



Susan Cates

Susan Cates is the co-founder and managing partner of Leeds Illuminate, a growth equity fund investing in education and workforce development. She has over 25 years of experience in private equity, investment banking, and education leadership. Prior to joining Leeds, Ms. Cates was chief operating officer at 2U, Inc., where she oversaw all product and service delivery operations. She was a founding team member of ThinkEquity Partners, where she led the education banking vertical, and a partner at Best Associates, where she led investments in education platforms across the U.S. and Latin America. Ms. Cates served as president of executive development at the UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School and led the creation and growth of the school's groundbreaking online MBA program, MBA@UNC. She began her career as an investment banker at Wachovia Bank and Merrill Lynch.

John Comly

John Comly is a partner at Falfurrias Management Partners, where he helps lead Falfurrias Growth Partners and supports investments in software and services businesses across multiple industries. He brings more than two decades of experience as an operator, investor, and board member, with a particular focus on technology-enabled and mission-driven growth companies serving education, workforce development, technology, services, and media. From 2017 through 2025, Mr. Comly served as president and chief executive officer of Certus (formerly American Safety Council), a leading online vocational training and credentialing platform. Under his leadership, the organization grew to support more than 3.4 million learners annually through a diverse portfolio of online education, certification, and workforce training programs serving individuals, enterprises, and government-sponsored initiatives. He led a team of approximately 400 employees dedicated to expanding access to lifelong learning and career advancement and was consistently recognized as a Great Place to Work®. During his tenure, Mr. Comly guided the company through a period of rapid growth and transformation, including significant investment in technology, multiple strategically aligned acquisitions, and a successful private equity-backed recapitalization with Ridgemont Equity Partners in 2021 — recognized as the Middle Market Private Equity Deal of the Year. Mr. Comly is a graduate of Washington & Lee University, with a BA in economics.

Chancellor Karrie G. Dixon

Dr. Karrie Dixon is the first woman to serve as chancellor at two UNC System institutions. She was named the 13th chancellor of North Carolina Central University on June 6, 2024, and began her appointment on July 1, 2024. Before her current appointment, Dr. Dixon served as the 12th chief executive officer and seventh chancellor of Elizabeth City State University, having served as the interim chancellor from April 9, 2018, after having played a crucial role as co-lead on the ECSU New Directions Phase 2 Operational Team since early 2017. During her tenure as vice president for Academic and Student Affairs for the UNC System, she played a crucial role in shaping policy and guiding best practices within academic and student affairs while spearheading initiatives to improve student success, increase access and enrollment, and boost retention and graduation rates. Her collaborative efforts fostered innovative partnerships between the UNC System, the NC Community

College System, independent colleges and universities, and the NC Department of Public Instruction, driving significant policy changes and projects that have profoundly impacted students across the University of North Carolina System and beyond. Under her leadership, statewide programs such as the College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC) Pathways and the federally funded NC State Approving Agency were established. Dr. Dixon has a bachelor's degree from North Carolina State University, a master's degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and a doctorate from North Carolina State University.

Chancellor Philip Rogers

Dr. Philip G. Rogers leads East Carolina University, a public university focused on student success, public service, and regional transformation. Since becoming chancellor in 2021, Dr. Rogers has focused on innovation and the success of all learners — from student return on investment and institutional costs to addressing the evolving market demand for programs and credentials. Prior to his appointment as chancellor, Dr. Rogers was senior vice president for learning and engagement at the American Council on Education, where he helped institutions navigate complex challenges facing the global higher education landscape. He was responsible for ACE's academic, research, and innovation strategy, overseeing five separate divisions including advancement and fundraising, education attainment and academic innovation, global engagement and internationalization, leadership and professional learning, and research. His appointment as chancellor was a homecoming for Dr. Rogers, who first came to ECU as a policy analyst in 2007 and served as chief of staff from 2008 to 2013. As chief of staff, he was responsible for external relations for the university, including government relations, marketing and communications, public service, and policy development. Under Dr. Rogers' leadership, the university earned the prestigious Research 1 (R1) designation in 2025, placing ECU among five percent of institutions in the nation recognized for having the highest level of research activity. Also, Dr. Rogers led the university in an historic effort to clinically integrate eastern North Carolina's regional health care system and ECU's Brody School of Medicine under a new, shared brand as ECU Health. He earned his doctorate in higher education management with distinction from the University of Pennsylvania, a master's degree in public administration from UNC-Chapel Hill, and a bachelor's degree in communications from Wake Forest University.