



Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) – Heritage University

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University Background

Located on the Yakama Nation Reservation in Toppenish, Heritage University trains and serves in the homeland of the Yakama People and the many tribes and bands now represented by the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation under the Treaty of 1855. The University honors Indigenous peoples as traditional stewards of this land and expresses gratitude for the opportunity to study, teach, work, and live in community here. Rooted in the homeland of the Yakama Nation, Heritage is committed to transformational, student-centered education that serves Indigenous students and strengthens relationships with the Yakama Nation and other Native communities.

Heritage University is a private, regionally accredited institution founded in 1982 on the Yakama Nation reservation in Toppenish, Washington. Established to expand college access for historically underserved communities, the university serves a diverse student population across the Yakima Valley and beyond. It is the only private university nationally designated both a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and a Native American–Serving Non-Tribal Institution (NASNTI).

Roughly 73% of Heritage’s students identify as Hispanic/Latino, over 17% as Native American, and about 85% are the first in their families to attend college. Many are adult learners—parents returning to education, career changers, and working professionals seeking to advance their lives through higher education—making Heritage a critical access point for both traditional and non-traditional students. The university works closely with the Yakama Nation and supports students from migrant-farmworker families through robust programs, ensuring that financial and cultural barriers do not impede success.

The main campus is located in Toppenish (3240 Fort Road), with an additional regional site in Kennewick that has been operating since 2023. Heritage also collaborates with Columbia Basin College in Pasco to further extend its regional reach.



Mission, Vision, and Values

Heritage University stands as a beacon of opportunity, empowering a multicultural and inclusive student body to rise above social, cultural, economic, and geographic barriers. With a bold commitment to transformational, student-centered education, the university cultivates leadership, inspires lifelong learning, and champions a more just and equitable society. At Heritage, education is more than a pathway—it is a catalyst for generational change.

The university is deeply rooted in values that celebrate access, equity, cultural inclusion, community engagement, and academic excellence. These principles are not abstract ideals; they are lived every day through the success of first-generation, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American students who thrive in our classrooms and communities. Heritage fosters a culture of continuous improvement, institutional vitality, and student achievement, creating a campus environment where all students can flourish.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs is entrusted with upholding and advancing these values. This leader will champion academic programs and services that reflect the university's mission, honor the cultural heritage of the Yakama Nation and surrounding communities, and ensure all students are empowered to succeed academically and to become leaders committed to a more just society.

Accreditation

Heritage University is institutionally accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), the regional accreditor recognized for assuring academic quality, institutional effectiveness, and continuous improvement—supporting students' access to federal financial aid. In addition, academic programs hold state and specialized accreditations, including Nursing (CCNE), and Social Work (CSWE), and Teacher and Principal preparation, reflecting Heritage's commitment to rigorous professional preparation and student outcomes.



Heritage's Diverse Programs

Heritage University offers a wide array of academic programs designed to meet the needs of its diverse student population and the communities it serves. The university provides associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees, along with certificates and endorsements across disciplines. Program offerings include liberal arts, sciences, professional and pre-professional tracks, with degrees such as B.A., B.S., B.A.Ed., B.S.W., M.Ed., M.A., M.I.T., and M.S.W.

Career-oriented programs such as Nursing, Social Work, Education, Criminal Justice, Business, Environmental Science, and Psychology are among Heritage's key strengths, alongside emerging offerings in areas such as Mental Health Counseling. In addition to traditional degree paths, the university provides specialized certificates and endorsements, including Substance Use Disorder Counseling and Spanish Language Service Provision. Heritage's academic structure supports multiple learning pathways, helping students from a variety of backgrounds achieve personal and professional success.

For a full list of Heritage University's current programs, click on this link:

<https://heritage.edu/academic-paths/>

Position Summary and Scope

The Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) serves as the chief academic officer of Heritage University and reports directly to the President. The VPAA provides visionary, hands-on leadership for all academic programs and initiatives, ensuring that teaching and learning reflect the university's mission and meet the needs of its diverse, first-generation, and adult learner student body.

This position oversees all academic departments and programs; academic support units such as the Registrar, Library, and Academic Skills Center, Center for Intercultural Learning and Teaching (CILT); and key grant-funded initiatives (e.g., Title III, McNair). Heritage University utilizes a structure in which academic leadership is provided by department chairs rather than college deans. These chairs are responsible for overseeing their respective academic programs, faculty coordination, and curriculum development. The VPAA provides direct supervision to these chairs and to critical academic support roles, including the Associate Vice President for Accreditation, Compliance, and Institutional Effectiveness.



The VPAA works in close collaboration with colleagues across the university to advance student success, support faculty, and strengthen academic quality. This structure offers a unique opportunity for the successful candidate to shape and elevate the academic enterprise in a lean, mission-driven environment, with potential for future growth of the role. The VPAA is a key member of the President's Council and collaborates closely with institutional leadership, faculty, staff, and external partners to fulfill the mission of the university.

Primary Responsibilities

(The following are representative, not exhaustive.)

1. Academic Leadership, Curriculum, and Assessment

- Provide strategic vision and leadership for the design, delivery, and continuous improvement of all academic programs (undergraduate, graduate, and certificate), aligning them with Heritage University's mission and the needs of the Yakima Valley, Tri-Cities, and broader region.
- Ensure that curricula, andragogy, and modes of delivery are mission-centered, culturally responsive, and current with disciplinary standards and workforce expectations.
- Lead academic planning processes in collaboration with department chairs, faculty, leadership teams, and council colleagues, including prioritizing academic initiatives and ensuring alignment with institutional goals and available resources.
- Oversee the processes for academic program review, curriculum approval, and student learning outcomes assessment, maintaining compliance with regional and programmatic accreditation standards.

2. Faculty Development and Support

- Supervise and support faculty across all academic departments, in partnership with department chairs.
- Provide leadership in faculty recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and retention, with particular attention to building a diverse and inclusive faculty.
- Oversee processes for faculty evaluation and promotion that value excellence in teaching, service, and scholarship.
- Foster a culture of teaching excellence and professional growth by supporting the Center for Intercultural Learning and Teaching (CILT), including New Faculty

Orientation, and facilitating ongoing faculty development, mentorship, and recognition.

- Encourage and support faculty engagement in scholarship, creative activity, and community-engaged work that enriches student learning.

3. Student Success and Enrollment Collaboration

- Work closely with Admissions Department and Student Affairs to promote student recruitment, retention, and completion.
- Align academic policies, course scheduling (including at the Tri-Cities site), and program offerings with enrollment goals and student needs.
- Champion student success initiatives including: advising, tutoring, supplemental instruction, learning communities, and early alerts—especially for first-generation and adult learners, and students needing additional academic support, in partnership with relevant support services.

4. Academic Program Development and Innovation

- Identify and champion opportunities for new academic programs, credentials, concentrations, and delivery formats (including online, hybrid, and site-based offerings) that fulfill regional needs and advance Heritage’s mission of access and equity.
- Lead the planning and launch of new degree programs and academic initiatives, ensuring rigorous market analysis, clear business and resource plans, and alignment with institutional strategy and capacity.
- Promote interdisciplinary, community-engaged, and culturally grounded curricular initiatives that draw on Heritage’s distinctive identity as both an HSI and NASNTI and respond to the lived realities of first-generation, adult, and rural students.

5. Accreditation and Academic Quality Assurance

- Ensure that the university maintains regional accreditation (Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities) and any program-specific accreditations.
- Provide leadership for accreditation self-studies, site visits, and ongoing compliance, working closely with the Associate Vice President for Accreditation, Compliance, and Institutional Effectiveness.
- Implement and uphold academic policies and standards of rigor, integrity, and assessment across all programs.

6. Cross-Departmental Collaboration, Budget, Sponsored Programs

- Collaborate with other senior leaders and departments (e.g., Finance, Student Affairs, Advancement, Strategic Initiatives, Information Technology) on institutional planning and resource allocation to advance academic priorities.
- Work in partnership with the CFO and Budget Committee to develop and manage the Academic Affairs budget, advocating for resources needed to support academic excellence and student success.
- In collaboration with the Office of Advancement and Sponsored Programs, faculty and instructional leaders, support the development and implementation of grants and fundraising for academic programs and initiatives.
- Support service-learning, internships, and research opportunities that connect students and faculty with the community and reinforce Heritage's role in promoting a more just and educated society.

7. Academic Administration and Operations

- Oversee academic support units, including the Library, Registrar, Academic Skills Center, Center for Intercultural Learning and Teaching (CILT), and related offices, ensuring high-quality services that advance teaching, learning, and student success.
- Ensure effective execution of the academic calendar, course scheduling, classroom utilization, and academic policies.
- Provide clear, consistent communication with faculty and staff, promoting transparency, shared governance, and a culture of collaboration and mutual respect.

Leadership Attributes, Core Values, and Relational Qualities

- The successful Vice President of Academic Affairs will bring not only strong academic credentials, but also the personal values and relational qualities that build trust, stability, and shared purpose across Heritage University. Desired attributes include:
- Deep alignment with Heritage's mission and an unwavering, student-centered focus, especially for first-generation, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, adult, and rural students.



- Genuine respect for faculty work and shared governance, with realistic expectations, clear decision boundaries, and transparent communication about academic changes.
- Visible, approachable, and authentic leadership that listens well, follows through, and regularly recognizes the contributions of faculty and staff.
- Strategic, systems-minded, and action-oriented decision-maker who connects academic choices to finance, HR, grants, and student affairs, and turns ideas into clear plans.
- People-centered manager who prioritizes workplace well-being, realistic workloads, clear roles, and proactive efforts to prevent burnout.
- Emotionally intelligent, steady, and courageous leader committed to continuity, follow-through on key initiatives, and mentoring emerging leaders.

Position Criteria

Required Qualifications

- An earned doctorate or other terminal degree (including but not limited to M.F.A., M.B.A., M.S.W.) from a regionally accredited institution.
- A record of significant, progressive academic leadership experience (typically 3+ years) in roles such as department chair, associate dean, dean, associate vice president, or equivalent.
- Successful experience as a full-time faculty member, including demonstrated effectiveness in teaching and engagement with scholarship and/or professional practice.
- Proven ability to lead faculty, foster shared governance, and support faculty development and program innovation.
- Experience with budget development, resource management, and data-informed decision-making in an academic setting.
- Demonstrated knowledge of curriculum design, student learning assessment, academic program review, and accreditation processes.

Preferred Qualifications

- Experience working in, or in strong partnership with, institutions that serve Hispanic/Latino, Native American, and rural populations.
- Demonstrated commitment to access, equity, and student success for underrepresented, first-generation, and non-traditional students.
- Excellent communication, listening, and interpersonal skills, with the ability to build trust and work effectively across diverse stakeholder groups.
- Experience in a mission-driven, access-oriented institution similar in scale and complexity to Heritage University.
- Experience with grant development, sponsored programs, or fundraising in support of academic initiatives.
- Familiarity with best practices in serving first-generation and “new majority” students, including learning communities, intrusive advising, and holistic student support models.
- Bilingual or multilingual abilities (especially English/Spanish) and/or lived experience that resonates with Heritage’s student communities.

Compensation & Benefits

- The salary range for this role is \$138,000 - \$159,908 annually, and is subject to annual review for potential increases.
- FLSA: Exempt
- Heritage University offers a comprehensive and competitive benefits program designed to help employees stay healthy, build long-term financial security, and balance work and family needs, including medical/prescription, dental and vision coverage, long-term disability, and life and accidental death & dismemberment insurance.
- Benefits also include a robust 403(b) retirement plan with a 5% university contribution plus a 100% match on employee contributions up to 2% (up to 7% total), generous time-off provisions (holidays and accrued leave), and education benefits such as tuition waiver opportunities.



Location

- Heritage University's main campus is located in Toppenish, Washington, (Yakima Valley) at 3240 Fort Road, Toppenish, WA 98948. The University also serves students at its Tri-Cities Regional Campus (333 W. Canal Dr., Kennewick, WA 99336) and at Heritage University at Columbia Basin College (CBC Planetarium 344; 2600 N 20th Ave., MS: HU, Pasco, WA 99301).
- This is a full-time, on-campus position based at Heritage University's main campus at 3240 Fort Road, Toppenish, WA 98948.

Application Guidelines

For full consideration, applicants should submit the following materials by March 1, 2026:

- A cover letter (up to five pages) addressing interest in the position and how your experience aligns with Heritage University's mission, student population, and the responsibilities of the VPAA role.
- A current resume or curriculum vitae (CV).
- Application materials should be emailed to the search firm at ExecutiveSearch@AristaHire.com. Candidates may be asked to provide contact information for professional references at a later stage in the process. Review of applications will begin immediately after the priority deadline and will continue until the position is filled.
- Desired Start Date for this Role is no later than July 1, 2026.

Heritage University is an equal-opportunity employer and strongly encourages applications from individuals who reflect the diversity of its student body and surrounding communities, including first-generation college graduates and those with experience serving Hispanic/Latino, Native American, and rural populations.