



POSITION PROFILE

VICE PRESIDENT OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

2025

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Sonoran University of Health Sciences is pleased to announce the national search for its next **Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA).**

Reporting directly to the President and CEO, the VPAA serves as the University's Chief Academic Officer and a dynamic, visionary, and servant leader at a pivotal time in higher education. This role is crucial in shaping academic strategy and driving programmatic innovation, with a focus on developing new degree and certificate programs that align with and advance the distinctive mission of Sonoran University in integrative health and sciences.



SONORAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

Sonoran University of Health Sciences is a world-class naturopathic medical school, with graduate schools of nutrition and mental health counseling, featuring an innovative research institution and clinical training that encompasses community health clinics throughout greater Phoenix. The Sonoran University community—faculty, students, alumni, and administration—is passionately dedicated to shaping a healthier future through the healing power of nature. Sonoran is much more than a brick-and-mortar academic institution—it's a place where passionate, like-minded students, faculty, and staff come together to make a difference in people's lives. The feeling of this commitment is tangible on campus, as illustrated in this video clip: <https://vimeo.com/725443614> and this [viewbook](#).

Sonoran University was originally incorporated as Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine & Health Sciences (SCNM) in 1992. New degree programs, a state-of-the-art research institute, and the expansion of free healthcare delivery and access in underserved communities drove the transformation to become [Sonoran University of Health Sciences in 2022](#).

The inaugural class of future naturopathic doctors enrolled in 1993, when the number of licensed naturopathic physicians in Arizona numbered fewer than 40. Today, over 800 licensed naturopathic physicians practice medicine in Arizona. The institution's first Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine graduation was held in 1996, the same year the institution moved to the current Tempe campus and began an expansion process that has tripled the campus size. The LEED-Platinum Lim Commons building was completed in 2015 and established a campus hub that includes a café, medicinal garden, library, teaching kitchen, classrooms, and the Neil Riordan Center for Regenerative Medicine. In 1995, Sonoran began a community health program that has provided free care to tens of thousands of women, men, and children in the Greater Phoenix area. The community health program continues to expand, with two new clinics added in 2023.

The 2018 founding of the [Neil Riordan Center for Regenerative Medicine](#) offered the Phoenix community a patient-centered, non-opioid approach to chronic pain. In 2019, Sonoran added the [College of Nutrition](#) and subsequently launched two Master of Science programs: MS in Clinical Nutrition and MS in Nutrition Business Leadership.

Soon after, Sonoran established the Ric Scalzo Institute for Botanical Research and secured initial NIH funding for its research programs. This fueled robust botanical research that is now housed in multiple state-of-the-art laboratory facilities, including a Biosafety Level 2 (BSL2) molecular and cellular biology laboratory with cell/virus culture capabilities, a compound isolation laboratory, and a compound identification and quantification facility, as a part of the Ric Scalzo Institute for Botanical Research.

The University continues to grow through innovation, having launched the **School of Mental Health**, offering a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program this year. Additionally, a commitment to transformative curricular innovations in the Naturopathic Medicine program is currently underway.

As a not-for-profit corporation recognized as a 501(c)(3), Sonoran is governed by a high-performing Board of Trustees responsible for reviewing and reaffirming a governance policy document that articulates the roles of groups and individuals in the University. This document is evidence of a remarkably transparent approach to leadership, as is the inclusion of a faculty member and a student as voting members of the Board.

Sonoran University's annual operating budget is approximately \$21 million, and the institution employs approximately 60 faculty members, one-third of whom are full-time, and more than 100 full-time staff, along with nearly 20 part-time staff.

Fall 2025 enrollment is projected to include 400 in the ND (Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine) program, 79 in one of the three Master's programs offered within the College of Nutrition, and 25 in the new MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling.

THE SONORAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Housed on 8.5 acres, Sonoran campus facilities include state-of-the-art classrooms, study and library spaces, a café, the integrative Neil Riordan Center for Regenerative Medicine, a teaching kitchen, laboratories, wellness facilities including a fitness center and yoga studio, a cadaver lab, administrative offices and the Ric Scalzo Institute for Botanical Research. In addition, Sonoran clinics, laboratories, and a medicinary provide naturopathic medical care to more than 14,000 patients annually.

The campus demonstrates Sonoran University's vision and commitment to foster an environment and a support system that promotes not only student learning, but also student health and community. More information can be found here: <https://www.sonoran.edu/about-sonoran/facilities/>

MISSION

Sonoran University of Health Sciences shapes a healthier future by supporting students as they train to excel as healthcare professionals, by enhancing the health and wellbeing of our patients and communities, and by discovering effective treatments for humanity grounded in the healing power of nature.

VISION

A world that embraces the healing power of nature.

CORE VALUES

We Achieve Excellence
We Are Resilient
We Do the Right Thing
We Love
We Shape the Future



ACADEMICS

Sonoran University is home to three distinct degree-granting educational units and multiple centers and programs, many of which connect the University with the Tempe and Greater Phoenix community. These high-quality programs enjoy stellar reputations in their fields.

College of Naturopathic Medicine

Sonoran University has the only accredited, full-time, four-year Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine degree program in the Southwest, offered through the College of Naturopathic Medicine. The innovative curriculum consists of rigorous academic study and extensive supervised clinical experiences in a variety of settings, including the on-site Sonoran University Medical Center and Neil Riordan Center for Regenerative Medicine. In addition to exposure to the widest scope of naturopathic therapies, students also learn the same basic sciences as taught in a conventional medical program. Clinical milestones are achieved throughout the program and provide the appropriate progression of medical education for graduates to become successful naturopathic physicians. This education prepares students for the Naturopathic Physician Licensing Board Examination; the quality of the program is evident through the fact that the scores of Sonoran graduates consistently outperform peer institutions.

College of Nutrition

The College of Nutrition is committed to inspiring, preparing, and empowering a diverse group of leaders and clinicians in the field of nutrition to have a positive impact on the lives of others. Each program (Master of Science in Clinical Nutrition, Master of Science in Nutrition Business Leadership, and Master of Science in Applied Clinical Nutrition) has been built with practical input from global industry experts and thought leaders, and each course is designed and delivered using best practices in teaching and learning. Led by passionate and dedicated faculty with real-world experience and expertise, students gain current, relevant, and evidence-based knowledge and skills and engage in authentic, practical, and innovative learning experiences. The College of Nutrition is at the forefront of high-quality, innovative, evidence-based, and engaging nutrition education students from all backgrounds who share a passion for nutrition and who are ready to help make a difference.

School of Mental Health

Sonoran University's Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling degree (MSCMHC) program meets the urgent need for licensed practitioners locally and nationwide. Designed for working adults who aspire to become licensed professional counselors, the MSCMHC program is fully online. The innovative curriculum, developed in collaboration with experts in the field, not only provides training on essential requirements for licensure and certification but also incorporates a unique focus on interprofessional collaboration, field-based crisis counseling, and evidence-based integrative mental health care, including topics such as nutrition and mindfulness.



OUTREACH AND SERVICES

In addition to these academic programs, Sonoran University offers a variety of other services that extend opportunities for student learning, research, and health care for underserved local communities:

The [**Neil Riordan Center for Regenerative Medicine**](#) provides non-opioid solutions for patients suffering from chronic pain. The Center's interdisciplinary team – anesthesiologist pain interventionalist, naturopathic physicians, acupuncturists – works closely with patients to determine the best solution to accelerate healing, reduce inflammation, and prevent scarring. Non-opioid pain therapies, including nutrition, mindfulness, acupuncture, manual therapies, and regenerative therapies – prolotherapy, platelet-rich plasma, – offer safe, effective and non-addictive treatments for pain relief.

The [**Sonoran University Naturopathic Medical Center**](#) provides comprehensive healthcare by combining the best of conventional and natural therapies. The Center's physicians and naturopathic medical students improve patients' health and prevent disease, and offer specialty care to treat specific conditions.

The Sonoran University [**Sage Foundation for Health Community Health Program**](#) is staffed with licensed faculty physicians and third- and fourth-year medical students from Sonoran University's College of Naturopathic Medicine. They serve children in underserved and under-resourced school districts, survivors of domestic violence, adults and children experiencing homelessness and recovering from trauma, LGBTQIA2S+ health, individuals coping with HIV/AIDS, and patients recovering from drug and alcohol use. Student physicians treat chronic and acute health conditions by working with patients to restore health and improve self-care choices through daily diet, exercise, and stress reduction treatment plans. Thanks to generous community support, services and treatments are provided to patients at no cost.

Leveraging high quality and evidence-based care standards, the [**Virtual Center for Personalized Nutrition**](#) engages clients on a Virtual Care Journey that retains the best practices of in-person personalized nutrition care delivered at no cost in the comfort of home through a virtual care setting.

Sonoran University's [**Medicinary**](#) is the largest natural medicinary in Arizona offering the highest quality, doctor-trusted, professional grade supplements, herbs, and health products.

The [**Ric Scalzo Institute for Botanical Research**](#) explores plant medicines at the cellular, molecular, and cultural level to develop new and improve existing botanical medicines to serve humanity. The Institute's researchers and state-of-the-art facility (molecular biology, analytical chemistry, and isolation laboratories) elucidate mechanisms of action and identify plants' active compounds by combining 21st-century science with botanical medicine's rich centuries-old traditions.

More information about these centers, offerings, and the campus is available online at [**Facilities | Holistic & State-of-the-Art | Sonoran**](#).





THE POSITION

Reporting to the President/CEO, the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) is Sonoran University's Chief Academic Officer. The VPAA will be a dynamic, visionary, servant leader who enhances Sonoran's programs, including the Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine program, Master of Science in Clinical Nutrition, Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, and various other degree, certificate, and continuing education/professional development programs.

The VPAA is responsible for the oversight, support, and advancement of the programs, including, but not limited to, ensuring overall academic quality and integrity, faculty development, curricular development, and student success. During this unparalleled educational-technology-driven moment, the VPAA will lead programmatic innovation and oversee the development of new degree and certificate programs that espouse the unique mission of Sonoran University. The VPAA serves as a member of the Executive Council, and in the President's absence, is the presiding officer of the University.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Demonstrate strategic leadership and collaboration with the members of the Executive Council to ensure communication between academics and the areas of Ric Scalzo Research Institute, student affairs, clinical affairs, finance and administration, and development.
- Supervise the academic deans to establish priorities, standards of excellence, and innovation in teaching; incorporation of technology; research; scholarship; and service for academic programs.
- Oversee the development and launch of all academic (degree and certificate) programs.
- Ensure that new programs align with Sonoran University's overarching academic strategy and institutional goals, are compliant with state, federal, and accreditation standards, and support research development and initiatives.
- Ensure alignment with Sonoran University's vision and mission, strategic plan, assessment, and accreditation activities through ongoing program review.
- Provide student learning consistent with academic excellence and integrity.

- Catalyze and support an environment of academic innovation, aligning academic priorities and initiatives across Sonoran University.
- Provide strategic oversight and guide the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into academic programs, ensuring compliance with ethical, regulatory, and safety standards.
- Ensure Sonoran University's clinical training programs adhere to best practices in clinical education and all regulatory, accreditation, and quality assurance standards for clinical care.
- Provide leadership and direction in self-assessment and other activities related to institutional and programmatic accreditation.
- Prepare and monitor annual academic budgets, allocating resources in accordance with the strategic and operational needs of Sonoran University.
- Coordinate the alignment of academic activities with the co-curricular and extracurricular programs overseen by student services.
- Foster collaboration between academics and alumni affairs in the provision of programs to optimize alumni lifelong learning and professional opportunities.
- Develop, foster, and nurture collaborations and partnerships with other educational institutions, clinical sites, corporations, agencies, foundations, non-profits, and community groups.
- Hold ultimate responsibility for reviewing and approving the reappointment, promotion, or dismissal of faculty.
- Oversee the implementation of faculty development activities to ensure alignment with institutional priorities and academic excellence.
- Exemplify a culture of continuous improvement.
- Champion and participate in shared governance and collaborative leadership.
- Engage in strategic planning activities.
- Use discretion and maintain confidentiality.
- Advise the President on academic and clinical education matters.
- Become involved in, and take leadership responsibility for, other tasks as assigned by the President.
- Provides strategic leadership and oversight for the growth of academic and clinical research.

Departments/Individuals Reporting to the VPAA:

- College of Naturopathic Medicine (Dean of Naturopathic Medicine/Associate Vice President of Naturopathic Medicine)
- College of Nutrition (Dean of Nutrition and Mental Health/Associate Vice President of Program Innovation)
- School of Mental Health (Dean of Nutrition and Mental Health/Associate Vice President of Program Innovation)
- Institutional Assessment (Director of Institutional Assessment)
- Library (Manager)
- Academics (Academic Services Manager)

Minimum Qualifications:

- A doctoral level (or appropriate terminal) degree and a minimum of five years administrative/management/leadership experience (higher education leadership experience preferred).
- A willingness to support Sonoran's unique nature and mindset to shape a healthier future through a transformation of healthcare.
- Demonstrated skill in strategic planning, organizing resources and financial planning, analyzing and solving problems, establishing priorities, making evaluative judgments, and supervising others.
- Demonstrated teaching ability.
- Experience working with institutional and programmatic accreditors across multiple academic disciplines.

- Demonstrated success in leading the development and launch of new academic programs, and the oversight and continuous improvement of existing degree programs.
- Experience supporting both on-ground and online educational programs.
- Demonstrated knowledge of graduate pedagogy, appreciation for the opportunities and challenges posed by AI, and knowledge of professional programs and their standards, assessments, and evaluations (familiarity with medical curricula is a plus).
- Proficiency with MS Office 365, Zoom, and comfort with/interest in artificial intelligence tools.

The ideal candidate will possess most or all of these qualities and characteristics:

- Outstanding interpersonal, oral, and written communication skills.
- Appreciation for conflict resolution and mediation principles and techniques.
- Demonstrated ability to build alliances and strategic relationships with stakeholders.
- Ability to meet the public in situations requiring tact, diplomacy, and poise.
- Commitment to the highest level of academic and personal integrity and high academic standards.
- Commitment to inclusive excellence and diversity, and intercultural understanding, broadly.
- A commitment to interdisciplinary and experiential learning.
- A commitment to continued professional development.
- Enthusiasm for participating in and promoting a culture of transparency, quality assurance, and continuous improvement in student learning and patient care.
- Ability to embody Sonoran University's Core Values:
 - We Achieve Excellence
 - We Do the Right Thing
 - We Are Resilient
 - We Shape the Future
 - We Love

WORKPLACE VALUES

At Sonoran, work-life balance is supported through an emphasis on wellness initiatives, flexible schedules, and hybrid options. The VPAA must be on campus for the majority of working days, with a minimum of 3 days each week.

Additionally, Sonoran provides comprehensive benefit plans, 401K matching, vacation, and sick time policies that are highly competitive in the higher ed community.





TO APPLY

Confidential review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled; parties who apply by September 1st will be given first consideration. Please submit a PDF version of your CV/resume and a cover letter. All applications and nominations will be held in confidence.

To apply online, go to: <https://theapplicantmanager.com/jobs?pos=su461>

For more information or to offer recommendations or nominations:

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Sonoran is an Equal Opportunity Employer committed to a diverse and inclusive workforce. We consider applicants for all positions without regard to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, or any other legally protected status.



Summit Search Solutions, Inc. is a boutique executive search firm dedicated to serving the education, healthcare, and nonprofit sectors nationwide. Based in Asheville, NC, Summit has a team of experienced recruiting consultants in strategic locations across the country including California, Colorado, Kansas, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, and Texas.



TEMPE/PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Sonoran University's 8.5-acre campus is located in Tempe, Arizona, just east of Phoenix, and part of the fifth-largest metro area in the United States. Nicknamed the Valley of the Sun, Greater Phoenix boasts more than 300 days of sunshine each year. The Valley is a destination for nature and outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy hiking, biking, boating, swimming, golfing, horseback riding, and even skiing or snowboarding during the winter.

Nearby destinations include Sedona, Tucson, the Grand Canyon, Mogollon Rim, and the White Mountains. With a little more time, it is an easy drive to the bright lights of Las Vegas or the beaches of southern California or Mexico.

Made up of 42 square miles with a population of 185,000 and a median age of 28 years, Tempe is also home to Arizona State University. Thus, this city has the vibe you would expect in a college town, with an abundance of cultural and social opportunities, pleasing foodies due to its numerous organic farms, farmers markets, and healthy restaurants. Local attractions include the Desert Botanical Garden, home to thousands of species of cactus, trees and flowers from all around the world spread across 55 acres of the city; Papago Park, known for its immense buttes offering incredible hiking and recreational areas; and Tempe Town Lake, featuring a system of recreational paths and boating opportunities.

Finally, Tempe is conveniently located just 10 minutes from the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.

To learn more about the area:

[Visit Arizona](#)

[Visit Phoenix](#)

