



Dean, Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania

THE SEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) seeks a visionary, dynamic, and engaged leader to serve as the next dean of the Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications (the College). This is a rare opportunity to lead one of the nation's top-ranked colleges of communications at a moment of extraordinary momentum and promise. The College stands at the forefront of a rapidly evolving communications landscape across the disciplines housed within it. With cutting-edge facilities, a world-class faculty, dedicated staff, ambitious students, and a highly engaged alumni network, the College is uniquely positioned to shape the future of media, journalism, advertising, public relations, film, and telecommunications. The next dean will harness this energy to elevate the College's national and global impact, champion innovation, and expand its reputation as a thought leader in the field.

Penn State is an internationally renowned public research university and a proud member of both the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA). Penn State is one of only three institutions in the U.S. accorded land grant, [sea-grant](#), [sun-grant](#), and [space-grant](#) status. Penn State ranks 30th among U.S. public universities and 63rd overall by *U.S. News & World Report* for 2025. Penn State's University Park campus houses the University's central administration, its renowned graduate and undergraduate programs, and its NCAA Division I Athletics Department. The campus is home to approximately 49,000 graduate and undergraduate students and more than 12,000 full-time faculty and staff.

As one of the largest accredited mass communications programs in the country, the Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications offers the resources of an R1 institution with the personalized support and environment of a small school. Enrolling over 2,800 students across four academic departments, the College is renowned for its hands-on approach to education, integrating classroom instruction with real-world experience through campus media, internships, and state-of-the-art facilities like the Bellisario Media Center. The College has experienced great success and growth over the last two decades, enabling the College's faculty and staff to provide opportunities and experiences unmatched by other communications programs. The College cultivates alumni who are leaders and changemakers with

enduring ties to the institution. This strong affinity fuels generous philanthropic and resource support, sustaining the College's momentum and expanding its impact.

Penn State seeks candidates who can provide collaborative and strategic leadership—both within the College and across the University—by championing the College as a vital educational and intellectual resource. The ideal candidate will actively foster partnerships and strengthen the College's role as a dynamic contributor to the broader community. The preferred candidate will hold a terminal degree and a scholarly record appropriate for a tenured appointment at the rank of professor within the College. In extraordinary cases, the University will consider candidates with professional backgrounds outside the academy who demonstrate great leadership talent and the potential to excel.

The dean will bring a forward-looking vision for the College, one that embraces the transformative potential of artificial intelligence and responds to the evolving media landscape shaped by other emerging technologies. The dean will understand the importance of creating an inclusive environment and ensuring that the entire College community is given opportunities to thrive and grow. The dean should demonstrate inspiring leadership qualities, exceptional interpersonal, collaboration, and communication skills, be an active and visible presence on campus, and have a familiarity with the accreditation process through the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). Additionally, the dean should be an experienced fundraiser with the ability to forge strong relationships and engage donors, alumni, and industry leaders in supporting the strategic priorities of the College.

Penn State has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this recruitment. Review of candidates will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. Nominations, inquiries, and applications, including a CV and letter of interest, should be submitted in confidence as noted at the end of this document.

PENN STATE UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1855, The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) is one of the world's premier research universities and a driver of economic growth and prosperity for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Led by President Neeli Bendapudi and Executive Vice President and Provost Fotis Sotiropoulos, the University embraces its mission of teaching, research, and service with a focus on fulfilling its land-grant mission in a 21st-century context.

With campuses throughout Pennsylvania, and an online World Campus, Penn State is a [strong economic engine](#) across the Commonwealth, contributing over \$15.8 billion annually to Pennsylvania's economy and supporting nearly 110,000 jobs. Penn State's research and development expenditures have increased steadily during the past decade, contributing to the Pennsylvania economy through innovation and technology transfer. Penn State research expenditures reached a record \$1.337 billion in fiscal year 2023-24, and the University established more than 2,000 industry partnerships in the last decade.

Granted the highest rating for research universities by the Carnegie Foundation, Penn State prepares students to be leaders with a global perspective.

Information about Penn State can be found at psu.edu.

- [Mission and Values](#)
- [Strategic Plan](#)
- [Facts and Rankings](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Budget](#)

Leadership

[Dr. Neeli Bendapudi](#) became the 19th president of Penn State on May 9, 2022, bringing nearly 30 years of experience in higher education and business. She leads Penn State's Commonwealth Campus network and online World Campus, focusing on student success, interdisciplinary research, impactful community engagement, inclusive excellence, and innovation. President Bendapudi has served as president of the University of Louisville (2018–2022), provost and executive vice chancellor at the University of Kansas, and dean of its School of Business. She also held leadership roles at Ohio State University and Huntington National Bank. A marketing scholar specializing in consumer behavior, she has been recognized for her academic contributions. She holds a bachelor's degree in English and an MBA from Andhra University, India, and a doctorate in marketing from the University of Kansas.

[Dr. Fotis Sotiropoulos](#), a Penn State alumnus, began his tenure as Penn State's executive vice president and provost in August 2025. Dr. Sotiropoulos came to Penn State after serving as provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). A pioneer in the field of fluid mechanics, Sotiropoulos brings more than 35 years of experience in higher education as a professor, scholar, and senior academic leader. At VCU, he led a series of forward-looking initiatives aimed at preparing learners of all backgrounds for the future of work, advancing student and faculty success, championing excellence, and cultivating a culture of transdisciplinary innovation. His leadership approach has been rooted in empowering faculty and staff to surface bold ideas and develop pioneering solutions that position institutions for long-term success. Sotiropoulos earned a diploma in mechanical engineering from the National Technical University of Athens, Greece, a master's in aerospace engineering from Penn State, and a doctorate in aerospace engineering from the University of Cincinnati.

State College

The State College area has a vibrant restaurant scene, a spirited nightlife, numerous local farmers' markets, an eclectic mix of retail chains and independent shops, an abundance of exciting events and festivals, and a well-regarded school district. Downtown State College is also home to a vibrant cultural arts district featuring galleries and theaters.

To experience the natural beauty of central Pennsylvania, several state parks are easily accessible, with lakes, boating, biking, hiking, skiing, camping, and cabin rentals.

State College Regional Airport is four miles from downtown, and there are short flights that connect to international airport hubs, at Philadelphia, Newark, and Chicago. In addition, five major cities – New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. – are all within a four-hour drive.

For more information about State College, visit:

- [State College](#)
- [Happy Valley](#)
- [Best State Parks Near State College](#)
- [State College Regional Airport](#)

DONALD P. BELLISARIO COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATIONS

College Mission

To prepare students to take their place in an information-rich society and in the professions as active, critical and ethical participants. Our activities promote effective, responsible use of communications media and technologies by individuals, organizations, industries and government.

The [Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications](#) is one of the largest and most comprehensive accredited programs of its kind in the nation, and prepares students to lead and innovate in a rapidly evolving media landscape. Named in honor of acclaimed television producer and Penn State alumnus Donald P. Bellisario, the College is distinguished by its commitment to excellence in teaching, research, and service. It boasts innovative facilities, nationally recognized faculty who bring both scholarship excellence and applied expertise, and a strong network of alumni and industry partnerships.

The College's [accolades](#) recognize the faculty's, students', and staff's deep commitment to the field of communications, scholarly research, and student success. The College is accredited by the [Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications](#) (ACEJMC), which conveys a commitment to the highest national standards for journalism and mass communication programs, and a focus on continuous improvement within the program. A team of evaluators is scheduled to visit the College in the Fall of 2025.

With a dynamic blend of academic rigor and professional preparation, the College offers five undergraduate majors across four departments— [advertising/public relations](#); [film production and media studies](#); [journalism](#); and [telecommunications](#)—as well as graduate programs in [media studies](#) and [mass communications](#). Interdisciplinary programs include a master's and Ph.D. dual degrees in [women's](#),

[gender, and sexuality studies](#) and an [online master of professional studies](#) (M.P.S.) in strategic communications.

The College is home to a robust portfolio of [research centers](#) that reflect its commitment to advancing knowledge and addressing pressing issues in media and society. The centers serve as hubs for interdisciplinary inquiry, faculty collaboration, and student engagement. Through cutting-edge research in areas such as media ethics, strategic communication, freedom of expression, and audience behavior, the College contributes meaningfully to both academic scholarship and public discourse.

- [John Curley Center for Sports Journalism](#)
- [Don Davis Program in Ethical Leadership](#)
- [Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education Initiative at Penn State, part of the Hammel Family Human Rights Initiative](#)
- [Information Communication Technology for Development \(ICT4D\) Consortium](#)
- [Institute for Information Policy](#)
- [Media Effects Research Laboratory](#)
- [Newspaper Journalists Oral History Program](#)
- [Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication](#)
- [Feminist Technocultures Lab](#)

The [Bellisario Media Center](#) exemplifies the College's commitment to innovation, excellence, and student success. Made possible by a transformative gift from Donald P. Bellisario and his wife, Vivienne, this premier facility provides students with access to cutting-edge technology and collaborative spaces that mirror professional media environments. As a hub for experiential learning, the Center empowers students to explore, create, and lead in a rapidly evolving communications landscape.

Student support and success is a mission-critical priority of the College, exemplified by its exceptional [Advising Office](#) with a dedicated, nine-person advising staff ready to meet the academic needs of the students. The [Office of Internships and Career Placement](#) works with industry partners to provide applied learning opportunities across academic disciplines and prepare students for their futures. The [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#) empowers students by providing integrated support, inclusive programming, and co-curricular opportunities that foster cultural competency while advancing the College's commitment to recruiting and retaining a diverse and engaged community. The College proudly recognizes that humanity is comprised of a wide array of people with storied experiences, complex backgrounds, and unique identities. The College believes that equitable access to media and communication technologies is essential and indicative of a healthy society and democracy. Everyone has a voice and the right to be heard and acquire accurate and necessary information.

The College includes 2,847 students (2,797 undergraduate students and 50 graduate students) and boasts graduation rates and student retention rates higher than Penn State averages. The College is home to 80 full-time faculty, 60 part-time faculty, with 58 staff members who work together to create an atmosphere

that supports innovation, collegiality, and a culture of success. The College has \$26.9 million budget and \$68.6 million endowment.

ROLE OF THE DEAN

Reporting to the executive vice president and provost, the dean is the chief academic and administrative officer of the College, and will guide faculty, students, and staff in developing an exciting vision for its next chapter as well as the strategic direction to get there successfully. The dean has broad oversight of the College's financial management, resource allocation, and fundraising efforts. The dean is responsible for advancing the College's teaching, research, service, and outreach programs, and ensuring alignment with Penn State's institutional goals and the University's strategic priorities.

Direct reports to the dean include four department chairs, the associate dean for academic affairs, the associate dean for graduate programs and research, the assistant dean for diversity and inclusion, the director of strategic communications, the director of the student news consortium, the director of student television and online operations, the manager of recruitment, and an executive assistant. Three other senior leaders are embedded in the College with dotted-line reporting to their respective units, including the director of development, the human resources strategic partner, and the director of finance and administration.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DEAN

To ensure the College's continued growth as well as academic and professional distinction, the next dean will address the following key opportunities and challenges:

Set an innovative and ambitious vision for the next chapter of the College

The next dean will be a visionary, inspiring, and forward-thinking leader, someone who brings creativity, strategic insight, and a clear sense of direction. As the College concludes its [current strategic plan](#), the development of a new plan is already underway. The dean will play a pivotal role in shaping and finalizing this roadmap, aligning it with the College's and University's bold aspirations and long-term goals. Building on the College's remarkable growth and momentum, the dean will champion its continued ascent toward becoming the nation's premier college of communications, while preserving the close-knit, "small school" atmosphere that students have come to appreciate.

As the communications landscape continues to evolve, driven by rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, immersive media, and digital technologies, the next dean must embrace innovation and position the College at the forefront of these changes. By fostering a culture of experimentation and adaptability, the dean will ensure that the College remains a leader in preparing students for the future of media and communications.

Elevate national visibility and champion the College's excellence

The College enjoys an impressive national reputation across advertising, public relations, journalism, film, media studies, and telecommunications. Yet, there remains significant opportunity to further elevate its profile and solidify its standing as a leader in the field. The next dean will strategically leverage the College's state-of-the-art facilities, renowned research centers, exceptional philanthropic success, accomplished alumni network, and industry partnerships to amplify the Bellisario name and showcase the achievements of its faculty, staff, and students. The dean will be proactive in promoting faculty scholarship and creative work, advocating for recognition through awards and honors, and ensuring that their expertise is visible and celebrated. In collaboration with faculty and staff, the dean will also expand opportunities for students to thrive in their disciplines, while reinforcing the values and ethics that define the College's academic and professional standards. Through thoughtful engagement and strategic storytelling, the dean will enhance the College's visibility across Penn State, the region, the nation, and beyond.

Strategically drive fundraising efforts while strengthening alumni and industry engagement

The College has achieved remarkable success in its philanthropic endeavors, most notably through the transformational \$30 million gift from Donald P. Bellisario and his wife, which named the College and funded the state-of-the-art Bellisario Media Center. With the public phase of Penn State's capital campaign launching in Spring 2026, the College is exceptionally well-positioned to build on this momentum. In close partnership with the College's director of development, the dean will develop, lead, and support strategic fundraising initiatives and cultivate relationships with industry partners and alumni to expand the College's network of supporters. The College's strong foundation of philanthropic support presents a powerful opportunity to expand lifelong learning and engagement initiatives for its current students and alumni community.

Effectively steward resources while managing a new budget model

The incoming dean will work with the provost and other University leaders to continue the implementation of a new, [data-informed budget model](#), which shifts greater financial responsibility to individual academic units; student enrollment is a significant component of the model. Given the College's strong enrollment trends, it is well-positioned in this transition. The new dean should bring an understanding of how to work within the new model to chart a strong financial future for the College and manage operative changes that may follow in the integration. The dean will continue to manage funds wisely while prioritizing spending that aligns with College and University goals and ambitious educational outcomes.

Develop, lead, and inspire a strong, service-oriented faculty and staff

The dean will join a seasoned and dedicated team of professionals and will play a key role in fostering an environment where faculty and staff are professionally fulfilled, intellectually challenged, and strategically deployed to maximize their strengths. The dean will recognize that every department and unit in the

College contributes to the College's progress and success and will continue to build an inclusive community across a talented faculty, staff, and student body. The dean will demonstrate a deep commitment to recognizing, valuing, and supporting the contributions of all faculty members, including tenure-line and non-tenure-line faculty across all ranks and classifications. This includes ensuring equitable access to resources, professional development opportunities, and meaningful participation in shared governance. Equally important, the dean will continue to build greater staff capacity by encouraging and supporting professional development, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, and ensuring that staff are equipped with appropriate resources to best meet student and faculty needs. The next dean must ensure a healthy and productive work environment and an organizational culture of openness, fairness, and transparency that celebrates a diversity of thought and expression and promotes an environment of inclusion. The dean will provide visible, accessible, and engaged leadership and will make it a priority to communicate actively, both formally and informally.

In addition, the College will benefit in several ways from the University's recent shift to the new budget model referenced above, including the hiring of new faculty this year, with the possibility of additional hires in the near term. Effective mentorship and retention efforts will be a priority for these new hires as well as current faculty and staff.

Collaborate, engage, and communicate with the Penn State community

The next dean will champion the College's excellence and strengthen its collaboration with academic units and stakeholders across Penn State's campus. By elevating the College's visibility, the dean will highlight how faculty, staff, and students contribute to cross-campus programs, research, and initiatives. Recognizing that interdisciplinarity drives intellectual innovation, the dean will actively foster collaborative academic and research efforts that benefit both the University community and the broader fields of study. Given the inherently integrative nature of communications, the dean will work closely with fellow deans to identify and develop new opportunities for interdisciplinary knowledge creation.

Steward the College's physical growth and infrastructure needs

As the College continues to expand in size, scope, and ambition, the next dean will play a critical role in assessing and advancing its physical infrastructure. With increasing demands for space to support innovative teaching, collaborative research, and student engagement, the dean will work closely with University leadership and advocate for strategic investments in the College's facilities. This includes optimizing current resources, planning for future growth, and ensuring that the College's physical environment reflects its academic excellence and evolving technology needs.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DEAN

Professional credentials: The preferred candidate will hold a terminal degree and a scholarly record appropriate for a tenured appointment at the rank of professor within the College. In extraordinary cases,

the University will consider candidates with professional backgrounds outside the academy who demonstrate great leadership talent and the potential to excel.

Vision: An understanding of the major trends that will impact how communications graduates find meaningful, fulfilling professional work, as well as how faculty and the College's leadership approach undergraduate and graduate education, research and scholarship, and engagement with the communities they serve. An eye toward innovation and creativity in problem-solving is also desired. Concomitant to such a vision is a record of shaping and successfully implementing a strategic plan that has demonstrably advanced organizational goals.

Leadership skills: Successful experience leading a complex organization characterized by broad collaboration; a commitment to and track record of leading within the context of shared governance; a record of building an organizational culture that engages internal and external stakeholders to work toward a common purpose and achieve shared goals; success attracting and retaining exceptional talent; and the capacity to serve as a key adviser and thought partner to the president, provost, and other senior leaders, with the attendant skills of a trusted, adaptive, and additive contributor to University leadership.

Dedication to mission: A deep resonance with Penn State's land-grant mission to provide unparalleled access to education and public service to support the citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and beyond.

Communications skills: Exceptional communication skills, including listening with care and working collaboratively within the College, with senior University leadership, and with partners across the University; the ability to present information effectively and respond to questions from internal and external audiences with grace and finesse, both orally and in writing; the capacity to formulate, articulate, and galvanize a wide range of audiences around a shared vision; the ability to inspire; and a style of engagement that builds mutual trust and respect.

Research and professional accomplishment: A record of impactful research and/or professional accomplishment in the communications field; a demonstrated ability to support top-tier research development and creative activity.

Fundraising and external engagement: Experience engaging partners outside a university setting to understand broad trends, employer expectations, and market demand; a record of developing mutually beneficial partnerships and relationships with external constituents; the ability to fundraise and effectively steward donations; and an understanding of the impact that a college of communications and University can have on the communities it serves and the alumni it produces.

Interdisciplinary focus: A deep and genuine commitment to interdisciplinary work; wide-ranging intellectual interests and desire to promote and advance education and research across the broad range of Penn State's strengths and interests.

Student-centered vision: A strong commitment to students and prioritization of student success through a student-centered curriculum, an ability to support students in their academic journey, a commitment to assuring the success of all students, and a demonstrated track record of and commitment to excellence in teaching.

Collaboration: Experience with and appreciation of the challenges and opportunities of interdisciplinary and inter-professional collaboration; the ability to inspire key constituencies to collaborate to achieve the University's priorities and to model a truly collaborative approach in all areas of their work.

Financial acumen: Exceptional management, planning, and financial acumen; an astute understanding of finances and the relationship among academic priorities, budgeting, and fundraising; sophisticated skills and experience in strategic planning and implementation.

Management skills: Demonstrated success in managing empathetically across complex environments, groups, programs, and operations; the ability to work collaboratively with faculty, staff, and students through shared governance to foster a shared sense of responsibility and commitment to successfully achieving the College's goals.

Personal qualities: The highest degree of personal integrity and trustworthiness; a history of making fair and firm decisions in the pursuit of excellence; political savvy; entrepreneurial spirit; the ability to empower and delegate while holding others accountable; the ability to inspire and motivate; flexibility and resilience; optimism and empathy.

TO APPLY

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 to the [Search for the Dean, Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications](#) page via the Isaacson, Miller website.

Jeff Kessner, Partner
Robin Dougherty, Managing Associate
Jenny Rubin, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

Penn State is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to providing employment opportunities to all qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability or protected veteran status. If you are unable to use our online application process due to an impairment or disability, please contact 814-865-1473.

CAMPUS SECURITY CRIME STATISTICS: For more about safety at Penn State, and to review the Annual Security Report which contains information about crime statistics and other safety and security matters, please go to <http://www.police.psu.edu/clery/>, which will also provide you with detail on how to request a hard copy of the Annual Security Report.

Employment with the University will require successful completion of background check(s) in accordance with University policies.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by The Pennsylvania State 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 Pennsylvania State University would supersede any conflicting information in this document.