

SEARCH PROFILE:

PRESIDENT



Wilkes University

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THE SEARCH

Wilkes University announces the search for its eighth President. The Board of Trustees and campus community seek an inspiring and collaborative leader who will champion the University's student-centered mission and guide it through a period of strategic growth and renewal. The President will inspire

a unified sense of purpose, galvanizing the campus around a shared vision that embraces academic excellence, financial resilience, and dynamic partnerships. The new President is expected to take office on August 1, 2026.



ABOUT WILKES

[Wilkes University](#) is a four-year private, nonsectarian institution that is home to more than 2,000 full-time undergraduate students and 3,000 graduate students. Located in downtown Wilkes-Barre, Pa., Wilkes' 35 acre campus features a unique mix of historic mansions and modern facilities conveniently situated within two hours of Philadelphia and New York City.

Founded in 1933 as Bucknell University's junior college, the institution attracted eager, highly motivated, and talented individuals, the vast majority of whom were the first members of their families to benefit from higher education. Bucknell University Junior College thrived through support and encouragement from leading members of the Wilkes-Barre community. Generous donations from local residents, including the stately mansions now used as residence halls and offices, represent the strong tradition of community support characteristic of the region.

In 1947, Wilkes College was chartered as an independent, nondenominational four-year college, with programs in the arts, sciences, and selected professional areas. Designated as a University in 1990, Wilkes offers undergraduate degrees and programs in three colleges: the Dr. Bing K. Wong College of Arts and Sciences; the College of Business and Engineering, which includes the Jay S. Sidhu School of Business and Leadership and the School of Engineering; and the College of Health and Education, which includes the Nesbitt School of Pharmacy, the Passan School of Nursing, and the Alley School of Education.

Wilkes is governed by an active, 28-person Board of Trustees. Its current Carnegie classification is Doctoral/Professional, assigned to institutions awarding at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees and spending less than \$5 million on research, or awarding 30 or more professional practice doctoral degrees across at least two academic programs.

Since the institution's earliest days, Wilkes has embraced the power of relationships to enhance learning. Mentoring is a cornerstone of the Wilkes experience, reflected in the University's mission and values.

MISSION

To empower our students with transformative educational experiences, civic values, and transferable skills through mentoring, individualized opportunities, and innovative teaching and scholarship in an inclusive environment.

VISION

Wilkes University will provide exceptional educational experiences that transform students and develop innovations through scholarly activities that lead to national recognition and shape the world around us.

VALUES

Mentorship: Nurturing individuals to understand and act on their abilities while challenging them to achieve great things.

Scholarship: Advancing knowledge and stimulating intellectual curiosity and creativity through research and discovery across all disciplines.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Celebrating diversity among individuals and ideas and ensuring that our community provides equitable, inclusive, and accessible opportunities to thrive.

Innovation: Supporting new ideas and programs through sustainable, impactful practices.

Community: Fostering relationships and a sense of belonging through a culture of care, respect, and support.

Service: Engaging ourselves and our communities through active citizenship and collaborative partnerships.

ABOUT WILKES (CONT.)

Stewardship: Affirming our commitment to intentionally honor University traditions and responsibly secure the evolution of Wilkes and its mission.

Wilkes strives to enhance the student experience by seeking outstanding individuals in every segment of the University who are collaborative, innovative, and community-minded.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The [Innovate. Engage. Thrive. Strategic Plan](#) was endorsed by the University's Board of Trustees in June 2023. The plan is five years in duration and is built on the successes and lessons of the *Bridge to the Future* plan (2021-2023) which guided the University out of the pandemic. In addition to campus-wide conversations, the strategic plan was developed through the work of two cross-functional groups of campus volunteers - the Strategic Planning Committee and the Strategic and Long Range Planning Committee.

The following six goals are the pillars of the *Innovate. Engage. Thrive.* strategic plan:

- Advance Academic Excellence
- Support Student Success
- Prioritize Community, Enrichment, and Service
- Promote Innovation and Partnerships
- Strengthen Financial Resilience
- Optimize Infrastructure

ACCREDITATION

Wilkes has been accredited with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) since 1937. The University's accreditation status was reaffirmed by MSCHE in 2020, following a virtual site visit due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the 2020 reaffirmation, Wilkes transitioned to an eight-year accreditation cycle from the previous 10-year cycle. The University is currently in the coordination phase of the next self-study, which will include a site visit in the academic year 2027-2028.

In addition to MSCHE, other professional accreditations and affiliations include American Chemical Society, Engineering Accreditation Commission of ABET, Accreditation Council for Business Schools & Programs, AACSB International, Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education, American Society of Health-System Pharmacist Commission on Credentialing, Pennsylvania Department of Education, and Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education.

Wilkes' commitment to academic excellence and student access is recognized by national organizations including:

- Ranked #228 out of 397 institutions in the northeast in *Washington Monthly's* best bang for the buck ranking, which recognizes schools that help students pursue a marketable degree at an affordable price.
- Ranked #14 among all colleges and universities for helping students from middle-class families raise their income level according to the *Brookings Institution*.
- Ranked #25 in the nation for economic value by *The Economist*.





ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Wilkes offers a mix of in-demand undergraduate, master's, and terminal degree programs online and on campus through three colleges:

Within the [Bing K. Wong College of Arts and Sciences](#), students are challenged to develop critical thinking skills, enrich their written and oral communication, foster their research skills, and cultivate a sense of civic responsibility. The College is composed of departments and divisions in Behavioral and Social Sciences; Biology and Earth Systems Science; Chemistry and Biochemistry; Communication and Media Studies; Integrated Media, Art, and Design; English; Global Cultures: History, Language, and Philosophy; Mathematics, Physics, and Computer Science; and Performing Arts.

The [College of Business and Engineering](#), which includes the Jay S. Sidhu School of Business and Leadership and the School of Engineering, fosters leadership, problem solving, and critical thinking. The College is composed of departments and divisions in Aerospace Studies; Civil and Environmental Engineering; Mechanical and Electrical Engineering; Finance, Accounting, and Management; and Marketing and Sports Management.

The [College of Health and Education](#) prepares students for careers that contribute to our society by helping others. It includes the Nesbitt School of Pharmacy, the Passan School of Nursing, and the Alley School Education. The Nesbitt School of Pharmacy offers the PharmD program and houses the pre-pharmacy guaranteed seat program, a BS in health promotion, and certificates in medicinal cannabis and CBD extraction. The Passan School of Nursing offers three undergraduate and five graduate programs in nursing. At the undergraduate level, students can earn a traditional four-year BSN, an accelerated BSN in an online format, and a BSN program for licensed

practical nurses. The school's graduate program offers a variety of programs leading to a MSN-Nurse Practitioner, the DNP, and the Ph.D. in nursing.

The Alley School of Education houses the four undergraduate programs, numerous master's degrees, and a doctoral program in education. Undergraduate students can major in elementary education, middle level education, secondary education, and special education. At the graduate level, students are offered the training and preparation needed to become leaders in education with 11 degree programs, seven certifications, four letters of endorsement, and an EdD in educational leadership.

In addition to these colleges, the Office of Academic Success provides robust services to assist all students from their initial transition to college through their progress to post-graduate studies and professional careers. The department is home for students who begin college as "undeclared" majors, and is the center for academic support services, the ACT 101 and Upward Bound programs, and others.

A vibrant Honors Program provides enhanced interdisciplinary educational experiences for exceptionally talented and motivated students. Wilkes students also benefit from cooperative programs with other universities including Penn State Law, Drexel University, Widener University Commonwealth Law School, Neumann University, Salus University, and numerous community colleges.

Wilkes boasts a 13 to one faculty to student ratio and 94% of professors hold the highest degree in their field. Students are encouraged to gain real-world experience in their field beginning with their first year on campus and faculty work alongside students to conduct research. The job/graduate school placement rate is 98%.



STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE

Wilkes is the academic home of 5,489 students, across undergraduate and graduate levels. The University enrolls 3,209 graduate students, 91.2% of whom are part-time. At the undergraduate level there are 2,055 students, 91.8% of whom are full-time students. The SAT 25/75 percentiles are 1020/1270. In-state students make up 62.3% of the undergraduate population, and approximately 40% of undergraduates live in campus housing. Maintaining Wilkes' historic commitment to first-generation students, 49% of first-year/first-time students are first-in-family to attend college.

Undergraduates at Wilkes enjoy a wide array of campus activities and leadership opportunities through [more than 70 student organizations](#) that enhance the quality of student life and learning. There is no Greek system on campus and, with the exception of honor societies, all student organizations are open to the entire student body. An engaged Student Government administers the student activity fee fund and provides funding and sponsorship for numerous all-campus events and programs. The Office of Student Development works in concert with Student Government, offering educational and social experiences that enhance the quality of student life and learning.

More than 500 Wilkes undergraduates wear the navy and gold as members of the Wilkes Colonels [athletics](#) program. The University offers intercollegiate competition in 24 varsity sports at the Division III level of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). All teams compete in the Landmark Conference,

with the exception of men's and women's ice hockey, which compete in the Middle Atlantic Conference. Intramural athletics and a variety of health and fitness clubs offer opportunities for all students to stay active.

Wilkes University students are active in service projects that benefit the local community and beyond. Many academic departments offer community-based learning courses that integrate classroom theory and hands-on experience with a pressing social issue. In addition to in-class community-based learning, Wilkes students, staff, and faculty contributed 12,000 hours of community outreach to local agencies in the 2024-2025 academic year. Wilkes is the only university in the region to offer the Bonner Leader Program, a nationally acclaimed service-based initiative that promotes public service, leadership, and professional development. Students may also choose to participate in Alternative Spring Breaks, which provide opportunities to learn about different cultures in locations near and far.

The Adventure Education program is an alternative learning experience designed to challenge students to engage in physically demanding activities that emphasize wellness and provide practical leadership tools and lessons on teamwork. Students have the opportunity to sign up for adventures such as hiking, rock climbing, mountain biking, and cross-country trips to locations such as the Grand Canyon National Park.

CAMPUS FEATURES

The Wilkes campus is located in downtown Wilkes-Barre, a city of 40,000 on the western fringe of the Poconos right on the Susquehanna River. The surrounding region offers considerable natural beauty and recreational opportunities, including numerous ski resorts, concert venues, water parks and state parks, and is a two-hour drive from both Philadelphia and New York City.

The 35-acre campus blends stately mansions with state-of-the-art facilities in a historic downtown neighborhood. The campus includes eight academic buildings, 17 residence halls, and nine administrative buildings, as well as the Eugene S. Farley Library, the Henry Student Center, and numerous other facilities that house student life and auxiliary functions. The on-campus Arnaud C. Marts Center and Ralston Athletic Complex, located within walking distance across the Susquehanna River, are home to athletics at Wilkes. In addition, the Simms Center on Main offers the multi-purpose McHale Athletic Center, a Starbucks, the Jay S. Sidhu School of Business, and the new Cohen Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation.

Over the past decade, a carefully executed campus master plan inspired projects to enhance beauty, safety, and accessibility at Wilkes. The addition of an attractive greenway framing the Fenner Quadrangle



improved the pedestrian experience and provided continuity through the center of campus. The Sordoni Art Gallery and Karambelas Media and Communications Center are prominently located on South Main Street, at the intersection of campus and community. Most recently, an extensive renovation to the Dorothy Dickson Darte Center for the Performing Arts significantly enhanced accessibility at the facility. Some of the University's historic mansions present challenges of deferred maintenance but add significantly to the charm of the campus.

To learn more about the campus, take the virtual campus tour located [at this link](#).

COMMUNITY

Founded to meet the community's need for higher education more than 90 years ago, Wilkes' mission remains closely linked to the community. Wilkes anchors the downtown Wilkes-Barre community and is committed to being a force for positive economic, social, and cultural development in the region.

Wilkes-Barre is the seat of Luzerne County, one of ten counties that make up the northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA) region. More than 1.1 million people live in NEPA, which features a mix of suburban neighborhoods, rural landscapes, and mid-size cities. The area's population blends newcomers drawn by higher educational opportunities and industry with longtime residents who have called NEPA home for generations.

Health care, social assistance, retail trade, transportation, and warehousing are the most dominant

industries in Luzerne County and the region's largest employers include the federal government, Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, and Amazon.com Services LLC. The region has a significant number of nonprofit organizations, approximately four percent of the state's total. NEPA's strong cultural resources, including historic resources and entertainment venues, enrich quality of life and drive tourism.

Wilkes offers many resources that benefit the community including the Small Business Development Center, which provides businesses with one-on-one consulting services and access to capital; the Family Business Alliance, which supports member businesses with educational programming and networking opportunities; and numerous educational outreach programs.

FINANCES

Wilkes University's operating budget is approximately \$110 million for FY2025-26. In recent years, like many institutions across higher education, the University has faced financial pressures driven by rising operating costs, shifts in enrollment patterns, increased financial aid investment, and structural budget assumptions. These factors contributed to an operating deficit in fiscal year 2024-25, prompting a comprehensive review of financial practices and long-term sustainability.

In response, the University has undertaken a focused effort to stabilize and strengthen its financial position. Leadership has implemented a multi-year financial recovery strategy centered on more realistic budget planning, strengthened expense management, and targeted revenue growth. Early measures have included operational efficiencies, closer alignment between projected and actual expenditures, and renewed emphasis on enrollment, retention, and program vitality. These actions are intended to reduce the structural deficit and position the institution to achieve balanced budgets in the coming fiscal cycles.

Wilkes maintains a solid financial foundation, supported by a growing endowment and ongoing philanthropic engagement. The endowment has increased to approximately \$76 million and continues to provide

annual operating support through a disciplined draw policy. Philanthropic support remains an important component of long-term institutional strength. The University has also made strategic investments in facilities, student spaces, and academic infrastructure.

Student charges for 2025–2026 include tuition and mandatory fees in the mid-\$40,000 range, with room and board varying based on housing and dining selections. For the upcoming fiscal year, the University has planned measured increases to support operating needs and rising costs, including a 4.6% increase in tuition, a 3.5% increase in required fees, a 3.7% increase in housing (room), and a 5.0% increase in board (meal plans), representing an overall tuition, fees, room, and board (TFRB) increase of approximately 4.2%. A significant majority of undergraduate students receive institutional financial aid, with a projected institutional discount rate of approximately 51% for all grade levels, reflecting the University's continued commitment to access and affordability. Financial aid represents a substantial institutional investment, and net tuition revenue remains a central driver of the operating budget. Graduate and professional programs continue to contribute an important share of total revenue and are a key component of the institution's long-term financial strategy.



FUNDRAISING & ALUMNI

Wilkes takes pride in the accomplishments of its more than 24,000 living alumni. An active, 30-member Alumni Association Board of Directors meets regularly with the goal of fostering relationships with alumni, enhancing the value of a Wilkes experience, representing the best interests of alumni with administration and encouraging alumni participation in fundraising.

The University is currently in the quiet phase of a comprehensive capital campaign with a goal of \$60 million and has secured approximately 37% of that target to date. Recent fundraising success includes the largest individual donation in the University's history.

LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

The Wilkes University Board of Trustees consists of up to 28 members, including the President who is an ex-officio voting member, the President of the Alumni Association who is an ex-officio voting member, and nine non-voting Trustee Emeriti. Members are elected to three-year terms and may be elected for two additional, successive three-year terms. In addition, one full-time faculty member, one staff member (non-faculty, full-time employee who is not a member of the President's Cabinet), and one currently enrolled student are invited to attend regularly scheduled Trustee meetings as observers. Standing committees and sub-committees of the Board include Academic Excellence & Student Success; Marketing, Communications, Branding & Engagement; Student Recruitment & Retention; Advancement; Audit; Finance & Support Operations; Human Resources; Trustee Development; and Investment Advisory (sub-committee of Finance).

Chaired by the President, the Cabinet includes leaders from each of the functional units across the University, including Senior Vice President and Provost, Vice President for Finance, Vice President

for Advancement, Vice President of Enrollment Management, Associate Vice President for Marketing Communications, Associate Vice President for Human Resources/Chief HR Officer, and Associate Vice President for Student Life and Success.

The Wilkes community places high value on the principles of shared governance. The Faculty Affairs Council, University Staff Advisory Committee, and Student Government, along with the President's Cabinet, participate actively in decision-making at the University level. The Faculty Affairs Council (FAC) oversees a variety of faculty and academic committees, facilitates communication between the Faculty and the Administration, and deals with a broad range of faculty concerns. The University Staff Advisory Committee (USAC) represents all levels of staff employees and is charged with enhancing communication between staff and administration. Student Government (SG) serves as a sounding board for students' concerns, formulates the student-activities budgets, and approves fund requests for all clubs.





PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP AGENDA

Wilkes University seeks a visionary, collaborative, and deeply grounded leader who combines strategic clarity with humility, integrity, and a genuine commitment to service. The successful candidate will be called to Wilkes' mission of student development, academic excellence, and community impact. Ideally, the President will bring demonstrated experience leading within shared governance and earned credibility through professional accomplishments in higher education or executive leadership in other complex organizational environments. The President will bring the skills needed to successfully manage financial affairs, grow enrollment, and advance fundraising.

Some of the key opportunities of the leadership agenda for the President are:

Promote Wilkes Community and Culture. A priority for the President is protecting and strengthening Wilkes' student-first mission and core values of shared

governance, transparency, and mutual respect. Wilkes students, faculty, and staff expect their President to be visible, engaged, open, and collaborative. The President must apply strong listening and communication skills to engender trust and goodwill across the campus community. Supporting a culture of collaboration and open communication with faculty, staff, students, and alumni will unite the campus and boost morale. A clear commitment to shared governance, two-way communication, and inclusive decision-making will enhance trust and support for senior leadership.

Ensure Financial Integrity and Stability. The President must address a budget deficit along with the headwinds common among all independent higher education institutions. The most significant of these is the challenge to traditional undergraduate enrollment, especially for private universities in the Northeast.

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP AGENDA (CONT.)

The President must lead the campus in developing strategies to leverage Wilkes' academic strengths and support for students to boost undergraduate enrollment. At the same time, investments in thriving online and graduate programs will generate revenue growth and diversification. Wilkes' endowment is modest, at approximately \$76 million, so a priority is reducing the institution's tuition dependence through enhanced fundraising. Another immediate priority is to ensure the implementation of a new financial management and budget control system, being led by the interim CFO, that is expected to contribute to expense control. This improved model and the opportunity to engage a new chief financial officer will allow the President to enhance confidence in the University's financial integrity.

Establish a Shared Vision and Change Leadership.

Wilkes needs a President who can lead planning and change within the University's culture of transparency and collaboration. Building on the goals and momentum of the existing *Innovate. Engage. Thrive.* strategic plan, the President must lead the senior team and campus through strategic decisions about programs, growth, and investment, ensuring enrollment growth, and diversifying the University's revenue stream. In the course of building a compelling vision and plans, the President must balance the need for institutional flexibility and speed with the University's culture of listening, building consensus, sharing information, and inclusive decision-making. Honest communication about these trade-offs, along with a relational and open personality that emphasizes long-term institutional benefits, is likely to yield success. Building consensus without avoiding difficult decisions is a test of real leadership.

Grow Resources and Partnerships. The President will have an opportunity to draw resources to the University as its external face to alumni, donors, and community partners. Recent efforts in alumni engagement and donor development have generated significant financial gifts and created momentum towards a historic capital campaign. The President will be expected to carry forward that campaign to a successful conclusion. Wilkes-Barre and northeastern Pennsylvania offer rich opportunities for partnerships of mutual benefit to the University and the local economy.



QUALIFICATIONS, CHARACTERISTICS, & EXPERIENCES

The President will have a graduate degree, with a preference for an earned terminal degree, and a successful track record of senior leadership experience that demonstrates the ability to manage a complex organization with multiple stakeholders. Demonstrated capabilities should include a commitment to student success, experience with budgets and financial planning, shared governance, excellent communication skills, and a proven ability to articulate and execute a compelling vision.

The successful candidate will possess many of the following characteristics, experiences, and qualifications:

- An open, genuine, and engaging person who develops and cultivates trust and credibility among students, faculty, staff, and the Board of Trustees, and externally with alumni, donors, government officials, and local and statewide leaders
- A strong commitment to access and student success and a track record of fostering a sense of belonging for students, faculty, and staff
- A transparent and effective communicator, able to listen with empathy and discernment, communicate complex issues and decisions, inspire confidence, build trust, and advance an inclusive culture of care, collaboration, and transparency
- A demonstrated record of fiscal responsibility and experience overseeing complex budgets and resource constraints
- An ability to lead change in a rapidly changing higher education environment while respecting institutional history, culture, and traditions
- A data-informed decision maker with the ability to understand and articulate decisions, balance competing priorities, and make difficult decisions
- Demonstrated fundraising success, and the ability to establish a compelling vision for donor support
- A commitment to academic quality and an appreciation of the importance of faculty excellence in teaching, mentoring, service, and research
- An understanding of the external environment influencing higher education, including state and federal government policies and their impact on institutions of higher education
- Insight into demographic challenges, with demonstrated success in enrollment management and retention, as well as a track record of academic innovation responsive to market interest and workforce needs
- A track record of building high performing teams, setting clear expectations, inspiring a sense of shared purpose, holding people accountable, and celebrating achievements
- Unquestioned integrity, trustworthiness, humility, and resiliency, and clear alignment between words and actions





APPLICATIONS, NOMINATIONS, & INQUIRIES

Academic Search is partnering with Wilkes University in this search. Confidential discussions about the position are welcome and may be arranged by contacting Jay Lemons at jay.lemons@academicsearch.org, Stuart Dorsey at stuart.dorsey@academicsearch.org, or Jennifer Kookan at jennifer.kookan@academicsearch.org.

Applications, nominations, and inquiries should be sent to WilkesPresident@academicsearch.org.

To apply, candidates should submit a current curriculum vitae and a letter of interest addressing, as appropriate, the leadership agenda and qualifications, characteristics, and experiences outlined in this profile. The position will remain open until filled, but only applications received by **April 13, 2026**, will be guaranteed full consideration by the Search Committee.

Wilkes University is constantly seeking to become a more diverse community and to enhance its capacity to value and capitalize on the cultural richness that diversity brings. The University strongly encourages applications from persons with diverse backgrounds. Wilkes University does not discriminate in its employment practices or in its educational programs or activities on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, age, religion, disability, pregnancy, sex/gender, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, marital or family status, military or veteran status, or genetic information.

Employment at Wilkes is contingent upon the results of a thorough background screening. PA Act 153 requires that persons working in positions with regular and unsupervised contact with minors complete additional clearances, including FBI fingerprinting and PA criminal and child abuse clearances.

ABOUT ACADEMIC SEARCH

Academic Search is assisting Wilkes 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.

