Nearly 50 sponsored programs and dozens of cosponsored programs. Marquee guest speakers and in-depth educational workshops. The formation of student-led political organizations.

The 2017-2018 school year was transformative for POLIS. Our campus reach has never been wider, and our brand as a campus champion of meaningful political engagement and politics done “the right way” has never been stronger.

Back in August, we took a series of deliberate steps to build on our success the prior year, including:

- Solidifying relationships with dozens of Duke centers and offices that share our ideals
- Opening individual communication lines with hundreds of politically minded students
- Formalizing the facilitation of cross-ideological student dialogue on topical issues
- Amplifying underrepresented student voices

The results have fortified our efforts to bridge political divides, train student leaders, and help solve some of today’s major political challenges. We have no doubt the 2018-2019 school year will continue to build on these successes.

Thanks to all those who have assisted POLIS financially, programmatically, and technically. POLIS’s achievements are your achievements. We look forward to engaging with you further as this center continues on its upward trajectory.

Frederick “Fritz” Mayer
Director of POLIS
Professor of Public Policy, Political Science, and Environment
POLIS is Duke’s primary facilitator of cross-ideological programming and student engagement. We meet with hundreds of students a year—often individually—to better understand their political ideals and under what circumstances they are willing to dialogue constructively with those with whom they disagree. As a result, this past year we have observed an overwhelming shift in how conservative, moderate, and liberal students engage with each other.

For example, last fall in the face of rising political strife over the future of Confederate memorials, POLIS convened a closed-door conversation between Duke Democrat and College Republican leaders. Intended to run 30-45 minutes, the intellectual, passionate, and highly respectful discussion lasted over two hours. College Republicans President and senior Colin Duffy later recounted that looking back on his four years at Duke, his favorite experience was participating in this POLIS event.

Similarly, POLIS engineered what no other administrative or student group has been able to do: broker an agreement between College Republicans and Duke Political Union to cosponsor and promote each other’s November events. So DPU—representing primarily left-leaning students—put their name on a discussion led by two conservative Fox News contributors, while the College Republicans agreed to support a talk led by a prominent liberal civil rights attorney. As a result, hundreds of Duke students bore witness to the power of influential student groups celebrating the importance of listening to political opponents.

The North Carolina Leadership Forum

Under the leadership of POLIS, with Fritz Mayer facilitating, the NCLF has successfully established Sanford and Duke as a place that brings together diverging viewpoints for civil and constructive dialogue. Co-chaired by Art Pope, Leslie Winner, John Hood, and Rick Glazier, this past year’s NCLF once again brought together 40 political leaders throughout North Carolina to address the question: “How can North Carolina meet the future energy needs of its residents and businesses in terms of reliability, affordability, and cleanliness?” A uniquely successful method for transforming disparate political thought into achievable cross-ideological solutions, NCLF will continue to effect meaningful change in 2018-2019.
Political Leaders

POLIS invited numerous national and state leaders across the ideological spectrum to speak on campus. Each was asked to make sense of our nation’s widening political divide and what steps they’ve taken—and will continue to take—to unite Red and Blue America. Here are three examples:

Congressman Seth Moulton (D-MA)

Congressman Moulton spoke to nearly 200 members of the Duke community on February 22, 2018, urging students to engage in public service and sharing the unique political perspectives of someone who never expected to enter public life. Moderated by Fritz Mayer, the discussion included an extended Q&A with students of all political stripes. This talk was bookended by a small-group discussion with 15 students and a private dinner with 20 students and 15 professors / staff members. POLIS took great care to ensure that a diverse group of students—by ideology, by gender, by race, by sexual orientation, etc.—participated in each event.
Congressman David Price (D-NC) and former Congressman David Dreier (R-CA)

Congressman Price and former Congressman Dreier shared the stage on April 4, 2018 to promote bipartisanship as something both achievable and necessary. In 2005 they co-founded the House Democracy Partnership, a collaborative body which focuses on strengthening democratic institutions abroad.

Speaking with humility and candor, the two long-time friends and colleagues helped students understand why ever-higher partisan barriers have been erected in recent years, and what they can do to dismantle them.
Citizen Activism Panel

Susan Hogarth (Chair, Libertarian Party of North Carolina), Jillian Johnson (Durham Mayor Pro Tempore and community organizer), and Mitch Meyers (conservative North Carolina activist) participated in POLIS’s citizen activism panel discussion on April 17, 2018.

Despite having little in common politically or ideologically, these three local leaders are united in their commitment to public service. Each eloquently imparted to Duke students how they, too, can become engaged citizens through hard work, dedication to deeply held principles, and a willingness to collaborate with differently minded people.
Student Engagement

POLIS has adopted a multi-pronged approach to combating political divides among students. We aim to nurture in students a greater desire to be curious about those with opposing viewpoints, a greater understanding of “why” such beliefs are held, and a greater appreciation for the complexity of countless issues. In this way, we seek to amplify all student voices—particularly underrepresented voices—so that challenging conversations are not feared, but rather are explored.

We believe such ideological engagement is essential for student growth. Our nation is stronger when political bubbles give way to open spaces for healthy dialogue. And our students are more prepared for life after Duke if they adopt a predisposition for healthy dialogue.

Here are some examples of POLIS-sponsored initiatives for bridging political divides among students:

**POLIS Bipartisan Leadership Team (BLT)**

The BLT is a POLIS-affiliated student organization dedicated to the twin missions of seeking solutions to the problems of contemporary politics and preparing a new generation of political leaders and engaged citizens. It serves as an advisory council for POLIS, as a campus leader in solution-driven programming, and as a hub for cross-ideological respect. The 10 handpicked Duke students are evenly divided among conservatives and liberals, women and men. Collectively, the group is the most diverse organization on campus. With POLIS serving as a hands-on advisor and facilitator, these 10 individuals have been working together to promote bipartisan collaboration and problem solving, with a focus on strengthening relationships that can rise above political disagreements.

**Leaders for Political Dialogue (LPD)**

LPD creates a meeting place—a forum—where representative voices, bipartisan and nonpartisan, undergraduate and graduate, can convene to discuss issues and hear each other’s point of view with curiosity and without fear. LPD also aims to foster skills training for participants in community engagement, facilitation and conflict mitigation so they can create similar forums to foster dialogue at home, on campuses and in communities. The main objective of LPD is to create a model process for dialogue—a model that can be replicated by other community and student groups and individuals, to help decrease polarization and bridge divides.
Purple Politics Roundtable

Purple Politics Roundtable is a champion project of the POLIS BLT, consisting of monthly roundtable discussions among students of all different backgrounds and political dispositions. The students come together to openly, honestly, and productively discuss a particular controversial topic that is polarizing America. The main objectives are to increase substantive knowledge of political issues, offer a better understanding of differing political and social perspectives, and provide an opportunity to formulate efficacious opinions. The ultimate goal is to decrease divisions between conservatives and liberals on campus.

Unum

Unum is a champion project of the POLIS BLT, uniting individuals across the political spectrum behind volunteer service to their community. These impacts encourage fruitful conversation and a mutual empathy for the other side of the aisle. When we realize how much we share in common as individuals, only then can we, as one, work to resolve damagingly close-minded political attitudes.

Devil’s Discourse Podcast

The Devil’s Discourse podcast captures 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. Each conversation is unscripted and unedited. Throughout this semester, these students will continually 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.

WTF: Wake to Fritz

POLIS Director Fritz Mayer brings together students for biweekly political conversations over breakfast. Frequently including a professor or outside guest, WTF helps students make sense of current events through a nonpartisan political lens, helping them uncover what’s really going on, and what they can do to affect change. This past year’s guests have included former Congressman Barney Frank, former Federal Reserve Board member Sarah Bloom Raskin, celebrated pollster Neil Newhouse, and more than a half-dozen Duke faculty members.
Training Leaders

POLIS seeks to impact students not merely during their matriculation at Duke. We aim to equip them with the tools to grow as leaders for years to come. It begins with classes, programs, and trainings to help them think for themselves—and grow to become the leaders they wish to be.

Building on its successful 2016-2017 program, POLIS produced a diverse array of offerings appealing to hundreds of students across beliefs, demographics, and areas of study. For example, POLIS continually seeks to promote civic engagement while amplifying underrepresented voices. As a severely underrepresented political group, women have been a key focus of POLIS’s efforts to nurture Duke students’ political leadership potential. Cosponsored by Duke’s Penny Pilgrim George Women’s Leadership Initiative, POLIS hosted a campaign workshop in January attended by female students ranging from first-years to PhD candidates. Then in March, POLIS secured a partnership with Sanford Alumni Affairs to produce a campaign fundraising/networking training for female students and alums. These highly successful and popular events have helped position POLIS as a vehicle for training future leaders.

Here are some other examples:

**Presidential March Madness**

Fritz and B.J. taught a five-day class over Spring Break titled “Presidential March Madness.” Utilizing brackets and rankings based on the NCAA’s famed “March Madness” college basketball tournaments, students examined the successes and failures of each U.S. president and determined which ones were more successful than others. By the end of the class, each student possesses the skills to more thoroughly scrutinize elected officials—a vital step in one’s development as an engaged citizen and civic leader.

The class was notable in the ways it incorporated expert input from 20 presidential historians—including John Ferling, H.W. Brands, Walter Borneman, and former Second Lady of the United States Lynne Cheney—who offered customized write-ups for this Duke course. Presidential March Madness also produced vibrant conversations on social media among more historians and presidential libraries and museums ranging from Abraham Lincoln’s to Richard Nixon’s to James Monroe’s.
Former Congressman Barney Frank (D-MA)

POLIS programmed more than a dozen events featuring former Congressman Barney Frank, most of which focused exclusively on student leadership training. Frank’s four decades of public service became fodder for numerous candid conversations with small groups of students, giving our future leaders a rare opportunity to learn from someone who’s been at the forefront of many notable political and policy battles.

Ellen Weintraub, Commissioner of the FEC

POLIS invited Commissioner Weintraub to campus in November to share her experiences as an FEC commissioner. She helped students understand the governmental and political power wielded by non-elected officials—as well as their limitations.

Political Communications Training

In November, POLIS hired West Wing Writers, one of the nation’s leading communications consulting firms, to educate students, faculty, and staff on effective political communication strategies. We recognize that effective communication is an instrumental component of effective leadership, making these trainings an invaluable resource for the more than 100 participating campus community members.
Global Political Perspectives

Seeking to foster leadership sensibilities beyond the U.S. political scene, POLIS developed a program that highlighted and celebrated the wisdom of students with unique international political perspectives. After securing partnerships with Duke’s Center for International & Global Studies and the International House, we produced two panel discussions on overseas politics.

Running a few days before Argentina’s elections, the October program featured four Argentinian Duke students sharing insights on politics in their home country, while the March program on Egyptian politics brought together three Egyptian Duke students for a candid conversation in advance of their country’s elections. The program will continue in 2018-2019 with events on Brazilian and Indian politics from the perspectives of Duke students who grew up there.

Voting Seminar

In September, POLIS partnered with Duke’s Center for Multicultural Affairs and the Center for Leadership Development and Social Action to host a forum for first-year students about Durham politics and issues. Students learned how to join political efforts locally and on campus, as well as how to register to vote.

Neil Newhouse

The lead pollster for Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential campaign and a three-time American Association of Political Consultants “Pollster of the Year,” Mr. Newhouse returned to campus in 2017 to train POLIS students on how to get their foot in the door in Washington, DC.
Political Reporters Series

This past school year POLIS lined up three political reporters to engage with several hundred Duke students on the nature of their profession, the state of politics, and how to pursue political reporting careers. They included:

- Jonathan Allen, NBC News national political reporter and co-author of two New York Times bestsellers
- Michael Kruse, POLITICO senior reporter
- Daniel Lippman, POLITICO reporter

Triangle Women’s Forum

POLIS collaborated with Duke Alumni Affairs on the annual Triangle Women’s Forum, in which POLIS recruited female student leaders and paid their registration fees so they could engage directly with political leaders Deborah Ross (former senatorial candidate), Jill Homan (Republican National Committeewoman for D.C.), and Megan Gonzales (People’s Alliance President) at one of DAA’s most important annual regional events.
Solving Problems

Democracy Lab

Two years ago, Fritz conceived of and began teaching a new kind of Duke class—one that emphasizes real-world problem solving over theoretical concepts. Democracy Lab is now a mainstay feature of Duke’s politics- and policy-focused curricula, featuring teams of undergraduate and graduate students uncovering innovative approaches to current political challenges, including:

- Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide on the Environment
- Bridging Political Divides on College Campuses
- Improving the Functionality of Social Media During Elections
- Reforming Legislative Redistricting in North Carolina
- Improving Voter Registration Best Practices in North Carolina
- Assisting the Successful Implementation of the North Carolina Leadership Forum

Guest speakers this past year have included former U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME), former Congressman Barney Frank (D-MA), and other political insiders. Several students have remarked that this was their favorite Duke class ever taken—that they were able to explore real-world problems and solutions in ways that will prepare them as leaders.

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, initiating what has become a statewide redistricting group consisting of a steering committee, notable 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.
Other Notable Events

Sanford on the Hill

This July, POLIS led the programming effort for the annual “Sanford on the Hill” event in Washington, D.C., featuring special guest Judy Woodruff, anchor of PBS NewsHour. About 250 Duke alumni, faculty and friends gathered at the Capitol Visitors Center to hear a conversation between Woodruff and POLIS director Fritz Mayer.

Former U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe

POLIS served as a lead cosponsor for a talk delivered by former Senator Snowe titled “Politics and Our Potential: Can Congress Rise to Meet Its Obligation to Govern?”

Reverend William Barber

POLIS served as a lead cosponsor for a talk delivered by Reverend William Barber, president of NAACP’s North Carolina chapter.
Durham Mayoral Candidate Forum

POLIS advised and helped fund a team of Duke graduate students that co-organized a pre-election forum for Durham mayoral candidates.

Conservatism in the Age of Trump

POLIS partnered with the Sanford School and the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy to co-produce a talk featuring two notable right-leaning political thinkers: Megan McArdle and Ross Douthat.
Promoting What Politics Should Be