



WashU

Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

Ralph J. Nagel Dean

Position Description, November 2025

POSITION SPECIFICATION

Position	Ralph J. Nagel Dean, Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts
Organization	Washington University in St. Louis
Location	St. Louis, Missouri
Reporting Relationship	Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Websites	<u>Washington University in St. Louis</u> <u>Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts</u>

THE OPPORTUNITY

Washington University in St. Louis (WashU) invites applications and nominations for the next Ralph J. Nagel Dean of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts.

The Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis is a leader in architecture, art, and design education. The School was founded in 2006, uniting the longstanding academic units of architecture, design, and art with the University's museum to create a unique new paradigm for education. The School advances its disciplines through innovative research and creative practice, excellence in teaching, a world-class university art museum, and a deep commitment to addressing cultural, social, and environmental challenges. Through the work of its students, faculty, and alumni, the School strives to create a more just, sustainable, humane, and beautiful world.

WashU seeks an outstanding leader to serve as its next Dean of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. Reporting to the Provost and serving as the chief administrative and academic officer of the School, the Dean will build upon established and successful programs in the College of Architecture, the College of Art, and the Kemper Art Museum. The Dean will bring an inclusive and collaborative leadership style that inspires faculty, students, and staff to build a shared vision for the future, working within the School to educate students who graduate ready to deploy exceptional technical and creative skills. WashU seeks a Dean who will work to invest in its people, and promote an ethos of professionalism, service, and care. The Dean will navigate the rapidly changing landscape of higher education broadly, and help foster a strong foundation and process for innovatively conducting research and creative practice.

The Dean will provide strategic vision and operational leadership, setting priorities for the School and guiding it toward its goals of enhancing and promoting professional practice, research, community-engaged scholarship, art history, theory, and criticism, and excellence in undergraduate, graduate, and professional education with a diverse population of students, faculty, staff, and stakeholders. Supporting WashU's research mission, the Dean will work closely with directors and chairs to advance the creative and scholarly activities of the faculty, including interdisciplinary opportunities and external collaborations. The Dean is the School's chief advocate and steward, promoting its achievement and spearheading its fiscal development and fundraising activities. The Dean will also be the School's public voice, promoting innovative ideas and solidifying partnerships within WashU, locally, nationally, and internationally as a recognized leader.



Under the leadership of Chancellor Andrew Martin and Provost Mark West, the Dean will have the opportunity to capitalize on the institution's forward momentum, as well as collaborate with other WashU leaders to further develop and enhance interdisciplinary education and the creation of new partnerships. The successful candidate will be a collegial, nationally recognized, and entrepreneurial leader prepared to advance the mission of the School and to support and sustain several existing areas of innovation, including new programs currently in development and ideation.

THE SEARCH IN CONTEXT

Carmon Colangelo, the founding Ralph J. Nagel Dean of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, will conclude his deanship on June 30, 2026, after two decades of service. During Colangelo's deanship, the Sam Fox School raised the funding necessary for endowed scholarships, professorships, research initiatives, new facilities, and museum programs and collections. The School launched new academic programs, including the Master of Landscape Architecture, the Master of Fine Arts in Illustration and Visual Culture, the Master of Design for Human-Computer Interaction and Emerging Technology, and the undergraduate minor in human-computer interaction. Dean Colangelo also established the Sam Fox School's Office for Socially Engaged Practice, which fosters community connections through coursework, special projects, and faculty research.

Historic Bixby, Givens, and Steinberg Halls were joined by both Walker Hall and Anabeth and John Weil Hall — a state-of-the-art home for graduate programs in both art and architecture — and, at the front door to campus, by the significantly renovated Kemper Art Museum. This growth increased the School's total square footage for studios, classrooms, offices, fabrication labs, and exhibition spaces by more than half. Now comprising six buildings, this growth has allowed programs previously housed in satellite facilities to return to WashU's Danforth Campus for the first time in decades, strengthening the School's commitment to both disciplinary and interdisciplinary practices.

The next Dean will join the Sam Fox School at an exciting time, as the School demonstrates exceptional momentum and success across several dimensions. Highlights include student achievement, recruitment, and increased scholarships, faculty hiring and grants, and award-winning projects and exhibitions. The University's endowment has a value of \$13.4 billion. The Sam Fox School is supported by \$210 million of the endowment, along with additional investment from the University's *Gateway to Success* dedicated to supporting undergraduate financial aid initiatives. The School has a budgeted annual operating revenue of \$41 million. The next Dean will have the opportunity to advance the position of the School as one of the very top in the country and lead it through the ongoing implementation of its current three-pillar strategic plan, which emphasizes digital transformation, strengthening communities, and sustainable practices. Through this implementation process, the Dean will articulate the intellectual mission and tangible goals to continue to move the School forward, identify ways to better integrate with other parts of the University, and will emphasize and grow the School's strengths across architecture, art, design, and the museum.

WashU, through the Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, has appointed a search committee chaired by Associate Professor Cheryl Wassenaar, and has retained Dr. Josh Ward from Korn Ferry, a preeminent executive search firm, to assist in the search. All inquiries, nominations, and application materials should be directed to Dr. Ward as indicated at the end of this document.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Washington University in St. Louis

Washington University in St. Louis offers student-centered educational excellence within a world-class, R1 research-intensive university. WashU has nine academic divisions including Arts & Sciences, Brown School of Social Work, McKelvey School of Engineering, Olin Business School, Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, School of Continuing & Professional Studies, School of Law, School of Public Health, and School of Medicine. WashU educates nearly 16,000 full-time students, divided almost equally between undergraduate and graduate/professional students. Over 150 fields of study lead to bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in a broad spectrum of traditional and interdisciplinary fields.

WashU belongs to a selective cohort of universities characterized by a deep commitment to excellence in education as well as in research and scholarship. Over the last two decades, the university has invested significantly in its student enterprise, constructing new residence halls, academic buildings, and a university center, expanding student services, and maintaining its strong commitment to personalized attention and small class size. The University's undergraduate student-faculty ratio is 7:1, and over 65 percent of its classes have fewer than 20 students. Today, WashU is one of the most respected institutions in the country, and it holds a national university ranking of twentieth in the nation by *U.S. News and World Report*. WashU's FY2025 operating revenues were \$5.28 billion, and its operating expenses were \$4.94 billion.

More information about WashU can be found online [here](#).



St. Louis, Missouri

As the second-largest employer in the metropolitan area, WashU is an essential institution for St. Louis, and the city's prosperity is essential to WashU. The University has provided innovative leadership, and the entire region counts on the University as a key partner for its success. To underscore the institution's commitment to the region, Chancellor Andrew Martin announced in October 2019 the *WashU Pledge*, a bold new financial aid program that provides a free undergraduate education to incoming, full-time students from Missouri and southern Illinois whose families earn less than \$75,000 a year.

Consistently ranked among the nation's most affordable and best places to live and raise families, the St. Louis region has excellent schools and offers many opportunities to watch or participate in a wide range of art institutions, sports, recreational activities, and cultural events. St. Louis is highly accessible, and there are more free, world-class attractions in the city than any place in the U.S. outside of Washington, D.C., largely due to the area's active philanthropic community. Not far from St. Louis's urban core are the beautiful rolling hills of the Ozark Mountain region. *Forbes* has consistently recognized WashU as one of the best employers in Missouri.



THE SAM FOX SCHOOL OF DESIGN & VISUAL ARTS

The Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at WashU has evolved over its past two decades. The Visual Arts & Design Center (1997), subsequently named the Sam Fox Arts Center (2002), was envisioned as a hub for interdisciplinary programs. The vision grew to encompass the launch of a new school at WashU. In January 2005, Chancellor Mark Wrighton announced the creation of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, uniting the academic units of Art and Architecture with the University Museum under the leadership of an inaugural dean.

The School offers rigorous programs in architecture, art, and design while drawing from the resources of a top-tier research institution. The School offers 15 unique degree programs for both graduate and undergraduate students, supplemented by a number of creative research centers, including Island Press and the Office for Socially Engaged Practice. The School has an enrollment



of over 750 students and draws on the expertise of over 65 full-time faculty and over 50 visiting and part-time faculty who expand the School's connections to contemporary global practice. Students work closely with distinguished faculty, utilizing expansive studios and spaces for making.

The Sam Fox School complex is made up of six buildings: the stately, Beaux Arts-era William K. Bixby Hall (1926) and Joseph B. Givens Hall (1932); the modernist pavilion Mark C. Steinberg Hall (1960); the limestone-clad Earl E. and Myrtle E. Walker Hall and Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum (both 2006); and the beautiful contemporary addition of Anabeth and John Weil Hall (2019). The improvement, expansion, and construction of new facilities for this collaborative unit have been significant accomplishments.

The School is named after the late Sam Fox, BSBA '51, who was integral in the realization of this collaborative vision. One of St. Louis' most active philanthropic leaders, he was also one of the staunchest supporters of WashU. He was founder, chairman, and chief executive officer of Harbour Group, Ltd., which acquires and builds companies for long-term investment. He and his wife, Marilyn, received many awards for their philanthropy, including the 2004 Excellence in Philanthropy award from the St. Louis Arts and Education Council.

College of Architecture and Graduate School of Architecture & Urban Design

Founded in 1910 as one of the 10 original members of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, the College of Architecture—formerly the School of Architecture—has a distinguished legacy of design excellence and innovation. The College of Architecture and Graduate School of Architecture & Urban Design emphasize environmental ethics, social responsibility, historical and global perspectives, and technological fluency. The College offers undergraduate degrees in architecture and graduate programs, including the Master of Architecture, Master of Landscape Architecture, Master of Urban Design, and Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design. Students learn from exceptional faculty in world-class studio and fabrication facilities and collaborate across disciplines linking architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, and related fields throughout the university. More information about the College of Architecture can be found online [here](#).

College of Art and Graduate School of Art

Formerly the School of Art, the College of Art was founded in 1879 as the first professional, university-affiliated art school in the United States. It is the only art school to have borne a major metropolitan art museum—the Saint Louis Art Museum. The College of Art and Graduate School of Art offer rigorous programs in undergraduate studio art (painting, printmaking, photography, sculpture and time-based media); and design (graphic design, interaction design, illustration and fashion); and in three graduate level programs (visual art, illustration and visual culture, and human-computer interaction). These programs draw upon our experienced faculty and impressive maker spaces, while linking to expertise and resources across the university. More information about the College of Art can be found online [here](#).

The Kemper Art Museum

Formerly the Washington University Gallery of Art, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum was founded in 1881 as one of the oldest art museums in the United States. The Kemper Art Museum is one of the nation's leading university art museums. As a teaching museum within a major research university, it serves as a center of cultural and intellectual life on campus and in St. Louis. Its mission is to collect significant modern and contemporary art and preserve its collection for current and future generations; provide excellence in art historical research, exhibition, and object-based learning; and engage the campus population, its visitors and alumni, the St. Louis region,



and the global art community. More information about the Kemper Art Museum can be found online [here](#).

To learn more about the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, please visit the following websites:

- [Faculty](#)
- [Education and Academic Programs](#)
- [Innovation and Collaborations](#)
- [Campus and Facilities](#)
- [Community, Access, and Well-Being](#)
- [2022-2032 Strategic Plan](#)
- [Latest Annual Report](#)
- [Leadership Team](#)



KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Reporting to the Provost, the Dean is the chief administrative and academic officer of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. The Dean must be an outstanding practitioner-scholar with demonstrated leadership experience and a detailed understanding of the current challenges and opportunities impacting the fields within the School. The Dean must be able to successfully work with leadership, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders on the local, state, regional, national, and international stage to advocate for and support every program within the School's portfolio.



The Dean must also forge relationships for future partnerships and innovation. The ideal candidate will be an experienced, inclusive, and collaborative leader who is committed to guiding the School to the next level of excellence. The successful candidate will bring the experience necessary to represent the School eloquently and compellingly to both internal and external constituencies, enhancing the visibility and impact of its work while increasing resources and funding.

The Dean's primary responsibilities and expectations for leadership include:

- Provide leadership to the School in all academic matters, including teaching, curricular, and research initiatives, as well as faculty recruitment and retention, to ensure the School's continued academic distinction
- Support high-quality and innovative educational opportunities to facilitate the transition from student to professional
- Support the School's mandate to educate the highest caliber of learners, leaders, and researchers, equipping them to effectively enrich the lives of others
- Support the chairs and directors to oversee reaccreditation processes
- Promote professionalism and high ethical standards with an understanding of cultural humility and responsiveness and social accountability to the community
- Support collaborations to further identify and develop robust cross-campus interdisciplinary partnerships, including with engineering, the humanities, social sciences, and public health
- Support the preservation of the art collection and its development, art historical scholarship, and the publications and educational activities of the art museum
- Provide the necessary stewardship of the School's fiscal and human resources to ensure successful execution of its primary missions, ensuring financial security for the School and additional funding for expanded material and human resources, equipment, faculty opportunities, student scholarships, and key strategic initiatives
- Support the School's efforts to obtain foundation and other extramural awards
- Ensure that the School continues to be a strong collaborator with local and regional communities
- Foster alumni recognition and participation in the growth of the School, as well as expand the School's philanthropic base, recognition, and respect
- Serve as principal advocate and spokesperson for the School within the WashU community and to local, national, and international constituencies in the public and private sectors
- Interpret and respond to local, national, and international events that affect the School

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE / PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Candidates must have leadership experience in academic instruction, scholarly accomplishment, and personnel and resources management. Competitive candidates will also demonstrate the skills necessary to lead faculty, staff, and students across the many diverse disciplines, professions, and programs within the School. Competitive candidates will have a variety of professional experience and personal qualifications, including the following:

- A kind, energetic leadership style that invites collaboration, encourages teamwork, welcomes diverse perspectives, and values transparency



- A deep intellectual understanding of the variety of disciplines represented within the School and the experience necessary to support them
- The ability to communicate and work cooperatively with students, faculty, staff, alumni, educators, and community leaders as partners to advance the School's and University's research, teaching, engagement, outreach, and service missions
- A track record of administrative achievement that gives strong evidence of capacity to manage a complex School, including its budget, workforce, and programs
- The skills to navigate the organizational, political, and fiscal realities of a major university
- The capacity to represent the School compellingly to external constituencies, enhancing the visibility and impact of its work
- A demonstrated commitment and understanding of supporting mutually beneficial community partnerships
- The ability to imagine and explore new possibilities, while also supporting existing initiatives currently in development within the School
- The ability to foster and support extramural awards and scholarship at the faculty and student levels, including disciplinary, interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration
- Demonstrated success as an educator with the ability to inspire and engage students, building genuine rapport and a lasting connection with the School's future alumni
- Demonstrated capability to lead professional and support staff effectively, including hiring, motivating, training, developing, and evaluating job performance
- The ability to recruit and retain highly desirable research and instructional faculty in a competitive environment
- Strong written, oral, and interpersonal skills with the ability to communicate the School's points of pride, needs, plans, and programs effectively to various constituents

EDUCATION, RANK, AND TENURE REQUIREMENTS

The Dean must have a relevant terminal degree from an accredited institution. Candidates must also have a distinguished track record of teaching, research, service, and community engagement that is commensurate with appointment to the rank of full professor and eligibility for tenure at Washington University in St. Louis.

NOMINATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Washington University in St. Louis has retained the services of Dr. Josh Ward at the executive search firm Korn Ferry. Applicants should submit the following two documents (in two separate PDFs):

1. An up-to-date and detailed *curriculum vitae*.
2. A brief (2-4 pages) letter of interest describing why you are interested in the role of the Ralph J. Nagel Dean of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis, why you would be successful based on your professional experience, and why now is a good time for you to consider this opportunity.

For priority consideration, please submit all application materials by **January 15, 2026**. It is anticipated that the Dean will take up the position no later than summer 2026. The two PDF documents should be sent directly to Dr. Josh Ward at Josh.Ward@KornFerry.com.



KORN FERRY CONTACT

Josh Ward, PhD, MPhil
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EEO Statement: Washington University in St. Louis is committed to the principles and practices of equal employment opportunity and especially encourages applications by those from underrepresented groups. It is the University's policy to provide equal opportunity and access to persons in all job titles without regard to race, ethnicity, color, national origin, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, protected veteran status, or genetic information.