research, and community impact.

Dr. Sotiropoulos most recently served as Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University (2021-2025). He previously held several leadership and faculty positions, including: Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs (2020-2021), Dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences and SUNY Distinguished Professor (2015–2021) at Stony Brook University; James L. Record Professor of Civil Engineering and Director of the St. Anthony Falls Laboratory at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (2006–2015); and faculty member in the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering, with a joint appointment in the G. W. Woodruff School of Mechanical Engineering, at the Georgia Institute of Technology (1995–2005).

An internationally recognized scholar in fluid mechanics, Dr. Sotiropoulos's research focuses on simulation-based engineering science for addressing complex, societally relevant problems in renewable energy, environmental hydrodynamics, human health, and biological systems. He has authored over 220 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, with a Google Scholar h-index of 82, and his work has been featured on the covers of several leading scientific journals.

His honors include the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) Fluids Engineering Award (2023), the American Geophysical Union (AGU) Borland Lecture Hydrology Days Award (2019), the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Hunter Rouse Hydraulic Engineering Award (2017), and a CAREER Award from the U.S. National Science Foundation. Dr. Sotiropoulos is an elected Fellow of both the American Physical Society and ASME, and his research has twice been recognized in the APS Division of Fluid Dynamics Gallery of Fluid Motion (2009, 2011).

State College, Pennsylvania

State College is consistently rated as one of the best places to live in Pennsylvania. Also known as "Happy Valley," State College offers friendly, walkable neighborhoods, a safe, vibrant downtown, and Penn State's University Park campus – the University's largest campus and administrative hub. Occupying approximately 4.6 square miles, with a world-class university in the middle, State College is a quintessential American college town. Living in State College gives residents access to the benefits that a global research university like Penn State brings to the community, including collegiate athletics, world-class entertainment, and cultural opportunities.

The State College area has a diverse restaurant scene, a spirited nightlife, numerous local farmers' markets, an eclectic mix of retail chains and independent shops, an abundance of exciting events and festivals, and a well-regarded school district. Downtown State College is also home to a vibrant cultural arts district featuring galleries and theaters. Outdoor recreation opportunities abound, with several state parks just a short drive from State College offering access to lakes, boating, biking, hiking, skiing, camping, and cabin rentals.

State College Regional Airport is approximately five miles from downtown, and there are multiple daily flights that connect to international airport hubs in Philadelphia, Washington Dulles, Charlotte, and Chicago. In addition, five major cities – New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. – are all within a four-hour drive.

For more information about State College, see: State College, Happy Valley, and Best State Parks Near State College.

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Procedure for Candidacy

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

WittKieffer is assisting The Pennsylvania State University in this search. For full consideration, candidate materials should be received by December 31, 2026.

Application materials and nominations should be submitted using WittKieffer's **candidate portal**.

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

Suzanne Teer, Ashlee Musser, and Bronwen Bares Pelaez, Ph.D.

PennStateSVPSS@wittkieffer.com

Penn State is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to providing employment opportunities to all qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability or protected veteran status. If you are unable to use our online application process due to an impairment or disability, please contact 814-865-1473.

Penn State is committed to and accountable for advancing equity, respect, and belonging. We embrace individual uniqueness, as well as a culture of belonging that supports equity initiatives, leverages the educational and institutional benefits of inclusion in society, and provides opportunities for engagement intended to help all members of the community thrive. We value belonging as a core strength and an essential element of the university's teaching, research, and service mission.

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