Two years ago, the Sanford School established a new center dedicated to seeking solutions to the problems of contemporary politics and preparing a new generation of political leaders and engaged citizens. Our ambition was not just to critique the politics that is, but to enlist the creative energies of the entire Duke community—faculty, students, and alumni—to promote the politics that could be.

This has been a momentous year for us. As political events have made even clearer the urgency of our mission, we have greatly expanded our activities on campus and in the larger community. Although the challenge is daunting, we are gratified at the growing level of engagement of the Duke community. POLIS is increasingly visible on campus through our events, podcasts, workshops, and courses. We’re rapidly becoming known in North Carolina and Washington through our public events, ability to convene bipartisan discussions on major issues, and direct engagement on issues such as partisan gerrymandering.

We are grateful to all who are contributing to our efforts: generous donors who make our programming possible; faculty colleagues who teach, advise, mentor, research, and model political engagement; loyal and engaged alumni who share their time, expertise, and contacts; and the many staff members at Sanford and across the Duke campus who support what we do. Thank you! We look forward to continuing our collaboration as we take the next steps in this exciting and important work.

Frederick “Fritz” Mayer

Director of POLIS
Associate Dean for Strategy and Engagement
Professor of Public Policy, Political Science, and Environment

Terry Sanford Distinguished Fellow Tom Ross speaks with students following a lecture on the state of American democracy.

Leslie Boyd, a Union County Board of Education member, speaks at a campaign training workshop for female Duke students.
BRIDGING DIVIDES

In these polarized times, many of our efforts are directed at bridging divides between students and in the larger community among leaders and other citizens with opposing views.

NORTH CAROLINA LEADERSHIP FORUM

The NCLF represents our deep commitment to bridging divides in North Carolina. In our first year, we brought together 35 prominent North Carolina leaders from diverse points of view for a series of sustained, informed, and civil conversations about how North Carolina can help more citizens earn enough to support their families. The NCLF is co-chaired by John Hood, a conservative columnist and president of the John William Pope Foundation, and Leslie Winner, a former Democratic state senator and former executive director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. In 2017-18, the NCLF is focusing on how North Carolina can best meet the future energy needs of its residents and businesses.

DEVIL’S DISCOURSE PODCAST

The new Devil’s Discourse podcast features Duke students engaged in tough, honest, and respectful conversations, proving how constructive dialogue is a vital first step toward jumpstarting meaningful collaboration and sound policy making. The goal is not agreement; it’s about respecting another’s right to think differently. Each week, two Duke students with opposing views discuss a topic. These students constantly remind us that no ideology has a monopoly on the best ideas, and that opening ourselves up to new concepts—even if we don’t agree with them—is a key ingredient to personal growth.

IS PURPLE POSSIBLE?

After the 2016 presidential election, POLIS brought together four prominent North Carolina leaders to speak to a packed room in the Sanford School:

- State Senator Dan Blue
- State Senator Tamara Barringer
- John Hood, president of the Pope Foundation
- Rick Glazier, executive director of the North Carolina Justice Center

The group engaged in a civil and honest dialogue on the current state of North Carolina politics and how the parties might collaborate going forward.
COLLABORATING WITH NPR: “A NATION ENGAGED”

POLIS served as host and advisor to NPR-WUNC in the production of a town hall conversation on state and national politics. NPR correspondent Adam Hochberg and NPR reporter Asma Khalid posed questions to a panel that included:

- Bev Perdue, former Governor of North Carolina
- Jonathan Felts, former senior advisor to North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory
- North Carolina State Senator Angela Bryant
- Mitch Meyers, North Carolina for Donald Trump
- Fritz Mayer, POLIS Director

The event addressed such questions as “What do last year’s election results say about our state and nation?” and “Is political compromise possible in a divided nation?” POLIS’s coordination included maximizing participation by an ideological cross-section of Duke students, empowering conservatives, moderates, and liberals to join in the conversation.

HOSTING SANFORD ON THE HILL

In July 2016, POLIS collaborated with the Sanford Development Office to produce Sanford on the Hill in Washington, DC’s Capitol Visitor Center. Featuring hundreds of Duke alums, the guests were treated to a panel discussion on the state of the 2016 election with Sanford Professor Deondra Rose, American University Professor Jennifer Lawless, and Amy Walter, national editor of The Cook Report. A reception followed, which was co-hosted by Sanford colleague Representative David Price (D-NC) and Sanford alumnus Representative Bradley Byrne (R-AL).

In 2017, POLIS once again took point on producing the Sanford on the Hill event, this time featuring Senators Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) in keynote roles. These two senators joined Fritz Mayer on stage for a discussion on the current state of politics, whether and how sustainable bipartisanship is achievable, and the challenges and opportunities confronting them each day as women in a male-dominated Senate.
TRAINING LEADERS

POLIS seeks to inspire and empower the next generation of political leaders. POLIS’s growing menu of programs—including classes, trainings, speakers, podcasts, and lunch-and-learns—equips our students with the tools to become more engaged citizens.

WOMEN’S CAMPAIGN WORKSHOP

POLIS seeks to promote civic engagement while amplifying underrepresented voices. Women are severely underrepresented nationally (comprising less than 20% of Congress), as well as in the North Carolina General Assembly (below the national average). Within Duke’s student government, women are continually in the minority on the executive board, in the Senate, and in the cabinet.

Each year, POLIS partners with the nonpartisan organization Running Start to lead a four-hour campaign training for female Duke students. Despite taking place on the Sunday before midterms, 40 women—from first-years to PhD students—attended the first training, and its popularity has swelled ever since. Students are offered a step-by-step process on how to run for local, state, and national positions, giving them the tools to nurture their leadership abilities and achieve greater civic and political influence both on campus (student government) and post-graduation (public office). Led by Running Start’s founder, Susannah Wellford, the interactive workshop features insights from guest speakers like Leslie Boyd (a Union County Board of Education member) and Tara Bansal (Duke Student Government president).

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BOOT CAMP

Conceived by POLIS intern / Duke student Tierney Pretzer, the Political Participation Boot Camp is a workshop that equips Duke students with the skills to be active members of our political system. The nearly three-hour training consists of:

- Communicating your message – led by Duke Office of News & Communications’ Keith Lawrence
- How to most effectively contact elected leaders – led by Duke alum and former Senator Kelly Ayotte press secretary Chloe Rockow Madsen
- Voicing concerns through direct action and protest – led by Duke alum and Durham CAN’s Casey Stanton
SOLVING PROBLEMS

POLIS is mobilizing efforts to tackle some of the monumental challenges facing our politics. Our primary focus this past year has been on combating partisan gerrymandering and reforming the redistricting process.

BEYOND GERRYMANDERING

With financial support from the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, POLIS has collaborated with Tom Ross, the Terry Sanford Distinguished Fellow, for over a year on finding ways to restore nonpartisanship and fairness to legislative redistricting. The ongoing effort has included educating the public on how an independent, impartial redistricting process would work. In 2016, an independent commission comprised of five Republican and five Democratic retired North Carolina jurists applied strong, clear criteria to create a new North Carolina congressional map. The project proved nonpartisan redistricting not only is achievable, but also fosters a more engaged citizenry.

NORTH CAROLINIANS FOR REDISTRICTING REFORM

POLIS has served as a strategic partner and advisor in a bipartisan statewide effort to enact nonpartisan redistricting reform, led by former UNC System President Tom Ross and North Carolina representative Chuck McGrady. The effort kicked off last fall when POLIS hosted a gathering of more than two-dozen accomplished conservative and liberal North Carolinians—including former governors, judges, and civic leaders—launching what has become a statewide redistricting group consisting of a steering committee, prominent public supporters, and fundraising goals. The 14-person steering committee includes former North Carolina Supreme Court Justice Rhoda Billings, former North Carolina House of Representatives Speaker Pro Tempore Skip Stam, Winston-Salem Mayor Allen Joines, and Pope Foundation President and John Locke Foundation Board Chairman John Hood. The group’s achievable goal reflects POLIS’s mission of bipartisan problem solving on an issue that has suppressed voting among both major political parties’ supporters.

REDISTRICTING REFORM: MAPPING OUR FUTURE

POLIS partnered with Common Cause in 2017 to host a two-day, nonpartisan conference on redistricting reform at the Sanford School. The roughly 100 guests and two-dozen speakers included some of the most notable names in this field. The gathering enabled individuals divided by ideology to find common ground—and to begin taking steps to achieve meaningful reforms—on a long-time contentious issue.

ELECTION 2016

The November election had a profound impact on the Duke community. POLIS worked with various stakeholders on all sides of the political spectrum to produce meaningful, thought-provoking events.

STUDENT VOTING

POLIS collaborated with professors and students to promote campus voting. Duke’s early voting site netted more than 6,000 voters. Duke also joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, which invites higher education institutions to improve democratic engagement, increase student voter participation rates, and graduate students with a lifelong commitment to being informed and active citizens.

PBS “THE CHOICE” DISCUSSION

POLIS co-hosted a public event with the DeWitt Wallace Center around “The Choice,” the two-part documentary on Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.
In early 2017, Fritz Mayer introduced a new course that created teams of students, both undergraduate and graduate, to work on a variety of innovative approaches to political issues. The class empowered students to find innovative solutions to political challenges, including redistricting/gerrymandering and voting rights and regulations. The class also had a section on how to drive social impact through film. Several students have since shared that this was their favorite Duke class ever taken—that they were able to explore real-world problems and solutions in ways that would prepare them for their post-graduate careers.

Democracy Lab was so popular and well received that it has now become an every-semester offering.

THE 2016 ELECTION RESULTS: WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

Less than a week after Election Day, POLIS hosted a standing-room-only forum attended by nearly 100 students, staff, and faculty that featured a panel of election experts from the Sanford community.

INAGURATION WATCH BRUNCH

POLIS hosted a gathering of students, faculty, and staff to watch a live feed of President Trump’s inaugural address. Immediately following the speech, Sanford professors Deondra Rose and Peter Feaver engaged with two student leaders (one Republican, one Democrat) in a roundtable discussion on President Trump’s address.

STAFF

B.J. RUDELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

B.J. joined the POLIS team in 2016 after spending about 20 years in Washington, DC, with stints on Capitol Hill, on a presidential campaign, in a newsroom, in classrooms, and for a consulting firm. He has authored three books and numerous political op-eds, including for the Dallas Morning News and Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Additionally, he has shared political insights on CNN, Fox News, and dozens of radio stations across the country. In his role with POLIS, his greatest focus is on Duke students: collaborating with them on programs and events, mobilizing them behind POLIS initiatives, and facilitating their exploration into what it means to be an engaged citizen.

JOEL LUTHER, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Joel began his career in Sanford’s Communications office before joining the POLIS team. He parleys his passion for public affairs and public policy into meaningful contributions to POLIS’s social media, graphic design, and video production efforts. Additionally, as a 2015 Duke graduate, he is uniquely positioned to connect with fellow students on the virtues and challenges of politics.

INTERNS

Student interns are a vital part of the team, taking leadership roles in areas such as event planning and social media. Duke students Tierney Pretzer and Claire Meyer, among others, have significantly advanced POLIS’s goals.
Promoting What Politics Could Be