Chief Communications Officer

Leadership Profile
August 2019

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The Opportunity

The University of Vermont (UVM) seeks a creative, visionary, and experienced professional to serve as its next chief communications officer. This senior-level position will act as a strategic thought partner and a dynamic and eager member of the senior leadership team who is ready to tackle an ambitious set of agendas at one of the nation’s most historic and respected public universities.

This talented and energetic individual will lead, supervise, and motivate a centralized communications team as well as provide overarching leadership and strategy to the chief communicators in the university’s colleges, schools, and foundation. This is a compelling opportunity for an experienced and adept communications leader to: develop and implement creative and measurable internal and external communications plans that encompass publications, digital/social media, market research, public relations, media relations, and other aspects of strategic marketing; manage the University of Vermont website; and protect, promote, and update the university’s brand. The chief communications officer will be a direct report to Dr. Suresh Garimella, President of the University of Vermont, in close managerial coordination with the president's chief of staff.

The chief communications officer advises the president and university leadership about strategic opportunities and initiatives that advance the profile and brand of the university and develops a compelling narrative about the significant education, scholarship, research, and public service offered by UVM; oversees university, college, and unit responses to crises and emergency communication; provides leadership as a university spokesperson on the local, state, national, and global level; and cultivates and leads a talented staff of communications professionals.

Since 1791, the University of Vermont has worked to move humankind forward. Today, UVM is a Public Ivy and top 100 research university of a perfect size, large enough to offer a breadth of ideas, resources, and opportunities, yet small enough to enable close faculty-student mentorship across all levels of study, from bachelor’s to M.D. programs. Here, students’ educational experience and activities are enriched by our location—from the energy and innovation of Burlington to the forests, farms, and independent spirit of Vermont. UVM provides students endless ways to explore the world, challenge ideas, and dig in on the most pressing issues of our time. This exceptional institution in an unparalleled location attracts top minds and talented professionals. UVM is committed to diversity and inclusion, ethical conduct, and working together to advance the University of Vermont’s mission to create and share knowledge and educate accountable leaders for humankind.

To submit a candidate nomination or to express personal interest in this position, please see “Procedure for Candidacy” on page 9. Recruitment will continue until the position is filled.
The University of Vermont

Vermont’s land-grant and only comprehensive university, University of Vermont (UVM) was founded as a private institution in 1791; it has always been an essential civic force in Vermont. The fifth New England college, established after Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, and Brown, is popularly called UVM, a derivation from its Latin name, Universitas Viridis Montis, the University of the Green Mountains. The university’s original charter explicitly declared support for freedom of religion—making it the nation’s first institution of higher learning to take such a public stance.

UVM embraces both a strong teaching mission and a dedication to advancing knowledge through research achieved by a distinguished faculty of accomplished teacher-scholars. Its rich environment for teaching, research, and scholarship in many realms of human inquiry has led to UVM being lauded in an array of national surveys. UVM is consistently recognized for its academic excellence and great overall value. UVM has been consistently ranked among the nation’s top 50 public universities in U.S. News & World Report.

UVM operates as a separate corporate entity from the State of Vermont, serving as an instrumentality of the state. The University owns its own land and buildings, manages its own capital and operating budget, sets its own tuition and fees, and employs its own faculty and staff. UVM’s governance is an explicit blend of public and private, with a 25-person board of trustees balanced between private and public members.

Additional information about University of Vermont is available at: www.uvm.edu.

Suresh V. Garimella, Ph.D., President

Suresh Garimella became the 27th president of the University of Vermont on July 1, 2019.

A seasoned administrator and an accomplished educator and researcher, Dr. Garimella previously led complex and expansive portfolios at Purdue University, a top-ranked, flagship research university. As Purdue’s inaugural executive vice president for research and partnerships, Dr. Garimella led a $660 million per year research enterprise, achieving five consecutive years of record research funding. He also oversaw Discovery Park, a unique set of facilities and institutes where disciplines converge to solve global challenges related to health and life sciences, sustainability, food, energy and defense, and security. He was responsible for Purdue’s international programs and its global and corporate partnerships, focused on strengthening relationships to advance innovation, research, education, and commercialization. He previously served as Purdue’s chief global affairs officer (2013-2014) and associate vice president for engagement (2011-2013). Dr. Garimella held the Goodson Distinguished Professorship in Mechanical Engineering at Purdue, and holds an appointment as professor of mechanical engineering in the College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences at UVM.

Dr. Garimella conceived of and implemented an ambitious $250 million Life Sciences Initiative focused on Pillars of Excellence in integrative neuroscience and immunological sciences, complementing Purdue University’s existing strengths in drug discovery and plant sciences. In
addition, he and Purdue’s provost partnered to develop the Integrative Data Science Initiative, which is focused on applying data science research to pressing fundamental and socially relevant issues while establishing an educational ecosystem of data fluency to prepare students for the rapidly expanding future of a data-driven knowledge economy.

In 2018, Dr. Garimella was appointed by President Trump to the National Science Board, which oversees the National Science Foundation and also serves as an independent body of advisers to both the president and Congress on policy matters related to science, engineering, and educating the next generation of scientists.

The co-author of over 525 widely cited archival publications and 13 patents, Dr. Garimella is an expert in micro- and nano-scale transport phenomena, thermal management, and energy efficiency in electronics systems, and renewable and sustainable energy systems technology and policy. He founded the Cooling Technologies Research Center, a graduated National Science Foundation I/UCRC, in 1999 and directed it for two decades. He has supervised over 90 graduate students, 27 of whom are now faculty members in prestigious universities.

Dr. Garimella served as a Jefferson Science Fellow at the U.S. Department of State from 2010 to 2011, analyzing cross-cutting issues at the intersection of energy security and climate change. He was a State Department delegate to the International Energy Agency (IEA). From 2011 to 2016, Dr. Garimella was a senior fellow of the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA), a regional partnership announced by President Obama in 2009 to promote clean energy, advance energy security, fight energy poverty, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support strategies for sustainable landscapes, and build capacity for climate change adaptation.

Dr. Garimella serves in editorial roles with leading energy-related journals. He is a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), and has received numerous awards in recognition of his educational, research, and service contributions.

Dr. Garimella received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley, an M.S. from The Ohio State University, and a bachelor’s degree from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras.
Position Summary: Chief Communications Officer

The new chief communications officer will have a demonstrated track record of success in delivering creative communications, marketing, and public relations products and strategies that advance an institution in a transformational way. The next chief communications officer will:

Communications

▪ Provide leadership for an integrated and well-coordinated university-wide strategic communications program that promotes the university’s identity, activities, and accomplishments with internal and external stakeholders.

▪ Supervise the university’s communications professionals, including those assisting with the following functions: publications, web communications, social media, media relations, university-wide messaging, and speechwriting.

▪ Develop, implement, and evaluate policies and standards for the university’s printed publications, websites, social media, official trademarks, logos, and other media.

▪ Productively collaborate with internal partners across the university, including the University of Vermont Foundation and the Alumni Association.

▪ Provide advice to university leadership regarding communications and marketing strategy, reputational impacts, and crisis communications.

▪ Provide direct support for the Office of the President, including development of special communications.

Marketing

▪ Develop, implement, evaluate, and refine a comprehensive marketing strategy, including digital marketing, designed to help the university enhance its reputation and achieve key institutional objectives.

▪ Use innovative and creative marketing strategies to strengthen the university’s brand, enhance its reputation, and achieve state and federal legislative priorities.

▪ Oversee collaborative external marketing efforts across the university to ensure quality and consistency of institutional presentations.

▪ Develop and implement data-informed, integrated marketing plans in support of student recruitment, fundraising, and alumni engagement.

▪ Plan and conduct market research to assist the university in evaluating potential programs and initiatives.

Media Relations

▪ Develop and implement a comprehensive and proactive media relations strategy to advance the university’s national visibility and reputation.
▪ Expand and nurture media relationships that will assist the university in placing stories and publishing opinion pieces and other articles in the national press, and that will promote media outreach to university experts in a wide range of issues of interest.

▪ Oversee the development of press releases designed to enhance the university’s reputation, extend the university’s reach, and strategically advance the university’s objectives.

▪ Provide direction and leadership in crisis planning and response. Serve as university spokesperson when necessary. Work with university leadership to anticipate and prepare for media inquiries. Investigate, develop consistent messaging, and prepare staff and faculty to respond positively, clearly, and honestly with messaging that minimizes the possibility of misinterpretation. Maintain positive and trusted relationships with members of the media. Directly respond to media inquiries and proactively provide information and context that assists the university in accurately portraying its response to the situation at hand.

▪ Supervise media relations professionals and help them achieve the university’s objectives.

Management

▪ Develop measurable short and long-term goals and strategic plans for achieving them.

▪ Strategically allocate the communications budget to best meet the university’s communications, marketing, and media relations objectives.

▪ Motivate, supervise, mentor, and evaluate communications staff. Create a positive and productive atmosphere to ensure optimum performance.

▪ Develop criteria to track and evaluate the effectiveness of communications and marketing strategies.

▪ Keep informed about developments in the fields of communications and marketing. Keep informed regarding issues of importance in higher education.
Goals and Objectives

The chief communications officer is responsible for the overall leadership and strategic direction of a comprehensive team of roughly seventy-five communications professionals (both direct and indirect reports) across the breadth of the institution. Organizational charts are available in Appendix I.

The following represent some of the immediate opportunities that the new chief communications officer will address upon joining the UVM community. They are presented here in no particular order.

A Refined Communications Strategy

University of Vermont has a compelling story to tell. The chief communications officer will leverage the strengths of the university to create a persuasive, unified, and contemporary narrative about UVM as a major player on the national higher education stage. The chief communications officer has a great opportunity to bring a deeper awareness and appreciation for the university's significant scholarly achievements, scientific discoveries, excellence in the classroom, and a deeply felt commitment to serving the public good. The chief communications officer will play a key role in managing the public perception of the significant work being done at UVM and deploying the resources, staff, and creative energy of the unit to highlight the numerous forms of significant work underway at the institution.

To this end, the chief communications officer must ensure a coherent, focused, and aligned communications effort with consistent and clear messaging across the entire institution. The chief communications officer will guide and prioritize the division's approach to commercial media, print, and other external relations; internal communications; and community relations efforts.

Update University Digital Presence

Updating UVM's virtual presence, including the university's website, social media outlets, and other digital platforms, will be an important, early priority for this next leader. The chief communications officer must inspire creative thinking, connect with current trends, and execute best practices in this area, including development and optimization of a digital strategy. Because of its geographic location, UVM is especially reliant on web and virtual platforms and engagement efforts to attract new students and educate constituents on the exciting advances at the institution.

The new chief communications officer will embrace the challenges presented and bring an energetic, tenacious spirit in identifying new resources, outlets, and market segments—domestically and abroad—which UVM has yet to leverage.

Reframing the Organization

The university recognizes the value of a strong, integrated communications unit as part of its strategy to raise its profile with internal customers and external stakeholders and align brand messaging. To do so, the next chief communications officer will have a spirit of open communication, instinct for collaboration, and desire to advance goals, enhanced public awareness, and maximize the reputation and potential for growth of the university.
There are many opportunities that will characterize and define this department as it continues to evolve. The president has committed to securing the appropriate levels of staffing and budgetary support for the unit required to achieve the ambitious goals as set forth by the university. To this end, the chief communications officer will continuously assess the staffing and operational needs as communications and industry trends change to ensure the office has the resources it needs to advance effectively the mission, vision, and brand of UVM.

**Candidate Qualifications**

The ideal candidate will have the following professional qualifications and personal characteristics.

- Bachelor's degree required; master's or other terminal degree preferred.
- Minimum ten years of experience in strategic marketing communications required.
- Demonstrated knowledge and expertise in communications and marketing strategy required.
- Outstanding project management skills and experience.
- Demonstrated success in leading an innovative and creative team to meet articulated objectives.
- Demonstrated ability to strategically allocate and responsibly manage a budget.
- Demonstrated success in the creative and strategic application of digital and social media technologies.
- Deep experience and expertise in marketing, digital marketing, media relations, crisis communications, issues management, and public relations.
- Demonstrated ability to manage digital marketers/agencies.
- Demonstrated commitment to the ideals of a public, land grant research university.
- Excellent writing skills and oral communication skills.

**The Community**

**Burlington, Vermont**

UVM derives much of its distinctive character from Vermont’s unique culture and intense sense of place. Reflecting the natural environment that Vermont occupies and nurtures, the UVM campus sits atop Burlington’s highest ridgeline overlooking Lake Champlain, between the Green Mountains to the east and the high peaks of the Adirondacks to the west. Surrounded by Burlington, a thriving, livable, historical city perennially voted one of America’s most exciting places to live, UVM boasts a classic New England campus that is both well designed and beautifully restored. Complementing the historical buildings on campus is an array of new, state-of-the-art academic and residential facilities.

Our hometown, Vermont’s largest city, perennially appears on national rankings that laud its livability, access to nature and recreation (including the best skiing in the northeast), thriving food and music scene, rising identity as a technology and innovation hub, and its status as a top college town. With Montreal a 90-minute and Boston a 3.5- hour drive away, international and metropolitan culture are easily accessible for weekend adventures.

For additional information about Burlington: [https://www.uvm.edu/about_uvm/burlington_vt](https://www.uvm.edu/about_uvm/burlington_vt)
Procedure for Candidacy

Inquiries, nominations and applications are invited. Candidates should provide a resume and a letter of application that addresses the responsibilities and requirements described in this leadership profile. The University of Vermont's consultants Melissa Fincher, Andrew Bowen, and Robin Mamlet can be reached at UVMCommunications@wittkieffer.com or via the desk of Christine Macias at 630-575-6993. Review of applications will continue until the position is filled.

Information that cannot be sent electronically may be forwarded to:

WittKieffer
2015 Spring Road, Suite 510
Oak Brook, Illinois 60523
Phone: (630)575-6993

The University of Vermont is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer. Applications from women, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and people from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds are encouraged.

The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. This material has been copied, compiled, or quoted in part from University of Vermont documents and personal interviews and is believed to be reliable. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and factual situations govern.

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Appendix I: Organization Charts

University Senior Leadership
Communications Division (Yellow indicates direct reports; green indicates indirect reports)
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