SEARCH PROFILE:

VICE PRESIDENT & GENERAL COUNSEL

OHIO
NORTHERN UNIVERSITY
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Ohio Northern University (ONU) seeks an experienced and strategic leader to serve as its Vice President and General Counsel (VPGC). This is an exciting opportunity to provide the University with effective legal services within the field of higher education. The Vice President and General Counsel will be a member of a very strong leadership team that is eager to collaborate with in-house legal counsel on complex issues facing the University to ensure that it flourishes as a lawful and ethical institution of higher education.

The University is led by President Melissa Baumann, who began her tenure on July 1, 2022. The University’s mission is to provide a high-quality learning environment that prepares students for success in their careers, service to their communities, and a lifetime of personal growth inspired by the values of truth, beauty, and goodness. The University’s distinctive academic programs include mutually supporting liberal and professional education components that integrate practice and theory, complemented by excellent co-curricular offerings. Faculty and staff at Ohio Northern engage with students in learning to think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, gain practical experience, solve problems collaboratively, and act as responsible members of their community.

The Vice President and General Counsel reports to the President of the University and is a member of the Cabinet. The successful candidate will: 1) continue to establish and define a system of legal services for University stakeholders; 2) proactively anticipate and plan for coming legal and compliance issues; 3) play an effective role in providing knowledge and advice around institutional governance, policy, and procedural issues; and 4) build effective and lasting relationships with the University community.

The University seeks a Vice President and General Counsel who holds a J.D. from an American Bar Association accredited law school, who is a member in good standing with the bar of their state, and who is eligible for license and standing in the State of Ohio. The successful candidate should also bring extensive experience in higher education legal issues and the ability to communicate knowledge and advice in succinct and compelling fashion. The appointee must bring exceptional judgment, value collaboration, and always work towards what is best and beneficial for Ohio Northern University as a whole.

The University has retained the executive search firm Academic Search to assist in this recruitment. All applications, inquiries, and nominations, which will remain confidential, should be directed to the search firm as outlined at the end of this profile.
Founded in 1871, Ohio Northern University is an independent, selective, and comprehensive university. The University has been affiliated with the United Methodist Church since 1899, instilling core values while offering religious freedom on campus. Today ONU has an enrollment of approximately 3,000 students from 38 states and 15 countries and offers more than 70 programs of study across five colleges (arts & sciences, business, law, engineering, and pharmacy). Capitalizing on its historic reputation for quality, ONU is poised to move to a position of significantly greater regional and national prominence.

Numerous rankings consistently give ONU high marks. The University is ranked third in the Midwest among regional colleges in the 2022 Best Colleges ranking in U.S. News & World Report and is fourth among Midwest regional Colleges in the “Best Value Schools” category. Washington Monthly ranks the University sixth on its “Bachelor’s Colleges” list. In addition, ONU is one of the top 12 small Midwest colleges by The Wall Street Journal. The Princeton Review includes ONU among its “Best 382 Colleges.” The University is also ranked by career-guidance site Zippia as the most likely college or university in the state of Ohio (and third in the nation) to place its graduates into a job.

Ohio Northern University is situated in rural northwest Ohio in the historic village of Ada (population 5,248). Columbus, Dayton, and Toledo are within easy reach. The beautiful 342-acre campus is made up of 60-plus modern residences and academic buildings, including the Freed Center for the Performing Arts that showcases several performing arts events each year. Guests of the University, as well as the public, enjoy the luxury and comfort of The Inn at Ohio Northern University. More than $100 million in capital projects over the past decade have helped maintain the beauty and functionality of the campus. The University enjoys an excellent relationship with the local community and a broad base of ONU alumni. This is evidenced, in part, by strong fundraising, and alumni and community participation in the life and support of the institution.
THE ROLE OF VICE PRESIDENT & GENERAL COUNSEL

The Vice President and General Counsel is the chief legal officer of the University and oversees the provision of all legal services to the University. The VPGC has general charge of all legal matters pertaining to the University and its governing board; attends meetings of the board and its committees; is responsible for the representation of the University in all legal proceedings; and advises the board, its committees and officers, the President of the University, and other officers on legal questions as may be required.

Historically, the University relied on outside counsel for legal advice, and that relationship was a fruitful and productive one over many years. In 2020, the University moved to an internal counsel model and has recognized the institutional advantage of having a senior leader on staff who can serve as a strategic and legal advisor as initiatives and changes are considered; engage in critical thinking about opportunities and risks; and, provide thoughtful analysis and counsel on a range of topics that confront the University.

Like many similar universities, ONU relies on legal counsel for advice on issues ranging from data privacy; copyright; request for documents under FOIA; immigration issues; liability policies; contracts with vendors; labor and employment, and other matters that confront a modern university. The University seeks for the Vice President and General Counsel to provide particular in-house expertise around labor and employment. Currently, this represents one of the largest areas on which the University expends time and resources. While the Vice President and General Counsel will be expected to provide sound advice and solutions for a range of topics, the VPGC should also be ready to effectively engage outside counsel in appropriate instances.
LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

The success of the Vice President and General Counsel will be determined by how the individual addresses the opportunities and challenges noted below:

**Continue to establish and institutionalize the role of Vice President and General Counsel within the context of Ohio Northern University’s structure and culture**

As ONU has only recently moved to an internal counsel model, the Vice President and General Counsel will have the opportunity to continue to define the role and set the vision for a system of legal advice in collaboration with the President, senior university leaders, and other important stakeholders. The VPGC will evaluate needs and then develop the appropriate systems and process to ensure that legal advice is provided in an effective and timely manner. The Vice President and General Counsel will also develop an internal legal services awareness program, which educates University stakeholders on the range of services they and outside counsel provide.

**Proactively identify and respond to potential legal issues**

In an ever changing and dynamic higher education environment, policies and regulations that govern institutions such as Ohio Northern University are also shifting, and the Vice President and General Counsel must play an active role in ensuring that the University is prepared to meet them. Proactively advising on legal risk, interpreting the law correctly so that the officers and stakeholders understand legal certainties and uncertainties in their actions, and helping University management make accurate assessments of risk will be critical tasks of this role. While there will always be unforeseen circumstances where the Vice President and General Counsel must react effectively, the individual must also strategically think through what is on the horizon to avoid or minimize reactive responses.

**Play a key role in the governance affairs and policies and procedures of the University**

As a senior leader and chief legal officer for the University as a whole, the Vice President and General Counsel will play an important role around institutional governance and policy. The individual will work closely with the President and the Board to provide knowledge and advice around the legal implications of important institutional decisions. The VPGC will also help in clarifying lines of authority of officers as well as reviewing current University practices and procedures to ensure they are compliant with current law and best practices. Where necessary, the Vice President and General Counsel will work with stakeholders to draft new policies or amend existing ones.

**Build lasting and productive relationships with the University community**

Ohio Northern University is embedded in a tight-knit rural community passionate about their mission for educating the next generation of ethical and conscientious citizens and leaders. Like many other universities or colleges of ONU’s size, personal relationships play an important role in the functioning and prosperity of the institution. The Vice President and General Counsel must strive to be both an objective source of information and advice but also be an approachable, transparent, fair, and trusted ally with which University stakeholders are eager to work.
QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE

The successful candidate will have the following skills, experience, and qualifications:

REQUIRED

• J.D. from a law school approved for accreditation by the American Bar Association; a member in good standing of the bar of the supreme court of the state in which the VPGC practices law; and the prompt eligibility for such license and standing in the State of Ohio and

• Comprehensive experience with higher education legal issues, either as in-house counsel in a college or university or outside counsel in a firm with a considerable higher education practice.

PREFERRED

Ability to effectively analyze and interpret legal issues and provide competent legal advice and counsel on a wide range of issues;

• Comprehensive experience with employment/labor/human resources issues in a higher education context is preferred;

• Knowledge about legal issues involving social media, online learning, and technology;

• Proactive, responsive, organized and a proven ability to prioritize, multi-task, and manage a broad portfolio of complex work;

• Excellent communication and interpersonal skills with the ability to present in a clear and concise fashion;

• Experience interfacing with executive leadership, including a board;

• Ability and interest in building diverse and broad relationships in a shared governance setting;

• Skilled in handling confidential and/or sensitive matters; and

• Committed to an environment that welcomes and supports diversity of identity, thought, perspective, and background.
PROCEDURES FOR NOMINATION & APPLICATION

Academic Search is assisting Ohio Northern University in this search. Applications, nominations, and expressions of interest may be submitted in confidence to OhioNorthernVPGC@academicsearch.org. When submitting a nomination, please include the nominee’s full name, title, position, and email address.

Confidential conversations about this opportunity may be arranged by contacting the Senior Consultants leading this search: Dr. Pam Balch (pam.balch@academicsearch.org) or Mr. John Garland (john.garland@academicsearch.org). To apply, a candidate should submit: 1) a letter of intent addressing how the candidate’s experiences match the position requirements and 2) a current full CV/resume. Please send materials in an email with two separate attachments to OhioNorthernVPGC@academicsearch.org. For full consideration by the search committee, applicant materials should be submitted by Tuesday, September 20. Additional information about the institution may be found at https://www.onu.edu.

Ohio Northern University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer. Ohio Northern University does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, national or ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability.
ABOUT ACADEMIC SEARCH

Academic Search is assisting Ohio Northern University in this work. For more than four decades, Academic Search has offered executive search services to higher education institutions, associations, and related organizations. Academic Search was founded by higher education leaders on the principle that we provide the most value to partner institutions by combining best practices with our deep knowledge and experience. Our mission today is to enhance institutional capacity by providing outstanding executive recruitment services, executive coaching, and transition support, in partnership with our parent organization, the American Academic Leadership Institute. For more information, visit www.academicsearch.org.

Committed to IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING LEADERS by providing the highest level of EXECUTIVE SEARCH to our higher education partners.