ASU faculty bring diverse expertise to National Academy of Public Administration

3 new fellows from ASU provide perspectives on responsible innovation, institutional design and election administration

By Ayrel Clark-Proffitt, ASU News
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Rapidly changing social and economic conditions alongside dramatic advances in technology are creating new and sometimes unexpected challenges in the field of public administration.

The need for broad expertise is reflected in the diverse backgrounds of this year's National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Fellows. Three new fellows are from Arizona State University, adding to the university's strong representation in the academy and highlighting its emphasis on addressing real-world challenges facing communities and public institutions.

This year's ASU inductees are Derrick Anderson, professor in the School of Public Affairs, incoming CEO of EdPlus and university dean of educational initiatives; Professor of Practice Bill Gates, executive director of ASU's Mechanics of Democracy Laboratory in the School of Public Affairs; and Foundation Professor David Guston, associate vice provost in the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory.

The presence of ASU faculty among academy fellows underscores the university's leadership in advancing the practice of public administration, said ASU President Michael M. Crow.

"The induction of our faculty members to the honored ranks of the NAPA Fellows reflects our institutional commitment to excellence, service and innovation," said Crow, who was elected as a fellow in 2006. "David, Derrick and Bill are exemplary leaders who are shaping the future of how people live and learn in meaningful ways, and I am proud we can advance this vital work together."

Fellows use their expertise to help government leaders make institutions more effective and accountable. They conduct reviews of federal agencies, serve on working groups that address

major challenges, and provide guidance through congressional testimony and advisory group participation.

This year's ASU inductees help build the academy's capacity through strengthening responsible innovation, designing institutions for maximum public value and bridging the gap between theoretical and day-to-day administration of U.S. elections.

Advancing Principled Innovation

Guston's work in responsible, knowledge-based innovation touches many aspects of public policy, from decisions about direct funding to tax-credit allocations and workforce development.

"Responsible innovation is one way of asking whether the public is getting appropriate value out of those investments," he said.

It involves anticipating both the intended and unintended consequences of those investments — something we need to get much better at, he said.

As a newly minted fellow, Guston's contributions to the academy will largely depend on its agenda. The careful development and implementation of artificial intelligence will likely be a critical focus, as it's "an important issue for people interested in public administration and public policy."

In addition to AI, he's interested in advancing the public administration aspects of research universities.

"I hope that my role with NAPA will allow me to bring work around responsible innovation, and particularly its anticipatory elements, into conversation with its agenda, and to be able to learn from an important and expansive network of scholars and public leaders about how to make these ideas more actionable," he said.

To Guston's great satisfaction, he is being inducted as a NAPA Fellow alongside Anderson, who was a student in the first undergraduate course Guston taught at ASU in spring 2006.

Designing institutions for a changing world

Anderson's research focuses on questions of what makes an institution public and how those institutions can be designed to create public value. He has applied these questions to higher education and the governance of emerging technologies.

"Universities are particularly interesting institutions because they operate across the boundaries of government, markets and civil society," Anderson said. "Emerging technologies raise many of the same questions about governance, institutional design and the relationship between public and private action."

Technology is reshaping how people learn while creating opportunities for institutions to serve learners and communities at an unprecedented scale, he said.

One of the biggest challenges in public administration is its breadth, Anderson said. As the distinction between public and private becomes more complicated, critical public problems increasingly need to be addressed across sector boundaries.

“I am interested in how we design institutions that can operate across sectors, adapt to technological and social change and create public value at scale. I hope that perspective can contribute to NAPA’s work as the academy considers what public administration needs to become in the decades ahead,” he said.

Bolstering election integrity

Before joining ASU, Gates spent eight years as an elected official on the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors, where he experienced the challenges surrounding the 2020 and 2022 general elections and accusations of election fraud. His experience highlighted a troubling crisis in public administration: eroding trust in government institutions.

“When people stop trusting the basic mechanics of how their governments operate, or worse, lose faith in the election administrators who tally their votes, the social contract falls apart,” he said.

The Mechanics of Democracy Laboratory is addressing distrust, as well as mis- and disinformation, through initiatives like its AI + Elections Clinic. The lab teaches public administrators to safely navigate AI and deploy it to help overworked local election officials improve voter communication, manage elections and detect threats such as deepfakes and automated disinformation campaigns.

Gates hopes his induction as a NAPA Fellow will help expand the academy’s focus beyond the federal level and bring greater awareness to the complex challenges local officials face.

“Democracy is maintained at the county and municipal level,” he said. “Becoming a NAPA Fellow isn't a victory lap for me; it’s a platform to double down on building a safer, more resilient infrastructure for the administrators, poll workers and voters who keep this country moving forward."

ASU NAPA Fellows

ASU stands out among public research universities and includes many academy fellows on its faculty.

“Public administration is a broad field, and its challenges require us to draw on knowledge from many different areas,” said James-Christian Blockwood, president and CEO of the National Academy of Public Administration. “ASU’s faculty bring that kind of breadth to the academy, strengthening our ability to handle pressing issues and to learn from one another as we work toward a more effective and accountable government.”

ASU has more active faculty NAPA Fellows than any other public research university and is second overall in faculty currently serving as fellows, based on analysis led by Shannon Portillo, director of the School of Public Affairs and an elected NAPA Fellow.

The current and past ASU inductees reflect the range of expertise the university brings to NAPA and its commitment to putting that knowledge to work for the public, Portillo said.

“Our work with NAPA allows us to live out the ASU Charter advancing research and discovery of public value, ensuring practitioners, policymakers and communities benefit from the expertise and innovation of ASU,” she added.

In addition to Crow and Portillo, Carissa Slotterback, dean of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, is an elected fellow. Other ASU fellows include School of Public Affairs faculty Mary Feeney, Vince Micone and Thom Reilly, as well as Professor G.L.A. Harris from Thunderbird School of Global Management. ASU emeriti faculty members Barry Bozeman, Stuart Bretschneider and Karen Mossberger from the School of Public Affairs are Senior NAPA Fellows.

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Main image



From left: Derrick Anderson, Bill Gates and David Guston have been named National Academy of Public Administration Fellows in 2026. Courtesy photos