

Carissa Slotterback named dean of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions

Outgoing Dean Cynthia Lietz calls Slotterback's appointment the 'beginning of a new season for our college'

By Ayrel Clark-Proffitt, ASU News
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Carissa Slotterback has long admired the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, even engaging with the college during the early days of the [Next Generation Service Corps](#) more than a decade ago.

Inspired by Next Generation Service Corps, she created a similar program at the University of Pittsburgh, where she has served as dean of the School of Public and International Affairs since 2020.

This fall, [Slotterback](#) will join Arizona State University as the dean of the Watts College.

Slotterback is a respected leader and scholar in public affairs and urban planning. At the University of Pittsburgh, she led efforts to connect academic learning to professional practice, as well as launched new academic credentials and expanded research capacity. Previously, she served as the program director in urban and regional planning, as well as associate dean, at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

When she visited ASU this spring, Slotterback said she admired the pride and energy for public service and community engagement exuded by the Watts students, staff and faculty she met.

"I had rich conversations that demonstrated to me that the Watts College — and the schools within it — are attentive to all of the changes that are happening in the world, as well as the changes and pressures happening across higher education. There is a real commitment to thinking about how to

evolve while ensuring student access and meeting commitments to communities,” Slotterback said.

Slotterback’s research explores the public engagement process, with a focus on how to build relationships and deepen collaboration. She’s committed to furthering the Watts College’s already-strong dedication to community solutions and “elevating the knowledge and capacity that exists in communities and ensuring that our work in universities is focused directly on local and societal needs.”

The college’s expertise in engaged work is unique and can be even further leveraged in major university initiatives and in interdisciplinary research and education, she added.

Slotterback will lead a college that is nationally renowned. Three of the four schools within the college are highly ranked by U.S. News & World Report, including two in the top 10: the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice doctoral program is No. 2 in the nation and the School of Public Affairs is ranked No. 9 for best public affairs graduate schools overall. The School of Social Work graduate program is ranked 20th.

In addition to building interdisciplinary capacity, Slotterback sees possibilities to increase enrollment by tapping into students’ motivation to do good in the community while in school and not waiting until after graduation, and ensuring that community engagement opportunities are available to both in-person and online students.

“Looking at who students are now and what motivates them, I think there are opportunities to truly distinguish a Watts College education from competitors by demonstrating what it means to be in service,” she said. “Sharing examples of opportunities for service will continue to attract students, and ultimately, give them an experience that is going to help them professionally and enrich their lives.”

Nancy Gonzales, executive vice president and university provost, said that Slotterback, as a first-generation college student herself, has committed to expanding access and creating opportunities for students from all backgrounds to succeed.

“Throughout her career, Carissa has built a profile as a respected academic leader, accomplished scholar and champion of public service education,” Gonzales said.

[Cynthia Lietz](#), the current dean of the Watts College and President’s Professor in the School of Social Work, said she has “great confidence” in Slotterback’s ability to move the college forward.

“This moment marks the beginning of a new season for our college,” Lietz said. “As we continue to focus on growing enrollment, creating new continuing education programs to better meet workforce demands and advancing the very best use-inspired public service research, I know Dr. Slotterback will bring a fresh perspective to these ongoing priorities.

“Her experience and thoughtful leadership are exactly what we need at this point in time.”

Lietz, who will return to faculty, served in the Watts College administration for the past 10 years, first as vice dean beginning in 2016 before being named dean in 2021.

Gonzales thanked Lietz for her years of outstanding leadership.

“Cynthia has led the college with vision, compassion and an unwavering commitment to students, faculty and staff. We are deeply grateful for her many contributions to ASU and to the many students and communities whose lives have been shaped by her work,” she said.

Slotterback’s tenure will begin on Oct. 1.

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Main image



Carissa Slotterback is the new dean of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions. Courtesy photo