

STATE OF THE SCHOOL 2025

Highlights from the State of the School address delivered on August 25, 2025 by Interim Dean Manoj Mohanan.



WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Thank you everyone for joining us today for the 2025 State of the School.

Change is part of every year but the year we are leaving behind was noteworthy for the amount and depth of change. Yet despite all the uncertainty, we have conducted remarkable research, hosted outstanding events, taught and supported students, and written influential articles. But it wasn't just the last academic year – our Sanford community has faced several significant challenges in the past few years.

Just as we were recovering from COVID, we lost some key pillars of our community - Stan Paskoff and Joel Fleishman, both of whom we miss dearly. As a school we experienced significant transitions with change in leadership, retirements, and transitions that left us feeling uncertain and vulnerable even before the challenges that Spring of 2025 brought.

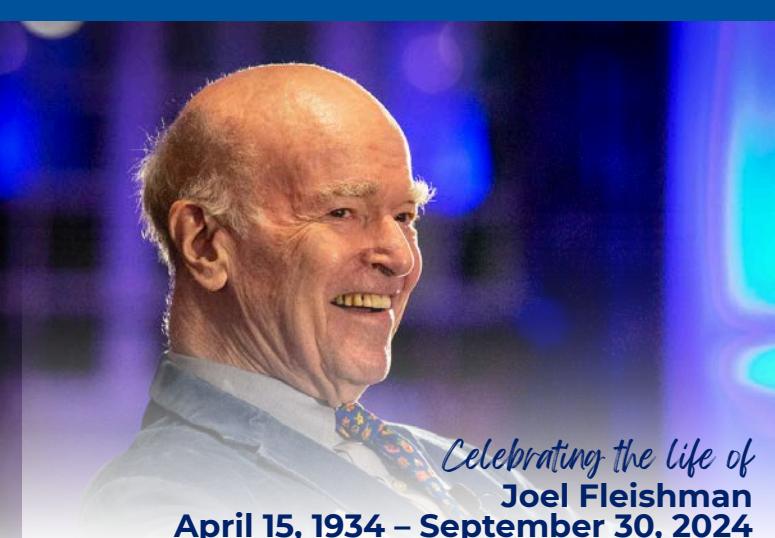
To start, I want to highlight the resilience of this community. Resilience even as we're being tested. Just like bamboo in a storm. It bends, but does not break. That is Sanford. We remain standing and remain strong through the storm. We can endure and withstand these winds.

In fact, we will need to grow stronger and more determined with each test of resilience. We'll find innovations in teaching, research, administration and engagement that keep our work relevant and impactful. Our fluidity, our ability and willingness to keep going and to keep learning, is what defines the Sanford community.



SANFORD'S MISSION

The Duke Sanford School of Public Policy's mission is to improve lives by researching the most pressing public policy issues and preparing students for lives of leadership, civic engagement and public service.



It is this spirit of resilience that will help us focus on our mission—the foundation that anchors us: to improve lives by researching the most pressing public policy issues and preparing students for lives of leadership, civic engagement, and public service. As we remind ourselves of our mission, I want to take a moment to remember our co-founder Joel Fleishman.

Joel was a friend, mentor, and visionary guide to all of us. 11 months after his passing, we continue to miss him every day. He set us on a path to take step after steady step in pursuit of our mission – a mission that he helped define. The momentum of his life's work doesn't just inform our present... it carries us into the future. Joel's contribution to the world of public policy and higher education broadly cannot be overstated, and we remain the proud beneficiaries of his legacy.



Just as we were ready to bid farewell to 2024 and look forward to a new era, we – like all major academic institutions – faced new challenges with the changes at the federal level.

In March 2025, Duke announced plans for a significant cost restructuring exercise to be undertaken at every unit across campus. Each school, in turn, was tasked with developing a plan to cut our controllable expenses by about 20%. At Sanford, that amounts to budget cuts of \$6 million dollars per year.

Our strategy was to first exhaust every opportunity for identifying funds available by examining endowments for flexibility, renegotiating agreements, cutting down on our flexible spending as much as possible. The objective was to minimize the toll of cost realignment on jobs.

We chose to prioritize cuts to expenditures over additional staff cuts. It was not an easy process or decision as we consulted with all unit managers to identify positions that could be realigned in this exercise. We look different today than we did at the beginning of the summer.

As you know, Duke also announced a faculty retirement program for eligible faculty – in coming days we will have more information for you on faculty retirements as well.



Given the challenges we've faced, the difficult decisions we've had to make, and the financial realities we must navigate, the question before us is clear: where do we go from here? What do we want to become as a community, as a school, and as a force for good in the world? I invite you to take a moment—look around the room. Look at colleagues sitting beside you, in front of you, and behind you. This is us – this is our team. Now is the time to move forward. And you are our Go Forward Team.

And it is a remarkable team. We are an extraordinary collection of talent, creativity, and dedication. We are resilient. We are strong. And together, we will accomplish amazing things – we have no choice but to strive to be amazing.

In this effort, we are fortunate to have an incredible senior leadership team, including our latest member, Jenny Edmonds. I am very grateful to our team for their support and leadership in helping navigate the many unforeseen challenges that have come our way in the past year and for their service to Sanford.

SANFORD SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM



Josh Bond



Anna Gassman-Pines



Christina Gibson-Davis



Jenny Edmonds



Jay Pearson



Zach Johnson

FACULTY COUNCIL

One of the most significant accomplishments at Sanford last year was the revision of bylaws for faculty governance in our school. I am thrilled that we now have a newly elected Faculty Council, and our inaugural Faculty Council Chair is Deondra Rose. Our sincere thanks go out to these amazing colleagues as well as everyone who was instrumental in bringing us to this moment.



Deondra Rose, Chair



Leslie Babinski



Mallory SoRelle



Asher Hildebrand



Vicki Bogan



Andrew Nurkin



Ken Rogerson



Nick Carnes

WELCOME NEW FACULTY



CJ Appleton is a criminal justice scholar who studies identity, desistance, community supervision, and organizational theory.



Celina Scott-Buechler studies renewable energy and carbon dioxide removal as well as community needs and experiences that inform climate policy.



Anne Washington is a technologist who examines governance of emerging data technology such as digital assets and artificial intelligence.

WELCOME NEW STAFF

We have many talented new staff colleagues who joined Team Sanford since 2024. I look forward to getting to know you better as our paths cross in the days ahead. Whether you are new to higher ed or a seasoned Duke employee in a new role, we are grateful to have you here at Sanford.

Marsha Adams-Rucker
Olivia Anderson
Jennifer Applebee
Kristen Aquilino
Liliana Bermudez
Jason Bouck
Megan Burch

Merritt Cahoon
Christopher Coome
Henry Cust
Zyra Dent
Jenny Edmonds
Mike Essman
Heather Eudy

Diana Flores Peregrina
Laura Gorla
Miroslava Jimenez
Rachel Knight
Kristie Lynch
Lauren Maynor
Lesley Mendez Sandoval

Giuliana Mendieta Melgar
Sarah Roberts
Danielle Samake
Kevin Shropshire
Elizabeth Sparacino
Katherine Stanley

DISTINGUISHED RESIDENT FELLOWS & EXECUTIVES-IN-RESIDENCE

The Sanford School is also honored to have an esteemed group of people who will be joining us at Sanford as Distinguished Fellows and Executives-in-Residence. Their presence and participation will elevate our work on research, teaching and policy engagement.



Retired General Charles Q. Brown Jr.,
former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff



Dr. John Hillen,
former US Assistant Secretary of State



Michael Regan,
former US EPA Administrator



Danny Werfel,
former IRS Commissioner



SANFORD CENTERS & PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Our research, teaching and engagement at Sanford is made possible through the work of the amazing centers we have at our school. I want to highlight just a few examples of Sanford's reach and relevance. From leadership development in our undergraduate programs to global experiences, we are preparing students to make a difference in a world that desperately needs principled, evidence-driven leadership.

CCFP'S Child Policy Research Certificate Program graduated its largest cohort to date, with 22 graduates.

The DeWitt Wallace Center's Journalism & Media minor graduated its largest class (30) in the program's 20-year history.

Hart Leadership launched the Laidlaw Scholars Research and Leadership Program, welcoming the first cohort of 25 scholars into this new, two-year leadership development sequence.

Thanks to Duke in DC, our students continue to gain incredible learning opportunities and policy experiences in the nation's capital.

American Grand Strategy continues to take the prize for the best student trips ever – this year they took 32 students, faculty, and alumni to Japan to study the end of World War II in the Pacific.

World Food Policy Center produced 42 podcasts uplifting research on topics ranging from the microbiome to the history of food as a political tool to weight loss drugs.

Polis, which continues to play a pivotal role in helping students understand politics and democracy, is also home to the Civil Discourse Project. I want to thank Abdullah Antepli for his leadership and welcome Stephen Buckley as the Interim Director.



Sanford's Academic Programs

PUBLIC POLICY UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR

INTERNATIONAL MASTER of ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

MASTER of PUBLIC POLICY

MASTER of INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

MASTER of NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

MASTER of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PHD of PUBLIC POLICY

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

Our academic programs continue to attract the top students globally. Undergraduates constitute half of our student body, with the masters and PhD students being the other half.

Highlighted in the above image is our newest Masters' program – the executive hybrid MPA program, which welcomed its inaugural cohort earlier this summer. I would like to acknowledge the hard work that the DGS of this program, Asher Hildebrand, and our amazing team from academic programs have put in to make this program a fabulous success. A few weeks ago, we also announced the expansion of this MPA program to offer a Technology Policy concentration for the next cohort.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM



I am proud of the high rankings Duke continues to receive from national publications for our amazing public policy major. We continue to be among the top majors at Duke and more importantly, our numbers have stayed steady over the years.

We currently have 333 public policy majors, and I am optimistic that with the new curriculum our numbers will grow in the future.

2025 Top rankings:

- Niche - #1 Best Colleges for Public Policy in America
- College Transitions - #1 Best Colleges in Public Policy
- US News - #3 Public Policy Related Majors

Strong program:

- 4th Largest Major at Duke

MASTER'S PROGRAMS

327 CURRENT MASTER'S STUDENTS

Enrollment numbers for this current year are slightly down but that is not unexpected given the moment we are in. We have an impressive group of MIDP students from 13 countries represented in the incoming class.

The MPP and MNSP programs continue to attract very strong students to our programs. I want to give a shout out to our amazing admissions and enrollment colleagues in Academic Programs who worked incredibly hard, reaching out to admitted students and doing everything humanly possible to help us attract the best talent to Sanford.

Residential:

- Master of Public Policy Program (176 students)
- Master of International Development Policy Program (47)

Hybrid:

- Executive Master of National Security Policy (22)
- Executive Master of Public Affairs – NEW! (24)

Joint Program:

- International Master of Environmental Policy (with Nicholas School and DKU) (58)

PhD PROGRAMS

50 Current PhD Students

27 Public Policy **19** UPEP **4** Joint Degree

10 Incoming doctoral students this year

4 Public Policy **5** UPEP **1** Joint Degree

Our educational and research mission is also made possible by the strength of our endowments and donor contributions.



MADE FOR **THIS**

THE DUKE CAMPAIGN

In February 2025, Duke launched the public phase of our capital campaign Made for This.

In FY25 alone, we secured \$7 million in new commitments, including \$1.6 million for the Sanford Annual Fund.

I will be personally helping this effort by participating in campaign events on campus and nationwide, engaging prospective donors, and helping the Sanford team build the alumni network and strengthen the donor pipeline.

Several of our faculty are also engaged, as speakers and content experts on **Duke's Campaign themes**: Climate, Science & Technology, Health, the Student Experience, and for Sanford, Democracy, Politics & Civil Discourse.



CLIMATE



**SCIENCE &
TECHNOLOGY**



**HEALTH
POLICY**



**STUDENT
EXPERIENCE**



**DEMOCRACY,
POLITICS & CIVIL
DISCOURSE**

I am grateful for the work our Development and Alumni Relations team is doing; I also want to give a special shout out to Josh who served dual roles as our associate dean for development and interim associate dean for communications for most of the past year.

SANFORD: BUILT FOR **CONNECTION, COLLABORATION, & COMMUNITY**

More than \$88M raised to date

Surpassed Duke Forward total of \$80M

FY25: \$7M new commitments

\$1.6M for Sanford Annual Fund

CONCLUSION & THANK YOU

Before I wrap up, I want to give a shout out to our many staff colleagues who work tirelessly to keep our operations running. Whether you work in central administration, communications, facilities, IT, or HR – the Sanford school's incredible research, teaching, and policy engagement would not be possible without you.

As I reflect on where we are today, I'm reminded of something I learned from my brother-in-law, who summited and led expeditions to Mount Everest. He taught me that the resilience required to achieve something as daunting as climbing the world's highest peak isn't about conquering the mountain all at once. It's about persistence—about focusing on the next step, and then the next, and the one after that.

That lesson feels especially relevant for me now. We don't need to solve every challenge in one leap. We need only to take the next step—and then to keep moving, together.

Our students remind us why those steps matter. Even in these uncertain times, hundreds of them have chosen Sanford to prepare for lives of service and leadership. Their decision is an act of hope—and a belief that better is possible.

So let us meet their hope with our own persistence. Let us focus on the next step—living our mission today, tomorrow, and each day after. Together, through our teaching, research, and service, we can help our students realize their dreams—and in doing so, strengthen the possibility of a better future for all.



Thank you,
Manoj Mohanan
Interim Dean

THANK YOU, Sanford staff and faculty!

A large, semi-transparent image of a building with several tall, decorative spires and a window with horizontal blinds. In the foreground, there are branches of a tree with purple flowers, likely crape myrtles, partially obscuring the view of the building.