



Dean of Student Life

Leadership Profile

Summer 2022



WittKieffer

Executive Summary

College of the Atlantic (COA), one of the country's most unique small colleges, invites nominations and applications for an experienced and creative student affairs professional to serve as the Dean of Student Life. College of the Atlantic's spectacular location on the coast of Maine, its rich academic program focused on human ecology, and its intentionally small size make this a particularly interesting opportunity for a student affairs professional who shares the college's vision and values.

The successful candidate will join a community serious about the quality of the student experience, ready for transformational change, dedicated to shared governance and the student voice in decision making, and ready to lead at a college that greatly values its commitment to the common good. The Dean will lead a staff of five talented professionals, each of whom leads a one-person student affairs department. The college seeks a leader who will thrive in this environment, will value the talents of the staff, and who will work directly with students, faculty, and administrators in efforts to support students as they engage deeply in the full range of experiences available at the college.

The Dean reports to President Darron Collins, '92 and serves as a member of the President's leadership team. The college seeks a dean who will model the values of hard work, personal and professional resiliency, and appreciation for the environment and the unique culture of Mount Desert Island. The Dean will appreciate the benefits of a campus committed to collaboration, social and environmental justice, and shared governance. With experience in supporting and developing a talented staff, the Dean will recognize the opportunity to transform the student experience at the college and help students to recognize their own strengths and talents. The hands-on nature of the COA curriculum provides an opportunity for learning inside and outside of the classroom: the Dean will lead in building a co-curricular program that is commensurate with the quality of the academic program.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy on page 12.

Role of the Dean of Student Life

This information is from College of the Atlantic's official job description for the Dean of Students role.

Operating under broad guidelines from the President, and in accordance with established policies and procedures, the incumbent is the senior student affairs officer of the college, responsible for developing policies and procedures, and overseeing programs to support and promote student physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health and wellness; developing a co-curriculum program that deepens and expands academic learning, intercultural awareness, and encourages personal growth; providing leadership opportunities to develop personal responsibility, community engagement, self-confidence, judgment, and interpersonal skills among students and colleagues; fostering a safe and supportive community vibrant with social and cultural opportunities for all; and collaboratively coordinating college response to individual and community emergencies.

Importantly, the Dean of Student Life also plays a leadership role on the President's Cabinet and, as such, provides direction, strategy, and inspiration for the college as a whole.

Specific responsibilities include but are not limited to the following:

- Lead a dedicated cohort of five or more Student Life staff members and student volunteers in the development and implementation of a program that advances student well-being, health, and intellectual growth
- Serve as a member of the President's Cabinet, providing counsel on issues related to the student experience and other decisions of importance to the college
- Serves as liaison to the Student Experience Committee of the Board of Trustees focused on developing long-term strategic goals
- Chair of the Student Life Committee responsible for the development of policies and procedures related to the student experience and the college community
- Coordinate the On-call Emergency Response Team to ensure a timely and effective response to student crises and emergencies
- Co-chair the Student Support Team/Behavioral Intervention Team to identify and support students with emerging academic and/or social difficulties
- Coordinate student orientation programs
- Lead the development and implementation of student retention initiatives
- Ensure compliance with relevant federal regulations and the dissemination of accurate and timely information for students related to those regulations
- Lead relevant pieces of college strategic planning and accreditation processes

- Collaborate with the Public Safety team to identify threats, to coordinate with local emergency responders, and to respond to crises and emergencies on campus
- Oversee assessment of relevant programs and initiatives
- Manage Student Life budgets

The Dean supervises and evaluates the work of the following staff. All staff in student affairs work in one-person departments, assisted by a talented team of student employees:

- Director of Student Support and Wellness
- Director of Residence Life and Student Experience
- Coordinator of International Student Services
- Coordinator of Community Engagement
- Student Life Operations Manager
- Kitchen Co-Directors

“An intimate, friendly community’ of do-ers and critical thinkers.... This unique educational model helps students ‘merge [their] talents/interests in a meaningful and applicable way,’ and allows for graduate-level research and real-world work experience *Self-motivated learning is everything here, and College of the Atlantic is for ‘idealists with elbow grease.’*”

— Princeton Review’s *The Best 381 Colleges*

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

Reporting directly to President Darron Collins, the Dean of Student Life serves as the Cabinet officer responsible for all aspects of the student experience on a campus of 350+ students. Assisted by a small staff of talented professionals, the Dean will be a vital part of the college's leadership team. The Dean will work directly with students, faculty, and staff and will oversee and support the work of the staff in Student Affairs.

In addition, the Dean of Student Life will be expected to:

- **Establish a vision for a post-COVID program in Student Affairs:** The Dean will lead at a time of great challenge and great promise, both at College of the Atlantic and in higher education as a whole. The leader of Student Affairs at College of the Atlantic must recognize the enormous positive impact that engagement in life outside of the classroom, in a healthy and respectful setting, can have on the overall education of a diverse and talented student body. The Dean will lead an inclusive and participatory effort to develop a transformative vision for Student Affairs, streamlining systems, improving efficiency, and utilizing the talents of a committed and experienced staff. College of the Atlantic has a rich tradition of students fully engaging in the intellectual and social life of the community. The Dean will be an advocate for students and for the Student Affairs staff and will embrace the opportunity to revitalize the Student Affairs organization. COA students have a passion for social justice and take seriously their role as the stewards of the campus environment. The Dean will have the vision to create a program that encourages students to take full advantage of the academic and co-curricular resources offered by the college. Experience and commitment to broadening and deepening the college's work in diversity, equity, and inclusion will be an important priority for the Dean of Student Life.
- **Lead the professional development of a talented staff:** The Dean will be an established leader in the field, committed to the professional development of staff. This leader will recognize and value the expertise of the staff while modeling student affairs best practice that is highly proactive and goes well beyond crisis management. As an established and progressive intellectual leader in student affairs, the Dean will develop a model of professional engagement that is well suited to the needs of an increasingly residential college, including expanding opportunities for interaction with faculty, parents, and alumni. The Dean will deepen the student affairs area's commitment to assessment and data-informed decision-making to guide the development of strategy within Student Affairs. The culture at COA includes a strong belief in the value of civil debate and respectful disagreement: the Dean will move with ease in this culture as a peer and colleague of the faculty and the senior administrators and will establish a long-term vision that co-exists with the need to be immediately responsive to individual student needs. It will be very important for the Dean to establish the ability to communicate respectfully, directly, and honestly with a group of highly engaged students seeking input and communicative leadership.
- **Engage with and enjoy contact with talented students:** The Dean will be a warm and caring leader who engenders trust and respect from students. This person will model visibility, presence, and engagement at a very high level in the informal life of the campus and will celebrate the many accomplishments and talents of the College of the Atlantic student body. The Dean will convene

conversations with students, faculty, and Student Affairs colleagues on issues of great importance to the college and will work easily within the established governance structures for student and faculty involvement in co-curricular life while ensuring that student voices are heard and valued on a wide variety of issues. These efforts will require excellent communication and leadership skills at all levels - from the interpersonal skills to engage meaningfully in a difficult conversation, to the leadership presence to command a diverse audience in a public setting.

- **Title IX and Other Civil Rights Issues:** The Dean will have experience developing and implementing policy and best practices around Title IX and other civil rights issues, and will work closely and collaboratively with the Title IX Coordinator, outside legal counsel, the office of the president and other institutional leaders to ensure that the college appropriately investigates and responds to complaints, and to educate students, faculty, parents, and other stakeholders about the college's comprehensive prevention efforts, procedures, and protections offered to students involved in sexual misconduct and other civil rights complaints.



Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

College of the Atlantic seeks a thoughtful, inspiring, dynamic, and experienced student affairs leader who will enhance the student experience through knowledge of student affairs and understanding of student engagement. Critical to the Dean's success will be; a track record of leading innovative change in a student-centered organization; an overarching commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in every aspect of the work, and the demonstrated ability to listen to, communicate with, and work collaboratively and effectively with a broad array of constituents, including students, faculty, and academic affairs colleagues, Trustees, and families. Successful experience in strategic planning, organizational management, and resource allocation is also necessary.

The ideal candidate will possess a minimum of five years of professional experience in higher education/student affairs or a related field with progressive leadership responsibilities; an advanced degree is preferred. Experience/involvement with student services, crisis management, investigation and resolution of complaints, and student conduct programs; particular interest and expertise in the unique culture of a college that is deeply identified with the environmental stewardship of its spectacular campus on the coast of Maine; and a record of success in working with highly engaged students, faculty, administrators, staff, and parents. A genuine desire to join a small and closely connected community in a leadership role will be essential to the Dean's success.

In particular, candidates will have the following professional qualifications and personal characteristics:

- **Student Affairs leadership experience:** The Dean will bring deep background and experience as a leader in student affairs; an understanding of the complex issues that arise in a small college setting; understanding, confidence, and empathy necessary to work with students experiencing mental health challenges; and enthusiasm for front-line student affairs work that is done in close collaboration with students and faculty. The college seeks a student affairs leader who will continue to develop a model of student affairs management that emphasizes proactive and strategic planning. Excellent oral and written communication; interpersonal, and organizational skills are paramount. The Dean will be a hands-on leader of a small staff. The five director-level staff of the component departments all lead "one-person" operations. The Dean and team will review the processes and structures that define student affairs and engage in thoughtful planning to achieve the goal of enhancing the quality of life of all students.
- **Personnel and budget management experience:** A strong record of administrative experience and achievement; ability to gain the confidence and support of students, staff, administrators, and faculty; success as a skilled and strategic management of resources and operations, especially in tight fiscal environments; and capacity to develop and manage an effective organization, including creating and implementing long-range plans.
- **Advocacy:** A key strategist and spokesperson for the changing needs of students and for ensuring that all students' needs are clearly understood in the community, the Dean will demonstrate commitment to student rights and responsibilities and have a track record of successfully advocating for student needs with the senior administrative team, board of trustees, faculty, and others by

utilizing research, data, best practices, and innovative programming to address emerging issues on campus.

- **Personal style:** Collegiality, inclusiveness, and optimism; ability to build trust and communicate effectively with tact and wisdom; genuine pleasure in the company of students and faculty; ability to listen and to connect; openness to new ideas; professional expertise coupled with a desire and ability to make a difference; sensitivity, approachability, and warmth; commitment to the stewardship of the extraordinary natural environment in coastal Maine; the highest sense of integrity and ethics; energy; grace under pressure and a sense of humor.



About College of the Atlantic

Self-designed major

At COA students hold in their own hands the freedom, and responsibility, of [building an educational path](#). Each student designs their own course of study in [human ecology](#)—an exploration of the relationships between humans and their natural, cultural, and built environments. Even though all students have the same major, no two students have ever taken the same set of [classes](#). And students don't have to choose just one area of study; in fact, we hope they will pull together different disciplines and get excited about the surprising connections between them.

Purpose-driven, engaged education

A COA education isn't just about learning—it's also about transforming thought into action to make a difference in the world, *starting now*. We believe that tomorrow's problem-solvers will need to [work across multiple disciplines](#), collaborate, innovate, and think far outside the box.

A (really) small community of scholars

With just 350 students, 35 faculty, and 70 staff members, students will soon recognize all of the faces on campus. We believe this kind of [close-knit, supportive community](#) is an ideal environment for fostering creative collaboration and intellectual risk-taking.

We run the college together

Every Wednesday at the student-moderated [All College Meeting \(ACM\)](#), COA students, staff, and faculty come together to shape the policies and practices that guide the college's operations. We learn engaged citizenship by putting it into practice—in all its inspiring, frustrating, empowering, mundane, and messy glory.

On an island, in the middle of a national park

Pink granite mountains, spruce forests, island-studded bays, and miles of rugged coastline: the landscape of [Bar Harbor](#) and [Mount Desert Island](#) has inspired awe in artists, vacationers, and local residents for centuries. But COA's location surrounded by [Acadia National Park](#) and the Atlantic Ocean isn't just a spectacular place to live and visit; it's a rich and multi-faceted laboratory for learning in the field.

Mission and Vision of College of the Atlantic

College of the Atlantic enriches the liberal arts tradition through a distinctive educational philosophy—[human ecology](#). A human ecological perspective integrates knowledge from all academic disciplines and from personal experience to investigate—and ultimately improve—the relationships between human beings and our social and natural communities. The human ecological perspective guides all aspects of education, research, activism, and interactions among the college's students, faculty, staff, and trustees.

The College of the Atlantic community encourages, prepares, and expects students to gain expertise, breadth, values, and practical experience necessary to achieve individual fulfillment and to help solve problems that challenge communities everywhere.

The faculty, students, trustees, staff, and alumni of College of the Atlantic envision a world where people value creativity, intellectual achievement, and the diversity of nature and human cultures. With respect and compassion, individuals will construct meaningful lives for themselves, gain an appreciation for the relationships among all forms of life, and safeguard the heritage of future generations.

Academics

- All students design their own major in [human ecology](#)
- 10:1 student-to-faculty ratio
- Average class size: 12
- Trimester schedule with fall, winter, and spring terms of ten weeks each
- Students take three classes per trimester
- All students complete an [internship](#) at a workplace in their field
- All students design and undertake a capstone [senior project](#)
- No academic departments
- More than half of our students have an [international experience](#) during their time at COA
- [Our teacher certification](#) program prepares students to teach at the elementary and high school level

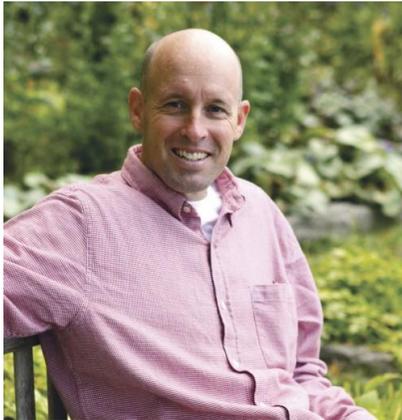
Campus & facilities

The 38-acre main [campus](#) is on the ocean in Bar Harbor, with two [organic farms](#), and two [offshore island research stations](#).

Students

- 350 total students—to maintain the closeness of our small community, we've decided not to grow any larger
- Students come from more than 40 states and 45 countries
- 24% international
- 15% from Maine
- 67% women, 33% men

Leadership



Darron Collins, President

I grew up in Parsippany, New Jersey. I graduated from COA in 1992 and won a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship that year, which brought me to New Zealand, Chile, and the Amazon Basin. After guiding rafts for a bit, I went on to get my master's degree and Ph.D. from Tulane University. My Ph.D. was in cultural anthropology and, for that degree and during that time, I lived and worked in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. When I graduated in 2001, I began a career with the World Wildlife Fund. That lasted ten years and was fantastic. I was fortunate to be offered the job as COA president in 2011. I live in Bar Harbor with my wife Karen, my two daughters Maggie and Molly, and my black lab Lucy.

Student Life

We build this place together

Making change is a central part of COA's mission. We put it into practice by involving students, faculty, and staff in governing the college. It's not necessarily the easiest way to get things done, but there's no question we all learn a lot in the process.

So many interests, so little time

Knitting, soccer, poetry, foreign affairs, rock-climbing, circus arts, activism, foraging for wild edibles. COA students tend to be really into whatever they're into. [Student activities](#) here are a mix of organized clubs, [getting outdoors in Acadia National Park](#), regular events like concerts, lectures, films, and open mics, and a healthy dose of creative spontaneity.

You'll forge your own path, but you won't be alone

COA is a great place for self-directed people: you'll [chart your own course](#), both in class and out. But it's impossible to be anonymous in such a small community, and you'll find plenty of fellow travelers with whom to share the journey.





Bar Harbor, Maine

Bar Harbor is a coastal town with 5000 year-round residents. In the summer and fall, millions of visitors make their way here to explore the rugged shoreline and trails of [Acadia National Park](#) and the bustling downtown restaurants and shops. During winter and spring, the tourist-oriented businesses are closed and COA students can experience the quieter joys of small-town life. Year-round businesses include restaurants and movie theaters, an outdoor gear store, natural foods shop, and a YMCA. Swimming, hiking, kayaking, sailing, and bicycling are popular summertime activities, and in the winter we shift our focus to ice skating, Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, and cozying up by the fire.



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 College of the Atlantic in this search which will remain open until an appointment is made. To be included in the first round review of candidates, materials should be received by August 15, 2022.

Application materials should be submitted using WittKieffer's [candidate portal](#).

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

Sheila Murphy
COA-DeanStudentLife@wittkieffer.com

College of the Atlantic is committed to academic excellence, cultural diversity, and multicultural education. COA is an AA/EEO employer. Applications are especially encouraged from persons who could enhance the ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity of the College.