Vice President for Government Relations

Position Description

August 2020
The Opportunity

The University of Michigan (U-M), one of the world’s preeminent research universities, is seeking its next vice president for government relations (VPGR).

Now operating in the beginning of its third century, U-M continues its mission to serve the public through preeminence in creating, communicating, preserving, and applying knowledge, art, and academic values. Currently, the main campus in Ann Arbor has an enrollment of 48,000 students, about a third of whom are in graduate and professional studies. U-M is consistently ranked among the top institutions of higher education globally with 280 degree programs and 102 graduate programs ranked in the top 10 nationally.

The VPGR is a position of broad leadership for U-M, serving as an executive officer reporting to the university’s president. As the chief government relations official of the university, this position is responsible for providing strategic vision, leadership, and effective management of U-M’s Government Relations programs at the local, state, and federal levels.

The University of Michigan: An Overview

The University of Michigan is one of the great public research universities in the nation and the world. Since the nineteenth century, it has served as a national model of a complex, diverse, and comprehensive public institution of higher learning that supports excellence in research, provides outstanding undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, and demonstrates commitment to public service and engagement.

The university was chartered in 1817 by the Michigan territorial legislature and was initially located in Detroit. In 1837, after Michigan had been admitted to the Union, the State of Michigan renewed the charter and relocated the university to Ann Arbor, where classes were first held in 1841. Today, the main campus is located in Ann Arbor, 35 miles west of Detroit, with regional campuses located in the cities of Dearborn and Flint.

The university is governed by the Board of Regents of the university, consisting of eight members elected at large in biennial state elections, and the president of the university, who serves as an ex officio member. The Regents serve without compensation for overlapping terms of eight years. According to the Michigan Constitution of 1963, the Regents are responsible for “general supervision” of the institution and “the control and direction of all expenditures from the institution’s funds.” The Regents meet periodically in formal public sessions as well as in informal sessions. The vice president for government relations attends all formal public sessions of the Regents, and relevant informal sessions, and works closely with the Regents throughout the year on a broad range of issues within the scope of their responsibilities.

Since 2014, the university has been led by President Mark S. Schlissel. Dr. Schlissel, a physician-scientist, is also a professor of microbiology and immunology and professor of internal medicine in the Medical School and professor of cell and development biology in U-M’s College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. In his first five years at U-M, his major areas of focus included advancing academic excellence at U-M through large-scale multi-disciplinary efforts that leverage
the academic breadth of the campus; advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion; increasing access to and affordability of a Michigan education; and promoting public engagement and service. Prior to becoming Michigan’s 14th president, Dr. Schlissel was provost at Brown University and professor of biochemistry and dean for the biological sciences at University of California-Berkeley.

U-M’s position of excellence in higher education rests on the outstanding scholarly and creative contributions of its faculty and on the intellectual quality, vitality, and passion of its students — undergraduate, graduate, and professional. Its 19 schools and colleges, as well as its centers, institutes, and libraries are nationally and internationally recognized. U-M is a founding member of the Association of American Universities (AAU).

The university sustains top programs in the arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and engineering, and in all of the major professional schools. It is the home of one of the largest and leading academic medical centers in the world. The university is also recognized for its outstanding interdisciplinary institutes and centers, such as the Institute for Social Research, the Life Sciences Institute, and the Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation. Overall, there are approximately 3,172 tenured and tenure-track faculty on the Ann Arbor campus, and an additional 4,160 individuals in instructional and research faculty roles such as clinical instructional faculty, research faculty, lecturers, and supplemental instructional staff.

The Ann Arbor campus currently enrolls approximately 31,000 undergraduates and 17,000 graduate and professional students. Its undergraduate students come from Michigan as well as from every state in the union and from more than one hundred countries. Today, the university has more than 600,000 living alumni around the globe. The campus is supported by approximately 15,000 staff members (not including the medical center staff).

The campus covers about 3,200 acres in and near Ann Arbor. Other holdings include about 18,000 additional acres in regional campuses, field stations, and other properties for research and teaching. In addition to classrooms, laboratories, and specialized research facilities, the university community makes use of a vast array of resources, including libraries, concert halls, art museums and galleries, an arboretum, botanical gardens, and athletic and recreational facilities. The university calendar offers a prodigious diversity of events and activities. Many thousands of conferences, symposia, speeches, workshops, concerts, performances, recitals, films, readings, and athletic events take place each year. As well, over 1,000 clubs and organizations provide innumerable opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to take part in the university community.

As a public institution, the revenues and expenditures of U-M are maintained in accordance with the governmental accounting principles of fund accounting. The total operating budget for the Ann Arbor campus was approximately $9.6 billion for fiscal year 2020, including about $5.2 billion for the university health system. For FY 2020, the budget for the academic operations of the campus totaled approximately $3.9 billion, of which about $2.3 billion was in the General Fund. General Fund revenues for FY 2020 included: $325 million appropriation from the State of Michigan, $1.7 billion in tuition and fees, and $277 million in indirect cost recoveries from sponsored research. Other FY 2020 sources of revenue for the academic enterprise included philanthropy, both gifts
and endowment distribution, and other investment income which together totaled $481 million; and sponsored research, exceeding $1.3 billion in grant revenue, placing U-M among the top institutions in the nation in terms of competitively awarded funds.

As a public university, U-M is dedicated to service in the larger world. Faculty research addresses a large range of critical issues — health care, robotics, the environment, social interventions, education reform and improvement, poverty solutions, human mobility, and many others. By extending fundamental understandings and advancing technological innovations, university scientists and engineers contribute to remarkable advances that are transforming life and contributing to building the economy of the state, region, and nation. University scholars in the humanities and the arts advance societal understanding around the most pressing and challenging problems facing the world today. Students take part in research alongside faculty in research labs, libraries, and community-based service and learning projects. The university collaborates with other universities, colleges, and K-12 schools, as well as provides research and other services for a variety of state and private agencies.

From its status as one of the first universities in the nation to admit women in 1870, to its historic defense of race-conscious admission policies at the United States Supreme Court in 2003, U-M continues to lead the way in making higher education accessible to all. In the fall of 2016, after a year of intense planning, U-M launched its five-year strategic plan for diversity, equity, and inclusion, which signified the university’s renewed pledge for developing a diverse university community while creating an inclusive and equitable campus climate. In 2018, U-M launched the Go Blue Guarantee, a program for in-state students on the Ann Arbor campus that guarantees four years of free tuition for most undergraduate students from families with annual incomes of $65,000 or less.

Office of Government Relations at the University of Michigan

The U-M Office of Government Relations directs the university’s government interactions at the local, state, and federal levels. This includes planning and developing the institution’s response to proposed legislation; analyzing and assessing legislative, administrative, and regulatory activities as they pertain to university programs, activities, and operations; and developing and maintaining effective relationships with governmental agencies and officials.

The Office of Government Relations includes the following teams which report to the vice president for government relations:

- **Federal Relations**: The U-M Washington, DC office monitors federal legislation and administration policies of interest to universities generally and U-M specifically; facilitates congressional and administration meetings and issue briefings for U-M faculty and staff; provides office space for university representatives on business in Washington; and serves as a clearinghouse on government activities, places, people, and employment opportunities. The office serves university faculty, staff, and students, as well as members of Congress and federal government officials and agencies. The office also works closely with higher education associations and coalitions to advance the university’s agenda in Washington.
• **State Relations**: The U-M State Relations office monitors legislation and administration policies of interest to universities generally and U-M specifically; facilitates legislative and administration meetings and issue briefings for U-M faculty and staff; provides assistance for university representatives on business in Lansing; and serves as a clearinghouse on government activities, places, and people. Legislative inquiries are handled concerning the university’s academic, research, and operations activities and its views on pending legislation. The office serves university faculty, staff, and students, as well as members of the legislature and state government officials and agencies. The office also works closely with the state higher education association and other coalitions to advance the university’s agenda in Lansing.

• **Community Relations**: The U-M Community Relations office coordinates partnerships of the university with local government and greater Ann Arbor community organizations. The office is a primary point of contact for the City of Ann Arbor and surrounding communities on topics of mutual concern such as parking, transportation, off-campus neighborhoods, facility construction, economic development, tourism, public service, and safety.

• **State Outreach**: U-M State Outreach personnel provide a direct line of communication between the university and communities statewide. Their goal is to connect U-M resources such as faculty expertise, student projects, unique facilities, research opportunities, and findings to the needs of Michigan communities. To that end, they regularly travel the state to establish and maintain personal contact with community organizations, associations, and local leaders.

The vice president for government relations also oversees the following:

• **Economic Growth Institute**: Provides innovative economic development programming and applied research to build more resilient businesses and communities, connect university innovations with small- and medium-sized enterprises, and provide student learning experiences for the next generation of community and business leaders.

• **University Research Corridor** (U-M’s participation in): An alliance between U-M, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University that serves as one of the nation’s top academic research clusters and the leading engine for innovation in Michigan and the Great Lakes Region.

Government Relations staff facilitate faculty meetings and presentations with Congressional, state legislative, and agency representatives in Washington, DC and Lansing, and help to coordinate government official visits to campus.

On the local level, Government Relations personnel are engaged with city and regional entities that are impacted by the physical plant and operations of the university. Community Relations and State Outreach personnel work with local officials and organizations in Southeast Michigan and throughout the state to explore and establish relationships that bring the resources and talents of the university to assist with addressing community interests.

The Office of Government Relations coordinates the annual Michigan Road Scholar tour which takes U-M faculty across Michigan; the Wolverine Caucus which brings university faculty to the
State Capitol for public policy briefings; and assists in the management of the annual U-M United Way Campaign.

The Position

The vice president for government relations is responsible for providing strategic vision, leadership, and effective management of U-M’s Government Relations programs at the local, state, and federal levels. As an executive officer of the university, the VPGR serves as a member of the president’s executive team. The position reports to the university president, preparing and staffing them in meetings with local, state, and federal officials. The VPGR also works closely with the other executive officers of the university, various governmental agencies, and elected officials. The VPGR oversees the 17 staff members in the Office of Government Relations and an annual budget of approximately $2.4 million.

The VPGR plays a leadership role in advocating on behalf of the university to government decision-makers, and must possess a thorough understanding of the public and external dimensions of the university's work; broad knowledge of the local, state, and national contexts in which the university operates; and a working knowledge of issues from a government relations standpoint.

The VPGR must be adept at navigating complex relationships across political lines and connecting the world-class expertise at the university to policymakers at all levels of government. By facilitating relationships between U-M and external stakeholders, including leaders in government, business, and the community, the VPGR secures state and federal funding for institutional operations including education, capital outlay support, financial aid, and research. The VPGR must also have a strong understanding of additional policies including economic development, immigration, tax, and health care.

Required Qualifications

Candidates for the vice president for government relations position will possess the following qualifications:

- Extensive background (range of 7-10 years minimum) and advanced first-hand experience in government relations matters at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Previous involvement or familiarity with institutions of higher education, or similarly complex organizations operating on a comparable scale with broad societal impact.
- Demonstrated awareness and ability to proactively seek out and understand emerging issues and policies.
- Proven ability to create and maintain strong working relationships and partnerships with a politically diverse and wide range of leaders in government, business, and education.
- Understanding of and appreciation for the breadth and depth of U-M and its unique role as a leader in the higher education and overall policy landscape, including issues that arise from the global nature of the university’s footprint.
- Ability to work collaboratively with university partners to manage, prioritize, and triage emerging legislative, policy, and regulatory issues in an organized, efficient, and productive way.
• An open and engaging work style with the patience and understanding to work towards consensus and compromise in sometimes difficult or ambiguous circumstances.
• Vision for leveraging the intellectual power of the university to enhance U-M’s local, state, national, and global leadership in a wide array of subject areas.
• Bachelor’s degree.

The successful candidate will also possess the following qualities and competencies:

• Personal and professional ethics and integrity to the highest degree.
• Demonstrated understanding of and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
• Appreciation for and ability to lead effectively within a non-hierarchical, de-centralized, and highly collaborative campus community.
• Good political acumen with a keen sense of how and when to engage the participation of different constituencies and the ability to build productive alliances.
• Skill in working with administrators, faculty, staff, and students in a climate of openness and transparency, integrity, trust, mutual respect, and collaborative problem solving.
• Understanding of and commitment to the academic, research, and service missions of a leading residential public university.
• Outstanding oral and written communications skills with an ability to transform ambiguity into clarity and to articulate campus needs with persuasiveness and conviction; excellent listening skills; and the capacity and willingness to engage in intellectual debate and discussion.
• High degree of energy, initiative, and organization; self-confidence, creativity, and willingness to take risks and to develop and evaluate new programs with knowledge of national best practices, including the ability to use research, data, and assessment to guide decision-making.
• Approachable, optimistic, and intellectually curious with personal warmth, generosity of spirit, a can-do attitude, and strong resilience in the face of criticism.
• Ability to select, develop, motivate, and win the respect and loyalty of faculty and staff through strong mentoring, coaching, and team-building skills with proven success in developing professional staff and creating and leading an effective team.
• Advanced experience applying management and organizational principles, including budgeting, planning, and personnel management.

Procedure for Candidacy

Those interested can apply through the U-M careers website. For fullest consideration, candidates should submit materials by Sunday, September 6, 2020. To submit nominations or ask questions, please email input-VPGRsearch@umich.edu.

The University of Michigan is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.