

From presidents to provosts, ASU faculty and leaders land prestigious positions around the country

University appointments are ‘points of pride’ reflecting ASU’s innovation, ASU provost says

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
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Arizona State University’s drive for innovation draws top faculty and administrators from around the world, and it also means that ASU’s leaders are often tapped for prestigious positions at other universities.

The latest examples: Stacy Leeds, dean of the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, has been named president of the University of Tulsa, and Elizabeth Wentz, vice provost and dean of the Graduate College, will become provost at Temple University. Both begin their new positions on July 1.

Leeds, who has served on the ASU Law faculty for six years and as dean since 2023, will be returning to her alma mater. She earned her JD at the University of Tulsa and is an expert in Native American law.

“I think it’s hard for anyone on the outside to get a sense of the scale and the enormous impact of ASU. You can read articles and case studies about what’s going on here, but until you get here and become a part of it, there’s no way you can comprehend it,” Leeds said.

“We make fun a bit and jest about innovation, but it is at the core of everything we do. My takeaway is that you really can branch out and do things very differently in higher ed and still be very successful.”

In announcing her new position, Wentz said it has long been her dream to be a university provost. She has been at ASU since 1997, starting as a tenure-track assistant professor in the geography department.

"I've had a really great career arc here, and I'm excited to take what I've learned and apply it as appropriate to another institution," she said.

"It about not being entrenched in, 'Well, this is the way that we've always done it,' and trying to think about the problem that needs to be solved and some creative ways we can think about doing that and how do we do those things differently while still aligning with our fundamental academic principles?"

ASU President Michael Crow said, "ASU's unique design attracts talented, energized people who want to develop new approaches to learning and discovery.

"Our transdisciplinary and collaborative environments empower driven leaders to explore their innovative ideas, create real impact and hone their creativity in a way that also helps them pursue aspirational endeavors in different ecosystems."

Nancy Gonzales, executive vice president and provost of ASU, said that Leeds and Wentz had critical roles in advancing ASU's reputation for excellence while expanding access to learners from all backgrounds.

"While we will miss their contributions, their appointments to these prominent roles reflect the strength of our academic community and the impact of ASU's charter in shaping leaders who advance higher education on a national scale," she said.

"Their appointments are points of pride for our university, and we look forward to the continued influence they will have in shaping the future of higher education."

Other administrators and faculty members who have been named to prestigious positions outside ASU include:

Sethuraman Panchanathan, former chief research and innovation officer at ASU, was director of the National Science Foundation from 2020 to 2025 and is now back at ASU as University Professor of Technology and Innovation.

Laurie Leshin, former director of the Center for Meteorite Studies at ASU, went on to several roles at NASA, most recently as director of the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory from 2022 to 2025, and is now back at ASU as University Professor of Space Futures.

Maria Rosario Jackson, a professor in The Design School, was chair of the National Endowment for the Arts from 2022 to 2025 and is now back at ASU as University Professor of Creativity and Social Impact.

Paul Johnson, former dean of the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering, became the president of the Colorado School of Mines in 2015.

Steven Tepper, former dean of the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, became president of Hamilton College in 2024.

Jonathan Koppell, former dean of the Watts College for Public Service and Community Solutions, was named president of Montclair State University in 2021.

Marlene Tromp, former vice provost and dean of the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, was named provost of the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2017, president of Boise State University in 2019 and president of the University of Vermont in 2025.

Elizabeth Cantwell, the former CEO of ASU Research Enterprise, became the senior vice president for research and innovation at the University of Arizona in 2019, president of Utah State University in 2023 and president of Washington State University in 2025.

Chris Callahan, former dean of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, became president of the University of the Pacific in 2020.

Mariko Silver, former professor of practice in the School of Politics and Global Studies and senior counselor to the president, became president of Bennington College in 2013 and is now president and CEO of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

Kwang-Wu Kim, former dean of the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, was president of Columbia College Chicago from 2013 to 2024.

Wellington “Duke” Reiter, formerly the dean of the College of Design at ASU, was president of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago from 2008 to 2010, and is now back at ASU as senior adviser to the president, executive director of University City Exchange and founder and director of Ten Across.

Mitzi Montoya, formerly the vice provost and university dean of entrepreneurship and innovation at ASU, became provost at Washington State University in 2019 and is now provost at the University of Utah.

Meenakshi Wadhwa, former director of the School of Earth and Space Exploration, became director of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in 2025.

Mark Naufel, former director of the Luminosity Lab, was named the president of the University of Silicon Valley in 2025.

Of her many accomplishments at ASU, Leeds is especially proud of the initiatives to expand access to a law degree, including the new online program.

“The [online JD](#) is part and parcel of our charter. It was our ability to demonstrate that we can do this in a very excellent way that opens up access to people who would not be going to law school right now but for this opportunity,” she said.

She also has fond memories of participating in ASU Law's spring break traveling classrooms for Indian Legal Program students. She taught courses on Native legal issues in [Alaska](#) in 2023 and in [Hawaii](#) in 2025.

"Not many universities can pull that off, so that will stand out in my mind," she said.

Wentz has seen the transformation of ASU in her 29 years here.

"The story that I like to tell is that in 2002, three things happened. I submitted my dossier for promotion and tenure, I had my first baby and Michael Crow (became president of ASU). And I don't know which of the three is the most significant," she said with a laugh.

Shortly after becoming vice provost and dean of the Graduate College in 2020, Wentz learned that ASU undergraduate students applying to ASU master's programs were being rejected at a rate higher than she thought was acceptable.

"And so we developed the [ASU Personalized Graduate Admissions](#) program, which automatically admits ASU undergraduates into ASU master's programs providing they have a 3.0 grade-point average or better," Wentz said.

"And it's been really successful both in terms of the numbers of people who have joined master's programs as well as people who have graduated and said it was a really good experience for them."

"It's the idea of taking the charter of the institution, or in the case of Temple, the mission of the university, and saying, 'Where are we not fulfilling that mission?'"

At a glance: Sun Devils making waves

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Laurie Leshin, director of the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory from 2022 to 2025

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Stacy Leeds, president of the University of Tulsa starting July 1

Elizabeth Wentz, provost at Temple University starting July 1

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Photo of ASU's Old Main building on the Tempe campus by Deanna Dent/ASU

Text image(s)



Stacy Leeds, dean of ASU's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, has been named president of the University of Tulsa. Her appointment starts on July 1. Photo by Tabbs Mosier/ASU Law



Elizabeth Wentz, vice provost and dean of ASU's Graduate College, will become provost at Temple University starting on July 1. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News