



**MISSISSIPPI STATE**  
UNIVERSITY™

## **Executive Director of Financial Aid and Scholarships**

Leadership Profile

December 2023

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**WittKieffer**

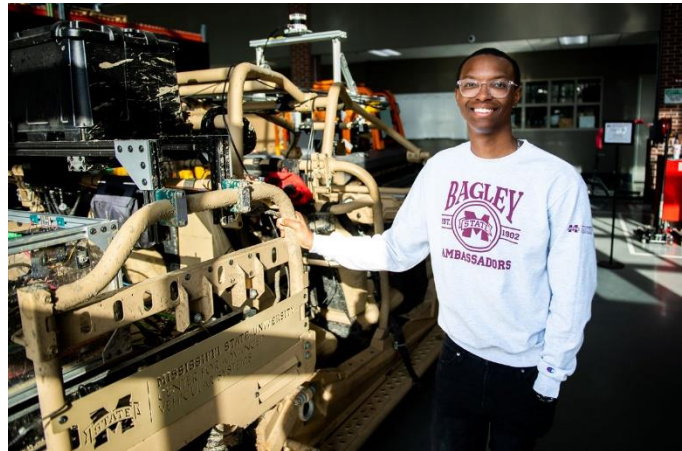
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## The Opportunity

Mississippi State University, one of the nation's leading public research universities and driven to make a difference since 1878, seeks an experienced, collaborative, and dynamic leader to serve as its next Executive Director for Financial Aid and Scholarships.

MSU has grown to become a leading research-intensive university with a rich tradition of academic excellence, innovation, and community engagement. Known for its commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environment, Mississippi State welcomes students from various backgrounds and disciplines, offering a wide array of undergraduate and graduate programs. The university's sprawling campus of 4,200 acres is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, complemented by a vibrant campus life.



Currently the university enrolls over 22,600 students including 18,305 undergraduates. With an average first-year retention rate of 82 percent, students at Mississippi State are thriving both in and outside the classroom. Enhancing its historic strengths in agriculture, natural resources, engineering, mathematics, and natural and physical sciences, Mississippi State offers a comprehensive range of undergraduate and graduate programs; these include architecture, the fine arts, business, education, the humanities, the social and behavioral sciences, and veterinary medicine. Mississippi State is classified as a "comprehensive doctoral research university with very high research activity" by the Carnegie Foundation. Often recognized as one of "America's Best College Buys," Mississippi State is committed to its tradition of instilling among its students the ideals of diversity, citizenship, leadership, and service.

Reporting to the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services, John Dickerson, the Executive Director for Financial Aid and Scholarships (executive director) will lead a team of 30 staff members and 5 direct reports and will be charged with administering a financial aid and scholarships program consisting of federal, state and institutional funds that exceed \$271M annually. As the chief financial aid compliance officer, the executive director will ensure regulatory compliance with all institutional, state, and federal financial aid programs. In addition to serving undergraduate students, the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships also serves all graduate and professional students at Mississippi State. The successful candidate will possess a strategic understanding of the integral role of student financial aid in supporting student enrollment, student success, and student services; and will have knowledge of financial aid trends as they relate to the use and delivery of student financial aid.

As an experienced leader of people and programs, the new executive director of scholarship and financial aid will have an ability to operate in a complex environment; demonstrated skills in leading and developing a large professional staff; excellent communication skills; an in-depth knowledge of financial aid policies, processes, and regulations; a commitment to quality service and student advocacy; and experience with the application of current and emerging technologies to the financial aid process. The executive director will be an operational, forward-thinking, collaborative, and skilled professional who will engage Mississippi State's campus constituents in the vision for financial aid, garnering support, trust, confidence, and collegiality. They will have excellent knowledge of financial aid regulations, laws, and policies and progressive leadership experience in the area of financial aid. The executive director will demonstrate an affinity for partnership with admissions and registrar's office colleagues, as well as other key collaborative units such as finance and administration, technology services, and student affairs. Competitive candidates will hold a bachelor's degree with a minimum of seven years of experience in the field of financial aid and scholarships and staff supervision.

The national executive search firm WittKieffer has been retained to assist Mississippi State with this recruitment. All inquiries, nominations and applications should be directed to the search firm as indicated in the "Procedure for Candidacy" section at the end of this document.

## Organization Overview

### Overview

Mississippi State University is a comprehensive, doctoral degree granting, land-grant university with a nationally and internationally diverse student body. To individuals, it offers a wide range of opportunities and challenges for learning and growth; to the world of knowledge, vigorous and expanding contributions in research, discovery and application; and to people in every region of Mississippi, a variety of expert services. It forms part of a cohesive community with the growing city of Starkville, population 25,000. Located in the eastern part of north-central Mississippi, the university is 125 miles northeast of Jackson, 165 miles southeast of Memphis, and 150 miles west of Birmingham. It is served by U.S. Highway 82, state highways 12 and 25, and by commercial air service through Golden Triangle Regional Airport, 14 miles east of campus.

### Mississippi State's History

The university began as the Agricultural and Mechanical College of the State of Mississippi, one of the national land-grant colleges established after Congress passed the Morrill Act in 1862. It was created by the Mississippi Legislature on February 28, 1878, to fulfill the mission of offering training in agriculture, horticulture, and the mechanical arts . . . without excluding other scientific and classical studies, including military tactics. The College received its first students in the fall of 1880. In 1932, the Legislature renamed the College as Mississippi State College and again in 1958 as Mississippi State University.

### Mississippi State's Vision

At Mississippi State, they are redefining the role of a land-grant university. They provide an innovative, hands-on learning experience, meeting all students where they are and equipping them for a world that needs their talent. They are working to help their communities prosper while exploring cutting-edge solutions to the world's biggest challenges. Together, they are taking care of what matters in the 21st century — starting in their own backyard.

<https://www.president.msstate.edu/communications/vision-mission/>

### Mississippi State's Mission

Mississippi State University is a public research, land-grant university with a mission to provide access and opportunity to all sectors of Mississippi's diverse population, as well as other states and countries, and to offer excellent programs of teaching, research, and service.



Mississippi State University offers a comprehensive range of undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across many disciplines.

The university embraces its role as a major contributor to the economic development of the state and beyond through targeted research and the transfer of ideas and technology to the public, supported by faculty, staff, students, and alumni relationships with industry, community organizations, and government entities.

Mississippi State University is committed to its tradition of instilling among its community ideals of diversity, citizenship, leadership, and service.

Building on its land-grant tradition, Mississippi State University strategically extends its resources and expertise for the benefit of Mississippi's citizens, the nation, and the world by offering access for working and place-bound learners through its on- and off-campus education and research sites, Extension, and distance education programs.

## University Leadership

### David Shaw, Ph.D., Provost and Executive Vice President



David Shaw is the provost and executive vice president at Mississippi State University. As chief academic officer, he oversees all academic policies, the integrity of the academic mission, and academic operations of Mississippi's leading university and land-grant institution. He provides direct oversight for eight academic colleges and two campuses, as well as many academic and non-academic support units. A longtime faculty member and former vice president for research and economic development at MSU, he works with senior administrators to develop budgetary recommendations that affect the teaching, research and service mission of the 141-year-old institution.

Dr. Shaw joined the Mississippi State faculty as an assistant professor in 1985, with a joint teaching and research appointment in the Department of Plant Pathology and Weed Science. He has taught undergraduate and graduate courses, including weed biology and ecology, herbicide physiology, fate of pesticides, and a remote sensing seminar. During his time on the faculty, he earned praise for his classroom teaching, graduate advising, publishing and ability to secure grant funding. He also played an active role in the Robert Holland Faculty Senate, including serving as chair of the Charter and Bylaws Committee. During that time, the Faculty Senate enacted the faculty governance document that remains in place today. In 1999, he was recognized as a William L. Giles Distinguished Professor, the university's highest honorary distinction.

Additionally, he was involved in expanding the curriculum through the creation of two multidisciplinary undergraduate degree programs. He has also advised and mentored numerous undergraduate and graduate students over his career. More than 20 of his Ph.D. students have become university faculty or government research scientists – helping to train a new generation. Others have served in leadership positions in industry or started their own businesses. Most recently, he was the major professor and mentor for a Ph.D. student who graduated in May 2019. He considers his students' success among his most significant – and rewarding – contributions.

During his tenure as the university's chief research officer, Mississippi State attained Carnegie Foundation R1-Very High Research Activity Doctoral University status and consistently ranked among the National Science Foundation's top 100 research institutions, including a national ranking of 9<sup>th</sup> in agriculture research and 17<sup>th</sup> in social sciences. The university's research expenditures totaled nearly \$241 million in FY 2017, accounting for more than half of the total in research and development expenditures reported by all Mississippi institutions. He also worked closely with local, state, and regional economic development officials to recruit new companies to the state.

Dr. Shaw previously served as the founding director of the Northern Gulf Institute, a NOAA Cooperative Institute. The NGI's primary goal is to develop a research and transition program that fills priority gaps or reduces limitations in current awareness, understanding and decision support between upland-watershed systems and coastal waters, habitats, resources and hazards, in the context of developing more resilient communities and ecosystems. NGI has led NOAA's cooperative institutes in research of unmanned aircraft for applications in hurricane modeling and levee assessment. He also was founding director of the Geosystems Research Institute at MSU, a research and outreach institute focused on spatial technology visualization of complex datasets and computational modeling in agriculture, forestry, water resources, climate, weather and oceanography.

Dr. Shaw is a fellow of the Weed Science Society and a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 2017, the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program selected him for its prestigious U.S.-France International Education Administrators Program. He holds a bachelor's degree in agriculture from Cameron University in Oklahoma and a master's and doctorate from Oklahoma State University, both in weed science.

## John Dickerson, Ph.D., Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Services



John R. Dickerson is the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services at Mississippi State University with oversight of the Offices of Student Recruitment and Marketing, Orientation and Events, Admissions and Scholarships, Student Financial Aid and Office of the Registrar. He served as Assistant Vice President for Enrollment/University Registrar from 2016 until 2023. In addition, he served as University Registrar from 2013 to 2016.

Prior to his appointment as University Registrar in January of 2013, Dr. Dickerson served as vice president of Copiah-Lincoln Community College's Simpson County Center. He was responsible for overseeing all aspects of the branch-campus operations. He became a Co-Lin vice president after having worked for a decade at MSU, joining the Starkville campus in 1997 as associate director for enrollment services. Prior to that, he had been Mississippi College's associate dean of students. At MSU, he earned successive promotions--including the directorship of enrollment services--until achieving the office of senior associate director for admissions and scholarships, the post he held before joining the administration at Co-Lin.

A 1986 graduate of Jackson's Jim Hill High School, Dickerson holds master's and doctoral degrees from MSU in counselor education and community college leadership, respectively. He also is a graduate of Mississippi College and Hinds Community College, where he was inducted as a member of the Gamma Lambda Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. He and his wife Christy are the parents of a son, Tyler and a daughter, Kate.

## Position Summary


### The Overview

The Executive Director of Financial Aid and Scholarships is responsible for providing leadership and services to all aspects of the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships and all aspects of the financial aid programs for Mississippi State undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. This includes implementing policy, providing regular staff training, and offering supportive guidance and effective supervision, while ensuring a high level of customer service by adhering to compliance demands, providing support to the AVP for enrollment services, and working with the AVP to set, measure, and fulfill the strategic direction and goals for the office. The executive director will represent the university and the enrollment services division by meeting with other university offices and through committee membership. The executive director will collaborate and partner closely with other student services offices and schools of the university to successfully balance customer service needs with university business goals. Mississippi State seeks an individual with the experience, skill, drive, and energy to oversee a medium to large complex operation while balancing the demands of compliance and excellent student service. Specific responsibilities include but are not limited to the following.

### Responsibilities

**The successful Executive Director for Financial Aid and Scholarships candidate will:**

- Manage operations and provide direction to staff members for the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships. The executive director leads five direct reports: 3 associate directors; 2 assistant directors; and indirectly supervises 30 career staff employees.
- Serve as a financial aid expert for prospective students, parents, and high school counselors through presentations and educational workshops.
- Address all concerns and issues from students, parents, and administrators pertaining to the core functions of financial aid and scholarships in a diplomatic and thoughtful manner.
- Provide oversight and management over all audit functions, both internal and external, related to financial aid and scholarships. Ensure that appropriate action plans are developed and implemented to address any audit findings and recommendations.
- Create, manage, and submit all reports including but not limited to the Fiscal Operations Report and Application to Participate (FISAP), Cost of Attendance (COA), Foreign gift aid received, and the Program Participation Agreement (PPA).
- Provide direct supervision and review for all monthly/annual reconciliation of Federal/State/Institutional funds.
- Manage and direct the student financial wellness and literacy program.
- Develop a close working and collaborative relationship with the academic colleges and departments, as well as campus administrative and student affairs departments.
- Assume oversight responsibility for the accurate, efficient, and timely delivery of student aid in compliance with all applicable regulations. Manage the evaluation and decision-making process of financial aid and scholarships.

- Provide educational information regarding financial aid and scholarship policies, procedures, and programs.
  - Develop and recommend policies for financial aid and scholarships that support the mission and goals of the University which ensure compliance with state and federal regulations.
  - Monitor and interpret changes in financial aid and scholarships policies at the state and federal levels and keep apprised of updated university policies impacting financial aid and scholarships.
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- Provide and participate in the overall leadership of Enrollment Services.
  - Support and participate in the implementation of the strategies directly related to the University's enrollment initiatives and goals.
  - Be an integral part of the enrollment services leadership team in the creation, implementation, and execution of a strategic financial aid plan using data-informed decisions to maximize financial resources for the recruitment and retention of students.
  - Provide oversight and ensure compliance with all federal, state, Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), and University laws, policies, and procedures.
  - Lead and/or serve on University and IHL level committees.
  - Create and maintain resources for faculty, staff, and students on the policies, programs, and resources pertaining to financial aid and scholarships.
  - Serve as a compliant and conscientious steward of confidential data, maintaining responsibility for the management and security of student financial aid and other personally identifiable information.
  - Allocate and monitor operating budgets for the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships.
  - Foster a collaborative and positive environment that promotes access and openness among team members and responsiveness to internal and external constituents.
  - Have current working knowledge of policy and regulatory requirements and ensure compliance with university policies and guidelines, as well as NCAA and federal Title IV regulations.
  - Empower staff to continually assess and refine strategies, tactics, and processes to provide the highest levels of service to students.
  - Represent the University and attend conferences and seminars to keep apprised of federal and state legislative and regulatory developments and of changes in lenders' policies.



## Candidate Qualifications

- Bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution of higher learning; master's or doctoral degree preferred.
- Seven or more years of demonstrated leadership in the field of financial aid and scholarships.
- Supervisory experience in a financial aid and scholarships setting.

### Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- Excellent interpersonal skills and a demonstrated ability to work with diverse members of the University community, including students, faculty, staff, and executives/administrators.
- Demonstrated ability for effective organizational skills and ability to connect to the institutional strategy while displaying attention to detail.
- Ability to synthesize and analyze quantitative and qualitative data and prepare and present reports effectively.
- Knowledge of state and federal laws related to the functions managed by this position.
- Knowledge and understanding of integrated program planning, development, and administration within a public institution environment.
- Technical leadership and supervisory skills, and the ability to motivate staff productivity and performance.
- Knowledge of budget preparation and fiscal services.

## Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives have been identified as priorities for this position:

- **Provide leadership and direction for the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships**

The executive director will come with deep expertise in financial aid and scholarships and will provide leadership and direction immediately to the team. The executive director will ensure that the university's financial aid programs adhere to all legal requirements and maintain a thorough understanding of changing regulations to avoid any compliance issues.

- **Develop collaborative relationships across the University**

The executive director will be engaged across the university. It will be important to continue to elevate the visibility of the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships and the scope of its work, building and maintaining strong and collaborative relationships across the campus. An ability to communicate up, down, and across the office and University organizational structure will be a considerable strength. It will also be essential for the

executive director to create an open, transparent, and ongoing dialogue with faculty and senior administrators that will engender cooperation, trust, and confidence.

▪ **Navigate a complex and dynamic institution**

The executive director will be expected to communicate frequently and effectively with multiple constituencies to advocate for positive student experiences within the necessary parameters of compliance and policy. The executive director will help to develop strategies and policies and communicate them to staff and other leaders across campus. The person in this role will need to possess exceptional drive, energy, and intellectual curiosity to lead financial aid efforts in a dynamic and constantly changing environment.



▪ **Utilize data analysis to assess financial aid and scholarship programs**

The executive director will analyze financial aid data, including retention rates, graduation rates, and student debt levels, to assess the effectiveness of aid programs. An on-going analysis will identify recommendations to the AVP of enrollment services and university leadership for improvement and to inform strategic decisions moving forward.

▪ **Inspire the team and align resources for growth**

The new executive director will play a critical role in assuring a capable and effective financial aid team. The executive director will conduct a review of organizational needs in order to align people and resources for maximum efficiency, and to enable the University to meet its enrollment goals. The continued professional development of staff is essential and requires high standards with an eye toward maintaining healthy working relationships, open channels of communication, and high morale.





## The Community

### Starkville, Mississippi

The community and the university are always working together to create a home away from home for our students. The delicious local restaurants and great shopping spots along with the fun festivals, sporting action, and friendly residents make Starkville: Mississippi's College Town!

As a college town of 24,360, Starkville maintains an excellent balance between town and gown, offering all the advantages of a vibrant business community, attractive residential neighborhoods, and the many sporting events, concerts, plays, museums, and galleries of [Mississippi State University](#). Also, a [Certified Mississippi Hometown Retirement Community](#), Starkville provides a congenial blending of ages, with each age group contributing its own energy.

Starkville is home to an eclectic array of festivals and events held throughout the year where you can enjoy art, food, culture, history, music, and more. From the [Bulldog Bash](#) to the [Cotton District Arts Festival and Taste of Starkville](#), you are sure to have a full calendar! But don't forget to bring your appetite as Starkville has more restaurants per capita than any other community in the state; it's no wonder so many Mississippi favorites began right here in Starkville.

For those that enjoy the outdoors, Starkville does not disappoint. [Hike](#) into the lush green bottomland hardwood forests, ride your [bike](#) down a gravel road, or grab your [binoculars to see the egrets and herons](#) fly in to the rookery for the night. Explore the many outdoor adventures you can have in Starkville.

For more information, visit [Starkville.org](#)



## Procedure for Candidacy

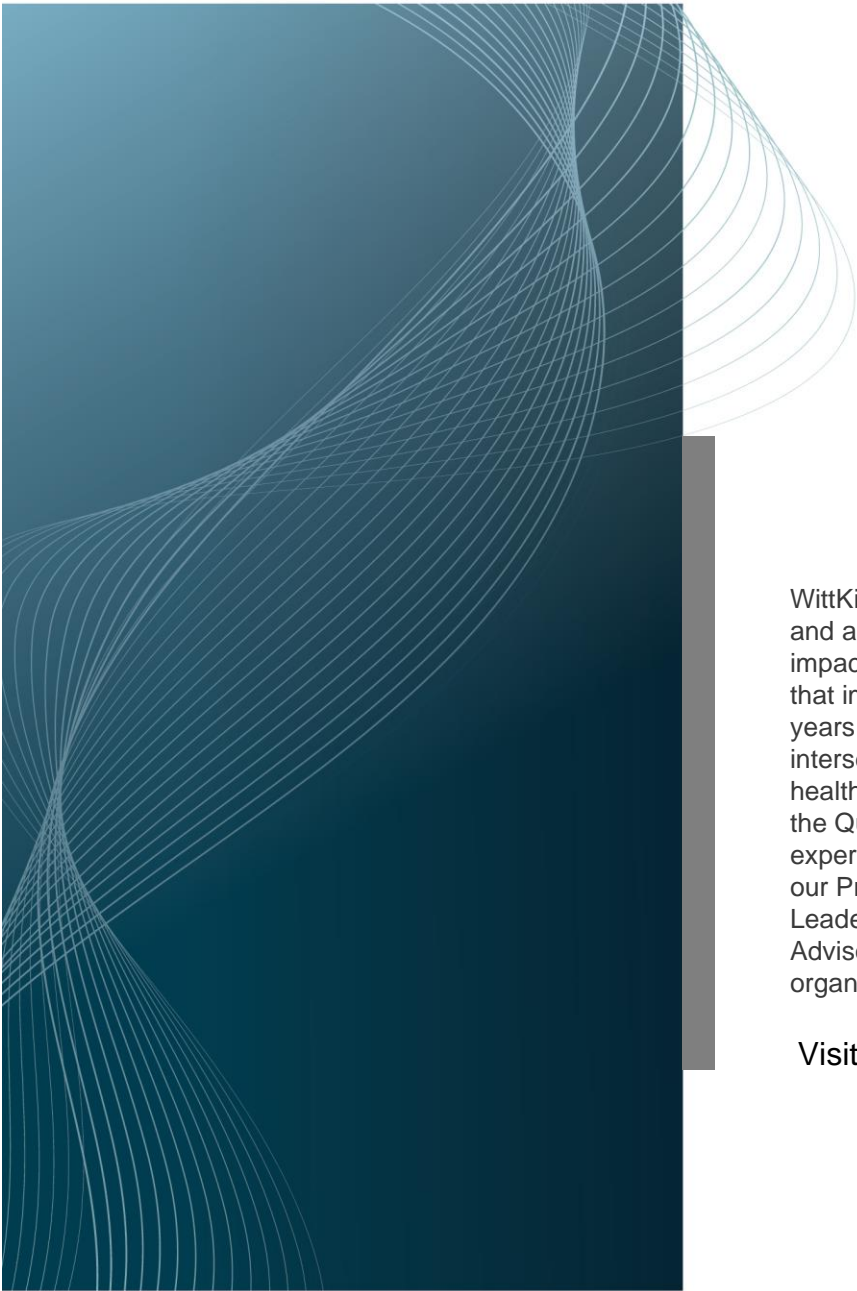
All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a cover letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile and a resume. WittKieffer is assisting Mississippi State University in this search. For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by **January 15, 2023**. Application materials should be submitted using WittKieffer's [candidate portal](#).

Nominations and inquiries may be sent via email to Christy Pratt and Roxana Woudstra at: [MissStateU\\_FinAid@wittkieffer.com](mailto:MissStateU_FinAid@wittkieffer.com)

*MSU is an equal opportunity employer, and all qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, ethnicity, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, genetic information, pregnancy, gender identity, status as a U.S. veteran, and/or any other status protected by applicable law. We always welcome nominations and applications from women, members of any minority group, and others who share our passion for building a diverse community that reflects the diversity in our student population.*

The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. This material has been copied, compiled, or quoted in part from Mississippi State University documents and personal interviews and is believed to be reliable. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and factual situations govern.

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