Duke’s professors are inspiring teachers, motivating mentors, and leading scholars and researchers. Recruiting and retaining renowned faculty is essential to maintaining Duke’s excellence.

Faculty quality is at the core of a university’s academic reputation. Duke is fortunate to have a world-class faculty—including many recognized with honors like Guggenheim Fellowships, MacArthur Fellowships, Sloan Awards, and the Carnegie Scholars designation, as well as elections to the National Academy of Sciences.

But professors who shine in both the classroom and in their scholarly work are in tremendous demand worldwide, creating a competitive environment for prestigious universities that makes faculty recruitment and retention a challenging, high-stakes endeavor.

By supporting outstanding faculty through the Duke Forward campaign, alumni and friends can help ensure that the university’s professors are true leaders in their fields and that our students receive a relevant and top-quality education.
WHAT IT TAKES TO LIGHT A SPARK

Each time Psychology and Neuroscience Professor Christina Williams teaches her Introduction to the Biological Basis of Behavior course, she does it a little differently—asking students to whip out cell phones to answer questions online or turning a typical research paper assignment into a collaborative book-writing project. “The thrill of teaching has to do with how students begin to incorporate knowledge into their own thinking and even develop ways of thinking that they didn’t have before,” says Williams, who was awarded the David and Janet Vaughan Brooks Award for teaching.

That commitment to hands-on, active learning extends to Williams’ lab, where undergraduates work with her research team investigating the way nutrients and hormones affect brain and memory function from early development on.

“It’s a chance for them to learn the soup-to-nuts of research, but they also make a significant contribution to our lab,” she says, noting that it’s not uncommon for Duke faculty to publish papers with undergraduates. “One of the things that sets Duke apart is that there are so many research-active students here. They’re really hungry to find those opportunities to conduct substantive research, and working with them adds something valuable to our experience as faculty.”

Endowed Professorships

Our professors are among the most respected and productive in the world, and they drive the most exciting things happening at Duke. They pioneer new fields of study, create opportunities for students to test their knowledge, inspire students to explore and discover, and conduct research of global importance.

Endowed chairs have been key to hiring and retaining such stellar faculty and will be critical to the success of Duke Forward. Donors who support endowed faculty positions not only honor remarkable academic leaders, but also support important scholarly work and make a lasting investment in Duke’s future. A permanent funding source ensures that, for generations to come, our students will have opportunities to connect with great thinkers and mentors.

YOUR GIFT OF $2.5 MILLION can endow a distinguished faculty chair, helping the university recruit and retain outstanding faculty to enrich Duke’s academic programs and provide mentors for our students.

YOUR GIFT OF $1.5 MILLION can create an endowed assistant/associate professorship fund to help us hire rising stars, or an endowed professorship of practice for faculty who bring distinguished records of experience outside the academy into the classroom.

YOUR GIFT OF $1 MILLION can endow a visiting professorship to support expert practitioners and visiting scholars who bring new experiences to the Duke community, enhancing the intellectual atmosphere of campus and the education of our students.

“A good lecture is worth its weight in gold, but it’s not enough to light a spark in students.”

Professor Christina Williams
Teaching Innovation Funds

Duke’s outstanding teachers don’t educate students by reading last year’s lecture notes from a podium. They innovate the curriculum, stress critical thinking, and connect work in one discipline with conversations in another. These faculty seek ways they can help students take the educational experience beyond the classroom walls—ways like the Humanities Laboratories, a new program housed within the Franklin Humanities Institute. These labs provide a catalyst for undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty to collaborate and apply their humanities skills to the kinds of real-world problems normally associated with other fields. Teams working in the Haiti Lab, for instance, tracked the flow of earthquake reconstruction funds from the U.S. to Haiti and collaborated with a renowned Haitian-born artist to create an original project exploring themes related to disaster recovery.

Duke also launched the Winter Forum, an annual conference that gives students an intensive experience working with faculty and outside experts to explore multiple dimensions of a complex global problem, like the green economy or pandemics. Programs like DukeImmerse let students dig even deeper into an area of interest by structuring an entire semester around a cluster of courses and hands-on projects related to a single theme, like civil rights.

Private support during the campaign can help innovative faculty create opportunities—like forums, field trips, visits from guest lecturers, and exposure to new technologies—that inspire students to truly engage with the content they’re studying. For students, these “extras” may well be the essence of what makes a Duke education extraordinary.

Mohamed Noor, the Earl D. McLean Professor and Associate Chair of Biology, has helped to revamp the biology curriculum at Duke to make even large introductory courses more interactive, improving learning outcomes for students. Faculty in fields ranging from art history to chemistry are creating and sharing exciting new approaches to engaging students. For example, using simple clicker technology in a large class lets a professor test students’ understanding of course material in real time, and then adjust the lecture content and encourage small group discussions to close any gaps.

YOUR GIFT OF $100,000 OR MORE can create an endowment to support groundbreaking research and interdisciplinary efforts that cross academic boundaries.
Research That Makes a Difference

In labs and offices across campus, Duke professors conduct research that shapes our understanding of the world and provides solutions to complex problems. Our faculty are generous with their discoveries, contributing to international conversations and sharing their expertise with peers in education, government, and industry. For example, evolutionary anthropologist Brian Hare is advancing our understanding of what it means to be human by exploring how humans, dogs, and primates think and solve problems; and psychologist Stephen Mitroff is studying how multitasking affects us when we drive a car.

Yet research funding can be a challenge to come by, particularly during a project’s critical start-up phase. Institutional and private support are the only possible sources of research funding in some academic fields. In others, national organizations will fund projects only after initial research generates sound data, making it necessary for faculty to find other funding sources for preliminary research. Private support can provide vital fuel for faculty research, creating learning opportunities for students and revealing new discoveries and innovations for society.

YOUR GIFT OF $100,000 OR MORE can provide endowment support for research in a school, department, or interdisciplinary area of scholarship.