M isericordia University (MU) announces a search for its next Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA), an uncommon opportunity for academic leadership at a special moment in the life of the institution. As President Thomas Botzman begins his second year at Misericordia, it is clear that the academic status quo will not be a part of this “young university’s” future. MU is financially healthy and educationally sound, providing the new VPAA with a platform of enviable strength from which to build for the future. She/he will accept responsibility for an academic program primed to engage its many moving parts in a qualitative step forward.

True to the value-centeredness of its founders, the Religious Sisters of Mercy, and grounded in a foundation of service to others, Misericordia welcomes candidates from all faith backgrounds who bring an understanding of, and appreciation for, the Catholic tradition. Misericordia University’s next vice president will be academically focused, accomplished as a strategic thinker, consultative by nature, decisive in practice, visionary as a leader, and understanding of the small comprehensive university.

As the chief academic officer, the VPAA will report to the President and will exercise oversight of the academic program, accountability for three College Deans (Health Sciences, Arts and Sciences, and Professional Studies and Social Sciences), and through them, responsibility for all faculty personnel matters, academic programs, and the academic affairs staff. The VPAA will be surrounded by a talented senior leadership team, a highly qualified faculty, a dedicated support staff, and a growing student body.
Misericordia University is a Catholic, liberal arts-based, co-educational, small comprehensive university founded in 1924 by the Religious Sisters of Mercy in the tradition of their founder, Catherine McAuley. The University provides quality education through programs and services shaped by the founding Sisters’ values of mercy, service, justice and hospitality. MU offers bachelor, master’s and doctoral degrees through 37 degree programs in full and part-time formats for residential, commuter, adult and online learners on campus and at three additional local instructional locations. Current full-time undergraduate enrollment is 1,773, and part-time enrollment is 692. An additional 731 students are enrolled in graduate programs. Twenty-nine states are represented among the MU student body. The average SAT for the 2014 incoming class was 1064 and the average ACT was 23. The quality of a MU education is evident in a first-year to second-year student retention rate of 80 percent from fall 2013 to fall 2014. The overall six-year student graduation rate is 69 percent.

With undergraduate classes averaging 20 students and a student-faculty ratio of 13:1, faculty members challenge, mentor, and know their students individually in a personal environment that enables students to succeed intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. MU faculty members also engage their students in collaborative research and other scholarly activity that enriches the academic environment.

During the 2014 calendar year, MU added 18 new or replacement faculty positions. Among the 123 full-time faculty employed at MU in the 2014-2015 academic year, 59 percent are female, 41 percent are male, and 10 percent are ethnically diverse. Seventy-eight percent of full-time faculty members hold a doctorate or terminal degree. Five new faculty positions will be added in the 2015-2016 academic year.

MU offers the bachelor of arts, bachelor of science, bachelor of science in nursing, and bachelor of social work degrees. Master’s degrees include the master of business administration, and master of science degrees in nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, physician assistant studies, speech-language pathology, education, and organizational management. Doctoral programs include the doctor of occupational therapy, physical therapy and nursing practice degrees.

Misericordia University ranks in the top tier of the Best Regional Universities – North category of the US News & World Report 2015 edition of Best Colleges and was designated a 2014 Best Northeastern College by the Princeton Review.

Misericordia University is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and has ongoing approval from eleven specialized accrediting agencies. Provisional accreditation from the Accreditation Review Commission on Education (ARC-PA) has been awarded for the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies program.

Located in a beautiful section of northeastern Pennsylvania, the 124-acre campus features two dozen well-maintained buildings and on-campus athletic facilities supporting 23 men’s and women’s varsity sports in the suburban community of Dallas, PA. A part of the greater Wilkes-Barre and Scranton region, MU is about a two-hour drive from New York City and Philadelphia.
THE AGENDA FOR THE NEW VPAA

Several benchmarks help to define the context in which the next VPAA’s agenda is being developed. In each case, these benchmarks help to underscore the anticipation existing around the arrival of new leadership for the MU academic program.

- Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) reaffirmed the university’s accreditation status in June 2014.
- A highly qualified interim VPAA, Dr. TJ Arant, is successfully serving in this capacity until the new VPAA’s arrival, no later than July 1, 2015.
- The MU Board of Trustees is expected to review and approve a “refreshed” university mission statement in the spring of 2015, providing a clear and updated focus for MU’s educational agenda.
- The new VPAA will arrive at a time (2015-2016) when a new strategic plan is being designed. The VPAA will be expected to play a major role in the plan’s formulation and implementation.

In short, the confluence of these benchmarks in the life of MU will provide a distinctive springboard for the success of a new VPAA, whose agenda will include:

**Helping the University to Mature**—College Misericordia became Misericordia University in 2007. During its recent MSCHE visit, the team complimented MU on its decade of growth, but underscored its status as a “young university.” The university’s complex three-college structure will benefit from leadership that helps them to work together more closely. The VPAA’s skills as a consensus builder and collaborator for enriching cooperation within and between the three colleges toward greater harmony will be important in unifying the valuable academic diversity.

**Strategic Planning**—The successful candidate’s arrival at the time when the strategic planning process is being launched will be a benefit for the university and an opportunity for the new VPAA. Carpe Diem! The VPAA’s advocacy for the academic program in the new strategic plan will be vital to the plan’s success. Structuring an inclusive process, engaging faculty and academic staff, prioritizing budget decisions around academic initiatives, and helping to identify “all university” strategic issues will be major contributions by the VPAA in ensuring strategic planning success. It will be critical for the VPAA to build consensus around the academic components of the plan, and successfully manage their implementation.

**Partnering with the President**—The new VPAA must work in comfortable partnership with the President on matters of substance and style. An ability to practice transparency, to communicate openly and candidly, to delegate responsibility with an expectation of accountability, and to lend strategic voice and thought to all matters of the future will align the VPAA with the practices of MU’s President.
These tenets of partnership, however, do not reflect a “think alike” policy. Representing MU’s academic personnel and programs may raise occasional instances of agreeable disagreement that will be necessary for MU’s progress. President Botzman welcomes constructive contribution based on sound alternative ideas.

Leading with Confidence—The new VPAA will be expected to be a gracefully assertive leader. As new strategic planning dialogue evolves, the VPAA’s voice will be needed in these areas:

- **Building on Existing Strengths** – As the chief advocate for academic programs and faculty, the VPAA will be expected to provide leadership and impact with respect to the core curriculum, program and student learning assessment, hiring and retaining faculty (including promotion and tenure), and faculty development, including support for scholarship.

- **Planning Future Initiatives** – The strategic planning activity will enable the VPAA to engage faculty’s creativity around new academic initiatives and programs within and among all three colleges. An ability to identify appropriate resources to support such initiatives will empower their implementation and lead to a renewed sense of affirming change. The VPAA will also be expected to play a major role in planning for new academic facilities, such as the new science building.

- **Shaping Diversity** – Efforts to enrich diversity should go beyond fostering the racial and ethnic profile of the student body, faculty, and staff. The VPAA will be integral to a campus-wide effort to build and model a diverse community. This diverse academic climate will enable MU’s students to live and lead in the world beyond the campus.

Managing with Creativity—The new VPAA will be accountable for a wide range of academic activities and for the oversight of professional and support staff in academic affairs. In addition to exercising leadership, she/he must have strong administrative skills. The new VPAA’s attention to detail and her/his seasoned organizational acumen will be essential. At the same time, an intuitive sense of the special qualities needed for successful academic administration will be important. Mentoring deans, department chairs and other faculty, chairing productive meetings, guiding effective shared governance procedures, and articulating a critical balance across teaching, scholarship, and service will be central to the VPAA’s administrative successes.

Establishing Visibility and Access—Although growing in size and complexity, the MU community has not lost its personality and intimacy. A presence in the life of the university and a visibility in both curricular and co-curricular programs will provide a reassuring “fit” for a successful VPAA appointment. She/he will also be expected to develop linkages with the Student Affairs division and, in so doing, further strengthen MU’s education of the whole student.
Committed to mission, building on existing strengths, and poised for qualitative growth, MU seeks a new VPAA with vision, intellectual curiosity, creativity, and a clear appreciation for the life of the mind. Strong candidacies will require a substantial track record of academic achievement, an ability to plan with input from all university stakeholders, and the courage to make informed decisions, coupled with the ability to articulate the need for those decisions and build consensus around them. Solid academic credentials are essential, integrity of the highest order is critical, and personal characteristics of warmth, authenticity, and a sense of humor are crucial. Beyond these, other attributes will be important. The successful Misericordia University VPAA should have:

- A demonstrated passion for teaching, learning, and scholarship;
- A commitment to MU expressed through an understanding of its core values, the complexity of its university ethos, and its vision for future accomplishments;
- A capacity for sustained and transparent leadership that will inspire, engage, and build confidence;
- An ability to advocate for faculty and student needs;
- Accomplishment as a strategic thinker and proactive planner, particularly as it applies to MU’s launch of a new strategic plan;
- Personal traits that model Mercy traditions and embrace the values of Catholic higher education;
- An ability to listen carefully and communicate clearly with all of MU’s constituencies;
- Demonstrated multicultural competence and global perspective;
- Academic management experience;
- A desire to be an integral member of the MU community and build relationships with faculty, staff, and students;
- A student-centered philosophy, with a track record of support for students inside and outside the classroom and of positive collaboration with student life professionals;
- Familiarity with issues prominent in higher education including the practical application of the liberal arts, relationship between curriculum and co-curriculum, appropriate integration of technology into program and pedagogy, and effective governance policies.
The Misericordia University Search Committee will be accepting nominations and evaluating application materials on a rolling basis through the rest of 2014, and will begin to narrow the candidate pool early in January 2015. Although applications will be accepted until the time that a new vice president is selected, candidates should submit materials by Monday, January 5, for the most favorable consideration. Final selection will be made by early March and the new VPAA will be invited to begin work on or about July 1, 2015.

Dr. Thomas B. Courtice of AGB Search is assisting with this search. Nominators and prospective candidates may contact him at tbc@agbsearch.com or at 614/395-3229. Application materials should be submitted to:

**Dr. Marnie Hiester**  
*Chair, VPAA Search Committee*  
miservpaa@agbsearch.com

Materials should include a letter of candidacy that responds to The Agenda for the New VPAA, a complete CV or resume, and the names and contact information (phone and email) for three references, none of whom will be contacted until a later stage of the search or without the formal permission of the candidate. All inquiries and applications will be received and evaluated in full confidence.