



Denver

Dean, School of Public Affairs
University of Colorado Denver
Denver, Colorado

THE SEARCH

The University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver) seeks an experienced, visionary, and mission-driven leader to serve as the next Dean of the School of Public Affairs (SPA or the School). SPA is dedicated to producing knowledge and cultivating leadership that transforms complex policy challenges into opportunities for positive change. The next SPA Dean will build on the strengths of its faculty, staff, students, and alumni to further elevate the School's profile and impact while maintaining its commitment to advancing the principles of democracy, equity, and justice to improve societal well-being.

SPA is [the top public affairs school in Colorado and amongst the best in the nation](#); its graduate program ranked 20th out of 266 programs nationwide. Its downtown Denver location provides extraordinary access to a diverse urban environment where policy becomes practice, and the faculty's expertise makes SPA a go-to resource for state and national policy makers, and for students who have a vision for a better future. SPA offers undergraduate and graduate programs in criminal justice and public affairs, in addition to leadership development programs for directors and managers in all sectors. Faculty conduct research on crucial issues affecting the whole nation, such as criminal justice, education reform, energy policy, health policy, urban sustainability, state and local public services, collaborative governance, and water policy.

Reporting to the provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs, the Dean of the School of Public Affairs serves as the chief academic officer of the School with full responsibility for its academic programs and curricula, budget, community outreach and engagement, and development activities. Additionally, the Dean is expected to provide bold and collaborative leadership to position the School for long-term success; advance SPA's excellence in teaching, scholarship, policy engagement, and public service; champion a student-centered culture that promotes access, success, belonging, and preparation for public leadership; cultivate relationships that further SPA's reputation, impact, and resource base; and lead with transparency, collaboration, accountability, and a commitment to shared governance.

CU Denver has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this important recruitment. Confidential nominations, inquiries, and applications may be directed to the search team as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT CU DENVER

CU Denver is the state's premier public urban research university, enrolling nearly 14,000 students across more than 125 in-demand, top-ranked bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs. Nearly 50 percent of CU Denver students are the first generation in their families to attend college, and half of first-year undergraduate students identify as students of color.

CU Denver partners with diverse learners—at all stages of their life and career—for transformative educational experiences. Across [seven schools and colleges](#), the University's leading faculty inspires and works alongside students to solve complex challenges and produce impactful creative work. As part of the state's largest university system, CU Denver is a major contributor to the Colorado economy, with 2,000 employees and an annual economic impact of \$700 million.

In February 2026, CU Denver refreshed its [2030 strategic plan](#), which was initially launched in 2021. Fast-changing dynamics in education, workforce, demographics, and technology warranted refinement to the plan, ensuring the institution is positioned to best meet its public service obligation to students, communities, and the State of Colorado. To achieve this goal, CU Denver is prioritizing learner success, discovery and impact, organizational excellence and innovation, and belonging and meaningful work.

Leadership

Chancellor

Kenneth T. Christensen, PhD, was appointed to serve as chancellor of the University of Colorado Denver in February 2025. As chancellor, Christensen is focused on advancing the public service mission of the institution, one grounded in academic excellence, student success, workforce development, community engagement, and economic impact. Christensen also holds a faculty appointment as a professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering.

He previously served as provost, senior vice president for academic affairs, and chief academic officer at Illinois Institute of Technology (Illinois Tech). With a focus on increasing experiential learning and workforce readiness, Christensen helped lead Illinois Tech through a period of national acclaim that included a 30% increase in undergraduate application volume and enrollment growth that exceeded 35%.

As provost, Christensen also cultivated numerous research and industry partnerships, including one with the Midwest Alliance for Clean Hydrogen (MachH2) and with global supplier DMG MORI to create a new national center for advanced manufacturing. He first joined Illinois Tech in 2020 as the Carol and Ed Kaplan Dean of the Armour College of Engineering. Prior to that, Christensen served on the faculty at the

University of Notre Dame, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the University of New Mexico.

A native of Santa Fe, New Mexico, Christensen holds a bachelor of science in Mechanical Engineering from the University of New Mexico (summa cum laude), a master of science in Mechanical Engineering from the California Institute of Technology, and a doctorate in Theoretical and Applied Mechanics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), American Physical Society (APS), and the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME).

Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Karen Marrongelle, PhD, is the Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and a Professor of Mathematics. As Provost, she provides leadership for academic planning and research advancement, working in collaboration with the deans of CU Denver's schools and colleges to ensure academic excellence, promote robust student outcomes, and support CU Denver's mission as a leading public urban research university.

Prior to her appointment as Provost, Marrongelle was the Chief Science Officer and Chief Operating Officer at the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), where she oversaw scientific direction and operations of the federal agency whose mission includes support for all fields of fundamental science and engineering. She also served as Assistant Director of the NSF for Education and Human Resources (EHR), supporting research that enhances learning and teaching to achieve excellence in U.S. science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.

Prior to joining NSF, Marrongelle was Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Portland State University and a Professor of Mathematics and Statistics. At Portland State, she oversaw departments and programs across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. She also held positions as the Vice Chancellor for Academic Strategies and as Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Standards and Collaboration with the Oregon University System. She served on a rotation as a program officer at NSF and led numerous grants, collaborating with researchers nationally and internationally to improve undergraduate mathematics education and K-12 mathematics professional development.

Marrongelle has a bachelor's degree in mathematics and philosophy from Albright College, a master's degree in mathematics from Lehigh University, and a doctorate in mathematics education from the University of New Hampshire.

About the School of Public Affairs

The School of Public Affairs at CU Denver is a world-class public affairs school with top tenured, tenure-track, and teaching faculty as well as leading practitioners across a wide range of policy topics. Its prime location in the heart of Colorado's capital city creates countless opportunities for experiential learning.

The School of Public Affairs offers undergraduate and graduate programs in criminal justice and public affairs. Specifically, SPA offers the following programs:

- Undergraduate programs: BA in Criminal Justice; Minor in Criminal Justice; BA in Public Administration; Minor in Public Administration.
- Undergraduate Certificates: Courts, Law and Society; Criminal Justice and Psychology; Juvenile Justice; Law Enforcement; Leadership, Equity, Advocacy, and Policy; Public and Nonprofit Management; Strategic and Collaborative Management; Victims and Victim Services
- Pathways programs (a program designed to allow students to work concurrently toward a bachelor's and master's degree, offering high-achieving students the opportunity to complete their degrees in just over five years): BA/Master of Criminal Justice; BA in Criminal Justice/Master of Public Policy; BA in Public Administration/Master of Public Administration (MPA); Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration/Master of Public Policy (MPP).
- Master's programs: Master of Criminal Justice; Dual Master of Public Administration and Criminal Justice; MPA; MPP; Dual MPA/MPP; Dual MPA/Juris Doctorate; Dual MPA/ MA in Applied Geography and Geospatial Sciences; Dual MPA/MA in Economics; Dual MPA/Master of Public Health; Dual MPA/Master of Urban and Regional Planning. SPA also offers a one-year Accelerated Master of Public Affairs (MPA).
- Doctorate programs: PHD in Public Affairs.
- Graduate Certificates: Crime Analysis; Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management; Education Policy; Emergency Management and Homeland Security; Environmental Policy and Management; Local Government; Managing for Social Equity; Nonprofit Management; Policy Entrepreneurship and Advocacy; Public Management; and Policy Analysis and Methods.

Additionally, CU Denver offers various [leadership training programs](#) for leaders and managers across all sectors. The programs are available asynchronously or as intensive three- to five-day seminars. To learn more about SPA's programs, please visit <https://publicaffairs.ucdenver.edu/programs>.

ROLE OF THE DEAN

Reporting to the provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs, the SPA Dean serves as the School's chief academic officer, and in collaboration with faculty, fosters a collegial and collaborative culture in the School. The Dean has broad oversight of the School's budget, personnel, facilities, and resources, and develops and implements systems and strategies to meet established goals and performance expectations while ensuring responsible stewardship of university resources. They recruit, retain, develop, and support outstanding faculty and staff, and support center directors and program leaders in achieving academic, research, and strategic goals. The Dean oversees approximately \$10 million in general fund allocations, auxiliary programs, and grant and gift accounts, and provides leadership,

support, and mentorship to the School's 24 full-time faculty, 32 part-time faculty, and 20 staff. The schoolwide senior leadership team includes an associate dean for faculty affairs, assistant dean for student success and strategic initiatives, and assistant dean of finance and operations.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DEAN

In addition to the essential work outlined above, the next Dean will address the following opportunities and challenges:

Provide bold, collaborative, and visionary leadership to advance the School of Public Affairs and position it for long-term success.

The incoming Dean will join SPA as CU Denver is in the second year of its refreshed strategic plan. Along with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community stakeholders, the Dean will develop and implement a compelling vision for the School of Public Affairs that aligns with the University's strategic plan and promotes the School's long-term fiscal sustainability. With deeply committed faculty and staff, and the platform of a leading urban research university, the next Dean has an opportunity to foster a culture of innovation, adaptability, and continuous improvement in response to emerging issues in public policy, public administration, social equity, governance, nonprofit leadership, criminal justice, public finance, and civic engagement.

Advance SPA's excellence in teaching, scholarship, policy engagement, and public service.

SPA has a strong national reputation and ranking as a leading school of public affairs. The next Dean will have an opportunity to further advance SPA's excellence and provide intellectual leadership for undergraduate, graduate, and professional education programs. The Dean will support faculty in teaching, curricular development, research, creative work, interdisciplinary efforts, policy engagement, and community-engaged scholarship while also increasing the visibility, impact, and external funding of faculty scholarship and research. Additionally, the Dean will ensure successful maintenance and continuous improvement of NASPAA accreditation and academic quality standards.

Champion a student-centered culture that promotes access, success, belonging, and preparation for public leadership.

The incoming Dean will continue SPA's work to cultivate a student-centered and inclusive learning environment where all students can thrive and achieve their educational goals. The Dean will lead the development of data-informed strategies that increase enrollment, persistence, retention, and graduation by enhancing the student experience through experiential learning, internships, capstone projects, community-engaged learning, and public service opportunities. Additionally, the Dean will ensure that SPA's programs prepare students for impactful careers across government, nonprofit, philanthropic, international, and public-serving organizations by expanding partnerships that create employment opportunities, policy fellowships, public service experiences, and professional mentorship.

Cultivate relationships that advance SPA's reputation, impact, and resource base.

SPA prepares and inspires leaders to serve the public good, and working with the public is central to the Dean's work. The incoming Dean will serve as a visible ambassador and trusted leader in policy, civic, and community conversations that advance the public good and support research, policy innovation, experiential learning, workforce development, and community impact. The School's urban location and proximity to the seat of state government provide great opportunities to create meaningful regional, statewide, national, and global partnerships, and the next Dean will capitalize on SPA's location to further its reach and impact.

One of SPA's greatest strengths is its large and loyal alumni base in Colorado and beyond. The Dean will continue fostering those relationships to engage alumni as ambassadors, mentors, advisors, and practitioners. In partnership with CU Denver's Office of Advancement, the Dean will also lead the School's fundraising efforts with alumni and other committed constituents to secure philanthropic support and strategic investments.

Lead with transparency, collaboration, accountability, and a commitment to shared governance.

The SPA community thrives in a culture of collaboration, accountability, trust, shared governance, and mutual respect. The next Dean is expected to advance a welcoming and inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds. As part of the strategic visioning process described above, SPA is eager for the School's next Dean to promote a culture of excellence and engagement by setting clear expectations and supporting growth, continuous improvement, and professional development. In addition to this critical work within the School, the next Dean should be a compelling advocate for SPA across CU Denver while working closely with the chancellor, provost, other academic deans, and campus leaders to advance institution-wide goals and initiatives.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Applicants for this position should meet the following minimum qualifications:

- A terminal degree (academic or professional) in a relevant discipline offered by the School of Public Affairs from an accredited institution.
- A record of transformative leadership that demonstrates an ability to develop and execute strategic priorities, lead organizational change, and achieve measurable results.
- Evidence of success in building partnerships with government, nonprofit, and community organizations.
- Demonstrated ability to successfully secure resources through fundraising, external partnerships, sponsored programs, or other revenue-generating activities.
- Proven ability to lead collaboratively and effectively in complex organizations.

- Substantial financial management experience, including the equitable allocation of resources across multiple programs and initiatives, and supporting innovation around new degrees, certificates, or other revenue generators.

In addition to the qualifications listed above, the successful Dean will possess many of the following qualifications:

- Successful senior leadership experience at a research university, school of public affairs, or comparable complex organization.
- Demonstrated record of advancing innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Experience leading initiatives that improve student success, enrollment growth, retention, and career outcomes.
- Ability to make difficult decisions with reflection, fairness, and transparency, and willingness to challenge the status quo to guide the School to further prominence locally, nationally, and internationally.
- A clear, transparent, empathetic, and empowering communication style; an openness to listening and integrating the input of others; an ability to advocate for the School's priorities; an ability to convey the mission, vision, and impact of the School and CU Denver to both internal and external audiences; and the capacity to serve as a thought leader within Colorado and beyond.
- Demonstrated experience championing inclusive excellence, access, and campus engagement with exemplary skills in communicating, collaborating with, and supporting a diverse community, removing barriers to inclusion, promoting student voice, and valuing student agency.
- Ability to foster a deep sense of community both internally at the School and externally with partners; desire to listen and learn and to serve as a visible and positive presence at SPA and on campus; and ability to foster a culture and community where kindness, humility, and respect are high priorities.
- A relationship-based leadership style that values teamwork and collaboration; a firm belief in shared governance and a high level of collegiality in working with faculty, staff, and students; experience bringing people together to solve challenges and seize opportunities; the ability to delegate; respect and appreciation for all of the School's disciplines; and experience facilitating strong partnerships among academic programs and other divisions of CU Denver.
- A leadership style that demonstrates accountability, integrity, compassion, empathy, kindness, humility, curiosity, enthusiasm, humor, flexibility, forward-thinking, good judgment, and discernment.
- A deep appreciation for research and scholarly endeavors, a record of recruiting and developing both people and programs of the highest quality.
- Successful experience in or a demonstrated capacity for fundraising; an eagerness to build relationships with donors, alumni, and community partnerships to advance the mission of SPA.
- Familiarity with the issues and opportunities across a range of academic areas and a natural curiosity about a broad range of intellectual endeavors, including those represented throughout the School's programs.

COMPENSATION

The anticipated salary range for this position is \$250,000-\$260,000. The salary of the person selected for this role will be determined by a variety of factors, including, but not limited to, internal equity, experience, education, specialty, and training. This position is not eligible for overtime compensation.

CU Denver's total compensation goes beyond the number on the paycheck. The University of Colorado Denver provides generous leave, health plans, and retirement contributions that add to your bottom line. For more information about CU Denver's benefits, please visit <https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/benefits>.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

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

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Janette Martinez, Senior Associate
Jenny Rubin, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

CU is an Equal Opportunity Employer and complies with all applicable federal, state, and local laws governing nondiscrimination in employment. We are committed to creating a workplace where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity, and we encourage individuals from all backgrounds to apply, including protected veterans and individuals with disabilities.

The University will provide reasonable accommodation to applicants with disabilities throughout the employment application process. To request an accommodation pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact Jenny Rubin at jrubin@imsearch.com.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by the University of Colorado Denver. 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 University of Colorado Denver would supersede any conflicting information in this document.