



Vice President for Academic Affairs

Leadership Profile

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WittKieffer

Executive Summary

The Executive Vice President (EVP) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for UNM Health Sciences seeks a dynamic leader to serve as Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA). The VPAA will drive institutional change, build consensus, and foster engagement to enhance the academic experience for faculty, students, and staff. The VPAA will play a key role in shaping academic policies, fostering faculty excellence, and championing learner success while ensuring alignment with the university's long-term strategic goals.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs will act as the lead academic liaison for faculty, students, and educational affairs within the Health Sciences Center (HSC), ensuring strategic alignment with ongoing institutional transformation initiatives. This role requires a visionary leader who can build trust, drive collaboration, and align stakeholders toward common goals while championing academic innovation and operational excellence. Additionally, the VPAA will foster broad engagement across faculty and student affairs and advance interprofessional education within UNM Health Sciences. The VPAA serves as a key advisor to the EVP/CEO for Health Sciences and acts as a liaison to UNM Central Administration.

The VPAA will have demonstrated success in resource management, including experience establishing internal and external partnerships that drive new revenue streams while allocating existing resources to sustain academic excellence and support interprofessional collaboration. The new leader will be an innovative and collaborative partner to achieve the continued growth and excellence that UNM Health Sciences has experienced within the academic enterprise. The new VPAA will have the opportunity to contribute in a strategically significant and meaningful way to the health and well-being of the citizens of New Mexico and throughout the Southwest.

The VPAA will have extensive academic administration experience and will hold an academically productive record, and have earned academic credentials suitable for the rank of a full or associate professor at UNM. Qualified candidates will hold a Ph.D., M.D., or equivalent terminal degree in a discipline related to UNM Health Sciences; demonstrated achievement in recruitment; proven success in external fund development; a broad understanding of national health policy and future challenges to academic health sciences. Above all, candidates are expected to present a demonstrated track record of success and collaboration, leading through times of growth and change, and to exhibit a strong commitment to the mission of UNM Health Sciences.

Role of the Vice President for Academic Affairs

The Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) will act as the lead academic liaison for faculty, students, and educational affairs within the Health Sciences Center (HSC), ensuring strategic alignment with ongoing institutional transformation initiatives. This role requires a visionary leader who can build trust, drive collaboration, and align stakeholders toward common goals while championing academic innovation and operational excellence. Additionally, the VPAA will foster broad engagement across faculty and student affairs and advance interprofessional education within UNM Health Sciences. The VPAA serves as a key advisor to the EVP/CEO for Health Sciences and acts as a liaison to UNM Central Administration.

This position will serve as a key member of the EVP/CEO's immediate leadership team, working in close partnership with the Vice President for Research, the Vice President for Finance and Administration, and the CEO of the Health System. The role carries a broad range of responsibilities and requires a strategic, solutions-oriented leader who can align people and priorities across the institution. As a central problem-solver and collaborator, the individual in this role will be expected to foster strong cross-functional relationships, ensure alignment of mission and goals, and contribute meaningfully to the overall leadership and direction of the university.

The VPAA is responsible for the strategic, tactical, and fiscal management of health science programs to ensure the maximum effectiveness of resources—financial, facility, and personnel. The VPAA holds the delegated academic responsibility for the University's four health sciences colleges.

Reporting Relationships

This position reports to the Executive Vice President for The University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center and Chief Executive Officer of the UNM Health System. In addition, the VPAA will work collaboratively with several other key leaders across the health system and university, including the Vice President for Finance and Administration, Vice President for Research, and Vice President for Clinical Affairs.

Direct Reports include the Executive Director for Student Affairs and the Executive Director for Faculty Affairs.

Key Responsibilities:

- Serve as the primary academic representative for education, faculty, and student affairs within the HSC, ensuring alignment with institutional transformation efforts.
- Lead change management efforts, creating strategies that build consensus, strengthen collaboration, and increase engagement across faculty, students, and administration.
- Provide guidance to HSC Deans, leadership, and legal teams to develop, amend, and implement policies that support faculty and student success.
- Co-create integrative opportunities for Deans and student learners of all HSC partners, with faculty senate and faculty committees to enhance shared governance and policy development.
- Oversee faculty contracts, compensation structures, and faculty promotion and tenure processes at the HSC level.
- Develop and implement strategic initiatives that drive faculty and student engagement, interprofessional collaboration, and academic innovation.
- Lead efforts in conflict resolution, student and faculty grievances, and policy appeals, ensuring a fair, transparent, and supportive academic environment.

- Supervise and empower key academic and student support offices, including Faculty Affairs, Faculty Relations, Student Academic Affairs, the Health Sciences Registrar, and Interprofessional Healthcare Simulation.
- Partner with the HSC Student Council to enhance student engagement and advocacy.
- Act as a liaison for the UNM Rio Rancho Campus Director, supporting the planning of future academic activities and program expansion.

Expectations for Leadership

The VPAA will be joining UNM Health Sciences at a time of exciting, dynamic change. The next VPAA will provide vision and strategy to address the following opportunities:

Strengthen Academic Programs: In partnership with the deans, the VPAA will work to ensure academic excellence across all programs. They will seek out opportunities to evolve programs that meet contemporary workforce and education needs in the health science fields, as well as explore interprofessional growth opportunities, community-engaged learning, and research. As they consider any changes, they will maintain the tradition and culture of UNM, which is grounded in student-centeredness and a sense of belonging, as a top priority.

This VPAA will work with the EVP and the deans to articulate a compelling vision for the healthcare of the future and prepare the health science colleges for active engagement in that future. The VPAA will ensure a culture of growth with specific, measurable objectives that enhance the research and education programs of the respective colleges and that create multi-school, cross-professional initiatives that leverage the strengths and faculty resources of the individual colleges.

Grow Programs: The next VPAA must provide a vision and strategy that supports enrollment across the health sciences. They will partner with the central campus to drive programmatic growth, without sacrificing the high academic quality which is a hallmark of UNM's reputation. They will provide innovation in curriculum delivery, professional certifications, and new degree programs that serve both the state's needs and the university's mission.

In cooperation with the deans, promote the strategic recruitment of nationally recognized faculty that builds on and contributes to the growth of competitive, sponsored research in focused programs, departments, and centers of excellence. Accelerate the growth of inter-college research programs not only among the health science colleges but also between the other colleges of the UNM.

Provide Visionary Leadership: The VPAA will provide visionary leadership, enhancing success across the entire health sciences and ensuring a focus on emerging education models. They will coordinate research and academic-related activities and partner closely with the EVP/CEO and key collaborators to achieve transformational growth across the health sciences portfolio.

This leader will build a partnership across UNM Health to promote the functional integration of health science education and clinical medicine; support the development of new models of education, training, and patient care; and that advances translational, basic, and population-based research to the benefit of the health science colleges, the UNM, and the people of New Mexico.

Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

The VPAA will have a proven record in clinical, academic, and administrative leadership. The candidate must possess demonstrable excellence in scholarly and academic achievements, a strong commitment to health science education, knowledge of the complexities of academic medical centers in the current healthcare environment, and an understanding of the challenges of a competitive healthcare delivery environment. The successful candidate's personal and professional reputation must be outstanding.

The VPAA must also be perceptive of and sensitive to the needs of both students and faculty, while maintaining an appreciation for the overarching needs of the University as a whole. The successful candidate must also be able to cooperatively and effectively work with internal and external colleagues to ensure that the goals of the various components of the Health Sciences Center are met. This leader must have an understanding of and sensitivity to the unique issues facing minorities in medical education, research, and healthcare delivery.

The candidate's ability to compellingly articulate a vision for the academic and the clinical enterprise of the Health Sciences Center and their personal reputation as a positive, effective partner and team player, as well as an inspiring leader, will play a key role in their success.

The chosen candidate should have a record of solid performance as a skilled manager, with the ability to develop and grow programs, meet budgets, measure and improve productivity and outcomes, recruit and develop talented people, and take appropriate business risks to achieve goals. Most importantly, the ideal candidate will have the capability to provide leadership as a passionate spokesperson for UNM Health Sciences Center mission, both on and off campus.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs will be a well-established, nationally recognized leader. Ideally, the successful candidate will possess the following attributes:

Minimum Education and Experience:

- M.D., Ph.D., M.D./Ph.D., MBBS, DO, JD, Pharm.D., DNP, DPT, DrPH, or equivalent.
- At least five years of faculty experience in an accredited academic health institution.
- Eligible for advanced academic rank of Associate or Full Professor.

Preferred Qualifications:

- Expertise in leading institutional transformation, change management, and driving strategic initiatives that increase engagement and academic success.
- A strong track record in building consensus and collaboration across academic and administrative units.
- Experience in faculty and student grievance resolution and conflict mediation.
- Demonstrated ability to drive cross-functional engagement and build collaborative relationships within a complex academic environment.
- A proven commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education leadership.
- A strong record of leadership in academic administration, faculty affairs, student affairs, and/or interprofessional education.

- Demonstrated ability to lead institutional change, navigate complex organizational landscapes, and drive strategic initiatives that increase engagement.
- Expertise in consensus-building, conflict resolution, and mediation, ensuring fair and transparent processes aligned with UNM/HSC policies.
- Strong organizational and communication skills to engage and collaborate with diverse stakeholders.
- A demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in academic leadership.
- A deep understanding of faculty and student policies, with the ability to develop and implement initiatives that foster academic excellence, collaboration, and long-term institutional success.

About The University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center

UNM Health Sciences Center is the state's largest integrated healthcare treatment, research, and education organization. UNM Health Sciences Center unites patient care, health professions education, and research to improve the health and well-being of all New Mexicans.

UNM Health, the clinical delivery system of the HSC, includes UNM Hospital and UNM Medical Group, Inc. As the state's only Level I Trauma Center, UNM Hospital provides the highest level of care for the most critically ill and injured patients from across the region. With more than 150 medical specialties and nearly 8,000 dedicated professionals, UNM Hospital recorded more than one million outpatient visits, 22,000 surgical procedures, and 100,000 emergency visits last year.

As New Mexico's largest teaching hospital, UNM Hospital trains the next generation of health professionals enrolled in HSC's academic programs. The **UNM School of Medicine** offers degrees in M.D., M.D./Ph.D., and eight allied health professions, including Physician Assistant, Physical Therapy, Dental Hygiene, and Anesthesiologist Assistant programs. With 795 Graduate Medical Education trainee slots, the school ranks among the largest in the nation for the size of its GME program.

The **UNM College of Nursing** - nationally recognized and ranked first in New Mexico - offers BSN, DNP, and Ph.D. degrees, along with certificate programs. These nursing programs emphasize hands-on clinical experience, simulation-based learning, and community partnerships.

The **UNM College of Pharmacy** awards Pharm.D. and a B.S. in Pharmaceutical Sciences degrees. With world-class faculty, a 7:1 student-to-faculty ratio, and state-of-the-art facilities, students engage in a rigorous, comprehensive curriculum that prepares them for excellence in patient-centered care and research.

The **UNM College of Population Health** is advancing toward accreditation as a School of Public Health, offering bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. degrees that prepare students to address health access and equity in diverse and underserved communities.

In 2025, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked the [UNM School of Medicine](#) 14th nationally in "[Best Medical Schools: Primary Care](#)." UNM's [nursing-midwifery program](#) ranks 10th nationally for "[Best Midwifery Program](#)" and UNM's bachelor of science in nursing is also recognized as the [54th best in the nation](#), placing it in the top 8% of ranked BSN programs. UNM College of Pharmacy ranks 44th nationally for "[Best Pharmacy Schools](#)".

Research is foundational to HSC's mission. Faculty lead more than 900 major projects and 300 clinical trials at any given time, generating over \$160M in biomedical research funding. These efforts drive innovation, improve health outcomes, and strengthen New Mexico's economy.

Together, the UNM Health Sciences Center stands as the state's only academic health center-educating tomorrow's health care leaders, advancing discovery, and delivering world-class care to every New Mexican.

For more information, please visit [UNM Health Sciences Center](#).

About The University of New Mexico

Overview

Founded in 1889 as New Mexico's flagship institution, with a total enrollment of over 26,000 students (44 percent Hispanic and 14 percent Native American) across multiple campuses, the University of New Mexico now occupies nearly 800 acres near old Route 66 in the heart of Albuquerque, a city of more than 900,000 people. From the magnificent mesas to the west, past the banks of the historic Rio Grande to the Sandia Mountains to the east, Albuquerque is a blend of culture and cuisine, styles and stories, people, pursuits, and panoramas.



Vision

Be a global leader in realizing human potential, addressing critical community challenges, and demonstrating the power of inclusive diversity.

Mission

As the state's premier institution of higher learning and provider of healthcare, the University of New Mexico promotes discovery, generates intellectual and cultural contributions, honors academic values, and fosters an educated, healthy, and economically vigorous New Mexico.

Values

EXCELLENCE

We value excellence in all of our work, and we strive to perform and achieve at the highest levels.

INCLUSION

We respect and celebrate the differences of all persons and value working in a collaborative environment where diversity is cherished and there is a shared sense of belonging.

ENVIRONMENT

We are dedicated to the protection of our planet to ensure the health, well-being, and success of future generations.

INTEGRITY

We value fairness, honesty, and transparency. We are good stewards of the resources that have been given to us.



PLACE

We are dedicated to the people and places of New Mexico, even as we reach for global impact for the benefit of all humanity.

The University has branch campuses in [Gallup](#), [Los Alamos](#), [Taos](#), and [Valencia County](#), plus an HSC extension campus in Rio Rancho, also home to the UNM Sandoval Regional Medical Center. [UNM's libraries](#), [museums](#), galleries, and performance spaces are rich cultural resources for the state. UNM is a federally designated Hispanic-serving institution.

The University represents a cross-section of cultures and backgrounds. In the Spring of 2025, [more than 25,000 students attended](#) the main, branch, and HSC campuses and education centers.

UNM boasts an outstanding faculty that has included four National Academy of Sciences/ Engineering Members, six National Academy of Inventors Fellows, 60+ Fulbright scholar program awardees, and several fellows of national and international associations and societies. Faculty publish in major peer-reviewed professional journals, including The New England Journal of Medicine, American Historical Review, and Nature, and with top-tier academic presses such as University of Chicago Press and Cambridge University Press. As publicly oriented scholars, UNM professors share their expertise in local and national media outlets from The Albuquerque Journal to The New Yorker.

UNM is the largest academic employer in the state, including employees of [University Hospitals](#). It has more than [200,000 alumni](#) with Lobos in every state and more than 2,400 alumni outside the U.S.

UNM offers 94 baccalaureates, 71 master's, and 37 doctoral degrees. Home to the [Lobos](#) and contenders in the Mountain West Conference, UNM athletics draw fans from all over. The University Arena or "The Pit" is one of college basketball's most famous and recognizable buildings. In fact, The Pit was ranked 5th by the Travel Channel as one of the [best college basketball venues](#).

UNM is a place where cutting-edge research and creative endeavors flourish. [As a very high research activity \(R1\) institution](#), UNM research injects millions of dollars into New Mexico's economy, funds new advancements in healthcare, and augments teaching, giving students valuable hands-on training in state-of-the-art laboratories.

As an academic institution, UNM is ranked nationally as a "[Top Public School](#)", "[Best Global University](#)", and "[Best National University](#)", and the highest ranked for each within New Mexico.

[UNM School of Law](#) has been ranked [8th in "Best Clinical Training Law Programs"](#), in the top 5% nationally for this recognition. The photography program at [UNM College of Fine Arts](#) is ranked [8th in the nation](#) for "Best Photography Schools" and ranks within the top 30% of "[Best Art Schools](#)" across the U.S.. The [UNM School of Engineering](#) has been designated within the [top 100 "Best Engineering Schools"](#), along with six [top 100 national rankings](#) for programs including Chemical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and Nuclear Engineering. At [UNM College of Arts & Sciences](#) [13 programs rank in the top 100](#) in the nation-including Sociology, Biology, History and Earth Sciences.

Among the University's many [outstanding research](#) units are the [Center for Advanced Research Computing](#), [Comprehensive Cancer Center](#), [COSMIAC](#), [Center for High Technology Materials](#), [Design Planning Assistance Center](#), [Innovation Academy](#), [Center for Quantum Information & Control](#), and the [Mind Research Network](#)-to name a few. **Learn more about UNM's strategic direction: [UNM 2040](#).**

Leadership

Michael Richards, MD, MPA



Michael Richards, MD, MPA, has been serving as Executive Vice President for The University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center and Chief Executive Officer of the UNM Health System since January 2025.

Prior to his role as EVP and CEO, Dr. Richards served as UNM's Senior Vice President for Clinical Affairs and Interim Dean of the UNM School of Medicine. He is a professor and former chair of the Emergency Medicine Department as well as a former Chief of Staff at UNM Hospital.

Dr. Richards' efforts have laid the foundation for ongoing clinical growth and clinical partnerships, ensuring that more New Mexicans have access to healthcare. As a trusted advisor on health policy, New Mexico's governors and state legislators have relied on his expertise to help create better access for patients and improved health outcomes for vulnerable populations.

His years of teaching and mentoring generations of students and trainees are a testament to his commitment to the UNM Health Science Center's core mission of building and expanding New Mexico's health care workforce.

Dr. Richards received his medical training at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and a Master of Public Administration at the University of North Carolina. He completed his internship and residency in Emergency Medicine at UNM.

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Albuquerque's affordable living, diverse dining scenes, outdoor recreational activities, accessible day trips, and wellness options create a compelling environment for those seeking a balanced and engaging lifestyle. The city's cost of living is 4% lower than the national average, a benefit that extends to housing, where the median home price remains attractively below the U.S. average. This economic advantage is coupled with lower property and state income taxes, making Albuquerque an appealing place for professionals seeking a high quality of life without the high costs.



The culinary landscape in Albuquerque is a tapestry of flavors deeply influenced by Indigenous, New Mexican, and Spanish cuisines. Dining out can range from sampling the famed New Mexican Chile in red and green varieties to exploring innovative dishes at upscale restaurants. The city's love for its unique culinary culture is evident in its numerous food festivals and markets, offering an endless array of dining experiences.

For outdoor enthusiasts, Albuquerque's proximity to ski resorts, such as the nearby Sandia Mountains, provides a winter playground for all ages. The skiing opportunities here cater to both beginners and seasoned enthusiasts, making it a perfect family outing. Beyond the slopes, the city's numerous parks, bike trails, and the Rio Grande provide endless outdoor activities, from picnics to kayaking, fostering a healthy, active lifestyle.

Albuquerque is ideally located for memorable day trips. Destinations such as Santa Fe, with its historic adobe landmarks and vibrant arts scene, and the Jemez Springs area, known for its natural hot springs and beautiful mountain scenery, are within easy reach. These excursions provide a refreshing break from the urban environment and an opportunity to immerse oneself in the natural and cultural richness of New Mexico.

Destinations like the Petroglyph National Monument offer a glimpse into ancient history, while the Bandelier National Monument and the Valles Caldera National Preserve allow visitors to explore stunning natural landscapes and learn about the region's cultural heritage.

Wellness and relaxation are also a cornerstone of the Albuquerque experience, with a selection of spas that leverage the tranquil desert setting to provide a serene retreat. From luxury spa resorts offering a full range of treatments to more intimate settings incorporating traditional Native American healing techniques, there are ample opportunities for rejuvenation.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.visitalbuquerque.org/> or <https://www.newmexico.org/>



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. Please direct all candidate materials to Mercedes Chacon Vance, Kerry Quealy or Charlotte Harris using the [WittKieffer Candidate Portal](#) or via email, at: UNM_VPAA@wittkieffer.com. The Candidate Portal is a secure, easy way to nominate a colleague, express interest, or apply for a position.

The University of New Mexico is committed to hiring and retaining a diverse workforce. We are an Equal Opportunity Employer, making decisions without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, age, veteran status, disability, or any other protected class.

The University of New Mexico requires all regular staff positions successfully pass a pre-employment background check. This may include, but is not limited to, a criminal history background check, New Mexico Department of Health fingerprint screening, New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department fingerprint screening, verification of education credentials, and/or verification of prior employment. For more information about background checks, visit <https://policy.unm.edu/university-policies/3000/3280.html>. Refer to <https://policy.unm.edu/university-policies/3000/3200.html> for a definition of Regular Staff.