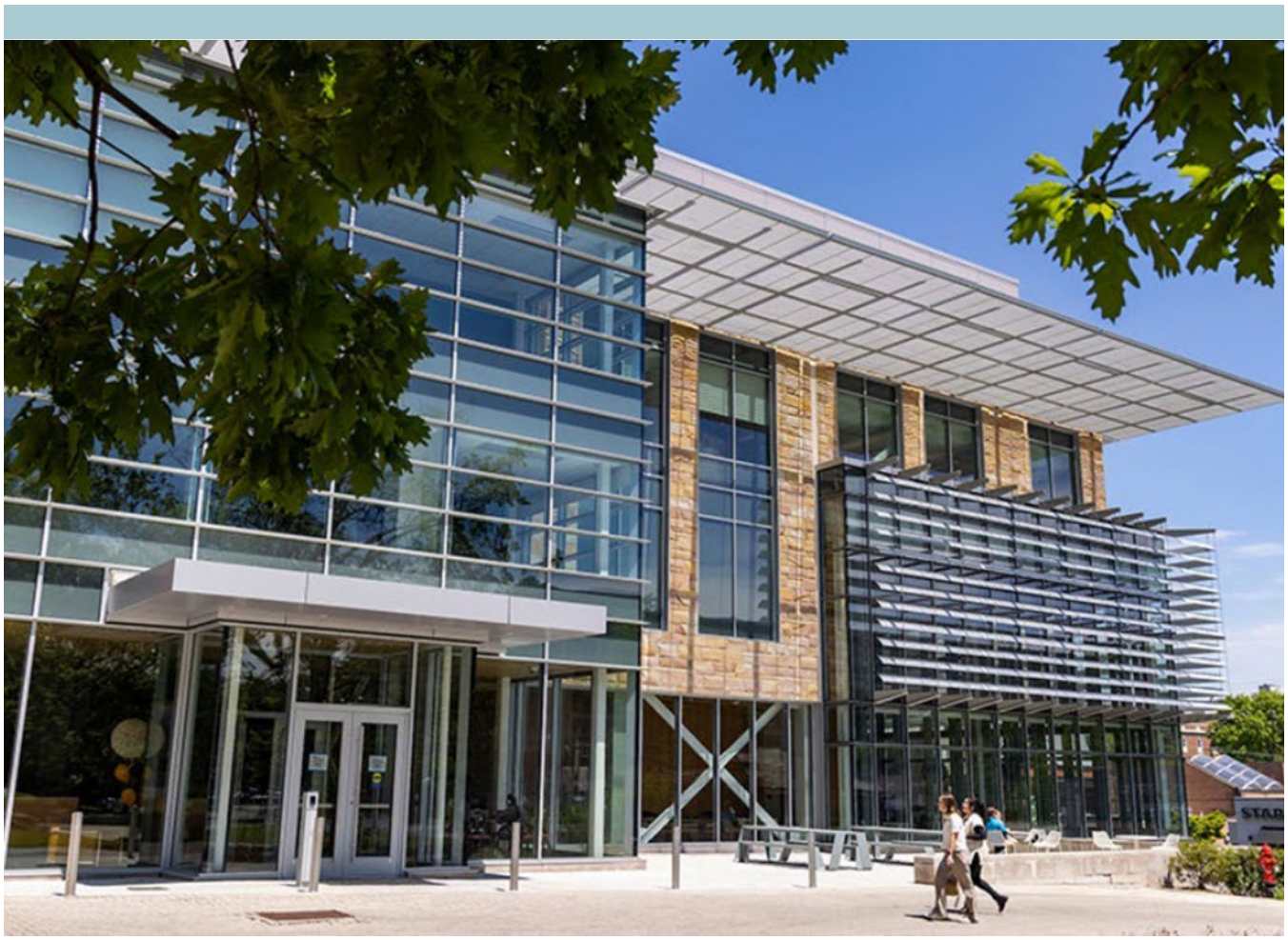
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
Owen Graduate School of Management

Senior Director for Custom Solutions, Executive Education

Leadership Profile

December 2025



WittKieffer

Executive Summary

The Vanderbilt University Owen Graduate School of Management (Owen) is seeking a bold, collaborative, and entrepreneurial leader to serve as its Senior Director for Custom Solutions, Executive Education.

Owen is one of the world's top business schools. Its rigorous curriculum, world-class faculty, and dynamic learning environment have consistently produced top-tier graduates. Owen is building the next generation of leaders through collaboration and a portfolio of programs that focuses on creating opportunities for its faculty, staff, and students to discover, grow, and thrive in business and beyond.

Transformation lies at the core of Owen's mission, and this is a particularly game-changing period in the school's history. Vanderbilt is a growth-minded university, and Owen is a key player in that strategy as the university looks to expand its business education and computing programs to West Palm Beach and explore an enhanced presence in New York City with a campus in Chelsea. Since Dean Thomas Steenburgh joined Owen in 2023, he has developed a new mission statement, moved Vanderbilt's undergraduate business degree to Owen, enhanced program offerings, and grown enrollment. A new state-of-the-art facility reinforces Owen's commitment to an unparalleled learning environment. Redesigned classrooms, gathering spaces, and a new multi-purpose space foster collaborative and academically enriching study environments.

The Senior Director for Custom Solutions, Executive Education, will be asked to infuse Owen's "*Discover, Grow, and Thrive"* mission into its Executive Education efforts. In particular, the Senior Director will be expected to strategically grow the Executive Education portfolio, nurture program innovation, amplify faculty and staff engagement to enhance Executive Education offerings and delivery, foster collaboration and synergy with university partners, and elevate Executive Education marketing.

The ideal candidate will possess deep knowledge of Executive Education, bring a creative and collaborative mindset, exhibit strong analytical and listening skills, and demonstrate the ability to work well with senior colleagues, C-suite executives, and Vanderbilt faculty to diagnose organizational learning needs and co-create impactful solutions. The ability to proactively identify and cultivate relationships that contribute to new client acquisition and the growth of existing client engagement, and a willingness to aggressively engage in prospecting and the pursuit of leads will be essential for success. Agile and flexible thinking, the ability to communicate with transparency and candor, and skill in leveraging the talents and commitment of colleagues will be assets for the role.

Located in Nashville, Tennessee, Owen draws from a city that has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, emerging as a vibrant hub for business, technology, and innovation. The city's dynamic and diverse economy, coupled with its rich cultural offerings, makes it an attractive destination for prospective students and working professionals. Owen has an enrollment of over 650 students in its MBA, Executive MBA, Global MBA for Executives, Master of Science in Finance, Master of Accountancy, Master of Marketing, and Master of Management in Health Care programs. In addition, the Owen School oversees the Hoogland Undergraduate Business Program, a trans-institutional business minor designed to complement students' strong liberal arts education. Owen's student body represents a broad range of backgrounds from across the U.S. and more than 40 countries.

Owen Executive Education, established in 1991, offers open-enrollment, certificate, and custom programs for practicing managers across a wide range of industries, including healthcare, financial services, manufacturing, technology, energy, retail, construction, and hospitality. More than 6,000 executives from diverse industries and functions have developed and sharpened their skills through Owen's programs.

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

Role of the Senior Director for Custom Solutions, Executive Education, Owen Graduate School of Management

The Senior Director for Custom Solutions, Executive Education, will report to the Chief Business Officer at Owen Graduate School of Management.

The Senior Director's key functions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Business Development and Revenue Growth:**
  - Originate, develop, and close new business opportunities across industries and sectors.
  - Build and manage a portfolio of high-value clients and corporate partners.
  - Engage confidently with senior executives (VP, SVP, and C-suite) to position Owen as a strategic partner in leadership and talent development.
  - Lead consultative sales conversations that uncover client challenges and align solutions with measurable business outcomes.
  - Consistently achieve or exceed individual and team revenue targets.
- **Strategic Market Expansion:**
  - Contribute to the design and execution of Owen Executive Education's growth strategy, including annual sales planning and pipeline management.
  - Identify and pursue emerging markets, industries, and client segments with high revenue potential.
  - Provide insight and recommendations on pricing, positioning, and new product development based on client feedback and market trends.
  - Collaborate with the team to shape go-to-market approaches and key account pursuit strategies.
- **Faculty & Program Collaboration:**
  - Engage Vanderbilt faculty early in the sales cycle, connecting their expertise to client opportunities.
  - Partner with faculty and program teams to design innovative, customized learning experiences.
  - Represent client needs and market intelligence in internal planning sessions to ensure program relevance and impact.
- **Client Relationship Leadership:**
  - Build long-term, trusted relationships with senior decision-makers to foster ongoing partnerships and renewals.
  - Maintain senior-level client engagement throughout program delivery, ensuring strategic alignment and satisfaction.
  - Collaborate with the Client Success & Sales Support Manager to ensure smooth transitions from sales to delivery.
- **Internal Leadership & Collaboration:**
  - Serve as a key contributor to the Executive Education leadership team, helping align sales strategy, marketing, and program delivery.
  - Provide mentorship and guidance to the Client Success & Sales Support Manager on sales operations, proposals, and client communications.

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

The Vanderbilt University Owen Graduate School of Management's new mission statement is centered upon the words *"Discover, Grow, and Thrive."* The Senior Director for Custom Solutions, Executive Education, will be a key player in infusing that ethos into Vanderbilt's Executive Education efforts.

In particular, the Senior Director for Custom Solutions will be expected to:

- **Strategically grow the Executive Education portfolio.**

Vanderbilt University's capital campaign, "Dare to Grow," embodies a sentiment that Owen takes seriously. The school seeks to leverage its past successes and build for the future. The momentum Owen has is incredible: In FY 2025, overall fundraising efforts surpassed $50 million. A new state-of-the-art facility with designated space for Executive Education provides a valuable resource that can be further optimized. Owen has experienced strong program growth, with total revenue up nearly 100% over the past four years. Custom executive education has been the growth engine, increasing more than sixfold over the same period.

The Senior Director will help shape and implement a growth strategy for Executive Education that aligns with Owen's priorities and maximizes the educational impact for participants and clients. The Senior Director will engage in business development efforts that identify and qualify opportunities for open enrollment programs as well as for custom programs. While Owen has previously focused on companies with a presence in Tennessee, Vanderbilt's planned campuses in West Palm Beach and New York City provide additional opportunities to expand its scope.

The Senior Director will possess deep knowledge of Executive Education, bring a creative and collaborative mindset, exhibit strong analytical and listening skills, and demonstrate the ability to work well with senior colleagues, C-suite executives, and Vanderbilt faculty to diagnose organizational learning needs and co-create impactful solutions. The Senior Director will be a leader who is adept at navigating an ambiguous, fast-paced environment and managing change as opportunities emerge and evolve for Owen. The successful candidate will have a track record of success in proactively identifying and cultivating relationships that contribute to new client acquisition and the growth of client engagements. A go-getter with a positive mindset, the Senior Director will engage in aggressive prospecting and the pursuit of leads. Experience in strategic planning, evaluation of programs, and outcome assessment will be assets for the role.

- **Nurture program innovation.**

The needs of clients and students are evolving. Additionally, the Executive Education space has become a crowded field. Growing Owen's Executive Education portfolio will include program offerings that are relevant, distinctive, and continue to help individuals fill a particular knowledge gap and meet organizations' leadership development needs. The Senior Director will be expected to bring bold, innovative thinking to support leadership and faculty in the examination of program offerings, leveraging the school's strengths, and evolving program options to be responsive to market demands. This holds true for both custom programs and Owen's open enrollment offerings.

The successful candidate will be able to harness data and contribute knowledge of market trends and competitive analysis to inform conversations about how to lean into areas of distinction and expertise for Owen, including AI, entrepreneurship, Fintech, healthcare, and real estate; examine different modalities; and explore other opportunities upon which Owen could capitalize. The Senior Director will be a learning-centered professional committed to the notion that Executive Education offers professionals the opportunity to acquire new skills and adopt different perspectives, ultimately advancing their careers.

- **Amplify faculty and staff engagement to enhance Executive Education offerings and delivery.**

The Senior Director must be a present and visible leader in the Owen community, engaging with faculty and staff to gain a nuanced understanding of the expertise of the Owen faculty, the strength of its programs, and what is required to deliver a high-quality experience for clients and participants.

Vanderbilt faculty and practitioners offer a game-changing combination of broad and practical expertise; research-driven insights; and a collaborative, personal approach to teaching. The Senior Director will ensure that faculty perspectives are incorporated into the visioning process for program offerings. It will be important for the Senior Director to develop mechanisms for regular engagement with faculty to understand their areas of academic expertise, foster interest in Executive Education, grow the pool of potential instructors, and assess their ability to serve as effective Executive Education faculty.

The delivery function for Executive Education falls within Owen's Academic and Student Affairs (ASA) division. Helping ASA staff to understand client expectations and preferences will enable a smooth handoff and the exceptional execution of programs. Developing feedback loops from insights gained through conversations with clients and participant survey data will help identify areas for program enhancement and solidify Owen's place as a pre-eminent leader in Executive Education.

The Senior Director will be a good team player who listens to coworkers and seriously considers others' ideas in shaping strategic direction; communicates with transparency and candor; and leverages the talents and commitment of colleagues to create exceptional experiences that enable program participants to feel that they are part of something greater than simply taking a class to gain particular skills. The Senior Director will be a champion for Executive Education, promoting its value for clients and participants as well as educating colleagues on how an expansion of the portfolio further advances Owen's *"Discover, Grow, and Thrive"* mission.

- **Foster collaboration and synergy with university partners.**

In addition to Vanderbilt's eleven schools and colleges, Vanderbilt supports numerous centers and facilities that promote interdisciplinary research and collaboration. The culture at the university is one of collaborative discovery, where people come together with a competitive spirit to fuel innovation. The Senior Director will lean into that institutional value and leverage the breadth of Vanderbilt's academic portfolio to explore opportunities for partnerships that can enhance Executive Education. For example, the new College of Connected Computing, Vanderbilt's first new college in 40 years, and the Data Science Institute could provide resources to strengthen offerings in AI. Nashville is one of the nation's fastest-growing healthcare hubs, and Vanderbilt University Medical Center may offer potential partnerships to advance Owen's healthcare management agenda. Nursing has seen more activity in micro-credentialing, which could offer additional opportunities for Owen's open enrollment programs.

Working with Owen leadership, the Senior Director will employ an entrepreneurial and collaborative approach in exploring potential partnerships across the university. Agile and flexible thinking, knowledge of emerging trends, and an understanding of and commitment to Vanderbilt University's aspirations will help the Senior Director create win-win solutions that help to grow Owen's Executive Education portfolio as well as meet the needs of other campus partners.

- **Elevate Executive Education marketing.**

Executive Education has become a competitive field with both higher education institutions and corporations actively involved in the space. The Senior Director will partner with Owen's new Chief Marketing & Communications Officer to develop strategies and tactics to convey Owen's unique value proposition and heighten brand recognition. This will be critical for business development. Shaping a compelling narrative for Executive Education offerings and creating a strategy for enhanced engagement of Owen alumni will help build pipelines for both custom and open enrollment programs. The Senior Director must help alumni understand what is being offered and the role that they can play in expanding Owen's position in Executive Education. Likewise, content highlighting the expertise of Owen faculty and impact for clients and participants will provide a foundation for building relationships with new clients.

Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

The Vanderbilt University Owen Graduate School of Management seeks a senior commercial leader responsible for driving revenue growth, originating new client relationships, and supporting the strategic expansion of the Executive Education portfolio. The ideal candidate will have the following professional and personal characteristics:

- Minimum of 8 – 10 years consultative sales or business development experience in executive education, professional services, or learning solutions.
- Demonstrated success generating $1 million+ annual revenue through complex, relationship-driven sales.
- Proven ability to sell to senior executives and manage multifaceted client relationships.
- Strong strategic mindset with experience contributing to revenue growth and market planning.
- Exceptional communication, presentation, and negotiation skills.
- Collaborative team player with leadership potential and the ability to mentor others.
- Ability to travel regionally and occasionally internationally.
- Bachelor’s degree required; advanced degree or MBA preferred.

About Vanderbilt University / Owen Graduate School of Management

Overview

Vanderbilt University is a non-profit, privately supported university located in Nashville, the capital of Tennessee. Widely seen as an “it” city, Nashville is consistently ranked in the top 10 cities to live and work. The Nashville Economic Market has ten counties and a population of more than 2 million, making it the largest metro area in the 5-state region. Many corporate giants call Nashville home, including AllianceBernstein, Bridgestone Americas, Dollar General, Hospital Corporation of America, and Nissan North America. As a national hub for the creative class, Nashville boasts a significant concentration of the music industry in the U.S. and vibrant manufacturing and tourism sectors with significant economic impacts on the region. The city is home to a collection of colleges and universities, including four of Tennessee’s seven HBCUs, with Vanderbilt as the dominant national university in the area.

Founded in 1873, Vanderbilt University is a tier-1 research university with a student body of approximately 13,500 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, and approximately 1,460 full-time faculty (excluding faculty employed by the Medical Center), of whom 56 have their primary appointment in the Owen School. The university is situated on a 330-acre campus located one and a half miles south of downtown Nashville.

The Owen Graduate School of Management (Owen) opened its doors in 1969 to 10 students and 10 faculty. Today, Owen is one of the world’s top business schools. Accredited by the AACSB since 1979, Owen is widely recognized for its challenging academics, stimulating research environment, strong student/faculty ratio (currently 11 to 1), and collaborative environment. Owen has an enrollment of over 650 students in its MBA, Executive MBA, Global MBA for Executives, Master of Science in Finance, Master of Accountancy, Master of Marketing, and Master of Management in Health Care programs. In addition, the Owen School oversees the Hoogland Undergraduate Business Program, a trans-institutional business minor designed to complement students’ strong liberal arts education. The Owen School is proud to have a student body that represents a broad range of backgrounds from across the U.S. and more than 40 countries.

Mission

Creating opportunities to discover, grow, and thrive in business and beyond.

The mission statement embodies the art of becoming and is both aspirational and true to Owen's identity. The mission acknowledges the importance of conventional forms of discovery, such as scholarly research, intellectual curiosity, and curricular learning. Yet, it equally celebrates the distinct facets of the human experience, characterized by the desire to connect with others, to find meaning in our work and relationships, and to create something new.

Transformation lies at the core of our mission. Owen is a hub where opportunities abound, where doors are opened, and where members of the community are inspired to embark on journeys of personal and intellectual growth. Owen encourages individuals to embrace courage as they navigate paths of discovery, striving toward the realization of their fullest potential.

Owen has been instrumental in transforming the lives of individuals, enabling them to thrive. The impact of Owen's work resonates deeply and personally with everyone involved with the organization. Their experiences capture why Owen is dedicated to its mission.

Values

Self-Direction

- Choosing your own path.

Growth

- Seeking mastery.

Belonging

- Developing meaningful relationships.

Collaboration

- Challenging and supporting each other to reach new heights.

Executive Education and Certificate Programs

Owen offers transformative programs that help professionals build valuable skills and elevate their careers. More than 8,000 executives across industries and functions have developed and sharpened their skills through Owen's programming, which includes:

- Programs for Individuals
- Custom Solutions
- Certificate of Excellence Leadership
- Certificates

Owen has partnered with over 100 organizations to develop custom programs for their high potential employees, including such organizations as AllianceBernstein, Bridgestone Americas, Nissan, ITT, Cardinal Health, and Dollar General.

The average age of an Executive Education participant is 39. Participants range from rising managers to C-suite executives; from small business owners to executives of large corporate boards. More than 10% of Executive Education participants live outside the United States.

Approximately 30 professors and presenters are involved in the delivery of Executive Education programs. They include both distinguished Vanderbilt faculty members and veteran industry practitioners.

Alumni

Owen graduates go on to impact a wide range of fields – from healthcare to technology, from finance to social entrepreneurship. Owen's alumni community of over 12,000 individuals is always eager to help those following in their footsteps.

Leadership

Owen Graduate School of Management

Tom Steenburgh, Ralph Owen Dean and Professor of Marketing

Dean Steenburgh is an expert in business-to-business marketing and sales. He believes in the power of collaboration between academics and business leaders to explore novel research ideas and solve real-world problems.

Awards & Accomplishments

Dean Steenburgh is a member of the Senior Advisory Board of the Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management. He sat on the editorial board of Marketing Science, was an Associate Editor of the Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing and is an ad hoc reviewer of academic articles published in high-impact sales and marketing journals.

Leadership

Prior to coming to Owen, Dean Steenburgh served as the Richard S. Reynolds Professor and Senior Associate Dean of the Full-Time Program at the Darden School of Business. He had previously served as the Senior Associate Dean of Faculty Development and the Senior Associate Dean of Executive Education and Lifelong Learning, and he was the course head for first-year marketing. Before joining Darden, he was on the faculty at the Harvard Business School where he developed electives and led executive education courses in business-to-business marketing and sales. Dean Steenburgh is a co-founder of the Thought Leadership on the Sales Profession conference, a unique event that brings together leading academics and senior business leaders to discuss cutting-edge ideas and practices in sales.

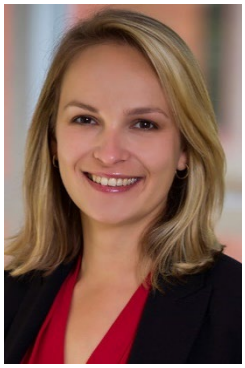
Publications

Dean Steenburgh's research has been recognized with the Neil Rackham Research Award for its long-term impact on sales practice. His article "Adding Bricks to Clicks: Predicting the Patterns of Cross-Channel Elasticities over Time" won the Louis W. Stern Award for making a significant contribution to the literature on marketing and channels of distribution. Has written articles for the Harvard Business Review on sales compensation and selling new products, and his HBR article "Motivating Salespeople: What Really Works" won the Wachovia Prize for Research Excellence. Dean Steenburgh has written numerous case studies that are taught in leading business schools around the world. His case study on Hubspot won the Case Center Award and is part of the HBS Premier Case Collection and the Case Center Classic Case Collection.

Research Interests

Dean Steenburgh's research analyzes the effectiveness of sales and marketing strategies. His work has shed light on topics such as whether lump-sum bonuses motivate salespeople to work harder or play timing games with their orders and whether firms should use sales and marketing actions to manage their earnings. He frequently speaks about his research at academic and company-sponsored conferences and has been a featured speaker at conferences run by the Sales Management Association, the Strategic Accounts Management Association, the Marketing Science Institute, the Institute for the Study of Business Markets, the Money Management Institute, and Siemens One.

Stella Vazna, Chief Business Officer, Owen Graduate School of Management



Stella serves as the Chief Business Officer at Owen Graduate School of Management, providing strategic leadership across critical organizational functions, including finance, human resources, facilities management, and administrative operations. With a comprehensive background in financial operations and strategic planning, she brings over two decades of professional expertise to her role.

Prior to joining Owen Graduate School of Management in 2016, Stella established her career in public accounting, developing comprehensive financial management skills across diverse accounting domains. Her professional journey at Vanderbilt began in 2013, supporting finance operations within Vanderbilt Student Affairs before advancing to her current executive position.

A licensed Certified Public Accountant (CPA) with an academic foundation in Economics from the University of Tennessee at Martin, Stella further advanced her professional credentials by completing her Executive Master of Business Administration from Vanderbilt University in 2020.

Nashville, Tennessee

As the hub for several booming industries, the home to a global community—including the nation's largest Kurdish population—and "America's friendliest city" according to *Travel + Leisure* magazine, Nashville blends history and hospitality with a rich mix of traditions and ongoing growth. Tennessee's capital is also an international destination for the arts, entrepreneurship, and scientific research, thereby attracting world-renowned scholars to Vanderbilt and the broader community. In turn, it's no surprise that many students choose to call Music City home, even after their time as Vanderbilt students comes to an end.

Nashville's dining scene has grown dramatically in the past decade and is now regularly included on "best-of" lists by publications such as *Bon Appetit*, *Travel + Leisure* and *Southern Living*. Home to several award-winning restaurants and chefs, the city's ever-expanding food options include cuisines from around the world, as well as signature dishes like Nashville hot chicken and other Southern classics.

Nashville offers many opportunities for enjoying the great outdoors with more than 100 stand-alone parks, and a quick drive away from the Great Smoky Mountains. Across the street from Vanderbilt's campus, Centennial Park comprises 132 acres of green space and paved trails, as well as a bandshell, dog park and other attractions. Centennial Park also has a rich history as the host site for the Tennessee Centennial Exposition and for Nashville's Parthenon, a full-scale replica of the classical Greek temple. The structure was built in 1897 to celebrate the city's reputation as the "Athens of the South"—a nickname earned through Nashville's progressive dedication to higher education and the exchange of intellectual ideas.

Industry

Major industries include tourism, printing and publishing, technology manufacturing, music production, higher education, finance, insurance, automobile production, and health care management. Nashville has been named one of the 15 best U.S. cities for work and family by *Fortune* magazine, was ranked as the No. 1 most popular U.S. city for corporate relocations by *Expansion Management* magazine, and was named by *Forbes* magazine as one of the 25 cities most likely to have the country's highest job growth over the coming five years.

History

Settled in 1779 along the banks of the Cumberland River, Nashville became Tennessee's state capital in 1843. Just 30 years later, Vanderbilt University was founded—marking the start of an enduring relationship between a dynamic Southern city and a world-class research institution.

Climate

Nashville's climate is often characterized as mild, with colder winter months and high temperatures in the summer. Most of the city's rain occurs during the spring, and if snowfall does occur, it's seldom heavy. Campus life at Vanderbilt benefits tremendously from the city's temperate weather, as outdoor activities can typically occur throughout the academic year.

Transportation

While several restaurants and cultural attractions are within easy walking distance of Vanderbilt's campus, ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft are also widely available throughout Nashville.

For getting into and out of the city, the award-winning Nashville International Airport provides nonstop flights to 75 markets, including Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, London, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C.

Neighborhoods

Each of the city's neighborhoods carries its own identity and benefits. The Vanderbilt campus is located approximately 1.5 miles southwest of downtown in the West End neighborhood of midtown Nashville. Among the closest neighboring areas are Music Row—often considered the heart and historic center of Nashville's recording industry—and Hillsboro Village, a pedestrian-friendly area filled with shopping, restaurants, and bars.

Click here for an introduction to Nashville, including information about arts and culture, food and dining, shopping, and the outdoors.

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 Vanderbilt University Owen Graduate School of Management in this search, which will remain open until an appointment is made.

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

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

Shelley Arakawa, J.D. and Maya Holt-Brockenbrough, Ph.D.

VanderbiltBusiness-ExecEd@wittkieffer.com

Vanderbilt University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer. Women, minorities, people with disabilities, and protected veterans are encouraged to apply.