



Search for the Dean, Sanford School of Public Policy

Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

"There is nothing wrong with being outrageously ambitious." —Terry Sanford, 1984

THE SEARCH

[Duke University](#), a global leader in education and research, invites applications and nominations for Dean of the [Sanford School of Public Policy](#) (Sanford or School). As one of the nation's premier public policy schools, Sanford thrives within Duke's vibrant interdisciplinary ecosystem and benefits from Duke's extensive resources and collaborative culture. The School is dedicated to producing knowledge and cultivating leadership that transforms complex policy challenges into opportunities for positive change. With a strong emphasis on evidence-based solutions, Sanford is recognized for its transdisciplinary approach, global outlook, and dedication to preparing students for lives of civic engagement, public service, and leadership in diverse policy arenas.

Founded in 1971 as the Institute of Policy Sciences and Public Affairs (Institute) by Duke President and former North Carolina Governor and U.S. Senator [Terry Sanford](#), the academic unit was focused on cultivating those with outrageous ambition—those who dare to ask the hardest questions, act with integrity even when no one is watching, reject the notion that suffering is inevitable, and remain grounded in ethics and morality. Terry Sanford helped pioneer public policy as a formal academic discipline, and in 2009, the Institute became Duke's tenth school, building on decades of innovation in policy education and research. The School quickly distinguished itself through an emphasis on undergraduate education and a growing portfolio of graduate programs.

Today, Sanford continues to educate policy professionals to lead in a rapidly evolving public sector, preparing them to address complex challenges where innovation, collaboration, and excellence are essential to driving transformative change. Recognized nationally for its academic rigor and impact, Sanford ranks in the top ten percent of public policy schools and programs in the U.S., with top-tier specialty rankings from *U.S. News & World Report*—including #3 in Environmental Policy and Management, #5 in Health Policy and Management, #6 in Public Policy Analysis, and #12 in Social Policy. The School offers a suite of undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees, supported by more than 70 faculty members, over 700 students, and a global alumni network exceeding 10,000. Sanford's

undergraduate major is among the oldest and largest in the country and remains one of Duke's most popular majors. The School's impact is magnified through its research centers and initiatives, which serve as transdisciplinary hubs for policy innovation and engagement at local, national, and global levels. Sanford graduates emerge as leaders across government, nonprofits, academia, and the private sector, committed to improving lives and communities through evidence-based policy and public service.

Reporting to the Provost and Chief Academic Officer, [Alec Gallimore](#), the Dean will be responsible for collaboratively creating and advancing a bold strategic vision for Sanford that deepens the School's innovative approaches to public policy education, research, and leadership development. This includes cultivating a modern, agile academic environment that is responsive to the rapidly evolving policy landscape, fostering a community grounded in belonging and purpose, and deepening transdisciplinary and global partnerships. The Dean will lead efforts to secure philanthropic support and manage resources effectively to ensure Sanford faculty, staff, and students can deliver the education, research, and service missions of the School with distinction. The successful candidate will bring a record of exceptional leadership and the vision to drive innovation and excellence, foster collaboration, and advance Sanford's enduring commitment to public service.

ABOUT THE SANFORD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

History

The Sanford School of Public Policy was born from a moment of transformation, both for Duke and for the nation. In the wake of the social upheaval of the late 1960s, Duke University faced intense campus unrest, including a dramatic protest in 1969 that ended in tear gas. Terry Sanford, a bold and forward-thinking leader, became Duke's president in 1970 and championed his belief in education as a powerful force for a better society. He saw public policy not just as an academic discipline, but as a means to channel student activism into constructive civic engagement. He envisioned a program that would prepare students to tackle the pressing issues of the day—poverty, inequality, and governance—with both intellectual rigor and moral purpose.

Terry Sanford's vision sparked the public policy program at Duke that was founded in partnership with [Joel Fleishman](#), who served as Sanford's legal advisor during Sanford's tenure as governor. Fleishman had developed a plan for integrating aspects of ethics, economics, political science, and history into the study of public policy in a report for the Ford Foundation. Using that template, Fleishman founded the Institute of Policy Sciences and Public Affairs, serving as director until 1983. The Institute's goal was twofold: to elevate Duke's national stature and to create a new kind of education—one that empowered students to lead with integrity and impact.

Sanford and Fleishman crafted a program that bridged the gap between academic theory and real-world application, combining the analytical strengths of economics, political science, and sociology with a

commitment to public service. Today, the School stands as a testament to Terry Sanford's enduring belief that principled leadership and public service are essential instruments for achieving a common purpose.

Students

Sanford's student body is mission-driven and committed to public service and policy innovation. The School enrolls over 700 students across its undergraduate and graduate programs, including more than 400 undergraduates and over 300 graduate students. Sanford students come from diverse backgrounds, with a strong representation of international students, first-generation college attendees, and people from underrepresented communities. Eighty-five percent of Master of Public Policy and Master of International Development Policy graduates secure employment or pursue further education within six months of graduation, with many entering roles in government, consulting, nonprofits, and international organizations. PhD graduates consistently place in prestigious academic, research, and policy institutions. Sanford's robust career services, alumni network, and commitment to experiential learning ensure that students are not only well-prepared but also deeply connected to the policy world they aspire to shape.

Academic Programs

Undergraduate Major

The undergraduate major in Public Policy is offered in close collaboration with the [Trinity College of Arts & Sciences](#). While Sanford administers the curriculum and provides specialized faculty, advising, and experiential learning opportunities, the major is formally housed within Trinity College. The Public Policy major provides a liberal arts foundation, offering courses in education and social policy, health and population, environment and energy, international development, global governance and security, civil society, and leadership and ethics.

Minors and Certificates include:

- [Child and Family Policy Certificate](#), sponsored by the [Center for Child and Family Policy](#)
- [Journalism and Media Minor](#), sponsored by the [DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy](#)
- [Health Policy Certificate](#), co-sponsored by the [Margolis Institute for Health Policy](#)

Master's Programs

Sanford offers four distinct master's degrees designed to empower current and emerging leaders to lift their careers, broaden their perspectives, and deepen their impact.

The School's residential programs include:

- [Master of Public Policy](#)
- [Master of International Development Policy](#)

Hybrid programs include:

- [Master of Public Affairs](#)
- [Master of National Security Policy](#)

Sanford offers joint master's degree programs in collaboration with other schools at Duke and select partner institutions. These dual-degree options allow students to earn a Master of Public Policy alongside degrees such as the MBA (with [Duke's Fuqua School of Business or UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School](#)), JD (with [Duke, UNC, or NCCU Law Schools](#)), Master of Environmental Management or Forestry (with the [Nicholas School of the Environment](#)), Master of Divinity or Theological Studies (with [Duke Divinity School](#)), MD (with [Duke School of Medicine](#)), Master of Engineering (with the [Pratt School of Engineering](#)), and Master of Data Science (with the [Hertie School in Berlin](#)). These interdisciplinary programs prepare graduates for leadership roles at the intersection of public policy and fields such as law, business, health, environment, engineering, and religion.

Doctoral Program

Duke's PhD in Public Policy aims to support cohorts of six to eight students. In addition to working with Duke's world-class faculties in public policy and with Duke's departments of economics, history, political science, psychology, and sociology, PhD students interact with leading scholars from [Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment](#), [Duke's Fuqua School of Business](#), [Duke Law School](#), and [Duke's School of Medicine](#).

Duke's [Program in Environmental Policy \(UPEP\)](#) PhD is a five-year program for intense research training, combining disciplinary specialization in economics or political science with an emphasis on understanding policy settings and the precise nature of the problem one hopes to solve with policy. The program is jointly administered by Sanford and the Nicholas School.

Faculty

Sanford's faculty includes more than 70 scholars and professors of practice who are nationally and internationally recognized for their expertise in areas such as health, social, environmental, and technology policy; international development; media and democracy; and security studies. Sanford has 42 tenure-track professors, 24 research professors and professors of practice, four lecturers, numerous professors emeriti, and many Duke faculty members with secondary appointments in the School. The School's faculty includes 15 who hold distinguished chairs, as well as six members of the National Academies or of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Sanford offers a dynamic and transdisciplinary academic environment that supports innovative teaching and impactful research. Faculty engage with a diverse portfolio of programs, designed to foster critical thinking, policy analysis, and leadership development across domestic and global contexts. Its faculty members publish influential research and actively engage with policymakers and practitioners. Faculty have opportunities to collaborate across Duke's schools and institutes, mentor students through

experiential learning initiatives, and contribute to shaping policy discourse through applied scholarship and public engagement.

Research

Sanford has a deep tradition of scholarship and research, consistently ranking among the nation's top public policy schools in research productivity. [Key themes](#) include: Energy and Environment Policy, Health Policy, International Development, Media and Democracy, National Security and Foreign Policy, Social Policy, and Technology Policy. Sanford has a robust portfolio of external funding for research and programs from both public and private sources.

Centers and Initiatives

Sanford provides a dynamic campus hub for [transdisciplinary research centers](#) exploring vital policy questions in the field and in the classroom. Headed by a director, the centers have faculty drawn from both Sanford and across Duke. Some centers also have support staff and research assistants. The centers provide students with the opportunity to participate in research projects and special course offerings. The centers also bring in guest speakers and hold conferences of interest to the Sanford community.

Staff

Sanford's staff of approximately 80 dedicated professionals are essential partners in advancing the School's mission to educate the next generation of public policy leaders and drive real-world impact. They bring expertise and commitment to every facet of the School's operations—from academic and student services to research, finance, communications, and external engagement. The next Dean will have the opportunity to lead and empower this talented and mission-driven team, fostering a collaborative and inclusive culture that values professional growth, operational excellence, and a shared commitment to Sanford's core values of service, integrity, and innovation.

Alumni

Sanford's over 10,000 alumni make up a diverse and global network that includes leaders and change agents in every sector of the economy and every level of government in countries around the world. The 29 active members of the [Board of Visitors](#) provide advice and support regarding curriculum, programs, development, external relations, and other matters. Board members also serve as mentors to students, sponsor interns, host events for students, and support programs to provide fellowships for graduate interns.

ROLE OF THE DEAN

The Dean leads Sanford in maintaining its commitment to teaching, research, and tackling the most pressing public policy challenges of our time. The Dean is the academic and administrative leader of the School. Reporting to Provost Alec Gallimore and serving in his Cabinet, the Dean will be an integral member of Duke University's leadership team and be responsible for ensuring the vitality and long-term success of the School. The next Dean will engage with the broader University community and beyond to advance an agenda of exceptional research, teaching, practice, and service.

The Dean manages all strategic, programmatic, academic, financial, personnel, and management operations for the School, and oversees a \$55 million operating budget. Sanford derives revenues from tuition and fees for degree and certificate programs, sponsored research and grants, gifts and endowment payouts, and other miscellaneous income. The Dean ensures that resources are allocated appropriately and the School remains fiscally sound, while tirelessly advocating for internal and external funding to support the School's mission and success.

The Dean is supported by a leadership team that includes the Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, the Associate Dean for Development and Alumni Relations, the Associate Dean of Communications and Marketing, the Associate Dean for Academic Programs, the Associate Dean for Finance and Administration, and the Associate Dean of Inclusive Academic Excellence. The Dean's office also includes the Directors of each degree program.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The next Dean will address the following opportunities and challenges:

Define and execute an ambitious strategic vision that promotes excellence in public policy education and research

Over the past 20 years, Sanford has transitioned from a primarily undergraduate-focused institute to a multifaceted school with a portfolio of professional graduate programs. The School's growth in programs and students has resulted in a significant increase in its impact and influence—both across Duke and externally across local communities, national policy arenas, and global platforms. Similar to other public policy schools across the country, recent enrollment in Sanford's master's degree programs—especially international student enrollment—has declined. As the School faces this challenging environment for public policy education and broader shifts in the public policy landscape regionally, nationally, and globally, the Dean will be expected to lead with clarity and resilience. This means navigating financial and enrollment pressures while positioning Sanford for long-term success by engaging faculty, staff, students, alumni, and external partners in a collaborative process to address immediate challenges and seize new opportunities. The culmination of this effort will be a clear and compelling identity for the School, and an

ambitious strategic vision for its next chapter that inspires existing and potential new students, faculty, staff, and others.

Secure resources to ensure continued growth, success, and impact

From its early days as an institute, Sanford has benefited from strong support from Duke as well as generous alumni and other committed stakeholders. The next Dean must align resources with institutional values and priorities to continue to ensure Sanford's long-term stability while maintaining the School's high academic quality. This includes not only optimizing current funding but also building a robust foundation for future growth. The Dean will lead efforts to diversify revenue streams and elevate fundraising strategies. This effort will include deep engagement in [MADE FOR THIS: The Duke Campaign](#), the University's most ambitious campaign in its history, and other initiatives to attract resources from an array of donors and partners. It will be vital for the Dean to pursue funding and philanthropic investment to bolster scholarships and financial aid for students, as well as provide resources for the education, research, and service missions of the School. The ability to inspire confidence in Sanford's vision and articulate its long-term impact will be critical to attracting transformational support now and in the future.

Cultivate a connected and inclusive community

Sanford's success is rooted in the strength and dedication of its faculty, staff, students, and alumni. The School has long been recognized for its collegial and community-oriented culture, and its mission emphasizes fostering an inclusive academic environment where diverse perspectives contribute to solving complex societal challenges. The next Dean will play a pivotal role in further strengthening the tight-knit Sanford community by enhancing internal communication, supporting inclusive decision-making, and nurturing a shared sense of purpose throughout the School. This leader will champion practices that promote inclusiveness and belonging, ensuring that all members of the Sanford community feel supported and empowered in their work. Success in this area will require exceptional interpersonal and management skills, an ability to reinforce a thriving culture of mentorship, and a focus on cultivating a healthy and collaborative work environment.

Position Sanford for strategic growth and institutional impact

Sanford's growth has been rapid and largely organic. The next Dean will play a critical role in aligning the School's vision, strategy, and internal infrastructure to support a modern, agile, and globally recognized academic unit. Through collaborative engagement with faculty, staff, and Duke leadership—and grounded in shared governance with the faculty—the Dean will shape and implement initiatives that position Sanford as both a distinctive school and a deeply integrated partner within Duke's broader academic ecosystem. Success will require the foresight to anticipate emerging challenges and the creativity to deliver scalable, mission-driven solutions that sustain Sanford's momentum and amplify its impact.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

This role calls for a visionary and collaborative leader who brings broad intellectual insight, strategic foresight, and emotional intelligence to complex academic environments. The Dean will demonstrate strong managerial acumen, sound judgment, and a commitment to inclusive excellence. In addition, the Dean will be an engaged, approachable, and decisive presence fostering a culture of mutual respect, open dialogue, and belonging. The Dean will also foster accountability, trust, and professional integrity in all interactions.

The ideal candidate will be a distinguished public policy leader and scholar with a doctorate or equivalent terminal degree, will have substantive experience managing within a complex institution, and will have compiled a scholarly record that reflects intellectual leadership in the field. The University will consider distinguished scholars as well as candidates whose extraordinary professional achievements and leadership experience outside the academy demonstrate great potential for success within a policy-focused academic environment.

The ideal candidate will bring most, if not all, of the following qualities and experiences:

- Academic stature, intellectual leadership, and recognition within the policy-making community;
- The ability to lead and inspire faculty on issues of academic and programmatic innovation and policy engagement;
- Familiarity with the landscape for schools of public policy, including emerging trends and opportunities for distinction;
- Significant personnel management experience in higher education or a similarly large, multi-faceted environment;
- The ability to attract financial and human resources;
- Effective communication and advocacy skills and a track record of community engagement, philanthropic and donor relations, and inter-institutional and national/global partnerships;
- Financial acumen and a demonstrated record of fiduciary transparency and accountability;
- The ability to work collaboratively with people across organizations and at all levels to align activities with broader institutional goals and interests;
- Experience promoting a culture of inclusion, equity, and transparency;
- Impeccable personal and professional integrity.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/duke-university-sanford-school-public-policy/dean>.

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Duke is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer committed to providing employment opportunity without regard to an individual's age, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, (including pregnancy and pregnancy related conditions), sexual orientation, or military status.

Isaacson, Miller, and Duke University are committed to creating an inclusive environment and welcome applications from candidates with disabilities. If you have any accommodation or access needs, we are happy to provide reasonable accommodations.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by the Sanford School of Public Policy and Duke University. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by the Sanford School or Duke University would supersede any conflicting information in this document.

APPENDIX

DUKE UNIVERSITY

Duke University, a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities (AAU), is a global, research-intensive institution enrolling approximately 6,500 undergraduate and 10,950 graduate and professional students representing almost every state and many foreign countries. The university has a network of over 200,000 alumni, employs more than 4,250 regular-rank faculty, and has approximately 48,000 staff (including the Duke University Health System), making it one of the largest private employers in North Carolina. While guided since 1859 by the motto *Eruditio et Religio*, or “Knowledge and Religion,” Duke University continues to evolve and is strengthened by its inclusive community that welcomes individuals of all backgrounds.

Duke consists of the following colleges and schools: Trinity College of Arts & Sciences; School of Law; Divinity School; Graduate School; School of Medicine; School of Nursing; Pratt School of Engineering; The Fuqua School of Business; Nicholas School of the Environment; and Sanford School of Public Policy.

Duke consists of both a world-renowned academic teaching and research institution and a world-class patient care organization. Duke is a financially strong, growing institution. The university’s endowment was \$11.9 billion as of June 30, 2024. For fiscal year 2024, the endowment ranked 16th largest in the country according to the NACUBO survey. (The 2025 rankings will be available in February 2026.) In February 2025, Duke launched the [Made For This](#) capital campaign. The campaign highlights four strategic areas where Duke can make a significant impact, including science and technology, climate change, the student experience, and health.

Location

Duke’s home campus spans 8,600 acres in Durham, North Carolina—a vibrant small city that has become an entrepreneurial hotbed and a cultural center with a population exceeding 304,000. The city is a two-hour drive from the beach and a three-hour drive from the Blue Ridge Mountains. Duke’s proximity to the Mid-Atlantic Region and Washington, D.C. in particular, provides easy access to federal funding agencies, policymakers, and many other collaborators that advance the research and education missions. The area is served by a convenient international airport approximately twenty minutes from campus.

Duke is situated in the heart of the Research Triangle with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina Central University, and North Carolina State University nearby. These institutions are public research universities with exceptionally strong science and engineering programs that provide a myriad of opportunities for collaboration and partnership.