



President
Leadership Profile
December 2025



WittKieffer

Executive Summary

Davenport University (DU) invites nominations and applications for the position of President.

The next President will be a visionary, entrepreneurial, and inclusive leader who embraces Davenport's innovative spirit and its longstanding commitment to preparing graduates for meaningful, future-focused careers. This leader will advance the University's ambitious strategic plan, deepen partnerships in Michigan and beyond, and continue positioning Davenport as a national model for agile, market-responsive higher education.

Davenport University—the largest private, nonprofit university in Michigan—has maintained unqualified audit opinions for more than two decades and remains grounded in its founding mission of career-focused education since 1866. With strong academic programs, a robust Global Campus, and a statewide footprint, DU continues its legacy of preparing graduates for leadership roles in business, technology, health, and urban education.

Over the past two decades, Davenport has transformed itself by embracing advanced analytics, continuous quality improvement, and data-driven excellence. These efforts have contributed to a 200% increase in graduation rates, all-time highs in retention and student satisfaction, and national recognition for organizational performance—including the Michigan Performance Excellence Award, advancement to a Baldrige site review, and the ACE/Fidelity National Transformation Award in 2021.

Davenport's agility sets it apart. With a deep understanding of labor-market trends and industry dynamics, DU is uniquely capable of developing new academic degrees and certificates within **60 days**, ensuring students are prepared for the roles Michigan and the nation need most. This rare speed and responsiveness drive Davenport's reputation as one of the most market-attuned universities in the nation. Students earn stackable certificates and degrees as they progress toward their ultimate educational goals, increasing the market appeal of their experience. Students also receive lifetime career services from their first day on campus, during internships, and throughout their careers.

The President will lead a capable and experienced senior leadership team, supported by faculty and staff who are deeply committed to Davenport's mission and student success. This individual will be responsible for fostering alignment, accountability, and collaboration across all divisions, ensuring that leaders are empowered to execute strategy with clarity and precision. The President will also play a central role in sustaining Davenport's strong employee culture—one defined by professionalism, innovation, and service—while championing the development, engagement, and retention of high-performing teams across the University.

With an enrollment of nearly 5,000 students at four campuses within the state of Michigan and a global campus, Davenport continues to build on its legacy of academic excellence, financial strength, and community engagement as it advances *Vision 2030*, its bold strategic plan to transform higher education through innovation, inclusion, and workforce relevance.

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

Role of the President

Reporting to the Board of Trustees, the President serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the University and is responsible for guiding Davenport's mission, vision, and strategic direction. In collaboration with the Board and senior leadership, the President ensures institutional excellence across academics, operations, finance, student experience, and advancement. This role reflects a tradition of stable, long-term leadership, as the past five presidents have collectively stewarded the institution over much of its 160-year history. The next leader will succeed the current president, who is retiring after serving for 17 years.

The President provides strategic and visionary leadership for all University functions, ensuring alignment with Davenport's mission. The President oversees the development and execution of the University's strategic plan, ensuring that all operations—academic, financial, technological, and cultural—advance Davenport's goals for student success and institutional excellence.

Working in partnership with the Board of Trustees and senior leadership, the President drives innovation, fosters collaboration, and positions Davenport University as a national model for agile, market-driven education.

The President leads a senior team responsible for Academics, Finance, Enrollment, Marketing and Communications, Student Services, Human Resources, Advancement, Information Technology, and Institutional Effectiveness, and works closely with an Executive Assistant.

Primary Responsibilities

- Provide strategic, inclusive, and visionary leadership aligned with Davenport's mission, vision, STAIR values, and *Vision 2030* objectives.
- Drive institution-wide enrollment and revenue-generation strategies to ensure sustainable growth, market competitiveness, and long-term financial strength.
- Ensure Davenport remains ahead of market and workforce shifts by advancing a rapid, industry-responsive academic model capable of launching new programs in **60 days**.
- Promote a culture of continuous improvement by establishing, monitoring, and enhancing key performance indicators (KPIs) and measurable institutional outcomes across academics, enrollment, finance, and student success.
- Foster a culture of academic and operational excellence, innovation, and inclusivity across all divisions of the University. Build upon the strong employee satisfaction scores included as one of the KPIs for the University.
- Strengthen and expand philanthropic support by actively engaging donors, cultivating new relationships, and collaborating with the advancement team to grow fundraising and external resources.
- Partner with the Board of Trustees to establish strategic priorities, develop policy, and ensure institutional accountability and transparency.
- Lead, mentor, and develop a high-performing senior leadership team that supports the University's strategic direction and operational excellence.
- Oversee financial sustainability and long-term growth by ensuring effective management of budgets, resources, and investments.
- Advance student success and outcomes through the development of academic programs, support services, and learning environments that meet the needs of today's learners and employers.

- Strengthen relationships with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners to enhance engagement and institutional reputation.
- Serve as the University's primary external representative and advocate, promoting Davenport's mission and achievements with governmental, business, and community stakeholders.
- Ensure compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and accreditation standards.



Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

Established in 1866 to serve the talent needs of the Grand Rapids region, Davenport University has grown into one of the nation's most agile, market-aligned institutions—continually adapting programs and strategies to meet employer demand. With a presidential transition in 2026, DU is well positioned to leverage its momentum and deepen its impact on students and the regional workforce. The next President will be responsible for advancing this work through the following priorities:

Implement the *Vision 2030* strategic plan. An enormous advantage in place for the next DU President is a thoughtful and visionary strategic plan that has been developed collaboratively by the Davenport community. *Vision 2030* clearly recognizes the challenges ahead and the need for higher education's transformation, but it also lays out areas such as innovation, educational quality, student experience, and employee experience where Davenport can continue to make its mark. A clear focus for the next President will be the continued incorporation of artificial intelligence and technology in day-to-day operations as well as curricula across the University. In addition, supporting innovation and maintaining a keen awareness of a changing marketplace are critical to enrollment gains and greater financial stability. Overall, *Vision 2030* is an ambitious roadmap demonstrating Davenport's enormous potential, and the next President should embrace and execute it with passion and commitment.

Continue to address financial and enrollment challenges. Davenport has done an excellent job recovering from the 2009 economic crisis and the COVID pandemic. While the University still faces financial challenges, it has clearly addressed obstacles to success and has met enrollment targets for nine consecutive semesters through Spring 2025. The next DU President must continue this good work by ensuring that the budget reflects the current environment, while working diligently to improve enrollment, persistence, and completion rates. DU was an early provider of online education, with its first program launched in 1999. The next president must help the institution build on this tradition of technological entrepreneurialism to meet the needs of its robust global campus while creating flexible learning modes to cater to its diverse student population.

Continue to build relationships in the business community, fundraise, and create new revenue streams. A consistent theme in discussions with the Davenport community is the University's nimble approach to education and training. Programs such as Casa Latina, the First Gen initiative, and Urban Education are notable examples of recent innovations. Given this history of creativity and adaptability, the next DU President will have many tools and capabilities at their disposal. The President must capitalize on these strengths and continue developing creative approaches to education through long-term strategic partnerships. In addition, the next President must leverage the University's deep ties to Michigan's business community to further engage this group as philanthropic and educational partners. Fundraising will be key to the future President's success, and the selected candidate can build on a strong foundation here as well. Finally, the DU community—from board members to frontline staff—believes in an entrepreneurial approach to education, and the next President will be encouraged to develop new revenue streams. There will be significant room for a new DU President to innovate.

Develop stronger government relations and advocacy function. Not that long ago, a highly effective government relations function might not have been seen as essential to a private university. With powerful changes to higher education being considered and implemented by the federal government, and the more muscular role some states are playing in postsecondary education, government relations has become critical for all colleges and universities. In addition, DU's commitments to workforce development, the coming AI revolution, and service to first-generation and Pell-eligible students mean that it must have a close working relationship with local, state, and federal government entities. While it maintains a positive reputation across Michigan, DU must continue to cultivate its profile to ensure it has a seat at the table as discussions are held about areas closely related to its mission. The next President must support and enhance this effort going forward.

Maintain the tradition of a supportive and caring professional environment. One of the current President's most significant accomplishments is the development of a professional, supportive, and caring environment for both faculty and staff at Davenport. While the University has faced some financial and enrollment obstacles, the teams spread across all of its campuses continue to remain dedicated to the University's mission and, most importantly, its students. Faculty and staff frequently express their appreciation for the University and the opportunity to positively impact students' lives. The next DU President must navigate the changes that have occurred at DU over the past few years, work toward fostering as well as mitigating the cross-currents in higher education, while maintaining the same positive environment at DU.



Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

As the face of Davenport University, the President will embody the institution's defining strengths: its agility, entrepreneurial spirit, deep community partnerships, and unwavering commitment to student success. This leader will champion DU's identity as an applied, career-focused, and industry-responsive university, serving as a visible and trusted presence across all campuses. The next President will build on the momentum of *Vision 2030*, sustaining DU's culture of collaboration, transparency, and data-driven decision-making.

Academic Credentials

- An earned doctorate from a regionally accredited institution is preferred.
- A master's degree with substantial executive leadership experience in higher education, nonprofit management, government, or another complex setting is required.

Executive Experience

- A minimum of ten years of progressive executive leadership experience, ideally within higher education or a mission-driven organization of comparable scope and complexity.
- Demonstrated success in strategic planning, organizational execution, and performance management to achieve measurable goals and key performance indicators.
- Proven ability to ensure sound financial stewardship, resource development, and long-term institutional sustainability.
- A record of fostering innovation, organizational effectiveness, and continuous improvement across diverse areas of operation.
- Experience cultivating collaborative relationships with governing boards, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and external partners.
- A demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in leadership, policy, and practice.
- Strong communication, interpersonal, and advocacy skills, with the ability to represent the University effectively to varied audiences.
- Capacity to navigate complex challenges and make informed, ethical, and transparent decisions in dynamic environments.
- An entrepreneurial mindset with the ability to identify and pursue opportunities that enhance institutional growth, visibility, and impact.

Strategic Leadership Competencies

- Broad understanding of the higher education landscape, including enrollment shifts, competitive pressures, K to 12 trends, political dynamics, and Michigan's evolving workforce needs.
- Ability to adopt and advance *Vision 2030* with humility, honoring the extensive work invested while guiding the institution toward continued innovation and stability.
- Strong financial acumen and experience managing complex budgets, aligning resources with mission, and sustaining morale and quality during periods of change.

- Capacity to lead a career-focused, applied-learning environment; appreciation for faculty who balance teaching with applied scholarship; understanding that DU's model is not one size fits all.
- Sophistication in leading institutional transformation through AI, integrating emerging technologies across academics, operations, and workforce partnerships.
- Skill in differentiating strategies across programs, campuses, and student populations, ensuring inclusion of satellite locations in university-wide initiatives.
- Ability to build and sustain trust-based relationships with business leaders, hospital executives, K to 12 partners, elected officials, and civic organizations.
- Strength in fundraising and donor engagement, grounded in West Michigan's relationship-focused philanthropic culture.
- Capacity to sustain DU's rapid pace of innovation; ability to merge bold action with thoughtful, strategic implementation.
- Visionary yet grounded leadership, capable of guiding DU confidently into the future while honoring its mission, history, and strengths.

Personal and Interpersonal Qualities

- High emotional intelligence, authenticity, and relational skill, reflecting DU's culture of service, collaboration, and community-mindedness.
- A visible, accessible, and personable presence across campuses; someone who engages students, faculty, and staff with warmth and genuine curiosity.
- Strong interpersonal awareness and respect for diverse perspectives, including cross-generational and cross-disciplinary viewpoints.
- Integrity, sound judgment, courage, and humility — the qualities that inspire confidence and trust in campus and community partners alike.
- Appreciation for DU's commitment to first-generation students and the ability to advocate for pathways that lead to meaningful career outcomes.
- Sensitivity to the experiences of student-athletes and understanding of the academic and operational considerations that shape their success.
- Creativity, adaptability, and openness to innovative solutions that strengthen DU's academic programs, student experience, and community impact.
- A genuine desire to foster belonging, partnership, and shared purpose across every corner of the University.

About Davenport University

Davenport University traces its origins to 1866 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where it was founded to meet the career needs of the local community. In May 2000, the system's three affiliated institutions—Davenport College, Detroit College of Business, and Great Lakes Junior College—were merged into a single institution, marking the beginning of the transition to university status. This merger united three colleges with more than 30 locations.

In September 2005, Davenport dedicated its 70-acre W.A. Lettinga Campus just south of Grand Rapids, establishing itself for the first time in its modern history as a traditional, residential institution. The campus features academic buildings, faculty and administration offices, an auditorium, lounges and study areas, a library, a student center with a field house, and an athletic complex comprising a football stadium, track, baseball stadium, softball field, and tennis courts. Three residence halls and two apartment complexes provide capacity for nearly 1,000 residential students.

Over the last decade, Davenport has embarked on a transformational journey to cultivate a culture that values data-driven quality and measurement. As a result, the University's graduation rate has increased by more than 200%, while student retention, satisfaction, and philanthropic giving are at all-time highs. In 2020, Davenport became the only university in Michigan to earn the Michigan Performance Excellence Award. In 2021, Davenport was one of seven organizations chosen for a site review—the final step toward the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award—an uncommon achievement for a first-year applicant.

Davenport is today the largest private, nonprofit institution of higher education in Michigan, with six locations statewide, classes delivered at two Michigan community colleges, and a robust Global Campus serving online learners. Primary locations include:

- W.A. Lettinga Campus (Grand Rapids) – Main residential campus on 70 acres, featuring LEED-certified facilities and comprehensive student amenities.
- Lansing Campus – Opened in 2013 with modern classrooms and labs supporting in-seat and hybrid instruction.
- Great Lakes Bay Campus – Located in Midland, Michigan, with classrooms and labs supporting in-seat, global, and hybrid instruction.
- Warren Campus (near Detroit) – This newly renovated campus with both classrooms and labs, welcomes students for in-seat, hybrid, and online learning.
- Additional Michigan locations – University centers are located in both Kalamazoo and Traverse City.
- Global Campus – Online programs, live stream, and flex classes serve as a flexible learning mode for most programs.

Facilities, Athletics, and Technology

Davenport University opened the residential campus in 2005. The W. A. Lettinga campus consists of modern, academic facilities and residence halls. Davenport University's [Farmers Insurance Athletic Complex](#) was first dedicated in March 2013 to baseball, softball, and tennis, with a significant expansion in 2016 adding the football stadium, soccer field, and track and field facilities. In January 2017, Davenport opened the Donald W. Maine College of Business building, a LEED-certified, high-tech facility featuring a variety of flexible learning environments designed to mimic a modern corporate environment, thereby blending the best of both a learning and working space.

Culture

Davenport University fosters an inclusive, fast-paced, and forward-looking culture. Leadership recognizes achievement and expresses gratitude. STAIR values represent the behavioral expectations of faculty, staff, and students.

STAIR Values:

- Serving with Quality – Understand our students; help students start, stay, and succeed; provide GREAT service; commit to continuous quality improvement.
- Trustworthiness – Communicate openly and honestly; demonstrate loyalty; maintain confidentiality; explain and ask “why.”
- Accountability – Ask, “What else can I do?”; solicit and provide feedback; follow policies and procedures; perform to the Vision and strategic plan.
- Innovation & Creativity – Share ideas; actively engage; constructively challenge the status quo; think outside the box.
- Respect for People – Understand and value individual and cultural differences; promote equitable treatment and inclusive behavior; leverage diverse perspectives; celebrate success; inspire and motivate.

Davenport has been recognized multiple times as a Top Workplace. The University has earned the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award nine times, the Hispanic Advocacy Award (2014), and the Diversity Visionary Award from the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce (2016).

Vision 2030

Davenport’s *Vision 2030* sets a course to change the dynamics of higher education. Through targeted programs infused with AI and personalized learning, Davenport supports students from all backgrounds in achieving professional success and builds the diverse talent Michigan’s and the nation’s economies demand.

Academics

Davenport University has five academic units: the Donald W. Maine College of Business, the College of Technology, the College of Health Professions, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the College of Urban Education. DU’s Global Campus works closely with these units to offer a majority of programs and courses online.

The Donald W. Maine College of Business

The College of Business prepares students for leadership in existing organizations and new ventures. Entrepreneurship is woven throughout the curriculum, and every graduate completes an internship, field experience, or course-based project.

Degrees and Programs include:

- 4 associate degrees, 17 bachelor’s degrees, and 12 master’s degrees (MBA, Competency-Based MBA, Executive MBA, Master of Management, Master of Accountancy, Master of Data Analytics).
- Post-baccalaureate certificates in Sustainable Business Development, Risk Management & Insurance, Human Resources Management, and Global Project Management.

- Graduate certificates in Finance, Forensic Accounting, Health Care Management, Human Resource Management, Internal Auditing, and Strategic Management.

The 60,000-square-foot Donald W. Maine College of Business building (opened 2017) maximizes collaboration and team learning and houses the Jandernoa Entrepreneurial Center.

The College of Technology

The College of Technology prepares graduates for success in a rapidly changing field with bachelor's programs in computer science, computer information systems, cyber defense, network management & security, digital forensics, and technology project management, and graduate programs in computer science, data analytics, technology management, and information assurance.

The College holds the distinction of Center of Academic Excellence (CAE) in Cyber Defense Education (NSA, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Defense). Numerous courses prepare students for external certifications that enhance employability. Student organizations include the Student Association of Project Management, Women in Technology, and the Cyber Defense Organization, a frequent winner of national competitions.

The College of Health Professions

Programs include AAS in Health Information Technology and Medical Assisting; bachelor's degrees in Medical Case Management, Health Services Administration, and Health Information Management; a pre-licensure BSN; and an RN-to-BSN completion program. Graduate offerings include Health Informatics & Information Management, Nursing, and Occupational Therapy; the MBA with a Health Care Management concentration is also supported.

The College of Arts and Sciences

The College provides a practical general education foundation and offers degrees in biological laboratory sciences, integrative professional studies—social work, and a master's degree and graduate certificate in data analytics. It develops and maintains the majority of courses in the Foundations of Excellence section of each degree (English, humanities, social sciences, math, environmental science, and diversity). For international students, ESL courses are available; Spanish is offered on campus and online.

Davenport University Excellence System (9 competencies):

As AI transforms the workplace, business partners are increasingly asking for “soft skills” that will be critical to the new workplace. Davenport has a development methodology that embeds with the ability to measure these critical “power skills” developed by students in addition to their professional skills. Being able to certify in these highly desired skills will allow students to stand out to future employers.

- Ethical Reasoning and Action
- Global and Intercultural Competence
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Analysis and Problem Solving
- Leadership and Teamwork
- Information and Technology Proficiency

- Written Communication
- Professional Communication
- Civic and Social Responsibility

Faculty are active proponents of service learning and studying abroad, offering students real-world experiences.

The College of Urban Education

Established in 2013, the College offers an MS in Urban Education. A new MS in Leadership for Principals and Superintendents has been developed, and an undergraduate degree in Urban Education with a clinical foundation and STEM focus is developing the teachers for the new future of education.



Student Life

Davenport serves a blend of traditional-age students and adult learners. The majority of the students on the residential campus in Grand Rapids are between the ages of 18 and 24, while adult students predominate at other locations and online. Most students are Michigan residents, and the University maintains a viable international student population.

More than 900 students live in three residence halls and two apartment complexes on the W.A. Lettinga Campus. Campus Life offers a variety of activities, a student center that serves as a hub for recreation and gatherings, and opportunities to study abroad that are expected to expand as part of Davenport's emphasis on global readiness.

Davenport fields 23 men's and women's varsity teams competing in NCAA Division II as a member of the GLIAC, plus three NCAA emerging sports (STUNT, women's rugby, women's wrestling) and 13 non-varsity teams in other leagues. Previously, as a member of the NAIA's Wolverine-Hoosier Athletic Conference (WHAC), DU won 87 WHAC Championships and six consecutive All-Sports Trophies (2011–16). Since 2002, Davenport has won national championships in soccer, hockey, lacrosse, rugby, cheer, dance, STUNT, and individual track & field events.

Student-athletes excel academically. In winter 2025, the collective GPA for all Davenport athletes was 3.26. Among GLIAC student-athletes, 141 maintained a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher through the 2024–25 season.



Living in Grand Rapids, Michigan

The West Michigan region supports a rich array of public and private colleges and universities, including Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids Community College, Hope College, Calvin University, and Aquinas College. Grand Rapids is home to a thriving health and life sciences community, including the Van Andel Institute, the Michigan State University College of Human Medicine, Helen DeVos Children's Hospital, and numerous specialty centers.

Grand Rapids offers a vibrant art, culture, and recreation scene, featuring symphony, ballet, opera, theatre, art museums, and a Broadway series, as well as minor league sports, an arena, concert venues, and a major convention center. West Michigan hosts notable enterprises such as Amway, Steelcase, MillerKnoll, Haworth, Bissell, SpartanNash, and Meijer. Davenport's W.A. Lettinga Campus is approximately one mile from Gerald R. Ford International Airport and about 40 miles from Lake Michigan's shoreline communities of Holland, Grand Haven, and Saugatuck.



Procedure for Candidacy

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 Davenport University in this search. For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by March 11, 2026.

Applications, nominations, and expressions of interest can be directed to:

Melody Rose, Ph.D., Greg Duyck, and Bree Liddell

DavenportPresident@wittkieffer.com

Davenport University is an Equal Opportunity Employer and welcomes nominations and applications from individuals who reflect the diversity of the University community.