Department Chair, Data Science

Leadership Profile

Winter 2026

WittKieffer

Executive Summary

Valdosta State University (VSU) invites nominations and applications for the inaugural Department Chair of the newly created Data Science Department within the College of Science and Mathematics. Reporting directly to the Dean, this is a transformative leadership opportunity to shape the future of a department and position VSU as a regional STEM Cluster Hub for computational and statistical data science.

This is an administrative fiscal (12-month) faculty position that will carry the rank of Associate or Full Professor, with the possibility of tenure upon appointment. The chair will lead a dynamic team of faculty and guide the department's growth, which currently offers a Bachelor of Science in Data Science with tracks in Business Analytics, Supply Chain & Logistics, and Computational Science & Engineering. The successful candidate will have the unique privilege of building upon this foundation to expand inter- and cross-disciplinary collaboration, innovate curriculum, and advance research in areas such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and predictive analytics.

Candidates must hold an earned terminal degree in Data Science, Applied Mathematics, Applied Computational Physics, Applied Statistics, Operations Research, or a related field from an accredited university. In addition, the ideal candidate will demonstrate a strong background in Data Science, including experience in course development and research publications in the field.

This role calls for a visionary leader who combines academic distinction with strategic thinking, collaborative leadership, and a passion for preparing students for competitive careers in a rapidly evolving data-driven world.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy on page 9.

Role of the Department Chair, Data Science

The newly established Data Science department is embarking on an ambitious journey to redefine itself as a leader in computational and statistical Data Science. The department's vision is to cultivate an environment integrating advanced computation, statistical methodologies, and inter-/cross-disciplinary collaboration to solve pressing local, regional, and global challenges. This department's transformation will empower faculty and students to excel in artificial intelligence, machine learning, data analytics, and their applications to systems modeling.

The chair will:

- Provide strategic leadership and vision for the department's growth and transformation.

- Lead and manage student recruitment and enrollment.

- Lead and manage a transformation in the department's academic environment.

- Manage faculty recruitment, development, and evaluation.

- Oversee curriculum development and ensure alignment with industry trends and accreditation standards.

- Foster a collaborative environment that supports excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service.

- Advocate for the department within the college and across the university.

- Serve as budget manager and ensure effective resource allocation.

- Engage in teaching and research activities that advance the department's mission.

About the Data Science Department

The department is committed to teaching, research, and service excellence. Faculty members are deeply involved in computational research, statistical analysis, and applied computational physics and astronomy, contributing to advancements in theory and practice. The department is vital in supporting STEM disciplines by providing foundational instruction in introductory courses and fostering a collaborative and innovative academic environment. With planned expansions into applied mathematics, statistics, actuarial studies, physics, and astronomy, all under the umbrella of data science, and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration within the College of Science and Mathematics, the department is well-positioned to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed for future careers.

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

This is a transformative opportunity for a dynamic leader to shape the future of a department and contribute meaningfully to the growth of computational and statistical data science at Valdosta State University.

The newly established Data Science Department offers a BS degree in Data Science with three tracks: Business Analytics, Supply Chain & Logistics, and Computational Science & Engineering. This is an exceptional opportunity to lead the department's transformation into a STEM Cluster Hub for computational and statistical data science, fostering interdisciplinary innovation and positioning the department at the forefront of modern academic and industry trends.

The Department Chair will be expected to achieve the following:

- **Build and Shape the Department**: The chair will establish the department's identity, culture, and strategic direction. This includes recruiting and mentoring students and faculty, defining priorities for teaching and research, and creating an environment that fosters collaboration, innovation, and academic excellence. The chair will set the tone for a department that is forward-thinking and responsive to the evolving landscape of data science.

- **Advance Inter- and cross-disciplinary Collaboration**: Data science thrives at the intersection of and across disciplines. The chair will lead efforts to build partnerships across the College of Science and Mathematics— including Computer Science, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics—and with other colleges such as Business and Education. These collaborations will enable faculty and students to tackle complex problems, develop joint research projects, and create interdisciplinary programs that reflect real-world applications of data science.

- **Enhance Research Impact**: The chair will position the department as a leader in computational and statistical applied research helping to build a suitable academic environment to support these goals. These goals include supporting faculty in securing external funding, developing research clusters in areas such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and predictive analytics, and increasing student participation in high-impact projects. By cultivating a strong research profile, the department will contribute to VSU's reputation and regional economic development.

- **Innovate Curriculum**: The chair will spearhead curriculum development to ensure programs remain relevant and competitive. This involves expanding market-aligned tracks within the BS in Data Science to provide students with unique Career Readiness opportunities, integrating emerging technologies, and naturally embedding experiential learning opportunities in the student's experience and academic preparation. The chair will also lead efforts to align curricula with industry needs and accreditation standards, preparing graduates for careers in data analytics, computational modeling, and related fields.

- **Promote Student Success**: Student success will be central to the chair's leadership. The chair will champion initiatives that provide students with hands-on experiences, including aligning the academic environment with opportunities for internships, undergraduate research, and industry partnerships. By fostering mentorship programs and career readiness activities, the chair will ensure that graduates are equipped with the technical skills, critical thinking and data awareness, manipulation and interpretation abilities, as well as professional competencies needed to thrive in a rapidly changing workforce.

Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

Valdosta State University seeks a dynamic and accomplished leader to serve as the inaugural Department Chair of Data Science. The successful candidate will bring a distinguished record of academic achievement, leadership experience, and a forward-thinking approach to education and research. An earned doctorate or terminal degree in **Data Science, Applied Mathematics, Computational Physics, Applied Statistics, Operations Research, or a closely related field** is required.

Required Qualifications

- **Academic Excellence**: A strong record of teaching, scholarship, and service that demonstrates commitment to student success and faculty development.

- **Leadership Experience**: Proven ability to lead in an academic or research setting, including experience managing faculty and staff, fostering collaboration, and guiding departmental initiatives.

- **Expertise in Data Science**: Deep knowledge of computational methods, statistical modeling, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data analytics.

- **Curriculum Development**: Demonstrated success in designing and implementing innovative academic programs that respond to industry trends and accreditation standards.

- **Communication and Interpersonal Skills**: Exceptional ability to articulate vision, build consensus, and engage stakeholders across diverse disciplines.

- **Commitment to Shared Governance**: A consultative leadership style that values transparency, collaboration, and inclusivity.

Preferred Qualifications

- **Grant Writing and External Funding**: Experience securing research funding and building partnerships with industry and government agencies.

- **Accreditation and Program Review**: Familiarity with accreditation processes and strategies for maintaining program quality and compliance.

- **Faculty Evaluation and Development**: Experience with promotion and tenure processes and mentoring faculty toward professional growth.

- **Prior Department Leadership**: Service as a department head or equivalent administrative role.

Personal Qualities

- **Visionary and Strategic Thinker**: Ability to anticipate trends in data science and position the department for long-term success.

- **Collaborative and Inclusive Leader**: Commitment to fostering a diverse and equitable environment where faculty, staff, and students thrive.

- **Student-Centered Advocate**: Passion for creating opportunities that enhance student learning, engagement, and career readiness.

- **Resilient and Adaptable**: Capacity to lead through change and navigate challenges with integrity and optimism.

About Valdosta State University

Overview

Valdosta State University (VSU), founded in 1906 and designated a regional comprehensive university in 1993, serves more than 10,300 students through a diverse portfolio of nearly 200 academic programs across undergraduate, graduate, specialist, and doctoral levels. Situated on a picturesque 168-acre main campus in Valdosta, Georgia—just minutes from the Florida state line—VSU is known for its distinctive Spanish Mission–style architecture, expansive green spaces, and a close-knit community atmosphere. The university blends the resources of a major institution with the personalized attention of smaller colleges: boasting a student–faculty ratio of approximately 17:1, VSU fosters high-impact learning through interactive classes, undergraduate research, and experiential education. With a deep commitment to academic excellence, innovation, and regional engagement, VSU is recognized as South Georgia's flagship university—offering GDP-enhancing outreach, strong community partnerships, and NCAA Division II athletics that include 12 national championships.

Mission and Values

VSU's mission is structured around three interrelated goals and guided by the beloved Blazer Creed of Civility, Integrity and Citizenship:

- **Student Mission**: To provide all students with an inspired education, a safe learning environment, a nurturing community, and a wealth of experience that equips them to become lifelong learners prepared to contribute meaningfully to a changing global society.

- **University Mission**: To operate sustainably—humanly, environmentally, and financially—while increasing value for stakeholders at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

- **Regional Mission**: To support the university's home region through academic outreach, economic development, entrepreneurship, and innovation that enhance quality of life, promote collaboration, and respect the local community and environment.

Academics

Valdosta State University provides a rich and expansive academic environment that blends diverse degree options, high-impact learning experiences, and strong faculty engagement across disciplines:

- College of the Arts
- College of Humanities and Social Sciences
- James L. & Dorothy H. Dewar College of Education & Human Services
- Harley Langdale, Jr. College of Business Administration
- College of Nursing & Health Sciences
- College of Science & Mathematics
- Graduate School
- Honors College
- Online College for Career Advancement
- University College

Leadership

Sheri Noviello, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Sheri Noviello has dedicated over 35 years to the University System of Georgia in various roles and across multiple institutions. She received a BSN from Columbus College (now Columbus State University) in 1986, an MSN in 1991 from Troy University, and a Ph.D. in Nursing from the Medical College of Georgia in 2007. In 1991 she became a faculty member in the BS in Nursing program at Columbus College (now Columbus State University) after working a year at a community college in Phenix City, AL. She worked her way through the faculty ranks and became a tenured full professor in 2008. In 2007 she served as the Assistant Director and in 2010 became the Director of the School of Nursing at Columbus State University. In 2014 she became the interim dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at Valdosta State University (VSU) and was permanently appointed in January 2016. In 2019 she was named the dean of the College of Health Sciences at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, GA. In 2023 the president at VSU requested that she return to the institution as the interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs where she has served since July 1, 2023.

Pierre-Richard Cornely, Dean, College of Science and Mathematics

Dr. Cornely has had a distinguished career with senior positions in both Academia and Corporate. In Corporate, he has led the research and development of geodynamic systems as President and CEO of 374's Electric Power Corporation with the development of the first generation of surf hydroelectric systems. These pioneering geodynamic systems have opened the doors to the next generation of surf hydro systems, now an important source of renewable energy in the world. Dr. Cornely has also been an integral contributor to the geodynamic systems of the Department of Defense of the United States as a Senior Research System Engineer, Senior Lecturer and Chair of the Radio and Communication Propagation and Atmospheric Physics Technical Group at Raytheon in Waltham, Massachusetts. At Raytheon, Dr. Cornely designed, developed, simulated, and tested Hardware and Software for the United States missile defense early warning system.

Dr. Cornely has a long tradition of contribution to Academia, including serving as Department Chair of Physics and Engineering before advancing to Chair of Science and Technology, overseeing the Departments of Mathematics, Physics, Engineering, Computer Science, Chemistry, Biology, Environmental Science and Forensic Science at Eastern Nazarene College (ENC) in Quincy, Massachusetts. His scholarly activities include earthquake forecasting as well as innovations in enrollment management and recruitment, curriculum development, and novel models of cross-disciplinary collaboration. Dr. Cornely has also led a vision of context-driven education based on project-driven applied learning, internships, and student portfolios. This approach has been at the core of a unique brand of academic preparation with potential for more effective engagement with the local community, municipal and state government, as well as the commercial sector.

Student Life

Valdosta State University offers a vibrant student life grounded in engagement, leadership, wellness, and tradition. Through the Office of Student Life, students can join more than 150 organizations spanning social, cultural, academic, and service interests, all accessible via BlazerLink, the university's interactive engagement platform. Greek life further enhances community engagement with a focus on scholarship, leadership, and service. The Campus Activities Board organizes campus-wide events like Fall Explosion, Homecoming, the Third Thursday Vendor Fair, and other special events that foster school spirit. Students can stay active and healthy through the Student Recreation Center, which features a heated pool, climbing wall, jogging track, multipurpose courts, group fitness classes, intramurals, and outdoor adventures via CORE Outdoors.

The newly renovated Student Union, located at the heart of campus, offers dining options (Starbucks, Chick-fil-A, Moe's), lounge spaces, and offices for student services like Career Opportunities, Fraternity & Sorority Life, and the Blazer Pantry. Annual traditions—such as SPARK orientation, Fall Explosion, Homecoming, Family Weekend, Lighting of the Palms, and the Mayhem Music Festival—create lasting memories and entwine the campus community. This multifaceted student life environment supports holistic development, engagement, and wellbeing, enriching the overall student experience at VSU

Valdosta, GA

When you join Blazer Nation, you'll be joining a lively community of 110,000 residents that love supporting VSU and its students – from cheering with them at football games and welcoming them into local schools as student teachers, to providing service learning, internships, and job opportunities. Valdosta isn't just a place where you'll feel safe to live, learn, and play; it's a place where you'll feel right at home.

Located in South Georgia near the Florida state line, Valdosta offers the charm of a welcoming college town combined with the convenience of easy access to larger metropolitan areas like Jacksonville and Tallahassee. The city enjoys a warm, subtropical climate with mild winters and abundant sunshine, making it ideal for year-round outdoor activities.

Valdosta is known for its affordability and quality of life. Housing costs and overall living expenses make it an attractive option for professionals and families alike. The community features strong public and private school systems, a regional medical center, and Moody Air Force Base, contributing to a stable economy and diverse employment opportunities.

Recreational and cultural amenities abound, including parks, golf courses, and the Grand Bay Wetlands for nature enthusiasts. Residents enjoy local arts at the Annette Howell Turner Center for the Arts, historical landmarks like The Crescent, and family attractions such as Wild Adventures Theme Park. A lively downtown offers dining, breweries, and seasonal festivals, creating a dynamic environment that blends Southern hospitality with modern conveniences.

Procedure for Candidacy

WittKieffer is assisting Valdosta State University in this search. All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, the following:

- Cover letter detailing your vision for transforming the department into a Computational and Statistical Data Science hub
- Curriculum vitae
- Statement of teaching philosophy that includes strategies for creating curricula to meet a diverse student body's needs and career goals
- Research statement outlining interests and plans to enhance the research mission of a regional public institution
- Leadership statement addressing contemporary challenges facing departments at regional comprehensive universities

For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by **March 15th**.

Application materials should be submitted to ValdostaDataScience@wittkieffer.com

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

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Christy Pratt and Toni Davis

ValdostaDataScience@wittkieffer.com

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Valdosta State University is an equal opportunity educational institution. It is not the intent of the institution to discriminate against any applicant for admission or any student or employee of the institution based on the age, sex, race, religion, color, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation of the individual.

USG Core Values Statement

The University System of Georgia is comprised of our 26 institutions of higher education and learning, as well as the System Office. Our USG Statement of Core Values are Integrity, Excellence, Accountability, and Respect. These values serve as the foundation for all that we do as an organization, and each USG community member is responsible for demonstrating and upholding these standards. More details on the USG Statement of Core Values and Code of Conduct are available in USG Board Policy 8.2.18.1.2 and can be found online at
https://www.usg.edu/policymanual/section8/C224/#p8.2.18_personnel_conduct.

Additionally, USG supports Freedom of Expression as stated in Board Policy 6.5 Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom found online at https://www.usg.edu/policymanual/section6/C2653.

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