

45TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON THE

FIRST-YEAR

EXPERIENCE

Seattle, Washington
February 15-18, 2026



NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA



Dear Conference Delegates,

On behalf of our team at the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, we are thrilled to welcome you to Seattle, Washington, for the 45th Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience! Whether you are a longtime participant or joining us for the first time, we are delighted to have you as part of this international network of educators and advocates committed to student success.

Seattle is a city that inspires innovation and connection—qualities that resonate deeply with the mission of this conference. Known for its breathtaking views of Puget Sound and the Cascade Mountains, its vibrant arts scene, and its role as a hub for technology and forward-thinking ideas, Seattle offers the perfect backdrop for our time together. We hope you'll take a moment to enjoy the city's iconic landmarks, from Pike Place Market to the Space Needle, and let the spirit of creativity and collaboration fuel your experience here. And, you'll never be far from a great cup of coffee to keep your energy high and your ideas flowing!

This year marks an exciting milestone for the Center: we have recently welcomed the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS) into the NRC family. We are honored to bring together two communities dedicated to student transitions and to celebrate the work of transfer champions alongside our ongoing commitment to first-year success. Please join us in extending a warm welcome to our NISTS colleagues as we explore new opportunities for shared learning and partnership.

To that end, our team has curated an outstanding program of preconference workshops, keynote and plenary sessions, featured presentations, and networking opportunities designed to inform, engage, and inspire. We encourage you to take full advantage of these sessions and the many informal opportunities to connect with colleagues, share insights, and build relationships that will strengthen your practice and your professional network.

Delegates at this year's conference represent forty-nine states, Washington, D.C., and institutions from around the globe, including Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates. While we come from diverse contexts, we are united in our commitment to supporting students through critical transitions and ensuring their success. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us or stop by the registration desk if you have any questions or need assistance. We look forward to meeting you, learning with you, and continuing this important work together.

Here's to a conference filled with discovery, collaboration, and inspiration—welcome to Seattle!

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen J. Lehman".

Kathleen (Kate) J. Lehman
Executive Director
National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

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CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 15, 2026

7:30 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.	Conference Registration
8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Preconference Workshops (additional registration fee)
5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.	Opening Session with Keynote Address— José Antonio Bowen
7:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.	Opening Reception

MONDAY | FEBRUARY 16, 2026

7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Conference Registration
8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	Primer for First-Time Attendees
9:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Conference Sessions
1:45 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.	Conference Sessions

TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 17, 2026

7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Conference Registration
8:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Conference Sessions
10:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon	Keynote Address— Amber Williams
1:30 p.m. – 5:35 p.m.	Conference Sessions

WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 18, 2026

7:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
7:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.	Conference Registration
8:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Conference Sessions
10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.	Closing Session— Katharine Pei

THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® is a service mark of the University of South Carolina. A license may be granted to registered conference attendees and others upon written request to use the term THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® in association with educational programmatic approaches to enhance the first year developed as a result of participation in this conference series. This license is not transferable and does not apply to the use of the service mark in any other programs or on any other literature without the written approval of the University of South Carolina.

The University of South Carolina provides equal opportunity and affirmative action in education and employment for all qualified persons regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or veteran status. The University of South Carolina System has designated as the ADA Title II, Section 504 and Title IX coordinator the Executive Assistant to the President for Equal Opportunity Programs. The Office of the Executive Assistant to the President is located 1600 Hampton Street Annex, Columbia, South Carolina; Telephone (803) 777-3854.

WELCOME

CORE COMMITMENTS

Student Transitions: Student transitions such as the first year of college, sophomore year, transfer experience, degree completion, and new graduate student experiences are critical junctures in the educational pipeline and unique opportunities for post-secondary student learning and development. We strive to set a standard of excellence for supporting student transitions and facilitating educational success for a diversity of students in the 21st century.

Connection Between Research and Practice: We believe that good practice in higher education must rely upon a foundation of high-quality research. Conversely, good research draws from and informs practices in our field. As such, the work of the National Resource Center advances and supports both scholarly practice and applied research.

Inclusion: We strive to create a supportive and professional environment where a diversity of viewpoints are recognized and considered in the ongoing dialogue on student transitions. One of the greatest strengths of the first-year experience and students in transition movement is its ability to cut across traditional boundaries in higher education and involve professionals from multiple sectors of education, institutional roles, and disciplinary perspectives as well as from a variety of personal backgrounds, institutional environments, and educational experiences.

Collaboration: Partnership and collaboration draw from the interdisciplinary nature of higher education, communicate an ongoing commitment to inclusion, and, ultimately, enhance the success of our efforts to support student transitions. The National Resource Center models effective collaboration and aims to create intentional and integrative connections between colleagues, units, organizations, systems, educational sectors, regions, and countries in support of student transition and success.

Lifelong Learning: We believe that all educators continue to be lifelong learners. We support a climate of intellectual curiosity and provide the tools and media to pursue professional development and an ongoing process of inquiry, exploration, and discovery.



WELCOME TO THE 45TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

This conference is designed with a setting and structure intended to be as professionally enriching as it is individually pleasurable. We hope this will be a rewarding conference for you.

GOALS OF THE CONFERENCE

The primary goal of the Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience® is to assist educators and administrators in institutions of higher education in the planning, implementing, and refining of programs designed to enhance the first-year experience. The conference aims to promote a comprehensive and engaging community open to the diversity of ideas, in which all delegates are given the opportunity and resources to grow personally and professionally.

CONFERENCE SPONSOR

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina has as its mission to support and advance efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education. The Center achieves this mission by providing opportunities for the exchange of practical and theory-based information and ideas through the convening of conferences, online courses, and workshops; publishing monographs, a peer-reviewed journal, a newsletter, guides, and books; generating and supporting research and scholarship; hosting visiting scholars; and administering a web site and electronic listservs..

GOALS OF THE CONFERENCE

Chartered in 1801 as South Carolina College, the University of South Carolina, Columbia remains on its original site in the state capital. The University of South Carolina is a publicly-assisted, coeducational institution dedicated to the entire state of South Carolina. The primary mission of the University of South Carolina, a multi-campus public institution, is the education of the state's diverse citizens through teaching, research and creative activity, and service. The University is committed to providing its students with the highest-quality education, including the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for success and responsible citizenship in a complex and changing world.

Registration Information

The conference Registration and information desk is located on the Level Three; Foyer. The staff of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition will be available to assist you throughout the conference.

Hotel Map

A floor plan of the meeting rooms at the Hyatt Regency Seattle are in Events App.

National Resource Center Publications

We are pleased to announce that publications from the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition are being distributed by Stylus. Limited numbers of select publications will be available for sale during the conference. Major credit cards, cash, and checks are accepted. Please visit the Stylus booth (Booth 15 in Vendor Hall) to browse our most popular titles..

Philanthropy Project

Wellness Café and Food Pantry at Seattle University

The Seattle University Wellness Café and Food Pantry is dedicated to “feeding minds and fueling hope.” Each week, our pantry supports 2% of our students, and 6% annually. Through partnerships with the campus Edible Garden and our dining vendor, our award-winning food recovery program provides over 2,100 frozen meals each year to student lounges across campus. Together, with your support, we can create a campus where every student can learn and succeed without worrying about their next meal.



Amazon Store



Donate Here!

Pencil Project

As in years past, The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition encourages you to participate in our on-going outreach project to encourage low-income K-12 school students to consider higher education in their future. The conference organizers invite all conference participants to bring at least one new pencil (bring as many as you like) with your college or university name or logo to the conference registration desk so they can be distributed to low-income students in the host city or in Columbia, South Carolina. We hope you will participate in this effort.

Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate Sessions



2026 Advocate Past Advocate

Several current and past recipients of the Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate award are presenting sessions at this conference. These sessions will be designated with the special symbols seen above.



Excellence in Teaching First-Year Seminars Award



2026 Award Recipient Past Recipient

Current and past recipients of the Excellence in Teaching First-Year Seminars award are presenting sessions at this conference. These sessions will be designated with the special symbols seen above.



International Sessions



Sessions being presented by those representing countries other than the United States of America are designated by the globe symbol.

Nametag Ribbons

Black - Volunteer

Session Evaluations

Session evaluations can be completed through the Acelevents app.

Conference Evaluations

An Overall Conference Evaluation Form will be sent to you via Anthology after the conference. When you return to your campus, please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation. The information you provide is used to evaluate the conference and improve future conferences; therefore, your comments are extremely important. The link to this evaluation form will be emailed out following the conference.

Internet Access

Wireless internet access is complimentary in the guest rooms for conference attendees. Wireless internet access is also available in the conference meeting space.

Network Name:

HYATT_MEETING

Password:

NRC2026

GENERAL

find us on **ACCELEVENTS**

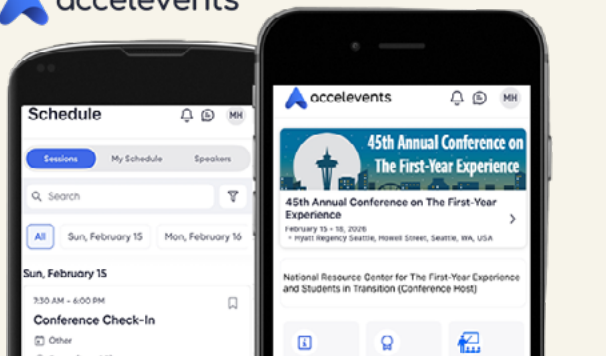
In order to develop your personal schedule for the conference, download the Acelevents app on your iOS or Android device. Open Acelevents, select “45th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience”, click “Enter Event”, and click on “Schedule” at the bottom of the screen. Once a session is selected, click the session card, then tap the calendar icon (top right-hand corner) to export it as an invite to your work/personal calendar it will be loaded into the “My Schedule” icon on the main menu page.



IOS APP



ANDROID APP



SESSION FORMATS

The sessions presented at this conference are in six formats. The alpha designation with the session numbers indicates the session type.

Concurrent Sessions

Concurrent sessions are either 60-minutes or 20-minutes. 60-minute sessions allow for 40 to 45 minutes of formal presentation with 15 to 20 minutes of discussion. 20-minute sessions allow presenters the opportunity to interact with attendees in a fast-paced manner and typically include 10-15 minutes of presentation and 5-10 minutes of questions and interaction. There are four types of concurrent sessions.

(CR) Research – These sessions are appropriate for presentations of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method studies on first-year students’ transition, learning, development, performance, retention, and other relevant issues.

(CT) Trends & Issues – These sessions address emerging trends, current issues, and broad concepts.

(CI) Assessed Institutional Initiative – These sessions are appropriate for presentations addressing and highlighting specific programs/initiatives that have been instituted, assessed, and shown to be successful on a particular campus.

(CP) Assessed Programmatic Approaches – These sessions present on a specific programmatic approach at a single institution.

(FD) Facilitated Discussions

These sessions promote open discussion around a significant or major issue or theme. Rather than making a formal presentation, session facilitators will encourage and maintain substantive discussion.

(V) Vendor Presentations

These sessions provide vendors with the opportunity to network with conference participants in a formal setting providing information on publications, products, or services.

Poster Sessions

Poster sessions are presented in the form of an exhibit and delivered primarily through the use of visual display and handout materials. Numerous poster sessions will be scheduled concurrently, and conference delegates will be free to move from one poster session to another.

(PR) Research Findings – This type of poster session presents research results focused on a specific topic or program.

(PP) Assessed Programmatic Approaches– This type of poster session presents on a specific programmatic approach at a single institution.

(PI) Assessed Institutional Initiatives – These posters address and highlight specific programs/initiatives that have been instituted, assessed, and shown to be successful on a particular campus.

PROPOSAL REVIEWERS

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition would like to thank everyone who served as a proposal reviewer. The participation of our reviewers is instrumental in the success of this conference.

To view a full list of proposal reviewers, visit our website sc.edu/fye.

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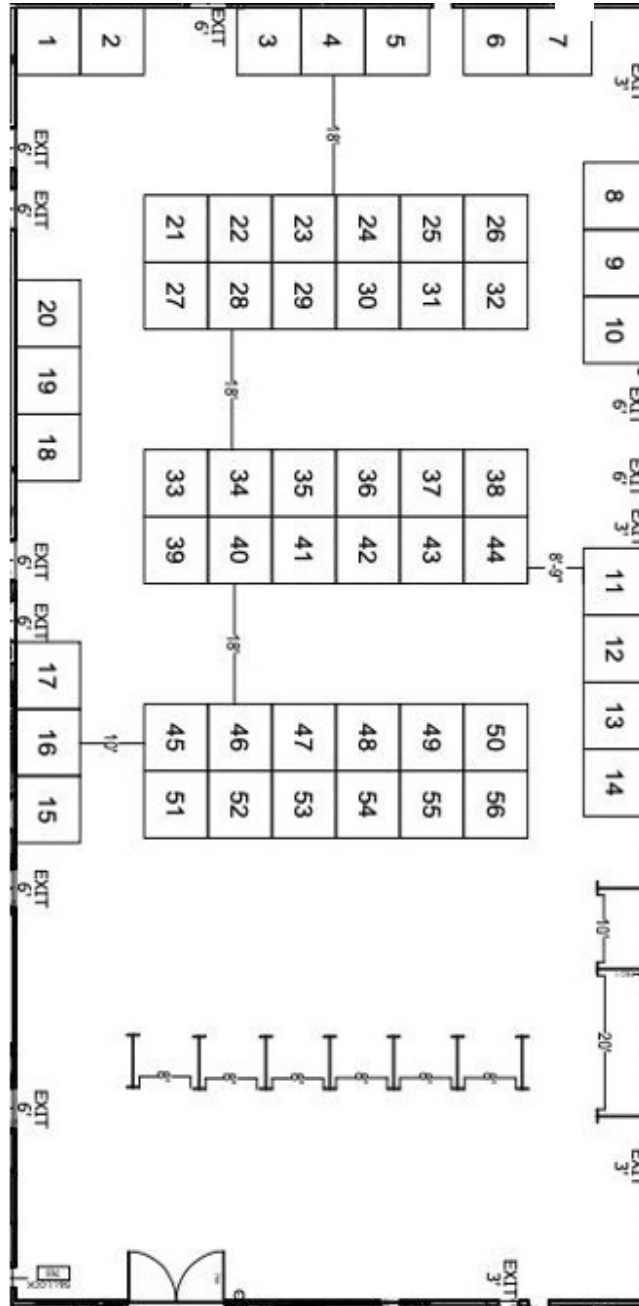
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

VENDORS AND SPONSORS

Vendors

Conference participants are invited to visit commercial and non-profit vendors showcasing their products and services for enhancing The First-Year Experience. Vendors are located in Regency Ballroom; Seventh Floor.

Entrance



Entrance

Vendor Hall Schedule

You will have the opportunity to visit with vendors during continental breakfasts, refreshment breaks, and the opening reception in addition to the vendor hall hours below:

Sunday, February 15, 2026

7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Monday, February 16, 2026

7:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

12:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 17, 2026

7:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon

Vendors

Conference participants are invited to visit commercial and non-profit vendors showcasing their products and services for enhancing The First-Year Experience. Vendors are located in Regency Ballroom; Seventh Floor.

American Psychological Association	1	Penguin Random House Education	33 & 34
Bedford St. Martin's/Macmillan Learning	2	Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau	35
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VENDORS AND SPONSORS

Conference participants are invited to visit commercial and non-profit vendors showcasing their products and services for enhancing the First-Year Experience.



MentorPRO

MentorPRO connects students with mentors who act as personal navigators, providing proactive support and guidance during the transition to and through higher education. Built on research demonstrating the importance of goal-focused mentorships, MentorPRO connects students to personalized resources, while receiving supportive guidance from a mentor through an all-in-one secure platform.



National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is the trusted expert, internationally recognized leader, and clearinghouse for scholarship, policy, and best practice for all postsecondary student transitions.



Innovative Educators

Innovative Educators partners with colleges and universities to improve student success, retention, and engagement. For over 20 years, we have supported higher education professionals with tools and resources that help students thrive—from orientation and first-year experience programs to academic success, wellness, and professional development initiatives. Our platforms provide flexible, online solutions designed to meet the evolving needs of today's learners while empowering institutions to foster inclusive, student-centered communities.

Contact Fred Scott: fred@ieinfo.org



Bedford St. Martin's/Macmillan Learning

Macmillan Learning improves lives through learning. We provide educators with tailored solutions designed to inspire curiosity, foster a sense of belonging, and support progress towards student and educator goals. Learn more: <http://www.macmillanlearning.com>.



Independent Publishers Caucus

The Independent Publishers Caucus (IPC) is a collective of small presses championing diverse voices and alternative publishing. We provide opportunities to bring booksellers, librarians, academics, and every day readers into contact with our member presses to foster more robust relationships across the book loving world.



HarperCollins Publishers

HarperCollins Publishers, the second-largest consumer book publisher in the world, has been educating, entertaining, and inspiring generations of readers for more than 200 years. The Academic Marketing Department is devoted to providing HarperCollins titles and instructor resources for educator use. You can visit harperacademic.com any time for more information.



Hachette Academic

Hachette Academic is part of Hachette Book Group, a leading publisher of award-winning books, authors, and imprints with a strong commitment to diversity. We offer a range of thought-provoking books to inspire and engage students, whether its fiction that fits a particular theme or nonfiction that stimulates discussion across disciplines.



Gardner Institute

The Gardner Institute partners with institutions, philanthropies, organizations, and systems to lead educational innovation leading to long-term transformation. Utilizing analysis, holistic planning, and targeted interventions, we empower institutions, faculty, and staff to ensure that every student can graduate. With significant outcomes correlated with our work, our initiatives drive meaningful change.



DIA Higher Education Collaborators

DIA Higher Education Collaborators helps colleges and universities adopt a holistic approach to student success. Through our platform, ISSAQ, we offer assessment, reporting, and training services that not only gather data, but help organize your institution around a meaningful student success strategy.



Association for the Study of Higher Education
The Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) is a scholarly association based in the United States, dedicated to higher education as a field of study.



Catharsis Productions
Catharsis Productions delivers research-informed, interactive trainings that confront sexual violence, harassment, bias, and related social issues with accessibility, humor, and insight. Through in-person programs or conversational online modules, we help campuses spark honest conversations, shift behaviors, and build safer, more inclusive environments where people can learn, work, and thrive.



E2E Advising LLC
E2E Advising empowers colleges and universities to improve student success through data-driven strategies and holistic advising. Its Achieve Platform unifies academic planning, progress tracking, and proactive alerts, giving students clarity on their path while equipping advisors with actionable insights to support equitable, efficient, and goal-aligned degree completion.



Franklin Covey Education
For nearly four decades, FranklinCovey Education has been a trusted partner for colleges and universities. Our courses, services, and technology help improve campus-wide initiatives related to learning and development, execution, and student success. Our mission is to enable greatness in administrators, staff, faculty, and students.



Broadview Press
Broadview Press is an independent publisher in the humanities and social sciences established in 1985..



FIE: Foundation for International Education
FIE has over 15 years of experience in the first-year study abroad arena and is committed to the development of creative learning environments. This commitment is driven by the belief that interaction between people of diverse cultures is the base upon which empathy among nations is built.



EdOdyssey
EdOdyssey is a purpose-driven study abroad and educational travel organization that partners with universities and colleges to design immersive, high-impact programs. From domestic and international First-Year Experiences to custom faculty-led travel, EdOdyssey helps students connect with people, place, and purpose through transformative learning experiences.



E.I. Games
E.I. Games creates award-winning gamified learning experiences that build emotional intelligence, empathy, and real-world skills for students and professionals worldwide. Our mission is to ensure every student has the support and resources they need to thrive in college. We understand that education is not just about academic achievement but also about personal growth and empowerment.



American Psychological Association
The American Psychological Association publishes APA Scholarly and Professional titles as well as our LifeTools nonfiction imprint and APA Style books, including the bestselling Publication Manual. Visit apabooks.org and apastyle.org for more information.

VENDORS AND SPONSORS



Ingram Academic & Professional

Ingram Academic & Professional exhibits on behalf of the 300+ independent presses that are distributed by Ingram Content Group. Come browse our First-Year and Common Reading Titles.



Kendall Hunt Publishing Company

Kendall Hunt is a premier publisher in both digital and print media with over 80 years of experience and over 9,000 titles. We combine service, innovation, and our pledge of quality to provide you with advantages that are unparalleled in educational publishing.



International Center for Supplemental Instruction

Created at UMKC in 1973, Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a non-remedial academic support program that targets high-risk courses rather than high-risk students. SI targets historically difficult courses by teaching students how to integrate course content with reasoning and study skills to increase their performance. The International Center for Supplemental Instruction® (ICSI) was established in 2003 at UMKC and has continued its national and international leadership around SI principles, program design, and model dissemination, including the implementation of SI Program Accreditation in 2016.



McGraw Hill

McGraw Hill is a leading global provider of education solutions for preK-12, higher education and professional learning. Our vision is to empower every educator to engage their students with personalized learning experiences that enrich the unique ways they learn, teach and grow.



Intuit for Education

Intuit for Education is a free and flexible financial literacy program for students that offers real-world tools to get them excited to learn and build their financial confidence.



Money Habitudes

Money Habitudes offers engaging tools that help students explore how their attitudes and behaviors influence financial decisions. Through the Money Habitudes Assessment, available online and as a card game, professors can lead meaningful, nonjudgmental discussions about money, values, and decision making while fostering financial awareness and confidence in students.



Launch

LAUNCH Student Success is the premier student success curriculum/program in helping increase success rates across the nation. LAUNCH combines student textbooks, video, and an interactive mobile platform for student engagement into one seamless experience. In addition, LAUNCH's workshops and professional development sessions help campuses create cultures of student success!



Academic

MacMillan Publishers

Macmillan Publishers is proud to publish books for first-year and common read programs, from classics like Elie Wiesel's NIGHT and Joshua Davis's SPARE PARTS to newer favorites like Dr. Fei-Fei Li's THE WORLDS I SEE and Tessa Hulls's FEEDING GHOSTS. Visit Academic.Macmillan.com for more information.



James Songster Emerging Leader Training

James Songster Emerging Leader Training offers workshops focused on promoting self-awareness, developing stronger teams, and leveraging creative problem-solving skills. Each discussion driven workshop is focused on providing new/rising student and campus leaders with effective tools that will help you adapt, identify your skillset, and expand your strengths.

VENDORS AND SPONSORS

FYE 2026



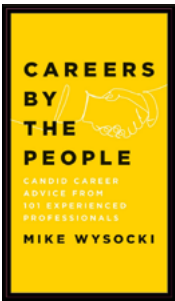
Alpha Lambda Delta

The Honor Society for First-Year Academic Success

www.nationalald.org

Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society

Retain high-achieving first-year students with an Alpha Lambda Delta (ALD) chapter on your campus. Founded in 1924, ALD is an international honor society recognizing the academic success of first-year students. ALD provides early engagement opportunities and assists students in recognizing and developing meaningful goals for their unique roles in society.



Careers By the People

Mike Wysocki is a career readiness speaker and author of the award-winning and best-selling book, *Careers By the People*. Wysocki offers students tactical advice about career preparation. Wysocki has spoken to thousands of students and educators. *Careers By the People's* YouTube Channel has 100+ videos on career readiness.



Acing The Undergrad

Acing The Undergrad (ATU) is a college success business that provides innovative products and speaking events for colleges, high schools, and college access programs.



Exploring Your Potential

Exploring Your Potential (EYP) is a student-centered readiness platform integrating wellness, career exploration, and durable skills. Designed for First-Year Experience and gateway courses, EYP builds early confidence and direction through curriculum, workforce-aligned certification, and data—providing institutions an infrastructure layer aligned to workforce pathways and Workforce Pell.



NMDP

At NMDP, we believe each of us holds the key to curing blood cancers and disorders. As a global nonprofit leader in cell therapy, NMDP creates connections between researchers and supporters—including college faculty, staff and administrators—to inspire action and to find life-saving cures. NMDP. Find cures. Save lives.



UpAhead

UpAhead manages and organizes student due dates by automatically setting up calendars and assignment trackers. Designed to ease the transition from high school to college, the platform gives students structure while providing helpful insights to the advisors, parents, and support staff who guide them.



Redrock Software Corporation

TracCloud is a comprehensive cloud-based software solution providing appointment scheduling, visits, demographics, and reports in a single center or by an entire community college district.



Narrative 4

Narrative 4 is a global education organization that equips young people to harness the power of stories to drive change in their communities. N4 believes that the shortest distance between two people is a story.



Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau

The Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau represents an unrivaled roster of speakers whose work is shaping national conversations—on and off the page. Be it a community read or convocation, a medical conference or CEO roundtable, our speakers take audiences beyond their everyday horizon.

VENDORS AND SPONSORS



NACADA

NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising is the premier Association for student success through academic advising in higher education. Formally chartered on May 2, 1979, NACADA serves its members through a variety of professional development and networking opportunities. In addition, the Association supports student success at the institution level through its comprehensive consulting services, Outcomes of Advising Surveys, and NACADA Excellence in Academic Advising program.



University of Chicago Press

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National Survey of Student Engagement

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) are self-supporting auxiliary units within the Center for Postsecondary Research (CPR) in the Indiana University School of Education. BCSSE first launched in 2007 as a companion survey to the NSSE.



Vector Solutions

Vector Solutions' Student Training LMS empowers colleges to improve student success, retention, and well-being through evidence-based courses on wellness, inclusion, safety, and career readiness. With customizable content and real-time insights, campus leaders can meet compliance needs while fostering safer, more supportive learning environments that drive positive student outcomes.



Penguin Random House Education

Home to award-winning, classroom-favorite authors, such as: Matthew Desmond, Percival Everett, John Green, Mona Hanna-Attisha, Dave Isay, Tommy Orange, and George Takei, Penguin Random House Education offers an array of First-Year and Common Reading titles. Visit our booth to browse books by subject area and learn more about our offerings.



NODA-Association for Orientation, Transition and Retention in Higher Education

As an inclusive community, NODA enhances and elevates orientation, transition, and retention practices in higher education that cultivate the professional development and education of student leaders, graduate students, practitioners, and scholars.



ThinkerAnalytix

Developed in response to documented skill deficits and discourse breakdowns, ThinkerAnalytix is a non-profit coalition of scholars and edTECH leaders working to scale critical thinking instruction at education institutions around the world.



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CampusESP is the leading, AI-powered parent engagement solution trusted by 450+ colleges and universities to turn family involvement into real results. Our all-in-one platform helps you share personalized content with families across a portal experience, email, and text message. From enrollment to retention to fundraising, CampusESP channels influence into results.

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Unify America

Unify America is a national, nonpartisan nonprofit working to replace political fighting with collaborative problem-solving. With high-impact, low-risk, engaging experiences that educate and empower, our turnkey programming delivers effective, scalable experiential learning that bridges ideological divides, fosters respectful dialogue, and develops essential civic and leadership skills.



Washington State Department of Health

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a free, confidential service that connects you to a trained crisis counselor via phone, text, or online chat. Call or text 988 or chat online at 988Lifeline.org to reach a crisis counselor 24/7/365. The 988 Lifeline provides support for thoughts of suicide, substance use concerns, and any other emotional distress. You can also get help if you're worried about a loved one.



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Forage

Forage supports first-year students with free job simulations, created with 125+ global employers including JPMorgan and Red Bull. These experiences have helped 6 million students explore careers, build confidence, and develop workplace skills. Career Explorer, our new simulation, also introduces first-year students to career paths and working styles.



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The National Society of Collegiate Scholars

NSCS is an interdisciplinary, non-profit honor society that recognizes high-achievement in the first and second years of college. NSCS offers its members career support, leadership experience, study abroad opportunities, scholarships, and community connections. NSCS is certified by the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS).



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Third Floor Foyer Registration Desk

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These workshops offer extended presentation, discussion, and interaction on a particular topic or area of interest.

Full Day Workshop | Rethinking the First Year: Principles and Perspectives for Improvement

9:00 am - 4:00 pm PST | \$250
Room: 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

John N. Gardner, Founder and Executive Chair Betsy O. Barefoot, Senior Scholar

Gardner Institute

For over 50 years, significant investments and changes have been made by many colleges and universities to improve the first year. But most of us are not where we want to be in terms of new student success. The world is changing and so are our students. Two of the founders of the FYE movement will help you take stock of your first year: where you are now, and where you want to go. What insights, principles, and new ideas could you use to help your institution and your students navigate the changing world while continuing to address persistent problems?

W-1 | Demystifying Data: Research Designs, Surveys and Focus Groups Made Practical

8:00 am - 12:00 noon PST | \$175
Room: 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Rajeeb Das Ann Bernhardt

Texas A&M University

Chelsie Hawkinson

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

A quick glance at headlines for the Chronicle of Higher Education show student disconnection is problematic. As educators, we know student engagement is critical for student success. Unfortunately, it can seem like an insurmountable task in a digital age where reaching students is challenging. In this workshop, participants will gain strategies to engage students in a variety of classroom and beyond-the-classroom contexts, including first-year seminars. Participants will be able to enhance curriculum or first-year programming. Special attention will be given to engaging first-generation students and the dispositions of effective instructors. Participants will be better equipped to engage students in a powerful way.

W-2 | Improving Student Disconnection and Enhancing Effective Instruction in the First Year

8:00 am - 12:00 noon PST | \$175
Room: 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Dottie Weigel *Messiah University*

James Winfield *Southern New Hampshire University's Global Campus*

The Chronicle of Higher Education headlines show disconnection is a growing concern in a digital age where reaching students is increasingly complex. Workshop participants will gain practical strategies to engage students across a variety of classroom and beyond-the-classroom contexts, including first-year seminars. The session will address the nuances of engaging students at different types of institutions—including two-year colleges, liberal arts colleges, and research universities—recognizing that institutional context shapes student needs and available resources. Special attention will be given to engaging special populations and identifying the dispositions of effective instructors. Participants will be equipped to foster engagement in powerful ways.

W-3 | Cultivating Genius and Joy in the First Year Experience

8:00 am - 12:00 noon PST | \$175
Room: 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Joy Gaston Gayles Jayla Moody Marshall

North Carolina State

Inspired by Gayles' (2023) call to humanize higher education, this preconference explores how higher education professionals can integrate genius and joy into the First-Year Experience. Drawing on Ghody Muhammad's (2020, 2023) Historically Responsive Literacy framework, we will share how the framework was used to develop a new elective course appropriate for first-year college students designed to "bring out" their unique gifts and talents using an asset-based approach. This session will demonstrate how intentionally cultivating genius and joy can empower first-year students, helping them feel visible, valued, and affirmed in rigorous teaching and learning environments.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15

W-4 | Establishing and Improving Peer Educator Programs

8:00 am - 12:00 noon PST | \$175

Room: 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Brad Harmon

Furman University

Tom Price

Temple University

Callyn Fahey

Bella Grille

University of South Carolina

One of the most important factors for first-year seminar success is the utilization of peer educators (Friedman, 2019). Peer education is an intervention strategy supporting student persistence and degree completion and serves as a transformative learning experience contributing to the retention, persistence, and belonging of the peer educators themselves (Bunting & Young, 2024). How do you build and sustain a high impact peer educator program? This workshop requires attendees to consider essential elements of peer educator programs with campus experts, establish goals for program creation or improvement and develop sustainable action plans to initiate or elevate their peer educator programs.

W-5 | Launching and Sustaining a Common Read Program That Works

8:00 am - 12:00 noon PST | \$175

Room: 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Spenser Stevens

Penguin Random House

Penguin Random House Board Members

Penguin Random House

Whether launching a new initiative or refreshing an existing one, this interactive 4-hour workshop blends data, creativity, and collaboration to help your Common Read program thrive. In today's politically charged campus climate, Common Reads remain vital tools for dialogue, belonging, and critical thinking—but success requires more than a great book. It takes strategy, structure, and stakeholder alignment. Led by the Penguin Random House Common Reads Advisory Board, this session offers practical tools, real-world insights, and a persuasive proposal template to support program design and institutional buy-in—tailored to your campus and ready to implement in an evolving higher education landscape.

W-6 | Purposeful Pathways: Helping Students Bring Focus to Their Goals and Dreams

1:00 pm - 5:00 pm PST | \$175

Room: 409: Wenatchee; Fourth Floor

Brad Garner

Indiana Wesleyan University

This session explores four powerful strategies to help college students discover and pursue their purpose with clarity and confidence. Participants will examine Ikigai (a Japanese framework for meaningful living), the Hero's Journey (a narrative arc for personal growth), Genius Hour (student-driven inquiry aligned with passion), and the Life Map (a reflective tool for visualizing life experiences and future goals). These approaches foster self-awareness, resilience, and direction—critical traits for academic and personal success. Attendees will gain practical insights and adaptable activities to integrate into advising, instruction, or mentoring, empowering students to envision and actively shape a purposeful future.

W-7 | Engaging Men in the First Year of College: Pathways to Persistence

1:00 pm - 5:00 pm PST | \$175

Room: 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Maurice "Tony" Davis

Wayne Jackson

Jackson-Davis Educational Consulting

Jamil D. Johnson

University of South Carolina

Men face unique challenges adjusting to the academic and social demands of college life. This pre-conference workshop is designed for practitioners committed to improving the first-year experience for men in college. This interactive workshop examines strategies that enhance student engagement, academic performance, and campus belonging. Participants will review national data, examine barriers to engagement, learn about high-impact practices, explore models of mentoring and advising, and work collaboratively to design approaches that support persistence and graduation for male students. Attendees will leave with strategies to foster engagement, motivation, and persistence among male students.

W-8 | Structuring and Strengthening the Transfer-Year Experience

1:00 pm - 5:00 pm PST | \$175
Room: 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Catherine Hartman

North Carolina State University

Emily Kittrell

University of South Carolina

Jeffrey Mayo

The University of Texas at Austin

Emily Kolby

University of Washington

Transfer and transfer-intending students face multiple complex and unique challenges as they prepare to transition and acclimate into new institutions. As such, it is important for faculty, staff, and leaders to take into account students' distinct journeys in their development of first- or transfer-year experience efforts. Creating and strengthening a tailored transfer-year experience for students serves as a crucial bedrock for successful navigation of the transfer process as well as academic and social success. In this session, we will focus on the knowledge, project planning, and management tools needed to build an interconnected and comprehensive transfer-year experience.

W-9 | Empowering You and Your Students: Cultivating Persistence, Resilience, and Mindfulness

1:00 pm - 5:00 pm PST | \$175
Room: 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Marinda Ashman

Benjamin Johnson

Stacy Waddoups

Utah Valley University

Sandi Bennett

Brigham Young University

College students today face unprecedented levels of anxiety, stress, and disconnection, which can hinder both academic and personal success. This interactive workshop empowers college educators and staff to support student well-being by cultivating persistence, resilience, and mindfulness—essential skills for thriving in today's world. Facilitated by experienced educators, the session offers evidence-based strategies and practical tools that can be immediately applied in teaching, advising, and mentoring. Participants will engage in experiential learning, explore adaptable wellness practices, and leave with a digital toolkit to foster a culture of empowerment and holistic growth across diverse institutional contexts.

W-10 | Transitions as Becoming: Theory-Based Tools for Designing High-Impact Transition Programs

1:00 pm - 5:00 pm PST | \$175
Room: 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Dallin George Young

University of Georgia

Bryce Bunting

Brigham Young University

Today's students are nearly always in transition – they enter, choose majors, temporarily leave and return, move back and forth between work and school, and experience many more periods of change. While these transitions present challenges, they can also be the source of tremendous growth. In this workshop we introduce a new theory of transitions grounded in ideas of community, participation, and becoming. Participants will have opportunities to work collaboratively to apply theory-based practical tools, evaluate their current practices, and develop prioritized plans for improving and refining the ways they support students across their many transitions.

W-11 | Design Thinking for First-Year Success: Create, Evaluate, and Transform Programs

1:00 pm - 5:00 pm PST | \$175
Room: 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor



Christine Harrington

Michael Sparrow

Morgan State University

Carmen Araoz

ITHAKA S+R

Discover how design thinking can transform the first-year seminar, orientation, advising, and other FYE programs. During this interactive workshop, you will learn how this approach led to the creation of a new, open-access self-assessment tool for first-year seminars. Explore how to use this first-year seminar tool on your campus and how to engage in a user-centric design thinking approach to transform the first-year experience. You will leave with fresh ideas, practical strategies, and a clear plan to enhance the first-year experience for all students at your institution.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Opening Session and Keynote Address

5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. PST | Room: Columbia Ballroom: Third Floor



José Antonio Bowen, Ph.D., FRSA

Senior Fellow, American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)

First-Year Thriving in an AI World

The AI threats to economic, academic, political, environmental and psychological well-being are becoming increasingly obvious. Higher education, however, finds itself in a unique position to understand and combat these threats: asking better questions and judging answers has always been at the center of a critical thinking education. Education manages the tension between learning to be fully human and preparing for a successful career. Since expertise is also essential to using AI well, we will need to prepare students to be experts in a world where AI can produce better work than many interns. Students are worried. Understanding how we might (or might not) use AI to support first-year student thriving will be essential as we begin the process of maintaining the best of our tradition while rethinking higher education for a new world. How could AI transform the first-year experience?

OPENING RECEPTION | 7:30 PM – 8:30 PM PST

Room: Regency Ballroom: Seventh Floor

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Featured Session

An Evening with John Gardner | 8:30 p.m. – 10:00 p.m. PST | Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor



John N. Gardner

Founder and Executive Chair, *Gardner Institute*;
 Founding Director, *National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*,
University of South Carolina

The FYE conference has many traditions, one of which, over the past 44 years, has been for the conference founder, John Gardner, to host an opening presentation and conversation after the reception for those attendees who are night owls! The tradition continues this year in which John will narrate the history of the “first-year experience” movement with special attention to how this history affects our work and challenges now. He will help participants to use these perspectives to consider how best to enhance first-year student engagement and success. We invite you to join and contribute to what will be an engaging conversation.

Award Recipients

Award Ceremony

Awards Reception | Tuesday, February 17 | 4:15 - 6:00 p.m. PST | Room Quinault; Fifth Floor

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is pleased to recognize the Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates. Sponsored by Penguin Random House and the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, University of South Carolina. To view a full list of Award Recipients Biographies, please see page 107.



Gregory David
University of Florida



Sonia Munoz-Duran
*California State University,
 Long Beach*



Bennie Moses
*Mesubed Eastern Oregon
 University*



Theresa DeLos Santos
Orange Coast College



Sarah Todd
Eastern University



**Chicquetta President
 Reed**
Claffin University



Nicole Juersivich
Nazareth University



Marie "Angie" Castillo
Cochise College



Dusten Crichton
*University of Nebraska
 at Omaha*




Anna Eichner
Cedar Crest College

Penguin Random House

Author Events at First-Year Experience®

AUTHOR BREAKFAST

Monday, February 16th | 7:15-8:45 AM | Elwha Ballroom A/B

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Hanif Abdurraqib <i>There's Always This Year</i>	Ayman Ismail <i>Becoming Baba</i>	Beth Macy <i>Paper Girl</i>	Adam Met, PhD <i>Amplify</i>

AUTHOR LUNCH

Monday, February 16th | 12:15-1:45 PM | Elwha Ballroom A/B

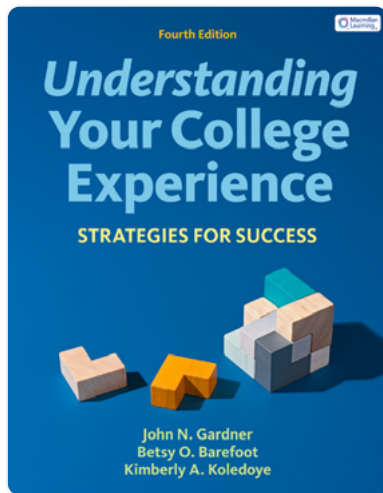
  <p>©Janelle Carmela</p>	  <p>©Max Buschini</p>	  <p>©Emily Kassie</p>	  <p>©InterAct International</p>
Alison Wood Brooks <i>Talk</i>	Banning Lyon <i>The Chair and the Valley</i>	Julian Brave NoiseCat <i>We Survived the Night</i>	Aziz Abu Sarah and Maoz Inon <i>The Future Is Peace</i>



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commonreads.com



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Intro to goal-setting and reflection:

This series of reflection surveys is aimed at helping you clarify your goals for this class, reflect on your progress, and identify your strengths and areas of growth as a student.

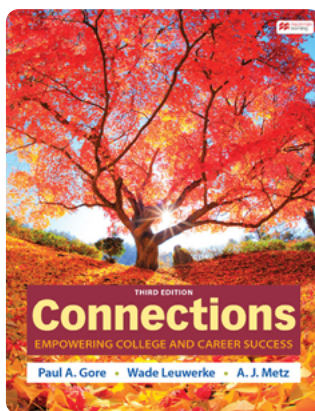
Being intentional about your goals for a course can help you better learn the material. Research has shown that having a goal that is focused on self-improvement and understanding leads to deeper learning than focusing on outperforming others or on normative grading standards.



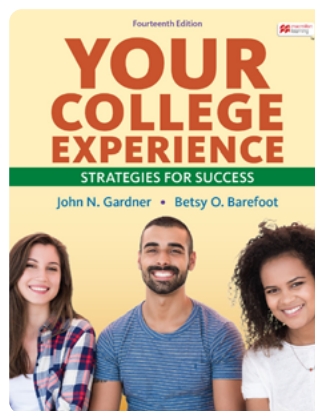
Mastery Deep Understanding Improved Skills Grade Recognition Personal Growth

Note: These responses are not anonymous and your instructor could be obligated to take action depending on the content of answers provided.

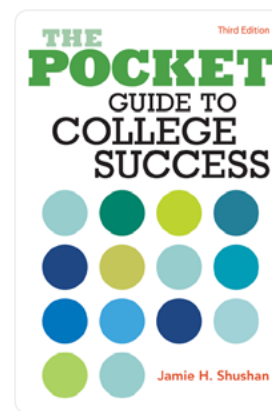
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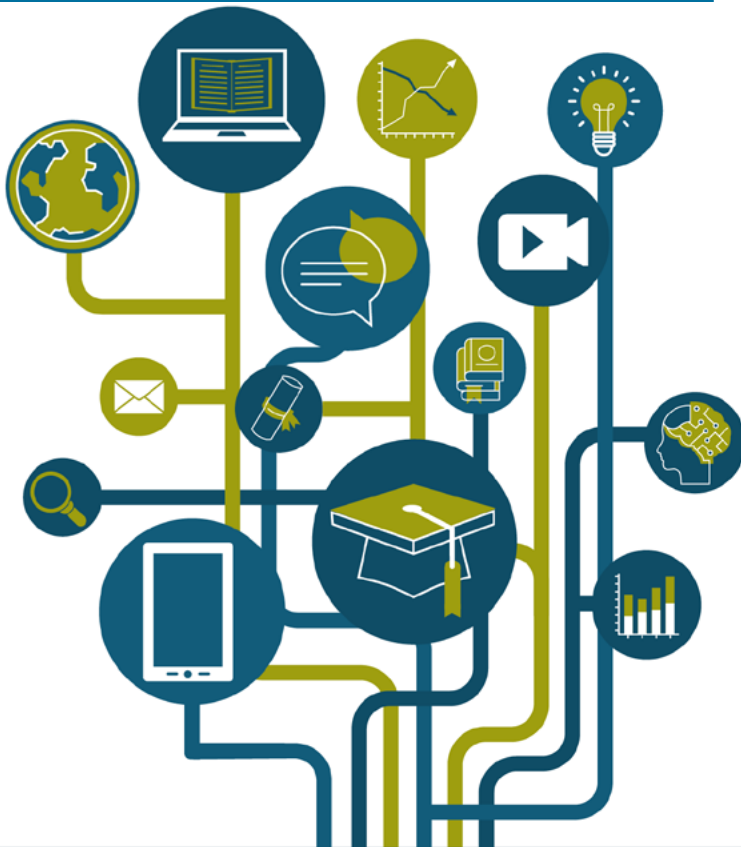
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MARCH 2 - MARCH 29, 2026

EXPLORING THE MIDDLE YEARS: SUP-
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AND THIRD-YEAR EXPERIENCES

Instructor: Kimberly Dressler

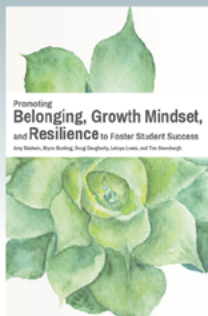
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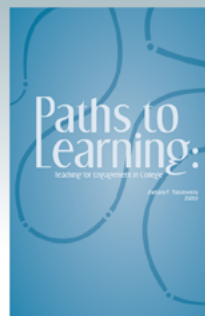
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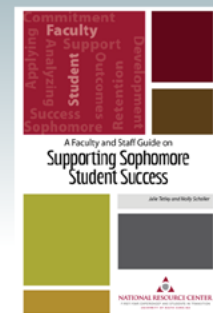
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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

7:30 AM – 9:00 AM PST
Regency Ballroom, Seventh Floor

CONFERENCE CHECK-IN

7:30 AM – 5:00 PM PST
Third Floor Foyer

A Primer for First-Time Attendees

8:00 a.m. – 9:00a.m.
Room Quinault; Fifth Floor

Kate Lehman
University of South Carolina

Katie Hopkins
University of South Carolina

John Gardner
(special guest)
Gardner Institute

A tradition at The First-Year Experience Conferences since 1983, the primer reviews the events that led to the creation of University 101 at the University of South Carolina, the resulting series of conferences, and an international education reform movement known as The First-Year Experience. The presenters will situate the meaning of this now ubiquitous concept in higher education in both historical context and present circumstances and define the philosophical assumptions undergirding this conference. They will also reflect on the current status of the movement, its accomplishments, and the current challenges bringing us together at this meeting. The session will conclude with practical and specific suggestions for how to make the most of the conference.

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

CT - Fail Forward: Reframing Setbacks for First-Year Students
Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Ashley Jagodzinski
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

First-year students often perceive setbacks as evidence they don't belong in college, undermining their confidence and persistence. This session explores how faculty can normalize failure as an expected, productive part of learning.

Drawing from my work with undeclared and exploratory students at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, I will share strategies for embedding "safe-to-fail" assignments, revision opportunities, and guided reflection activities that transform mistakes into growth. Participants will learn how modeling resilience and designing risk-friendly learning environments can reframe failure as a catalyst for self-efficacy, ultimately supporting student success both in and beyond the classroom.

CR - Belonging by Design: Identity-Based Peer Mentorship for First-Year LGBTQ+ Students
Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Kevin Yu
Domnique Green
Michigan State University

This session presents a mixed-methods study examining whether identity-based peer mentorship supports first-year LGBTQ+ students' transition to college at a STEM-oriented college. The Peer Mentorship Program at Lyman Briggs College traditionally matches mentors and mentees based on academic and career interests. For the first time, a pilot group of LGBTQ+ students was paired with affirming mentors who share their identity. Pre/post surveys and focus groups assess belonging, well-being, academic self-efficacy, community contribution, and purpose. Findings will inform inclusive mentorship models and offer practical strategies for supporting marginalized student populations during the critical first-year transition.

FD - Using Viral Social Media Interview Formats To Reach FY Students
Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Nicole Arnold
University of California, Irvine

When it comes to student outreach and engagement, everyone wants views. Who better to take inspiration from than viral social media content creators? What can we learn from playful and low-stakes content that can make our university services more approachable/less intimidating? Learn about how we harnessed the celebrity interview format, Vogue's 73 Questions, to create an informal and informative outreach video for an FYE asynchronous online course. Discuss how using a simple phone camera and a fun set of interview questions can reach and impact your students.

CP - Peer Mentorship at Scale: Bridging Coursework and Student Support
Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Susi Krulewich
University of Missouri-Kansas City

The Peer Academic Leadership (PAL) Program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City demonstrates how a single peer mentorship model can effectively scale to meet diverse institutional needs. Each year, we support 1,400+ students in the First Semester Experience course. We also support around 600 students from multiple scholarship programs across campus, each with distinct requirements and little historical alignment with the FSE course. By integrating one-on-one mentoring, in-class peer support, and program-specific expectations into a streamlined system, the PAL Program has advanced efficiency, coordination, and student success while also fostering leadership development for peer mentors.

CT - Maintaining Effective Learning Environments: Cross-divisional Partnerships to Address Disruption

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Christina Nava
Kate Law

Boise State University

In response to increasing classroom behavior referrals, Student and Academic Affairs collaborated to design faculty training on Maintaining Effective Learning Environments. This workshop equips instructors with proactive strategies to foster respectful, welcoming classrooms while effectively addressing disruptions. Participants will engage in a co-facilitated model and develop an action plan to strengthen cross-divisional partnerships in managing classroom challenges.

CI - Peer Mentorship for Student Success: High School to Community College

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Regina Lezama Lomeli
Alyssa Synder
Joselyn Esquivel

Salt Lake Community College

Join us to explore how Salt Lake Community College's PACE and Bruin Scholars programs create a seamless pipeline of support for first-generation and underrepresented students from 9th grade through college graduation. Our peer mentorship model combines early intervention and personalized guidance to remove barriers and foster student success. As students transition from high school to college, we highlight how student involvement and retention are strengthened by engaging events, individualized outreach, holistic support, and provision of personalized resources and attention. Session attendees will leave with practical strategies and a Student Support Toolkit to adapt for their own campuses.

CT - From Day 1: Strengthening Connections through Innovative Group Work

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Heather Snay
Tijera Safir

University of Kansas

In this presentation we will discuss the design of our First-Year Seminars at the University of Kansas. We will present the design of the course, project, and how this project is scaffolded to ensure student success. This will include how we support a larger group project and promote student engagement and connection through group work and by allowing students some agency in choosing the focus of their project. As part of this assignment, we have an end of semester showcase where students present their final timelines and posters to their peers and faculty, we will also discuss facilitating this event.

CT - Experiential Learning in First-Year Business Seminar

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Judy Dones
Karen Daas

University of Texas at San Antonio

At UT San Antonio, where most students commute and many are first-generation, fostering engagement and career readiness is critical. The first-year business seminar includes an experiential learning project where student teams manage vendor booths at campus festivals, simulating real-world business operations. Each team represents a business function and collaborates to achieve a shared goal, promoting teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership. This initiative supports the NACE career readiness competencies, improves knowledge retention, and builds a sense of belonging. By combining academic content with real-world application, the course reinforces the university's commitment to student success and prepares students for meaningful careers in business.

FD - High Impact Peer Educator Programs: From Theory to Practice

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Brad Harmon

Furman University

Tom Price

Temple University College of Science and Technology

Dallin Young

University of Georgia

Bryce Bunting

Brigham Young University

This facilitated dialogue features a panel of experts leading a guided discussion on the ways higher education professionals can develop high impact peer educator experiences. Examples from two different institutions – a small, private liberal arts university and a large, public research university – will offer participants a unique opportunity to see how recent research and theory have guided institutional practices related to the development of peer educators. Participants will consider ways they can apply these findings to enhance practices at their respective institutions and could develop a program enhancement action plan poised for immediate implementation.

CP - Creating and Supporting Effective Teaching Teams

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor

Katie Morton
Callyn Fahey
Caroline Elliott

University of South Carolina

At the University of South Carolina, our first-year seminar, University 101 (U101), is taught by a teaching team of an instructor and a peer leader. The teaching team relationship is a critical component of the course's success. This presentation will share the U101 Instructor and Peer Leader training and development cycles and how the two have been blended to ensure that the teaching teams are well-supported and prepared for U101. The presenters will also share our assessment approaches for all parts of the teaching team and how the feedback received helps to shape the future of the program.

CT - Redefining Engagement: Time Banking for First-Year Belonging and Retention

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Chad Kimmel

Shippensburg University

Student retention and belonging remain pressing challenges for first-year success. This session introduces an adaptation of time banking—a model rooted in reciprocity and service—into the higher education context. Through a campus-based currency, students earn recognition and rewards for supporting peers, engaging in service, and strengthening community ties. This session explores how time banking can be reframed as an emerging trend in student engagement, offering a scalable, equity-minded approach to cultivating connection, motivation, and trust. Attendees will consider how this model can inform campus strategies for the first-year experience and student success.

CI - Beyond the Classroom: Lessons Learned

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Shanti Freeman

Sara Huggett

Virginia Tech

Join the Program Directors of the Securitas and Impact Living-Learning Communities at Virginia Tech as they share strategies for fostering student engagement through effective communication, a dynamic point system, and housing structures that support community growth. Both directors will discuss lessons learned, successes, and challenges in creating inclusive and vibrant student communities. Participants will gain actionable ideas for developing engagement tools, enhancing student accountability, and cultivating a strong sense of belonging.

CT - Neurodivergent Voices Rising: Strength-Based Approaches for First-Year Students

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Lucy Stamp

Landmark College

Grounded in research, practice, and collaboration with neurodivergent learners and other stakeholders, this session explores neuroinclusive, strength-based approaches for supporting first-year students. Strength-based approaches applicable to students exhibiting a broad range of abilities will be discussed, as well as those more specific to learners with neurodevelopmental disorders, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and related conditions. Through case study analysis and interactive discussion, participants will gain a nuanced appreciation for the relevance of strength-based approaches informed by neurodivergent learners' lived experience, along with practical tools and strategies they can readily integrate into their own practice and interactions with first-year students.

CR - Exploring Belonging for Graduate Students Across Diverse Learning Environments

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Dottie Weigel

Messiah University

Belonging is essential to student thriving, which includes academic success, psychological well-being, and a strong sense of community (Schreiner, 2010). The mixed methods study highlighted in this presentation explores how graduate students, particularly those in online or hybrid programs, experience belonging and how it influences their persistence and overall success. Findings reveal the

critical role of connection in supporting students through the complexities of graduate education. This presentation invites participants to reflect on the data and consider actionable strategies to foster belonging and promote thriving among graduate students across diverse learning environments.

CT - Building Resilience: A Six-Pillar Approach to Student Well-Being

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Thomas Rojo Aubrey

South Mountain Community College

This session explores how teaching academic resilience and well-being in First-Year Experience (FYE) courses can strengthen students' capacity to persist and succeed in college. You'll be introduced to a six-pillar resiliency co-curriculum designed to help students develop emotional, psychological, and behavioral tools for managing stress, overcoming obstacles, and thriving both academically and personally. Participants will learn how this innovative pedagogy, implemented across several Community Colleges, fosters increased mental health, grit, and purpose. Data-informed outcomes will be shared, emphasizing this model's potential to improve student persistence, retention, and overall success, especially within high-stress academic disciplines.

FD - From Foot-Dragging to Future-Focused: Motivating Early Career Exploration

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Madysen Flint

Texas State University

Are your first-year students slow to engage in career planning, thinking it's "forever away?" Join us for an interactive discussion on motivating early career exploration. Share your challenges, successes, and creative approaches surrounding first-year career exploration and development. Possible sub-topics from the facilitator and your peers may include "First-Year Favorite" presentations, career curriculum models (required and optional), career assessments, student outreach and programs, and more. Attendees will gain relevant feedback on and ideas for their institutional practices within career exploration.

V - Real-World Financial Education that Drives First-Year Student Success

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Michelle Biggs

Marshall University

Caleb Tegtmeier

Intuit for Education

First-year students increasingly face financial pressures that affect their well-being, academic performance, and persistence, yet many begin college without the knowledge or confidence to manage everyday financial decisions. This session highlights how Marshall University partnered with Intuit for Education to integrate free financial education tools into UNI 100, the institution's First-Year Experience course. Presenters will describe how the tools were incorporated, the support provided by peer mentors, and how students engaged with realistic financial scenarios to practice budgeting and planning. The session will also share early impact data insights into shifts in students' financial confidence and behaviors. Attendees will leave with practical considerations for bringing real-world financial education into their own first-year student success initiatives

CT - AI 2.0: Guiding Students Through Custom GPT/Projects, and M365 Notebooks

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Jeremy Tiedt

University of Nevada, Reno

Students are entering college during an AI explosion, yet most underuse its most powerful tools. This session shows how instructors can guide students to engage meaningfully with advanced platforms like ChatGPT Projects, Custom GPTs, and Microsoft Copilot Notebooks. These tools support iterative thinking, ethical reflection, and creative ownership of learning. We'll share classroom-tested activities and student work that promote critical thinking and sustained engagement with AI, all without requiring technical expertise.

Featured Sessions

9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

FS- Engaging Seattle: Academics, Student Development, and Community in a First-Year Seminar

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Lydia Cooper

Laura Hauck - Vixie

Hilary Hawley

Seattle University

In the Jesuit spirit of educating the whole person, Seattle University recently developed and piloted an academically focused first-year seminar for all incoming students. These seminars offer academic skills and tools, community building, an introduction to Jesuit education, a sense of place on campus and in Seattle, and preparation for respectful community engagement in our Core. We'll share how Student Affairs and Academic Affairs are collaborating to develop programming in and out of the classroom, tips on faculty buy-in, and how we successfully sought grant support. Session attendees are invited to join later breakout tours and a reception on campus.

FS - Data-driven, Cross-functional Partnerships for Student Success and Retention

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

Lauren C. Bell

Randolph-Macon College

Jonathan Fuller

Virginia Commonwealth University

Juan Carlos Huerta

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

Institutional organization charts can lead to 'siloeing' among faculty and staff, resulting in duplication of efforts, limits on information sharing, and inefficiencies in programs and services. In the context of student success and retention, siloeing reduces an institution's ability to meet students' needs. This pre-conference workshop brings together professionals from multiple institution types to provide guidance about creating data-informed, cross-campus partnerships to support students from the time of acceptance through the second-year. Participants will leave this session with models of successful partnerships and programs and next steps to enhance their own institution's programs and services.

FS - 2023 National Survey on the First-Year Experience Findings Discussion

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Jamil Johnson

Alyssa Stephens

University of South Carolina

Juan Carlos Huerta

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

Buffy Stoll Turton

Central Oregon Community College

James Winfield

Southern New Hampshire University

The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students and Transition is pleased to welcome FYE26 conference attendees to a lightning round session on the findings of the 2023 National Survey on the First-Year Experience, facilitated by the Editor, Dr. Jamil D. Johnson. The survey examines the landscape of the first-year experience, focusing on institutional structures: both curricular and co-curricular that are meant to support student success in the transition to college and the first year. Dr. Johnson and Dr. Winfield will provide a general overview of the national attention to the first-year experience, Dr. Huerta will discuss the impact of learning communities, Dr. Turton will examine the role of new student orientation programming, and Alyssa Stephens will review early-alert and intervention programs. Learn research practices and ask questions from the content experts in the field on the first-year experience at this exciting session! Also, join us for a more in-depth discussion on first-year seminars: "Instructors and Peer Mentors Roles in FYS Return on Investment," check the conference app for time and location.



FS - Navigating Critical Thinking and Writing Through the AI Looking Glass

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Robert Kenedy

York University

In the era of AI, critical thinking infused writing requires a specific approach that is student-centered, navigating all the complexities of AI software. Current research suggests that students who can write and think critically are more likely to successfully complete their degree (Kenedy, 2023, 2024). Teaching students to become critical thinkers and writers requires a comprehensive educational approach, that considers AI intricacies. This interactive session highlights strategies for critical thinking infused writing pedagogies navigating AI in FYE seminars, introductory courses, and other courses. We explore relevant AI research, pedagogy, and that promote "best practices" for teaching critical thinking infused writing.

Morning Break with Poster Sessions 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Poster sessions are presented in the form of an exhibit and delivered primarily through the use of visual display and handout materials. Numerous poster sessions will be scheduled concurrently, and conference delegates will be free to move from one poster session to another.

PR - Advancing Financial Literacy and Empowerment in First-Year College Students

Poster 1; Regency Ballroom

Agnes Amfu-Ado

Oklahoma State University

Kelly Way

Akosua Sayer Koduah

University of Arkansas

Financial stress significantly impedes student success. Embedding financial literacy into first-year seminar courses is a high-impact strategy to promote academic persistence and financial wellness. This study investigates the effectiveness of Money Habitudes (MH), an experiential activity that fosters financial self-awareness through exploration of personal money-related values and habits. Using pre- and post-surveys, the research examines changes in financial behavior among students at a mid-South public university. Preliminary findings suggest MH enhances financial literacy, reduces stress, and supports positive financial behavior, positioning it as a valuable tool in student transition programming.

PP - Public Sphere Pedagogy 20 Years Later: Still Relevant

Poster 2; Regency Ballroom

Sue Peterson

Danielle Fernandez

California State University, Chico

Public Sphere Pedagogy (PSP) emerged at Chico State nearly 20 years ago as a high-impact practice connecting first-year students to authentic public dialogue on pressing issues. Through events such as the Town Hall Meeting and Great Debate, PSP has engaged thousands of students in civic inquiry, research, and community connection. This session revisits PSP in today's context, sharing recent assessment findings and highlighting adaptable strategies for creating meaningful dialogue in first-year courses. Participants will explore practical design principles and leave with ideas for integrating PSP to foster engagement, belonging, and purpose on their own campuses.



PR - Handwriting Analysis of Learning Difficulties for Individually Optimal Learning

Poster 3; Regency Ballroom

Yukari Hashimoto

Keiko Suzuki

Kyonmi You

Tateo Hashimoto

University of Nagasaki

This study aimed to visualize individual learners' processes through writing activities. A digital handwriting tracking system (Bamboo Slate) was employed to analyze handwritten quiz responses in a Korean language class. The analysis focused on "pause points" and "pause frequency." For each participant, pauses were identified visually at the character level, and the number of learners who

paused at each position was recorded. A pause was defined as lasting five seconds or more. Results indicated that long pauses occurred most frequently at the initial character of responses and at characters requiring grammatical conjugation.

PT - Trauma-Sensitive Teaching: Creating Safe and Resilient Classrooms for Student Success

Poster 4; Regency Ballroom

Thomas Rojo Aubrey

Brielle Rawlings-Dube

South Mountain College

This interactive workshop introduces trauma-informed pedagogy, equipping educators with practical strategies to support students affected by trauma. Participants will explore the impact of trauma on learning, engage in hands-on activities to create inclusive and resilient classroom environments, and discuss best practices for fostering student well-being. By examining signs of trauma, implementing trauma-sensitive teaching techniques, and building supportive campus networks, educators will gain actionable tools to promote academic success and resilience. This session is ideal for faculty, staff, and administrators committed to creating safe, empathetic classrooms that empower all students, regardless of their background or challenges.

PR - Unheard Struggles: Communicative Management of Misophonia in First-Year Students

Poster 5; Regency Ballroom

Leah Bryant

DePaul University

This research examines how first-year students with misophonia address and/or communicate their condition with instructors and classmates. Misophonia is a sound-sensitivity disorder affecting approximately 20% of the population, in which individuals react to often unavoidable trigger sounds (e.g., chewing, throat clearing, keyboard tapping, pen clicking) with emotional responses (e.g., anger, anxiety, disgust). The onset of misophonia usually occurs in early adolescence, making the transition to college an important context for researching the experiences of incoming students. A better understanding of this phenomenon in instructional contexts may allow universities to provide much-needed acknowledgment and support for incoming students with misophonia.

PP - Implementing and Assessing Critical Thinking in the First-Year Experience

Poster 6; Regency Ballroom

Jillian Arizpe

The University of Texas at Austin

This session provides strategies for incorporating critical thinking into first-year courses through experiential learning. Using UT Austin's Signature Courses as a model, attendees will gain practical advice and tools to develop, implement, and assess critical thinking components in introductory classes from both programmatic and pedagogical perspectives. Participants will leave equipped to cultivate students' skills in conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information across disciplines.

PP - Essential Elements: Charting a Course for Student Success

Poster 7; Regency Ballroom

Kaytlen Powers

University of Texas at Austin

First-year seminars play a pivotal role in student transitions to higher education, fostering academic integration and a sense of belonging. At UT Austin, Signature Courses, while serving as foundational first-year seminars, are distinguished by their "Essential Elements" a unique framework designed to cultivate critical inquiry, research literacy, written and oral communication, and engagement with UT Austin's intellectual community. This poster presentation explores how Signature Course faculty creatively and effectively incorporate these Essential Elements into pedagogical practices, making them more than course requirements but integral components of the learning experience, ultimately enhancing student success and preparedness for the rigors of university study.

PI - Underconfident or Overconfident? Role of Confidence in First-Year Student Performance

Poster 8; Regency Ballroom

Lizzie Santiago

Michael Brewster

Jake Follmer

Adam Ogunjembola

West Virginia University

One goal of academic institutions is to develop learners who can accurately assess their knowledge, adjust their study strategies accordingly, and determine whether their solutions to problems are correct. Accurate self-judgment enhances both comprehension and self-assessment, enabling learners to recognize their strengths and address their deficiencies. This study explores the role of students' judgment accuracy in their ability to solve mathematics and engineering problems. It presents an intervention designed to improve students' ability to accurately predict their performance and adjust their learning accordingly. Results show improvements in learner's metacognitive awareness and accuracy of judgement during problem solving.

PP - Passport to the First Year: iCharleston and Beyond

Poster 9; Regency Ballroom

Bruce Fleming

Lizzie Kuesel

Ava Gonglewski

Carly Pruitt

College of Charleston

iCharleston is an innovative first-year international bridge program that offers students an alternative start abroad opportunity specially designed to encourage academic, social, and personal development. A key component to the iCharleston experience is the weekly Passport to CofC experience; it is a pivotal FYE seminar class created to support an efficient and successful transition for students into their first college semester. The class explores first-year experience themes in the international context of the iCharleston program. This presentation showcases Passport to CofC's subject matter, implementation, and accomplishments through qualitative and quantitative assessment over a 10-year period.

PR - From Data to Action: Developing a Predictive Scorecard for Early Identification of First-Year Students at Risk of Leaving College

Poster 10; Regency Ballroom

Zurine De Miguel

California State University, Monterey Bay

This research presents a predictive modeling framework using the NCHA-III Spring 2024 survey (16 000 students, 500 + variables) to identify first-year students who may consider leaving college. Models trained on the national dataset were tested on an institutional subsample to confirm generalizability. Combining statistical screening and machine-learning techniques, the study produced a 12-item risk scorecard that converts wellbeing and academic indicators into early-alert metrics. Integrated into the First-Year Seminar (FYS) program, the scorecard links each factor to campus support services through a simple Excel interface that supports proactive student outreach.

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

CR - Strategies to Assess First-Generation FYE Experiences: Examples from Three Programs

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Rajeeb Das

Brandy Snyder

Nancy Hutchins

Ann Bernhardt

Texas A&M University

At one institution, we assessed three different FYEs for first-generation (first-gen) students. We share strategies to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data on student participants. Findings reveal common experiences for all first-gen students, but also unique experiences. We also share two kinds of recommendations. The first set of recommendations refers to program operations, changes that inform the continuous improvement cycle. The second set relates to assessment and how to "dig deeper" to understand why these experiences have an impact. Attendees can incorporate our strategies to better understand how and why FYEs impact first-gen students.

CT - Innovative Approaches to FYE Implementation in the Community College

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Kimberly Vandervort

Jennifer Merchant

Jeanne Costello

Fullerton College

While community colleges typically serve greater numbers of historically underserved and first-generation students than four-year schools, CCs are less likely to have FYE courses to support these populations. The Guided Pathways framework in CA encourages streamlining required courses to improve completion, and limited resources make fully developed FYE programs challenging to implement. Fullerton College has developed an innovative and cost effective FYE at scale by embedding program elements in foundational first year courses like English, Math, and Business. This session will share our strategic program development process, focusing on faculty-driven program design, culturally responsive instructor training, and intentional assessment.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

CR - “Learning to Learn Better”: First-Year, At-Promise Students’ Metacognition

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Ralitsa Todorova

University of Southern California

Jennifer Harvey

University of Nebraska Kearney

Jennifer Johnson

University of Nebraska Omaha

Helping students understand how they learn can profoundly impact college success. This session highlights findings from a qualitative study exploring first-year, at-promise students’ metacognition and offers suggestions for supporting student learning. Our research highlights how students figured out effective learning strategies, adapted when needed, and how their confidence, well-being, and emotional states influenced their thought processes. This session will also include practitioner perspectives with insights and tools for metacognitive student support. Participants will leave with ideas for helping students become more aware, confident, and effective learners during the college transition.

FD - Navigating AI in the First Year: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Christine Dobbs

Roberta Collinsworth

Panola College

Generative AI is reshaping how first-year students read, write, study, and solve problems—sometimes empowering learning, sometimes short-circuiting it. In this facilitated dialogue, a Teacher Education professor and a Math professor invite participants to examine classroom realities across disciplines: study habits, metacognition, academic integrity, and equitable access. Using quick prompts, small-group rounds, and whole-room harvests, attendees will surface practices that actually work (and what doesn’t) for orientation courses and gateway math. We’ll co-create a takeaway menu of policy language, assignment ideas, and student-facing scripts you can adapt tomorrow.

CR - Assessment in First-Year Experience Programs: Advancing Value through Practice

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Kevin Wenger

Jarrett B. Warshaw

University of South Carolina

Assessment has been championed as integral to quality practice in the FYE since the early days of the movement, but its implementation and impacts remain unclear. Using data from the 2017 and 2023 National Surveys on the First-Year Experience, this study investigated the prevalence of assessment in FYE programs and modeled relationships between assessment and the perceived value of these programs. Findings show a declining culture of assessment in these programs but suggest the sustained value of this practice. Join us to learn about this study conducted by the NRC and learn about the value of assessment in our work.

CT - What’s New? The FYE Leads to the Graduate Student Experience!

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

John Gardner

Gardner Institute

This session will explore a growing national conversation about what could constitute “the graduate student experience” and how the experience of graduate students affects those who interact with first-year students. Currently, about four million graduate students lack the attention we rightfully lavish on our first-year students. How could we bridge these two worlds of undergraduate and graduate student populations to enhance the success of both in a greater win/win for all? Fundamentally, this is about finally incorporating graduate students in the national work to improve student success. A half century of work on improving the FYE shows the way.

CT - An Evidence Based Guide to Help Students Studying Like Champions

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Regan A R Gurung

Oregon State University

Students are more distracted than ever. Together with social media addictions, many students use AI with the belief that it can aid their learning. Even before social media, students did not study in the most effective way. This issue is particularly problematic for first year students. A rich body of scientific research shows the most effective ways to study and warns against detours and poor techniques. This presentation will both review effective and efficient study techniques and demonstrate the best ways to help students use the techniques in first year seminars, their general education courses, and through their college education.

CT - Using Cross-Department Partnerships in Student & Family Transitions

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Taylor Eubanks

JT Faccione

Jalynn Wynn

University of Georgia

Supporting students and their families requires a multi-faceted approach. Utilizing collaboration across departments allows for a seamless and coordinated first-year experience. This session explores how three siloed departments intentionally partnered to create a more connected transition and first-year experience. Participants will learn practical strategies used to create shared goals, align approaches, and effectively communicate across departments. Participants will discover tactics for building partnerships that improve experiences for students and supporters, while strengthening the holistic campus community. Leave with actionable ideas to enhance collaboration, break down barriers, and ensure every student and supporter experiences a seamless, coordinated, and accommodating first-year experience.

CI - Growth of a Peer Leader Program

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Tom Price
Samir Buch

Temple University

After the College of Science and Technology at Temple added a seminar requirement to all majors, the presenter attended the Institute on Developing and Sustaining First-Year Seminars. A key takeaway was the urgent need to launch a Peer Leader program as a fundamental component of an effective seminar. Learn how we went from one volunteer Peer Leader in one section to a fully developed program with a Peer Leader in over 40 First-Year seminars. Includes information on a Peer Leader Development Seminar, ongoing support, comparative assessments with/without Peer Leaders, and a tiered Peer Leader program.

CT - Welcome Aboard, Rattler Voyage: Re-imagining the New Student Onboarding Experience

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Jennifer Collins
Letina Banks
Doyin Smith
Alicia Hudson

Florida A&M University

Florida A&M University is reimagining the new student journey through "The Rattler Voyage"—a luxury cruise-inspired onboarding model designed to reduce melt, increase yield, and foster student belonging. Modeled after the seamless elegance of a cruise boarding experience, the initiative integrates digital boarding badges, personalized success crews, and high-energy "sail away" events. This presentation will explore how intentional design, interdepartmental collaboration, and immersive technology transform onboarding into a high-touch, student-centered process. By focusing on Gen Z expectations for personalization, clarity, and seamless technology, the session highlights why innovative onboarding is essential for retention and success in today's higher education landscape.

CT - Retention Systems that Work: Designing In-house Collaborative Case Management Tools

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor

Veronica Wilson
Joyce Wroten

National Louis University

Retention and CMS software promise efficiencies and streamlined work, yet often there are limitations to users when it comes to data-sharing across systems and user groups. Learn about how one department creatively solved this problem by developing data-informed communication hubs that served student-facing staff in case management, enabled stopped out student re-engagement, facilitated new student onboarding and degree auditing, and supported enrollment management strategies. Leave this session with ideas on how to improve the systems that support your retention efforts as well as considerations when it comes to external vendor contracts.

CP - A Flexible FYS Curriculum for Holistic Student Success

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Jordan Ochs
Michelle Johnson

University of Connecticut

The University of Connecticut implemented a First Year Seminar curriculum framework designed to simultaneously provide maximum flexibility and inclusion while maintaining standard, assessable student outcomes. The framework was developed around 6 competency areas designed to support holistic student success, including: Academic Engagement, Personal Growth, Health and Wellbeing, Career Development, Social and Cultural Connection, and College Navigation Skills. Instructors were provided with activity and assignment options aligned with each competency area to implement throughout the semester. Competency development in enrolled students was measured via pre and post surveys in the Fall 2025 semester.

CT - What the Duck? The Serious Side of Play

Room 602: Nooksack; Sixth Floor

Jillian Alexander

East Tennessee State University

What can a six-brick duck teach us about engaging first-year students? This session blends playful practice with serious theory to explore how metaphor, storytelling, and reflection can support student success in the first year of college. Research shows that new college students are often more open to active learning than their more experienced peers, making first-year classrooms an ideal setting to experiment with innovative strategies. Participants will take part in a brief LEGO® duck build that sets the stage for exploring scalable, low-resource approaches to playful pedagogy that foster curiosity, belonging, and connection across seminars, workshops, and courses.

CT - From High School to Higher Learning: Strategies for First-Year Success

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Amy Baldwin

University of Central Arkansas

What can you do to empower first-year students to make the leap from guided learning to confident college independence? This breakout session will help faculty and staff reimagine their approach to supporting first-year students navigating the critical transition from high school to college by creating consistent, empathetic, and evidence-based interventions that redirect traditional-age students toward clear pathways to success. Participants will learn how to bridge the gaps between high school expectations and college-level demands, build confidence in supporting students through adjustment challenges, and foster meaningful connections that promote belonging and academic success.

V - A Proactive Intervention for At-Risk Students: The 7 Habits Approach

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Julie Larkin
Phyllis Kowis

FranklinCovey Education

What if you could stop playing defense and proactively improve student retention? This session introduces a new paradigm to address the fact that

one in three students drops out after their first year. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective College Students course empowers students to take ownership of their success, develop practical time management skills, and establish principles of personal effectiveness. By embracing the habit, “Be Proactive,” support services can establish a culture of early intervention, meeting student needs before they escalate. This dual-impact framework empowers both students and staff to achieve sustained success and higher retention campus-wide.

FD - Facilitating Reflection Through Art Creation

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Dominique Harris
Emily Boardman

University of South Carolina

In this interactive workshop, presenters will facilitate discussion on how to use art to promote reflection in the classroom. Participants will have the opportunity to engage in multiple activities and strategies to encourage self-reflection through creativity. Presenters will dispel myths about artistic abilities and discuss strategies on how to encourage creative expression regardless of skill level when engaging with first-year students.

CP - Utilizing a First-Year Transition Program to Boost Retention

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Lance Vanderberg

Taylor University

The Transition to College Program at Taylor University is intentionally designed to promote student success and retention. The program serves provisionally accepted freshmen students who benefit from additional academic support. Major components include enhanced admissions communication, priority scheduling/advising, one-on-one meetings, and a paired academic success course. Special attention will be paid to the paired course format, which brings together the program’s academic success course with a major first-year course taken across campus. The Transition to College program has boosted the retention of provisionally accepted students, significantly contributing to the university’s overall 94% freshmen retention rate.

CI - Rewriting the Advising Story: Meta-Majors and the First-Year Experience

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Marcelle Martens
Kristen Swaney

University at Albany-SUNY

Starting college is exciting but often overwhelming, especially when choosing a major or thinking about careers. Traditional advising can push students into narrow tracks too quickly, limiting exploration and equitable support. At UAlbany, we launched a Meta-Major Advising Pilot in 2025. By grouping related majors, students could explore within a cluster while connecting academics to possible careers from the start. In this session, we’ll share how the pilot was developed, what worked—and what didn’t—and how it fostered stronger collaboration among advisors, faculty, and career services. Participants will leave with ideas for adapting meta-majors on their own campuses.

Featured Sessions

11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

FS -Lecturing Moves that will Engage First-Year Students

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor



Christine Harrington
Laura Dorsey-Elson
Alana Gregory

Morgan State University

During this high-energy session, participants will learn about instructional moves they can make during lectures (or workshops) that are based on a new science-to-practice holistic approach that integrates design, engagement, and learning principles. Explore how simple strategies such as emphasizing the big ideas of your lecture, using attention grabbers, weaving in curiosity-building activities, and incorporating opportunities for students to recall, digest, and reflect on what they are learning can elevate your lectures. Walk away with easy-to-implement lecturing moves that tap into the affective and cognitive aspects of learning that you can immediately put into practice. Will need presenter email and institution

FS - Context Matters: Shaping First-Year Experience Across Diverse Institutions

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Kate Lehman (Moderator)

University of South Carolina

Natacha Cesar-Davis

California State University San-Marcos

Jennifer Keup

Association of Public & Land-grant Universities, (APLU)

James Winfield

Southern New Hampshire University’s Global Campus

Amunoo Temboo

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Nicole Craven

The Ohio State University

As the landscape of higher education continues to diversify, so too must our approaches to supporting first-year students. This session brings together leaders from a range of institutional types and context—including urban-serving research universities, two-year colleges, online education, and a state system—for a fireside chat exploring how context shapes the design, delivery, and impact of First-Year Experience (FYE) programs. Panelists will share insights from their institutions and systems, discuss challenges and innovations, and reflect on how FYE can be a lever for equity, access, and upward mobility. Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how institutional mission and student demographics influence FYE strategies and leave with ideas for adapting practices to their own contexts..

FS - Trauma-Informed Pedagogy: Building Resilient Classrooms for Student Success

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Brielle Rawlings-Dube

Thomas E. Rojo Aubrey

South Mountain Community College

This interactive 75-minute session introduces trauma-informed pedagogy and equips educators with practical strategies to support students affected by trauma. Participants will explore how trauma impacts the brain and learning, engage in hands-on activities to build safe and inclusive classroom environments, and practice trauma-sensitive teaching techniques. Through scenario-based discussions, small-group collaboration, and guided reflection, attendees will learn how to recognize trauma responses, respond with empathy, and create predictable, empowering learning spaces. Drawing on current research and national best practices, this workshop provides actionable tools to strengthen student well-being, academic resilience, and campus-wide collaboration. Ideal for faculty, staff, and administrators committed to fostering equitable and compassionate educational environments.

1:45 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.

CT - Probation to Possibility: Reimagining First-Year Student Success

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Ashley Gragido

California State University San Marcos

First-year students on academic probation often struggle with motivation, confidence, and belonging. This session explores what it means to be “student-ready” through the lens of institutional data and budget realities. Participants will learn inclusive, strength-based strategies that foster resilience and connection in and beyond the classroom. We will also highlight CSUSM’s Academic Recovery Courses and Peer Coaching model, which have led to double-digit gains in retention and GPA—offering a scalable, impactful approach that could benefit your campus.

CT - Publishing Research and Practice on College Student Transitions

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Sean Cleary

University of South Carolina

Joseph Kitchen

University of Southern California

The National Resource Center offers multiple outlets for publishing research and practice related to college student transition experiences: The Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition and Insights for College Transitions. Meet the Center’s editorial team, including our new Journal Editor, and learn about submission processes, strategies for crafting strong manuscripts, and opportunities for involvement with our editorial review boards.

CR - Can Coffee Cultivate Retention?

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Rene Couture

Dana Tribble

Lynlee Mitchell

Arkansas Tech University

As college students increasingly report loneliness, disengagement, and a preference for online interactions, campuses must explore innovative ways to foster connection and belonging. This session introduces a pilot initiative using coffee shop meetups in a first-year seminar to cultivate peer relationships, encourage campus engagement, and support retention. Participants will learn about the project design, preliminary outcomes, and implications for student success. Practical takeaways will help institutions consider scalable, low-cost strategies to strengthen community and persistence among today’s students.

FD - Self-regulated Learning Strategies, How Do You Teach This Stuff?

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Suzannah Crandall

University of Wisconsin-Superior

This interactive session invites participants to share practical ideas and classroom experiences related to teaching self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies. SRL—the ability for students to understand and manage their own learning—is essential for college success. First-year instructors often rely on textbooks or create their own materials, but these can be limiting. Insights from peers working directly with first-year students can offer fresh, valuable strategies. Attendees will share SRL activities, ask questions, and explore new approaches. Participants will leave with ready-to-use ideas for designing engaging lessons that help students build self-awareness, monitor progress, and gain confidence in managing their own learning.

CT - “The Art of Alignment: Leveraging Initiatives for First-Year Student Success”

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Carmen Allen

Jean-Jacques N’Ganga

Janene Davison

Galveston College

This session explores how Galveston College strategically coordinated its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and a \$3 million Title V grant to build a cohesive First-Year Experience program. Presenters will highlight intentional design choices that built cross-functional collaboration among instructional, student services, and grant leadership teams—maximizing institutional resources and avoiding duplication of efforts. Rather than silo efforts, the college aligned initiatives to boost student credit momentum, academic growth mindset, and belonging. Attendees will leave with practical strategies to leverage overlapping initiatives, increase campus buy-in, and build institutional capacity for sustained improvement.

V - Building Your Common Reading Program

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Celia Monroe
Hachette Academic

Andrea Gochnauer
Simon and Schuster

Kim Racon
HarperCollins Publishers

Peter Wentz
W. W. Norton & Co.

Michael Fynan
Macmillan Publishers

A publisher-led panel on how to pick the perfect Common Read for your First-Year Experience Program. Participating book publishers Hachette, Simon & Schuster, Macmillan, HarperCollins, and W. W. Norton will outline how to launch a Common Reading program on your campus, present top titles that speak directly to the student experience, and provide important resources to get you started.

CI - ISU Learning Communities: 30 Years of Sustained Student Success

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Jennifer Leptien
Iowa State University

Iowa State University Learning Communities are a sustained, high-impact practice serving over 6700 students annually. This year, we are offering 80 learning communities. Since 1995, our program has sustained intentional academic and social transition support through common course offerings, faculty/student interactions, peer mentor engagement, career exploration opportunities, and more. Join this interactive session to learn about the Iowa State University Learning Community model and how it continually evolves to meet the changing needs of students. Participants will be invited to share their approaches to learning community program sustainability on their respective campuses.

CT - Exploring Pathways: Supporting Student-Athletes & Exploratory Students in the First Year

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Jessica Kylo
James Madison University

The first year of college is a critical transition for all students, but student-athletes and exploratory students often face unique challenges. This session draws from professional experience in athletic academic advising and exploratory advising to highlight strategies that foster academic ownership, resilience, and belonging. Participants will explore approaches to balancing athletic commitments with academic goals and guiding undecided students through purposeful exploration. Through discussion and practical takeaways, the session provides adaptable practices for supporting diverse first-year populations and building collaborative networks across athletics, advising, and student success initiatives.

CT - First-Gen Navigators: A Faculty Training Model for First-Gen Student Success

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Christopher Walls
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

In this session, participants will learn about the First-Gen Navigators Summer Institute, a faculty training pilot where five faculty members engaged in a 5-week program designed to provide them with evidence-based tools, resources, and data to support Charlotte's First-Generation students in, and outside of the classroom. First-Generation students represent roughly 33% of the undergraduate, degree-seeking population at UNC Charlotte, and approximately 54% nationwide. As more students seek postsecondary education, the need for flexibility and intentional faculty support only becomes more dire.

CI - Poking Holes in the Silos: Collaborative Strategies for First-Year Transition

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Katie Murray
Towson University

We often talk about breaking down "silos" to build a cohesive experience for students; however, some of those "silos" must stay in place to ensure ownership and execution of tasks. This presentation focuses on a cross-divisional partnership for new first-year student transition aimed at poking holes in the silos through collaboration, communication, and commitment to effective onboarding. We'll highlight our successful strategies to streamline and coordinate new student communications, enhance course availability in high enrollment first-year courses, and increase student onboarding task completion. When our "silos" have holes for communication and collaboration we help students transition more effectively.

CT - "Design Thinking" Approach: Putting the "Student" in New Student Orientation

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Daidre Hulick
Emeline Emerson
Ashley Treu
Brigham Young University

Goodbye awkward icebreakers, hello authentic connections! This session shares how we applied design thinking to redesign New Student Orientation, creating a student-centered experience that increases belonging, confidence, and meaningful engagement. Participants will learn how to map the student journey, identify high-impact touchpoints, and prototype simple but powerful changes that elevate student transitions. Using the five stages of design thinking—empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test—attendees will leave with practical tools and strategies to craft inclusive, outcome-driven orientations that adapt to changing environments and foster authentic connections for first-year students.

CT - Partnering for Progress: Uniting Academic and Student Affairs

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

David Jenkins

Rachel Abbott

Georgia Southwestern State University

Georgia Southwestern State University is enhancing student success through a collaborative redesign of its First-Year Seminar, guided by partnerships between academic affairs, student affairs, and the National Institute for Student Success (NISS). This session highlights strategies that foster student engagement, belonging, academic growth, and improved retention through integrated curricular and co-curricular efforts. Presenters will share how NISS insights informed data-driven improvements and a shared vision for student learning. Attendees will gain practical tools for cross-division collaboration and for designing first-year experiences that promote belonging, self-advocacy, and career readiness through project-based learning.

CT - What's Needed Now! Identifying Cumulative Trends to Support Student Retention

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor

Adrienne Carter-Sowell

Maedeh Mir

Jorge Restrepo-Garcia

University of Oklahoma

According to Education Data [2022 and 2023], approximately 22.3% of Freshman dropped out of college (Hanson, 2025). Current approaches to retention trends in higher education should be proactive, flexible, and short- and long-term oriented. This session addresses what's needed now in both academic performance factors (e.g., student preparation, course design and delivery, and testing/assessment effectiveness) and non-academic factors (e.g., campus environment, student engagement, health stability, and competing priorities for students). We build on a theoretical framework to guide programmatic rationale and identify novel factors to understanding retention. We'll highlight implications for institutional policy and first-year student support practices as well.

CI - From One to Many: Collaborations Driving Student Success

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Tammy Rhodes

University of North Alabama

How can one staff member make a big institutional impact? At the University of North Alabama, the First-Year Experience program was transformed into a Collective model through cross-campus collaboration, peer mentor leadership, and creative programming. With limited staffing and resources, partnerships became essential to scaling FYE beyond the classroom and into the culture. This session will share strategies for leveraging collaborations, re-imagining peer mentor roles as student success partners, and designing low-cost, high-impact events. Participants will leave with practical ideas to maximize influence and strengthen retention, even in small or one-person offices.

CI - Maximize NSO: Addressing the Immediate Concerns of Incoming Students

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

David Waddell

Micah Russell

Allie Wright

Brigham Young University

Defining and assessing outcomes of New Student Orientation (NSO) can be challenging. Our research shows that focusing on students' most immediate needs – feeling seen, supported, and confident – results in a simpler, assessable experience. Most importantly, students establish a stronger foundation for their first year. This session will present an easily replicable, peer mentor-led experience that engages students in storytelling, collaborative activities, and reflection on belonging, purpose, and academic expectations. Developed from earlier pilots, the activity has been assessed through student surveys, mentor observations, focus groups, and course feedback. We will highlight the experience design, outcomes, and institutional impact.

CT - From Course to Campus Movement: Cultivating FYS Champions

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Ney Arias

Maggie Hohne

Florida Gulf Coast University

First-Year Seminar (FYS) programs often succeed or struggle depending on how well they are embedded within the broader institutional mission. This session shares a model for cultivating "FYS Champions" across Academic Affairs who advocate for, collaborate on, and integrate first-year efforts into student success planning. Attendees will explore how to identify and empower champions, align FYS goals with institutional priorities, think creatively about meaningful integration, and infuse a culture of care throughout campus that elevates learning and engagement. The session will present a roadmap for transforming FYS from a single course into an institutionalized movement for student success and belonging.

V - Simplifying Orientation: Better Online Experiences for Students and Families

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Tim Black

CampusESP

Devin Carpenter

University of Montana

Orientation sets the tone for the entire first-year experience — but for many institutions, it's also one of the most fragmented. Students juggle multiple systems. Families struggle to find accurate information. And staff spend countless hours answering the same questions, reconciling registrations, and chasing down missed steps. In this session, the University of Montana and CampusESP will walk through how Montana identified critical breakdowns in its orientation experience, including disjointed communication, complex registration processes, and information overload that left students and families confused — and staff stretched thin. You'll hear how these challenges directly impacted engagement, preparedness, and early retention signals. The presenters will share how Montana streamlined its online orientation experience by centralizing communication, simplifying registration workflows, and creating a single, trusted destination for students and families. The

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result: clearer expectations, higher engagement, reduced staff burden, and a more confident start for new students and their supporters. Attendees will leave with practical takeaways for improving orientation communication, aligning internal teams, and designing online experiences that work for students, families, and staff alike — without adding more tools or complexity.

V - Do THEY Really Believe THEY Can Achieve? Power of Beliefs

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

LaDonte King

Jahmad Canley

LAUNCH Student Success

Success, it is what we want for all students! It is no secret that students who succeed possess similar characteristics and strategies for success. Grit, persistence, time management, and a growth mindset are just some of those characteristics that research shows can help students from all backgrounds achieve their goals. The question is, can we be even more intentional in the way we coach students to success? In this interactive workshop, we will explore and demonstrate the importance of how to teach these skills to students during transitional periods of their academic careers through the lens of equity.

FD - Supporting Spring Start Students: Bridging Gaps in Belonging

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Kate Thibodeaux

Rebecca Gilmore

Emely Cruz Arrazola

Colorado State University

Spring undergraduate enrollment continues to grow, with a 3.2% national increase in Spring 2025 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2025). Yet, spring start students are often overlooked in institutional data and support planning. This session highlights Colorado State University's onboarding model tailored for spring start first-year and transfer students and will facilitate a dialogue on their unique needs and challenges. Attendees will gain practical strategies and tools to better support this expanding student population on their own campuses.

CP - From Exploration to Coherence: Life Design Practices for Student Thriving

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Sarah Wolff

Chelsie Hawkinson

Janel Doll

Anne Jacklin

University of Nevada Las Vegas

UNLV's College of Education has integrated Life Design pedagogy into its first- and second-year seminar courses to support student thriving, decision-making, and purpose development. Presenters will share concrete classroom strategies that guide students from exploration to coherence across their first two years. This session highlights how Life Design was scaled across COE 103 (First-Year Seminar) and COE 202 (Second-Year Seminar), shares outcomes from pilot level assessment of life design principles, and discusses institutional implications for improving retention, purpose-driven learning, and holistic student development

CI - Teaching Success: Student Engagement, Academic Performance and Institutional Impact

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Elizabeth Bleicher

Ithaca College

This session describes two successful programs that improved student engagement and academic performance for incoming first years and rising sophomores tapping an underutilized resource: summer! IC Advantage is a free and low cost online academic program offered prior to orientation. The Summer Success Academy provides selected rising sophomores a residential academic recovery program that combines academic success and career exploration with a general education course for credit. Both programs paid for themselves in the very first year. We provide assessment results, student and college impact, and access to advice for those seeking to implement similar programs.

Featured Sessions

1:45 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

FS - Shaping What's Next: The Future of Transfer Work at the NRC

Room Quinault; Fifth Floor

Kate Lehman

Emily Kittrell

University of South Carolina

Judith Brauer

Janet Marling

National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students

Following the integration of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS) into the National Resource Center, this session creates space for transfer, transition, and first-year-focused professionals to help shape the future of the NRC's transfer work. Whether you've been working in transfer for years or are just beginning to focus on this population, we want to hear from you. Through facilitated discussion, we'll identify the most pressing needs of transfer students and those who serve them, surface gaps in current resources and research, and prioritize what comprehensive support should include. Join us to share your challenges, spark new ideas, and help envision what's possible for transfer-focused scholarship and practice.

REFRESHMENT BREAK

2:30 PM – 3:15 PM PST

Regency Ballroom, Seventh Floor

3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

CP - FYE for All: Elevating First, Second, & Transfer Year Students!

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Christina Rogers

Shellee Stewart

Stella Rocha

University of California, Riverside

This session will explore how an FYE department at the University of California, Riverside utilizes common readings, authentic assessment, and student learning outcomes to standardize the curriculum for small- and large-scale learning communities (LCs). By standardizing the curriculum, it ensures consistency in learning across course sections and provides equal access to essential knowledge and skills for all students. It facilitates the measurement of student progress through these tools, enabling educators/instructors to identify areas for improvement. This allows for streamlined communication and collaboration among professionals, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the learning communities throughout the academic year.

CP - Multi-modality Faculty Training for First Year Seminar

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Rob Tripp

Kelsey Axe

University of North Carolina Wilmington

UNCW has developed a multi-modality training program for faculty in its UNI new student seminar classes. The model includes asynchronous online training, 24/7 access to instructor resources, a campus-wide First-Year Experience Conference, the support of a faculty peer mentoring program, and an ongoing professional development "Lunch and Learn" series. This presentation will focus on the data that went into the decision to move toward this model, its implementation, and the continued evolution of the training. Attendees will leave with an understanding of the model and how it might be adapted for use at their institutions.

CI - From FYE Pilot to Campus-Wide Belonging Framework

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Liz Coronado Castillo

Anna Saulsbury-Molina

St. Philip's College

This session shares how St. Philip's College transformed a small-scale First Year Experience (FYE) pilot into a college-wide Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), as required by SACSCOC. Grounded in the cultural values of FAMILIA-Family, Acceptance, Mentoring, Inspiration, Learning, Interconnection, and Advancement-the initiative addresses declining persistence among first-time-in-college (FTIC) students by fostering a sense of belonging. Two pilot cohorts (57 and 61 students) each achieved a 74% persistence rate, surpassing institutional averages. These consistent outcomes laid the foundation for the QEP, Culture of Caring and Belonging: Developing FAMILIA, which will launch in 2026–2027.

FD - Belonging Beyond the Bachelor's: First Gen in Graduate School

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Elsen Megan

Tiffani Riggers-Piehl

University of Missouri- Kansas City

First-generation graduate students (FGGS) navigate unique challenges related to identity, belonging, and academic culture. Lacking important intergenerational knowledge, FGGS can experience strong feelings of marginality in their graduate school experience. Using Schlossberg's concepts of marginality, mattering, and the Four S's, we identify strategies that foster community and affirm identity for this growing population. The session highlights approaches that help FGGS navigate academic transitions and make meaningful connections to peers, faculty, and staff. Presenters will share examples of campus-based initiatives at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Participants will leave with practical ideas to promote FGGS mattering in their own institutional contexts.

CP - Meeting Students Where They Are: Reimagining Post-COVID Outreach Strategies

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Natalie Meredith

Matthew Nolan

Nicole Craven

The Ohio State University

Supporting first-year students at a large institution requires adaptable, scalable strategies. This session shares our office's experience transitioning our focus from a proactive outreach model to a student-driven, opt-in approach. Faced with declining engagement and shifting post-COVID student behaviors, we redesigned our academic year support to prioritize student agency, comfort, and meaningful connection. Through Success Consultations, Peer Leaders now guide new students to targeted resources based on self-identified needs. Attendees will gain insight into how assessment and peer feedback shaped this transition, and how large campuses can evolve outreach to better support student development throughout the academic year.

CT - Redefining the First -Year Student Journey with Data Driven Communications.

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

Dylan Moore

Kenny Goode

East Carolina University

Utilizing student journey mapping to reveal where students encounter barriers, our team developed multichannel communication strategies that are designed to guide and support students while enhancing their first-year experience. Through broadened collaboration with Academic and Student Affairs as well as other strategic partners, campus communications have been redefined and transformed. Changes in multichannel communication strategies have resulted in historically higher retention rates and have positively impacted the first-year student experience. Our presentation will highlight the methods used to align campus communications with student needs, showcase measurable outcomes, and share best practices for influencing the student journey through strategic communication.

V - TracCloud: Retention through Engagement

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Laura Reed

Redrock Software Corporation

TracCloud is the most comprehensive, powerful, cloud-based software solution providing on-demand access to essential tools such as appointment scheduling, visits, demographics, and activity reports. Contacts, appointments, and schedules are managed on multiple criteria. Integration with campus information systems links course enrollments and other critical data. Our new Student Success Plans module increases student engagement and allows you to create and document success plans for each student. The SAGE module aids with student retention by creating early alerts.

CI - Cross-Institutional Collaboration for First-Gen Student Success

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Catherine Paolillo

Ariela Canizal

University of San Diego

This session highlights a successful collaborative approach to a student success summit for First-Generation students in San Diego. Four institutions partnered to share regional trends and data on this student population and their intersecting identities, while also providing support strategies for the broader community. The summit enhanced engagement, enrollment, and overall success by fostering a deeper understanding of First-Gen students and encouraging collaboration among colleagues across institutions. Session attendees will get a framework for organizing a multi-institutional student success initiative and to better understand the value of using regional data to create targeted First-Year and First-Gen student support strategies.

CI - Embracing Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes: Becoming a Multifaceted Community College FYE Program

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Emily Bangham

Pasadena City College

Pasadena City College has had a first year program for over 20 years and a cohort that has grown from 300 students to 5,000. In this presentation, we will detail the ways that the program has adapted to student and institutional needs, including the partnerships with departments such as Outreach, Enrollment Services, and Financial Aid. We will talk about embracing change and extending services to all students and how it has redefined the role that FYE plays on campus, especially the way that the first year support center has become the foundation that jumpstarts a students' academic journey.

CT - Revamping Orientation Programming: A Cross-Campus Collaboration for Continuous Improvement

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor



Nicole Juersivich

Nazareth University

This session will explore how faculty and staff used Democratically Engaged Assessment (DEA) principles to revamp and revitalize the First-Year Orientation programming at Nazareth University. The collaborative process brought together

stakeholders to assess values, relationships, and outcomes, making intentional improvements to the student experience based on the Thriving Framework. Attendees will learn how full participation, co-creation, rigor, and resilience in assessment led to a more engaging, inclusive, and responsive orientation. This session will provide practical insights for higher education professionals interested in continuous improvement through collaboration and student-centered design.

CI - From Participants to Planners: First-Year Students Leading First-Year Engagement

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Deborah Hall

Micah Russell

Sage Shoell

Brigham Young University

BYU's First-Year Student Activities Committee empowers first-year students to design and lead campus events, fostering belonging, leadership, and engagement. This initiative responds to the disconnect between traditional programming and the lived experience of first-year students. Through intentional recruitment, mentorship, and collaboration with campus offices, the committee has increased participation and strengthened student development. This session will share the structure, outcomes, and assessment of the initiative, offering a replicable model for institutions seeking to enhance first-year programming through student-led leadership and experiential learning.

CR - Assessment Matters: Information Literacy, Retention, and Student Success

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Sara McCaslin

Western Kentucky University

Assessment of information literacy efforts can impact college students' success and retention. Library outreach and partnerships with teaching faculty, especially those targeted towards first-year students, are important. Library involvement with High Impact Practices (HIPs) including Living Learning Communities provide librarians with an assessment-rich environment to connect information literacy with student success and retention. This presentation will showcase research findings and highlight the impact of information literacy library instruction on first-year Living Learning Community (LLC) Criminology students.

CT - Designing FYE Courses for Gen Z: A Digital Workbook Approach

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Gwen Fears

Jan O'Brien

Liz Walsh-Treviño

Miami University

We've all heard it. "Today's students are just... different." And if you've encountered the dreaded "Gen Z stare" while teaching an FYE course, you know they're different. We had to ask: what actually resonates with this generation in an FYE course? Our answer was to rethink content delivery altogether, resulting in an interactive, dynamic, digital workbook that engages students throughout the semester and produces a useful artifact for their entire Miami University experience. In this session, we'll share what we've learned about Gen Z, how assessment data guided our process, and the response from students and instructors.

CT - Practical Strategies for Reading and Learning in The Digital Age

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor

Laurie Hazard

New England Institute of Technology

This presentation explores the challenges of engaging students and fostering self-efficacy in reading, studying, and learning amid the digital age. Drawing on recent research and media reports, it examines how digital distractions impair students' ability to concentrate, retain information, and sustain academic habits. With evidence that online environments diminish deep reading and burden working memory, the session highlights the cognitive costs students face. Participants will gain practical strategies and pedagogical tools to counteract these effects and support student success. Designed for student success practitioners, this workshop offers actionable solutions to improve focus, motivation, and academic performance.

CT - Enhancing FYE Courses in Decentralized Settings

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Reba Daniels

Allison Holden

University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

Discover how to build a thriving, collaborative community on a decentralized campus! Whether you're looking to boost engagement, foster a sense of community, or refine your approach, this session will equip you with actionable insights. We will share how we've aligned core principles while honoring our unique populations on a campus with over 350 seminar sections. Learn how our research informed practices maintain a cohesive vision, tailor support, and leverage our campus's diversity to enhance student success. Attendees will gain tips on how to balance unified goals with personalized approaches, foster community, and strengthen cross-campus engagement in first-year seminars.

CT - Using Mindfulness in the First Year Foundations Course

Room 602: Nooksack; Sixth Floor

Kelly Rieckmann Krause

Marian University

Our first year students begin the school year with a desire to obtain an education that will set them up for a successful career and happy life. The impact of trauma, stress, and a lack of resilience often hijacks their path leaving them in a state of flight or freeze. In our first year seminar course, students learn what it means to be part of a community that embraces a growth mindset and practices mindfulness techniques that support their mental well-being and sense of belonging. Through group practice and opportunities for introspection, students are supported in their endeavor to thrive.

CI - Developing an Academic Adviser Caseload Model for First Year Students

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Joe Murray

Florida Atlantic University

Historically, academic advising has been defined as 'course-scheduling'. Institutions are now realizing that correct course scheduling is not enough.

Proactive, intrusive, relationship-based outreach is becoming a necessity. Our institution has transitioned from a scheduling culture to a case management model. Outreach and relationship building begin with students prior to arriving on campus and continue throughout their college experience. Come see how this change in culture and structure has driven a 25.9% increase in 4-year graduation rates, a significant decrease in undeclared students by the end of their second year, and a 12% increase in first to second year retention.

CR - Career Exploration and Skill-Development in the First-Year Experience

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Kevin Wenger

Jarrett Warshaw

University of South Carolina

Jillian Kinzie

Indiana University Bloomington

During the first-year experience (FYE) the decisions that students make can alter the course of their lives, serving as a key period for growth, skill development, and exploration. Therefore, career preparation has become a growing focus area for FYE programs. In this study, we use data from two national surveys, the National Survey on the First-Year Experience (NSYFE) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), to examine how institutions' efforts in this area reflect on student perceptions and outcomes. Join us to learn more about this study and how career and personal exploration can benefit your first-year students.

CP - Framing the Institutional Mission Via the First-Year Seminar

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Noel Dolan

Gregory Hoskins

Villanova University

This session will use Villanova's 2-semester seminar sequence (ACS) as a model of how to use an FYS to communicate the mission and to unify a fluid, multidisciplinary instructor pool. At the heart of ACS is the mission belief that seeking the truth (veritas) with respect and love (caritas) toward one another leads to deep and lasting community (unitas). Students share common readings, most importantly St. Augustine's Confessions, which introduces them to a key question central to any first-year student: who am I? The course thus explores both individual values and growth as well as the importance of community.

CT - Micro-Certifications as Milestones: Boosting Persistence and Motivation

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Thomas Aubrey

Brielle Rawlings-Dube

South Mountain Community College

This session explores how micro-certifications and stackable credentials serve as powerful motivational tools for first-year and transitioning students. Presenters will share proven strategies from community college programs that saw dramatic increases in persistence and course completion rates through the use of milestone-based micro-credentialing. Attendees will learn how digital badges enhance student confidence, support workforce

readiness, and align with industry needs—while offering flexible, personalized learning pathways. Learn how to integrate these tools to better engage students early in their academic journey and promote lifelong learning habits.

FD - Trauma Informed Strategies for Effective Classroom Management

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Wayne South
Lauren Prior
Anda Zhao
Angela Vaughan

University of Northern Colorado

In this session, participants will discuss trauma-informed classroom management strategies for college instructors. Participants will learn about recent research in trauma-informed practices, discuss skills necessary to facilitate difficult conversations and to provide support to students. Additionally, participants will learn how trauma-informed classroom management practices can positively impact students with varying needs and personal identities and how instructors can help students navigate challenges in their college experience. Throughout this session, professionals will learn how trauma-informed practices can be implemented leaving with strategies for how to best support students with trauma histories or currently experiencing trauma.

V - Choose Your Own Academic Adventure: Personalized First-Year Success at Scale

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Fred Scott
Innovative Educators

Meg Foster
PVCC

What if every first-year student had a success plan built just for them? This session introduces a scalable, personalized support model grounded in brief self-assessments, nudging tools, and 75+ skill-building workshops. Designed like a “choose your own adventure,” students select learning paths aligned with their goals, challenges, and readiness. Learn how institutions are ditching outdated, one-size-fits-all FYE textbooks in favor of flexible, data-driven support that meets students where they are. Attendees will explore implementation strategies, preview student feedback, and discuss how personalized academic pathways can transform the first-year experience without burning out faculty or blowing budgets.

CP - Lights, Camera, Connection! Turning Campus Resources into Two-Minute Stars

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Tracy Emmons
Elena Johnson
Oklahoma State University

First-year students often underuse campus resources. It is not because those resources are unavailable, but because they can feel unfamiliar or intimidating. To help bridge this gap, we created a series of short “Brought To You By...” micro-videos inside the UNIV 1111 first-year seminar. Each two-minute video puts a human face to a key resource such as the library, tutoring, or advising. Staff introduce themselves, explain their role, and share one practical tip. This

session will highlight the program design, share our in-progress assessment strategies, and discuss early observations. Participants will leave with a replicable programmatic model they can adapt.

4:15 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.

CI - Best Practices for Student Onboarding

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

John Haller
University of Miami

This session will describe best practices for student onboarding and transition. It involves the development of a pre-orientation program that reduced summer melt, the development of a Federal Work Study program targeting lower income students that reduced student attrition, the creation of a transitional advising office, the development of a first-year seminar that facilitated student transitions and increased student retention, as well as the development of a quantitative retention tool that identified at-risk students.

CI - Campus Collaboration Between CCA's & FYS Instructors within Residential Education

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Jenny Hulbert
Tanya Puentes
San Diego State University

San Diego State University's Coordinated Care Advising (CCA) model fosters student success through campus wide collaboration using a holistic approach. Targeting first-year students, proactive and personalized advising has proven to improve retention by 94% within the last four years, maintain a 3.3 GPA, and foster a sense of belonging. This advising model breaks down barriers often faced during the formative years of higher education. Within Residential Education, first-year students enroll into a 1-unit University Seminar course. The curriculum focuses on goal setting, study skills, and career planning. Collaboration between CCAs and FYS instructors ensures students receive academic guidance and resources.



CI - Turning Required Course Groups into Student-Led Learning Communities

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Sachiko Ito
Institute of Science Tokyo

This session introduces a case from a Japanese university where first-year course units, originally created by Academic Affairs for scheduling purposes, evolved into student-led learning communities. Although not intended to support peer learning, the units offered a framework for connection and engagement. Student Affairs recognized this potential and began encouraging new students to use these units as learning communities through orientation and ongoing programming. The session will highlight key strategies, collaborative practices between Academic and Student Affairs, and lessons learned that may inspire participants to repurpose administrative structures for student success.

FD - Friend, Foe, or Future? The Dueling AI's in the FYE

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Ryan Hassler

Pennsylvania State University Berks Campus

Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents both remarkable opportunities and complex challenges for higher education. As we prepare first-year students to thrive in a rapidly evolving academic landscape, questions emerge about balancing innovation with academic integrity. Is AI a tool for empowerment or a threat to foundational learning? This facilitated dialogue invites participants to explore the “dual AIs”—Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence—through shared experiences, practical challenges, and forward-thinking strategies. Attendees will leave with new perspectives on how higher education can responsibly navigate AI’s impact while safeguarding the values that uphold meaningful learning and student success.

CR - Representation: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Peer-Mentors of Color

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

Michael Graham

Lucia Solano

Lander University

This session presents research on the experiences of peer-mentors of color within a First Year Experience program at a predominantly white institution. The study follows 8 mentors throughout a semester to better understand how representation shaped both their personal and professional identity development. Findings highlight the benefits of mentorship as well as the unique challenges that students of color encounter in these leadership positions. Attendees will gain insight into structural barriers, opportunities for professional development, and strategies for creating more inclusive peer-mentorship programs. Resources and discussion will support participants in applying these findings in their own institutional contexts.

CP - Why They Stay: Second Year Persistence in LA College Promise

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Joanna Zimring Towne

Giselle Ramirez

Los Angeles Community College District

The Los Angeles College Promise (LACP) is a two-year success and completion program that has served over 40,000 students representing 76% LatinX, 48% first generation and 54% Pell recipients. Although Fall to Fall persistence among LACP student is significantly higher than their non-promise peers, 2nd year persistence continued to be a challenge. To address this, LACCD partnered with the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University to implement an enhancement to our success coaching model and implemented a self-evaluation of successful second year students. Through qualitative and quantitative review, LACP discovered what variables are key in keeping students enrolled.

CT - Gamified Introduction to Campus Resources for FYE Students

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Jennifer Wright

Debby Marindin

John McMann

College of Charleston

First-year students often struggle to navigate the overwhelming range of academic, wellness, and campus resources available to support their success. To address this challenge, we developed an interactive Student Resource Hub supported by student-created videos and themed, gamified activities—including escape rooms, scavenger hunts, and game show formats—that require students to engage directly with key resources and offices on campus. This cross-departmental initiative highlights an emerging trend in using gamification and digital storytelling to promote belonging, wellness, and academic success. Participants will learn how intentional design and collaborative approaches can transform resource awareness into active, meaningful student engagement.

CT - Multitasking is the Mindkiller: Focus Amidst Chaos

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Lindsay Harper

Texas Tech University

In a world of constant distraction where attention is currency, multitasking feels necessary—but science shows it’s actually making us less productive and more anxious. This session debunks the multitasking myth and introduces the concept of continuous partial attention, particularly as it impacts first-year college students. Through relatable examples and hands-on activities, attendees will learn practical, brain-based strategies to reduce stress, improve focus, and increase productivity. By understanding how thought habits are formed and how to rewrite them, participants will walk away with actionable tools to help students—and themselves—thrive amid the demands of a fast-paced, always-connected world.

CI - The Directors Playbook for First Year Experience Success

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Milton Jackson

Grambling State University

Directing a First Year Experience program means wearing many hats. Some days you are an advisor, other days an instructor, often a team leader, and always a strategist. Through it all, the focus has to stay on first year students. This session gives a director to director perspective from Grambling State University, where the First Year Experience team, housed within University College, made the shift from transactional advising to a coaching culture built on validation and care. Participants will leave with inspiration, practical tools, and a playbook for leadership that keeps students and staff first while meeting goals.

CT - "Democracy in Our DNA": Inclusive Dialogue at New Student Orientation

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Nancy Koppelman

The Evergreen State College, Academic Engagement Network

Colette Coleman

George Washington University

Since October 7, 2023 a polarized political climate added an unanticipated element to campus life at many institutions nationwide. This presentation describes an orientation week initiative at George Washington University in fall 2024. It focuses on an interfaith panel with both Jewish and Muslim presenters who educated students about antisemitism and Islamophobia. The session was explicitly connected to GWU's institutional mission and values in order to highlight mutual understanding, cooperation, and collegiality. All new students were required to attend. Presenters will explain the event and make time for questions and discussion.

CT - Warhawk Waypoints: Building Confidence through Connection in First-Year Experience

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor

Jennifer Go

Djuana Duncombe-Paden

Thaddeus Hoffman

Auburn University at Montgomery

In UNIV 1000, we facilitate learning environments that foster collaborative learning and curiosity, introducing our students to a variety of learning experiences and opportunities to connect with the AUM campus and local communities. By presenting learning as an explorative act, we encourage students to step out of their comfort zones and find the courage to try, whether that's joining a club, utilizing campus resources, asking for help, or just doing something new. In this session, we discuss Warhawk Waypoints, a nine-week challenge that asks students to complete tasks from four categories: Campus & Community, Academics, Wellness, and Just for Fun.

CT - Interdisciplinary Studies: Reimagining Undergraduate Education and College Completion

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Merlin Langey

Florida A&M University

A review of enrollment and graduation rates indicates that both two- and four-year colleges are reporting slips. In Florida, the Board of Governors have implemented the Performance Based Funding Model to address the above issues for each of the twelve (12) State Universities. Florida A&M University institutional response resulted in the implementation of the BS/BA Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) degrees to enable First Generation African American College and Low Income students an opportunity to complete their education and to achieve their career goals. This presentation will discuss student responses, programmatic trends, institutional challenges, future directions, and the needs of the market.

CT - Transforming Your Institutional Strategy Toward New Era of Student Success

Room 602: Nooksack; Sixth Floor

Lisa Dela Cruz

NODA-Association for Orientation, Transition, & Retention in Higher Education

NODA's philosophy toward orientation, transition, and retention is to blur the traditional independent fields known more specifically to orientation-transition is the continuous process leading toward orientation and retention. Practitioners must recognize the intersectionality of orientation, transition, and retention to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to successfully support students. Institutions must adapt and be prepared for demographic shifts among students within the United States. Standard approaches to orientation, transition, and retention will likely not be as effective if institutions do not take a better data-informed approach that addresses the unique and individualized needs of their students.

FD - Belonging Without Borders: Co-Creating Impactful Strategies for the Online Learner

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Nancy Trojanowski

University of Maryland Global Campus

As more students begin their academic journeys fully online, universities must rethink how to foster belonging, readiness, and engagement in the first year. This facilitated dialogue invites participants to share strategies, challenges, and innovations for supporting online students. Drawing from UMG's experience of supporting over 100,000 online learners, the facilitators will prompt discussion around onboarding challenges, collaboration strategies, and the role of analytics in supporting student success. Together, we'll explore how orientation, advising, academic support, and community-building can be reimagined to meet the needs of online learners and co-create a set of strategies and best practices to inform future work.

V - How Hybrid Orientation Models Can Improve Student Retention

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Aaron McNicol

Comevo

In an era where flexibility and accessibility are key to student success, hybrid orientation models are emerging as powerful tools for improving engagement and long-term retention. Join Comevo, a leader in online orientation solutions, as we explore how a thoughtful blend of virtual and in-person orientation experiences can create a more inclusive, scalable, and impactful onboarding process. In this session, we'll share insights from institutions successfully using hybrid models, explore data on how hybrid orientation influences student retention, and offer practical strategies for designing your own hybrid orientation experience. Whether you're looking to enhance accessibility, streamline operations, or boost student success metrics, this session will provide actionable takeaways to help your institution thrive in today's evolving higher education landscape.

CT - Helping Families Be Positive First Year Student Coaches

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Linda Krzykowski

SUNY at Albany

Colleges often expect students to be independent when they arrive, negotiating the college experience on their own. Yet students arrive on college campuses still connected to their family. No longer seen as "helicopter parents", college students often want parents to be "co-pilots" and seek their opinions about college experiences. While FERPA reinforces student autonomy, parents continue to have a large influence on their student's everyday college experience. To help parents transition into their new coaching role, Great Danes 101 was developed. A semester-long course for families, the University at Albany has seen tremendous success with this new FYE course.

FD - Checking Out Success: How Libraries Lend Support to First-Year Students

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Megan Benson

Binghamton University

As society and information needs evolve, so too will library support for the first-year experience. This facilitated dialogue invites participants to explore how librarians are navigating a shifting information landscape while striving to maintain sustainable models of student and professional support. Generative AI will likely emerge as a focal point, but conversation will also center on how FYE support is delivered, implemented, and assessed across formats—from in-person instruction and activities to online modules. Attendees will share challenges, strategies, and successes, leaving the session with fresh ideas, practical approaches, and new colleagues to connect with beyond the conference.

V - What If Real-World Learning & Belonging Were the Keys to First-Year Success?

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Peter McGovern

Ben Polansky

EdOdyssey

Shannon Fairly-Pittman

Northeastern University

Higher education faces urgent questions: How do we help students feel connected? How do we demonstrate the value of college in a rapidly changing world? This session explores place-based first-year experiences — immersive programs rooted in people, place, perspective, and purpose — as a powerful solution. Drawing on examples, including Northeastern University's Scholars Program (domestic) and other international and domestic first-year models, we'll illustrate how real-world learning builds belonging, resilience, curiosity, and early career readiness. We will also highlight how these programs expand institutional capacity through strong partnerships and scalable design. Participants will leave with strategies to create equity-minded first-year initiatives—whether piloting with a small cohort or designing for hundreds—that energize students, strengthen retention, and bring learning to life beyond the classroom.

CI - Outcome-Oriented Freshman Seminar Driving Retention for Conditionally Admitted Freshmen

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Ryan Combs

Austin Peay State University Clarksville

UNIV 1010: University Success and Foundations of Learning was introduced in Fall 2024 at Austin Peay State University to improve outcomes for conditionally admitted students. This three-credit course, developed by a committee of faculty and staff, emphasizes academic preparedness, resource awareness, and student engagement. After just one year, the outcomes were clear: higher GPAs, fewer course failures, and a 7.5% increase in retention. These early results underscore the value of proactive, structured academic support in promoting equity and persistence in higher education. This session explores how intentional support strategies can make a lasting impact on conditionally admitted student success.

Featured Sessions

4:15 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

FS - Spirituality, Authenticity and Wholeness in American Higher Education

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

John Gardner

Betsy Barefoot

Gardner Institute

Tiffani Riggers-Piehl

University of Missouri - Kansas City

Sandy Greene

University of South Carolina

A perfect way to end this intensive day of learning: this session is a conference tradition since 1997 continuing a practice of Alexander and Lena Astin, Arthur Chickering, and Laura Rendon. John, Betsy, Sandy, Tiffani, and Kate will lead this session in guided reflection in which they will ask participants to discuss such questions as: 1. How congruent are you in terms of your values and beliefs in the context of the practiced values of your supervisors and your institution? 2. How "authentic" as a person do you feel you are with your students and colleagues? 3. And thus, how "whole" are you as a person in your first-year experience work? 4. And how can we make necessary adjustments and commitments to practice our profession in ways that are more centered, congruent, authentic and whole?

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

FS - Celebrating Students and their Experiences at HBCUs

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Jamil D. Johnson

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina

Dalvin Dunn

Texas A&M University

Jamila Lyn

Bottom Up Consulting

Travis Smith

Alabama State University

Led by Editor, Dr. Jamil D. Johnson, over the past two years, six authors and over 15 co-authors have engaged in research projects examining student experiences at HBCUs. Our recently published open access book titled "Celebrating Students and their Experiences at HBCUs," centers the student and how campus and community play a significant role in HBCU student success. Join us for an engaging lightning round discussion to learn more about the "special sauce," that make HBCUs unique and practices to support student success outcomes. Dr. Johnson will overview the general landscape of HBCUs and the context for the book, Dalvin Dunn will share his findings on the significance of financial literacy and decision-making among students, Jamila Lyn will introduce an innovative online course sharing model to improve student success metrics, and Dr. Smith will discuss the important experiences of being "More than an Athlete" at HBCUs. Interact with leading HBCU experts in this impactful session. This work is funded by the Advising Success Network (ASN)/NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

FS - Strategies for Mental and Physical Wellbeing for Your FYE Course

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Marsha Fralick

Seth Batiste

Furman University

Since current research shows that about 65% of college students have reported a need for mental health services, colleges are working to enhance these services. The first-year experience course can become part of a college culture of wellness by including wellness topics in the curriculum. An outline of wellness topics will be presented along with practical exercises for the first-year experience classroom. Topics include exploring personal strengths, practicing fundamental cognitive behavioral therapy principles, increasing resilience, managing stress, relaxing, improving exercise and nutrition, getting enough sleep, taking steps to increase happiness, and reflecting on life purpose.

Featured Session

4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

FS - Supporting the First Year at Community Colleges: A Conversation with the NRC

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Kate Lehman

Silvia Patricia Rios Husain

University of South Carolina

This meeting provides space for community college practitioners to share perspectives on what support, resources, and professional learning are most valuable in their work with first-year students. Feedback will inform how the National Resource Center can better tailor its tools, events, research and publications to meet the realities of community college contexts.

Featured Session

4:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Attendees of Settle University's featured session, "Engaging Seattle: Academics, Student Development, and Community in a First-Year Seminar" scheduled for Monday (2/16) from 9:00am-10:15am in Room: 302 - Beckler; Third Floor will have the opportunity to attend a tour of Seattle University's campus! You will need to attend this featured session in order to reserve your spot for the tour. Space is limited.

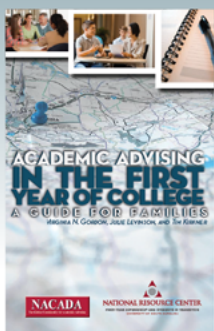
15 min: Shuttle ride to campus

1 hour: Breakout tours on campus, highlighting the Center for Community Engagement, the Redhawk Residential Experience programming, the Office of Sponsored Projects, the Advising and revamped first-year registration model, or the Signature Seminar faculty.

1 hour: The tours end in a reception, where all the above partners will be brought together so that participants can network directly with staff and share contact information if they would like to learn more about a specific element or initiative.

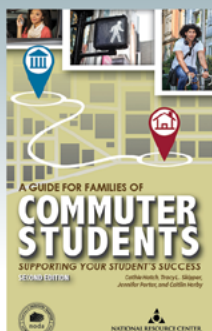
15 min: Return shuttle ride to conference hotel

GUIDES FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES



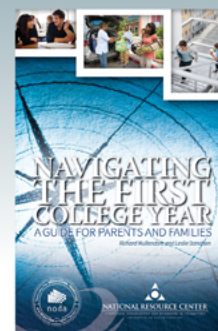
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MONDAY

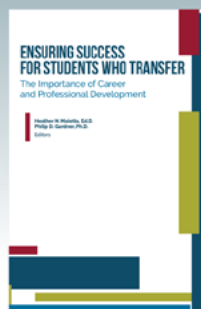
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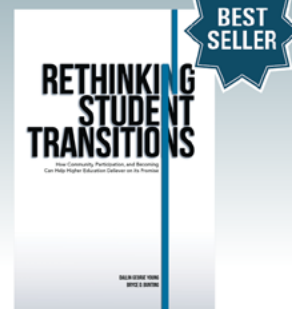
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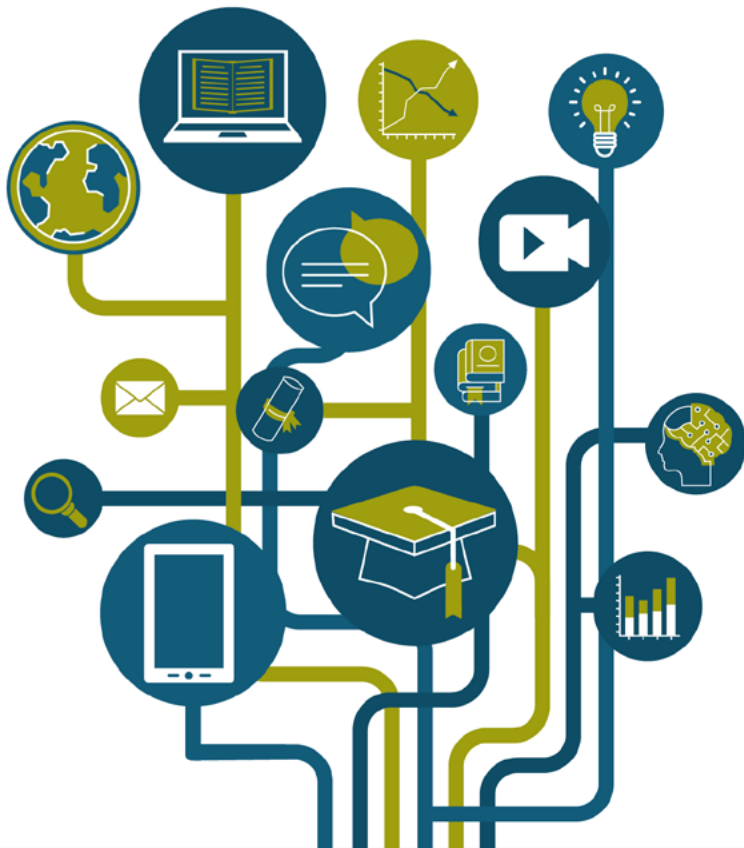
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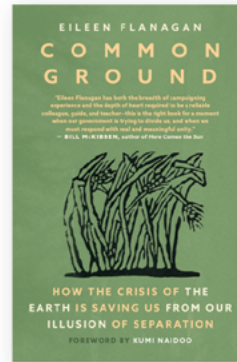


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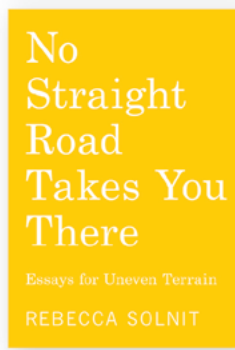
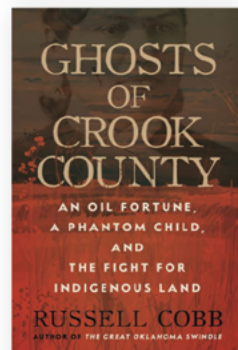
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CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

7:30 AM – 9:00 AM PST
Regency Ballroom, Seventh Floor

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

CT - Examining Your Life as an FYE Innovator: Taking One's Measure

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

John Gardner

Gardner Institute

This session addresses the centrality of innovation in successful First-Year Experience programs and courses as the essence of this powerful, global, concept; and will invite you to examine your role as an FYE innovator. Since its 1982 introduction by John Gardner, the FYE concept has always been more about innovation than retention. Today, John hosts a podcast on innovation in higher education that has included approximately 200 interviews in 3 years, and over 20,000 downloads, getting innovators to talk about their life journeys as innovators. This reflective and interactive session will explore with participants one's journey as an FYE innovator.

CT - Belonging by Design: Fostering Connection in First-Year Experience Courses

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Kimberly Koledoye

Bryant Nail

Jamarc Crawford

Houston City College

A strong sense of belonging is critical to student success, especially during the first year of college. This session explores practical strategies for fostering belonging in First-Year Experience (FYE) courses through inclusive pedagogy, community-building activities, and intentional course design. Grounded in research and student development theory, the session will highlight approaches that support identity, connection, and engagement among diverse student populations. Participants will gain tools to create welcoming, student-centered learning environments that promote retention, academic confidence, and personal growth. Join us to learn how small shifts in practice can make a big impact on students' first-year experience.

CT - Curriculum as Invitation: Civic Life and Community Engagement at AU

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Martyn Oliver

Lizzie Worden

Keith Leonard

American University

What does it mean to engage in a life of learning within an institution—and then extend that engagement outward to the world? This session explores

a two-semester first-year sequence, Encounters, that introduces students to civic engagement through academic inquiry and shared experiences. The first course examines the university as an institution; the second, centered on James Baldwin, considers how we critique and improve institutions beyond campus. Together, the courses foster belonging, purpose, common intellectual experience, and civil dialogue. Presenters will share program design, early outcomes, and strategies adaptable to first-year initiatives at diverse institutions.

FD - "Okay, But How Do I Put It All Together?"

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Nii Kpakpo Abrahams

Butler University

Each year, professionals arrive and leave the FYE conference excited, but also overwhelmed, by all the great ideas, sessions, and strategies. This facilitated dialogue creates space for those new to the field (or their roles) to pause, reflect, and zoom out to create a cohesive and holistic view of the FYE across the lifecycle of an academic year. The session will be anchored by the question: "How do we move from inspiration to integration?" Whether you're launching a new program or inheriting a legacy one, you'll leave with clarity, confidence, and next steps.

CR - (M)POWER Summer Pathways: Building Bridges of Belonging

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Elizabeth Sturgeon

Mount Saint Mary's University

Summer bridge programs are vital recruitment and retention tools. Mount Saint Mary's University in Los Angeles (MSMULA) launched the (M)POWER signature program in 2025, creating a summer bridge experience open to all incoming freshmen at no cost to them. Students spend six weeks of the summer before their freshman year enrolling in two credit-bearing classes. Students forge connections with people, offices, and the Mission, all while becoming immersed in academics and the culture and community of Los Angeles. In this session, we will share how to foster widespread buy-in and student success in the summer bridge space.

CT - Inside Out: Navigating the First-Year College Experience Through Emotion-Informed Advising

Room 402: Chilliwack; Fourth Floor

Shannon Butler-Mokoro

Wellesley College

This presentation explores how the emotional journey of first-year college students mirrors the core emotions featured in Pixar's *Inside Out*—Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger—and how first-year experience programming and first-year academic advising can better support students through these emotional phases. By using this emotional lens, FYE staff, faculty, and advisors can more effectively empathize, connect, and guide students through the transition to college life. This interactive presentation will use case scenarios and small group activity and discussion to help FY staff and advisors successfully guide students through pivotal moments such as homesickness, roommate troubles, academic challenges, exam stress.

CR - The Impact of University Mission Alignment on Student Mental Health

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Jonathan Sandberg**Bryce Bunting****Kathrine Paget***Brigham Young University*

This presentation will present pre and post data from a first semester student success course required of all new students. We hypothesize that increases in reports of student engagement in behaviors aligned with the university mission (intellectually enlarging, spiritually strengthening, character building, life-long service and learning) will be correlated with decreases in mental health struggles (specifically depression and anxiety) for first semester students. Data was gathered from the nearly 7000 news students taking the student success course in fall of 2025.

**CI - The Belonging Blueprint: Identifying & Activating Levers to Improve Connection**

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Natalie Nickson*University New South Wales*

UNSW, a top 20 global university with over 78,000 students (30% international), faces the complex challenge of fostering belonging within a large scale, diverse community. In a project spanning 3 years, the university conducted comprehensive research engaging 7,000+ students through choice modelling and persona development to identify what impedes and enhances belonging. This student-centered approach revealed measurable components of belonging, enabling UNSW to design targeted interventions that address specific barriers. Learn more about the evidence-based initiatives implemented that demonstrated significant, quantifiable improvements in students' sense of belonging across our diverse community, providing a proven framework for improving student belonging.

CT - UDL and AI: A College Success Story

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Karrie Morin**Michelle White***CT State Capital*

UDL and AI: A College Success Story explores the intersection of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the redesign of CCS-1001: College and Career Success. This session highlights the UDL Guidelines and AI tools such as Copilot, Grammarly, ChatGPT, and NotebookLM. Participants will explore how dual coding theory, multimodal assignment, and executive functioning supports were embedded into course design to foster access, inclusivity, and student agency. Attendees will engage in hands-on activities applying strategies within their disciplines. This presentation is ideal for educators, designers, and administrators seeking to align pedagogy with digital innovation and institutional goals.

CT - Access Denied: Removing Barriers to First-Year Students Seeking On-Campus Employment

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Mara Sansolo**Keah Tandon***University of South Carolina*

Students with experiential learning engagements tend to have better early career success. Institutions can support access to experiential learning and students' career readiness development through providing on-campus employment opportunities. However, these are frequently for continuing students with previous work experience; first-year students rarely have the same access. This session will review the barriers to first-year students gaining on-campus employment as well as provide strategies for reducing the effects of these barriers. The session will conclude with time for participants to discuss current practices and identify potential strategies to implement on their own campuses.

CI - Business Is Personal: Developing Peer Facilitators for Leadership and Success

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Victoria Lopez*Arizona State University*

With more than 20,000 students, the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University is among the largest business schools in the nation. Each fall, over 100 peer facilitators support 3,000+ first-year students enrolled in WPC 101: Student Success in Business, a seminar course designed to ease the transition to college. This session highlights how facilitators are empowered through a structured leadership pathway, a 3-credit upper division elective course, involvement in curriculum development, and co-curricular events. Participants will see how this scalable, data-driven model strengthens mentorship, fosters belonging, and enhances first-year student success.

CT - Collaborating to Community-Building: Library Leadership of a Common Book Program

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Sam Greeson**Jill Becker***University of Kansas*

Discover how KU Libraries relaunched a common book program to foster community and connection among the KU community. This session explores innovative initiatives such as "Lawrence Reviewed," a digital archive of student reflections inspired by John Green's *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, and "Book Club in a Bag," which empowers students to host their own discussions and seed nominations for future common book selections. Attendees will learn strategies for integrating unique programming for first-year experiences, building collaborations across campus and the local community, and assessing impacts of engagement.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

CT - How to Establish a Mentoring Program for First Year Students

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Wayne Jackson

University of Central Florida Orlando

Maurice Davis

Montgomery County Community College

In this workshop, participants will learn the key components in developing a successful mentoring program on their campus. With university and college budgets tightening due to lack of funds, college administrators are exploring ways to develop cost effective measures to increase student retention, without killing the budget. This session will particularly benefit those who are interested in developing or enhancing their mentoring program with the expressed intent of increasing retention and persistence.

CT - Partners in Purpose: Engaging Peer Mentors Through Collaborative Summer Training

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor

Sandi Bennett

Natalie Yates

Brigham Young University

At Brigham Young University, the Office of First-Year Experience (FYE) has implemented a robust online summer training program for peer mentors that serves a dual purpose: developing foundational mentoring skills and cultivating a community of support and purpose. Through structured learning and intentional community-building, mentors connect with each other, the mission of BYU-FYE, and the broader university purpose. The training models the very principles mentors will pass on, ensuring they're equipped to foster belonging, promote success, and support students from day one. This session will introduce the design and impact of this initiative, offering insights into its structure and outcomes.

CI - What's Your Story? The Power of Vulnerability for Connection

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Khristina DeLorenzo

Anthony James

Megan Colascione

Wayne State University

Storytelling fosters self-awareness, confidence, and community - key elements of student success. This interactive workshop guides participants through reflecting on personal values and lived experiences to craft and share a "60-second truth." With over 240 student participants and 70+ faculty/staff engaged, the initiative has shown measurable impact on personal growth, engagement, and institutional culture. Attendees will explore how vulnerability and storytelling enhance student belonging and professional development, leaving with practical tools to adapt this experience for first-year programs, classrooms, and campus initiatives. Join us to discover how personal narratives can strengthen connections and drive inclusive excellence across your institution.

CI - More Than a Name Change: Rebuilding Trust in FYS

Room 602: Nooksack; Sixth Floor

Zak Krug

Amanda Horwitz

Wayne State University

At Wayne State University, an urban R1 institution, FYS 1010 shifted from a required course to an optional seminar - resulting in declining enrollment, waning instructor interest, and reduced confidence in its purpose. In Fall 2025, the course returned with more than a name change: a bold redesign featuring new curriculum, updated learning outcomes, and a revitalized approach to instructor recruitment, training, and development. In this session, participants will hear from the program coordinator and a current instructor about strategies for re-engaging faculty, aligning curriculum with student needs, and rebuilding trust in a first-year seminar.

CP - Creating Intentional Curricular Connections Beyond Transition

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Kelsey Axe

Rob Tripp

University of North Carolina Wilmington

This presentation explores how First-Year Seminars (FYS) can extend beyond transitional support to foster deeper academic engagement through intentional curricular connections. Grounded in high-impact practices (HIPs) and experiential learning theory, participants will examine Kuh and O'Donnell's eight essential elements and apply them to their institutional context. Through case studies, attendees will identify strategies to integrate experiential learning, information literacy, career development, and civic responsibility into FYS curricula. Participants will leave with ideas for a personalized action plan to enhance student learning, engagement, and success beyond the first semester.

CT - From Instructor to Architect: Designing Scalable Support

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Katie Campbell

Texas A&M University

What happens when you're the first person in a brand-new role, inheriting a large, established system and tasked with making it even better? In this session, you'll hear how to do just that - building on what existed, while streamlining logistics, enhancing communications, and adding your own style to aid in elevating support for over 500 instructors across multiple course formats. Learn how small, intentional changes can transform a program from good to great and inform the future. This session offers practical strategies for infusing existing systems with your style and moving instructor support from good to great—without starting from scratch.

V - Building Civic Muscles: Dialogue for First Year Students at Scale

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Arielle Mizrahi

Reddgo Long, Jr.

Unify America

First-year experience courses ground students in skills for college, work, and civic life. Humility, curiosity, collaborative problem solving, and critical thinking are all skills that cultivate thriving, pluralistic communities and are valued by employers. To meet these needs at scale, in 2021, Unify America developed the Civic Gym, a virtual program to help students build and flex their civic

muscles. To date, 33,000+ students from 250+ colleges and universities across 43 states have participated. During this session, participants will learn about Unify America, surface adoption strategies, and discuss ways to measure civic and civil dialogue programming impact and outcomes.

CT - 7 Steps to Infuse Trauma-Informed Pedagogy Into Your Classroom

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Molly Lampros

Clark College

With an increasing number of students facing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), the role that COVID-19 played in their development, it is more important than ever for educators to recognize the impact of trauma on learning, behavior, and development. A trauma-informed approach not only supports student well-being, but also improves academic engagement, reduces behavioral disruptions, and helps build a positive school climate. This session will introduce the audience to the principles and practices of trauma-informed teaching. It will also bridge the gap between student engagement and practical application of course concepts through community building.

FD - Bringing Librarians and Instructors Together to Address AI Usage

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Annika Deutsch

Linn-Benton Community College

Whether instructors allow, encourage, or prohibit use of AI in the classroom, students are using these tools. Librarians are uniquely situated to not only help students learn the pitfalls of AI and what circumstances might be appropriate for its use but also to help instructors navigate student use. Let's come together to discuss partnerships in the classroom that can identify and manage AI use and misuse.

CI - Starting Blocks: Launching Students Toward Academic Success

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Lori Lowder

Hannah Stocks

Lis Hames

Kennesaw State University

Block scheduling enhances the student experience and supports academic success by simplifying registration and ensuring first-year students enroll in key courses such as English and math. It reduces credit loss if majors change, promotes full-time enrollment at 15 credit hours, and fosters connections through study groups and peer networks. This session will showcase the launch of block scheduling at a large public research university serving over 50,000 students across two campuses. Results demonstrate its effectiveness, with more first-time, full-time students registering for 15 credit hours, improved course success rates, and notable gains in first-year retention.

CT - Supporting our Newest Students: Faculty, FYS Instructors, Advising and Beyond!

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Faith Ford

Michael Makara

University of Central Missouri

Often in higher education we hear about "supporting students where they are at", but how are we to meet them there if we are unaware of their previous experiences or perceptions? With a variety of first year students with different lived experiences, it can be difficult to get them the information they need when they need it or make informed decisions. In this session, we will explore how the University of Central Missouri connected both faculty and staff with first year students' data to support their respective initiatives and student success through the Ruffalo Noel Levitz: College Student Inventory.

9:15 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

CT - Using Noncognitive Skills to Maximize your Student Success Resources

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Abby Coffin

University of Kansas

Ross Markle

DIA Higher Education Collaborators

At many colleges and universities, the challenge is not finding the resources to support student success, it's about marshalling those resources around a meaningful student success strategy. This session will show how institutions can use data gathered early in the first-year experience to help (a) improve understanding student strengths and challenges, (b) identify critical resources for early student support and engagement, and (c) organize campus resources based on student needs and interests. Attendees will engage in activities to connect lessons learned at one large institution to their own context.

CP - From Deposit to Day One: Communication Lifts Retention

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Faith Ford

Waleed Ahmed

Longwood University

Longwood University implemented a communication plan that began when students first arrived through move-in. Weekly student engagement events, such as checklists, summer webinars, Cancer Days (Welcome Week), and early relationships with advisors and coaches build momentum and belonging. Using CRM, Banner, Xtrics, and Civitas Learning, we tracked task completion and engagement and adapted content weekly. Results: year one retention rose from 76 percent for the Fall 2022 cohort to 79 percent for 2023 and 80 percent for 2024. Attendees leave with a measurement playbook they can adapt.



CI - Implementing a First-Generation Student Learning Community Model at Your Institution

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Vanessa Anagbo

Albany State University

Albany State University (ASU), a leading HBCU in Georgia, has developed a high-impact approach to improving student retention and engagement through its University College Learning Communities (LCs). Rooted in Tinto's Student Integration Model, ASU's program has grown from 9 Learning Communities serving 250 students to 19 communities supporting over 475 students. These LCs foster strong academic and social connections for first-year students through linked courses, intentional mentoring, professional networking, and experiential learning. This presentation will focus on the First-Generation Student Learning Community, an initiative that supports students who are the first in their families to attend college.

FD - Models of Peer Mentoring in First Year Seminars

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Lisa Schwebel

Carly Zerbe

Veronica Manlow

Brooklyn College

This Facilitated Dialogue invites discussion on the challenges and rewards of integrating peer mentors into First Year Seminars and explores different models for doing so. The session will address how the different models represent the goals of the various stakeholders at the institutional, faculty, program, and mentor levels.

FD - From Classroom to Cloud: Online FYE Success Strategies

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Kari Lee

Pueblo Community College

Anna Super

Arapahoe Community College

This interactive session invites educators to explore the art of crafting dynamic online First-Year Experience (FYE) courses. It offers insights from two successful community college models: a flexible 1-credit seminar and a comprehensive 3-credit course. Participants will learn evidence-based strategies to foster student connection, belonging, and success in virtual settings. Attendees will leave with actionable strategies to enhance their FYE programs, supporting first-year transitions and retention while preserving the personal touch of transformative seminars.

CR - Aligning Purpose: Beginning Students' Career Plans and their First Year

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Jillian Kinzie

NSSE, IU Center for Postsecondary Research

Jim Cole

BCSSE, IU Center for Postsecondary Research

Career and life purpose issues weigh heavily in students' first college year. This session uses matched student data from BCSSE and NSSE to explore the relationship between beginning students' expectations for career and life purpose and their engagement in the first year, including faculty interaction, peer collaboration, perceived gains, and career advising experiences. Results demonstrate the importance of aligning expectations with first year experiences and emphasize the importance of facilitating students' early exploration of career and life purpose for higher levels of engagement and success. Implications for early interventions, career education and first-year seminars will be discussed.

CI - First-Generation Success Hub: Empowering Students with Online Resources and Support

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

Lee Williams

Texarkana College

First-Generation Success Hub: Empowering Students with Online Resources and Support explores innovative strategies to support First-Gen students across online, hybrid, and on-campus settings. The session highlights the development of a virtual hub focused on academic success, retention, financial literacy, and career readiness. Through a dynamic mix of lecture and interactive discussion, participants will gain practical tools to implement online orientations and student success workshops that empower First-Gen students and enhance their overall college experience.

CT - Global Perspectives and student development

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Tchule Moore

Valonda Roberts

University of Missouri at St. Louis

Global perspectives are essential to the first-year college student as they transition to a new level of maturity in their lives and experience new cultural viewpoints that they may not have ever encountered before. It is hard enough for our students to understand who they are and what they want, and now they have to consider the perceptions of their peers as well. As the country continues to shift away from the use of diversity, equity, and inclusion, practitioners in higher education must be intentional in how they embrace difference and support students with multiple perspectives and experiences.

CT - Beyond the Prompt: Integrating AI Literacy into First-Year Information Literacy

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Amanda Andrews*Northern Kentucky University*

Artificial Intelligence is transforming how students access, evaluate, and create information. This session provides practical strategies for integrating AI literacy into information literacy instruction, utilizing tools such as Copilot, Gemini, NotebookLM, Claude AI, Perplexity, and ChatGPT. Participants will explore ready-to-use classroom activities that teach students to critically examine AI-generated content, identify biases, verify sources, and document responsible use of AI. The session covers faculty development and policy considerations to create consistent expectations across first-year programs. Attendees will leave with adaptable lesson plans, sample rubrics, and talking points for campus partners, ensuring AI supports—rather than replaces—human judgment in research and writing.

CI - Building Strong Foundations: Peer-Led Programs Impacting the College Experience

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Jenna McLaughlin**Bree Ocampo****Mell Vigoa Campa***University of Florida*

The Warrington Welcome program at the University of Florida transforms the first-year experience into a foundation for lifelong success. Peer leaders guide students through reflection, goal setting, and resource connection while also developing their own skills through Warrington (NACE) competencies, servant leadership forums, workshops, socials, and community volunteering. This session highlights how peer mentorship, intentional curriculum, and community-building create impact that extends beyond orientation by strengthening belonging, engagement, persistence, and career readiness. Attendees will leave with strategies and adaptable tools to design first-year initiatives that ease transitions and shape the entire college journey.

CT - Strategies for Supporting the Transition to Academic Disciplinary College-Level Reading

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Lauren A. Liang**Elizabeth Nelson****Colli Lucas***University of Utah***Megan M. Van Deventer***Weber State University*

College professors often express frustration when students fail to complete or fully engage with course readings. However, what may appear as a lack of motivation is frequently a lack of college-level academic reading skills. Faculty interventions, even when well-intentioned, are often unsuccessful in supporting students, leaving them feeling discouraged and unprepared, isolating them from the college experience and increasing the risk of attrition. This session, led by literacy experts, offers practical strategies that can be introduced in the first year seminar to help students develop the transferable reading skills essential for their long-term college academic success and self-efficacy.

CI - Creation, Evolution and Sustainability of a Summer Bridge Program

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Ryan Hassler*Penn State University Berks*

Summer bridge programs are one of the most effective ways to help students transition from high school to college. But what goes into the creation of a bridge and how can its evolution ensure sustainability? This session will answer these questions by analyzing Engineering Ahead (EA), a four-week bridge program supporting underrepresented students. Over 10 years, EA has evolved from a math boot camp to a dynamic program with hands-on labs, mentoring, and career readiness. Because of EA's successes, the Biology Ahead program was launched this year, representing the first step in expanding bridge opportunities into broader STEM fields.

CR - Understanding First-Year Men's Engagement in College: What the Data Reveal and Why It Matters

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Kate Lehman**Kevin Wenger****Sandy Greene****Katie Hopkins****Rebecca Greenfield***University of South Carolina*

Student engagement outside the classroom is strongly linked to success and retention, yet national data consistently show that men participate less than women in many key areas from the start of college. Why does this gap exist—and what can we do about it? This session shares findings from a large-scale study at a public research university that examined where first-year men are (and aren't) engaging, how their academic and personal characteristics compare to peers, and what these patterns mean for practice. Attendees will leave with fresh insights, practical strategies, and a preview of next steps in the research, including an upcoming qualitative phase. If you work with first-year students and want to boost engagement for all, this session is for you.

CT - Small Nudges, Big Wins: Wise Interventions for College Success

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor

Amy Baldwin*University of Central Arkansas*

This interactive breakout session introduces participants to the powerful world of "wise interventions"—brief, targeted strategies that create lasting improvements in student motivation, belonging, and academic performance. Drawing from social psychology research, these seemingly small classroom practices can dramatically shift student outcomes by addressing underlying psychological barriers to success. Participants will explore evidence-based interventions including values affirmation exercises, growth mindset prompts, and belonging uncertainty activities that have been proven effective across diverse college populations. Through real classroom examples, attendees will learn how to implement these low-cost, high-impact strategies that help students overcome stereotype threat, imposter syndrome, and academic anxiety.

CT - Student Storytelling: Using the Circle of Courage Framework to Support Student Success

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor



Sarah Vande Corput
College of Menominee Nation

As faculty, we know the importance of seeking to understand our students' perspectives. The Circle of Courage conceptual framework, which weaves Indigenous wisdom with research on resilience and positive youth development, can be helpful. This framework identifies four core needs—generosity, belonging, mastery, and independence—that, when met, holistically supports students academically and personally. This session presents dissertation research on how Native students at one TCU express these values and the relationship between the values and students' definitions of success. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of success and learn how to develop culturally relevant teaching practices.

CT - Teaching is Caring: Presence, Empathy, & Hospitality

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Brad Garner

Indiana Wesleyan University

In an era where efficiency and outcomes seem to dominate higher education, faculty are rediscovering the transformative power of care. This session explores teaching as a caring practice, showing how relational approaches foster a sense of belonging, amplify voices, and build resilience in today's diverse classrooms. Participants will engage with research, case studies, and reflective dialogue to reimagine classrooms where rigor and human flourishing coexist. We will also address empathetic communication, flexible design, hospitality, and presence, creating opportunities for care-centered pedagogy to thrive. Participants will also gain access to a rich collection of resources on this topic.

CT - Trends in Academic Advising and Implications for the First-Year Experience

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Kyle Ross

NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising

Recent trends in research on academic advising and student success illuminate the need for postsecondary institutions to rethink structure, policies, and procedures to promote first-year student success. The pandemic, the enrollment cliff, and heightened accountability for higher education have shifted student demographics, which has increased the demand on academic advising to be able to address students' complex and unique needs. Additionally, the rise of AI has also prompted institutions to seek more efficient approaches to academic advising meeting those needs. Yet, advisors need intentional time, especially for first-year students, to foster relationships that help students draw on their assets and strengths to overcome challenges they encounter in higher education. This session reviews current research on academic advising and observations through several resources that NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising offers institutions. The presenter will discuss how academic advising can uniquely help first-year students feel a sense of belonging with their institution and build their capital to navigate the complexities of higher education and access to the workforce. Included in the presentation will be an overview of several themes around the need for institutions to prioritize advisor retention, continuous training

and development, and the need for centralized authority over academic advising especially in decentralized cultures to bridge academic and student affairs.

CT - Thriving by Design: How Intentional Integration Creates Transformative First-Year Experience

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Dannie Woods

Brandi Kellett

Lipscomb University

This session presents a philosophical and practical approach to integrating the distinct priorities of academic growth and student affairs in a First Year Experience class. While many universities inadvertently support a siloed approach to success and well-being, Lipscomb University created systems of intentional collaboration between academics and student affairs in their revision of the Core Curriculum. The result is a course that builds critical thinking skills through transformative experiences in academics and personal well-being, and is actively resourced by multiple colleges, programs, and areas. Key takeaways, design elements, assignments, co-curricular events and activities, and strategic integrations will be shared.

CT - 15 years, one LLC: Analyzing student goals through their data

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Elise Lewis

David DeWeil

University of South Carolina

This session explores fifteen years of data collected from the Capstone Scholars' Personal Challenge (goal setting), highlighting both historical trends and consistent patterns among our first- and second-year students. By analyzing these data, we identify common themes related to students' goals, persistence, and engagement. The session will demonstrate how these findings inform our programming, services, and supportive efforts. We will discuss practical strategies for applying student data to improve retention, tailor support systems, and strengthen institutional approaches to first-year and second-year student success. The data also help us build on strategic initiatives for the broader university.

FD - A Discussion of the Research-Theory-Practice of High-Impact Peer Leader Experiences

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Dallin Young

University of Georgia

Bryce Bunting

Brigham Young University

Robert Kenedy

York University

This session will engage participants in a Research-Theory-Practice dialogue drawing on results from the International Survey of Peer Leaders (ISPL). The facilitators will draw on findings from the 2022-24 administration of the survey to set up a conversation about peer leadership as a high-impact practice and will provide theoretical contexts for how to create high-impact peer leader experiences on participants' campuses. The participants will then engage in a series of activities to consider how they can deliver on that potential in their own programs and on their campuses.

CR - Different Approaches to Support Belonging Among Low-income Students

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Joseph Kitchen

University of Southern California

Morganne Grutsch

University of Nebraska Omaha

Precious Loving-Afuh

University of Nebraska Lincoln

Students from low-income backgrounds often face challenges in developing a sense of belonging on campus, which is linked to retention and academic outcomes. Drawing from a longitudinal mixed methods study, we developed a research-informed typology of belonging that practitioners and researchers can leverage to understanding the different ways students establish (or do not) belonging on campus. The session will introduce the typology and potential implications, including practitioner reflections on effective strategies to support low-income students' belonging. Attendees will leave with practical ideas about how to use the typology to support students in developing academic, social, and campus community belonging.

V - What Can I Get Out of This?: Building Classroom Citizenship and Community

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Carlo Rotella

Boston College

Carlo Rotella invites us into the mind of a group of skeptical first-year students who are ultimately transformed by a required literature class. Following thirty-three students through his class to provide an intimate look at teaching and learning from their perspectives as well.

REFRESHMENT BREAK

10:00 AM – 10:30 AM PST

Regency Ballroom, Seventh Floor

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. PST | Room: Columbia Ballroom: Third Floor



Amber Williams, Ed.D.

Vice Provost for Student Success
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Beyond Deficit: The Strengths-Based Architecture Behind the 92%

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), the state's flagship, moved beyond the deficit model to achieve an unheard-of increase in first-year retention—from 86% to over 92% in five years—a success recognized by the APLU. Dr. Amber Williams, UT's Vice Provost for Student Success, challenges the community: Stop asking what went wrong, and start building 'that place' where grace and inherent potential lead. She reveals the strengths-based, student-first, scalable model and actionable blueprint that ensures every scholar thrives. Walk away with the strategies necessary to replicate the success on your campus.

1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

CT - Garden-to-Market Meals: Supporting Student Success Through Food Security

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Kathy Gean

Southern Arkansas University

Food insecurity affects a growing number of college students and poses significant barriers to academic success, especially in the first year. This session introduces Garden-to-Market Meals, an innovative program that

prepares nutritious, ready-to-heat meals from garden and local market produce, freezes them, and distributes them through the campus free food pantry. Participants will learn how this model supports first-year students' health, reduces stress, and fosters a stronger sense of belonging. Practical strategies and resources will be shared to help campuses replicate or adapt the program.

CT - Building Career Preparation into the First Year Experience

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Iqbal Atwal

California State University

We know the importance of belonging to undergraduates: Establishing a strong sense of belonging in first-year students helps improve their retention and degree completion rates. However, career preparation is just as critical and should also be a major emphasis in the first-year experience. Attend this session to learn why career preparation is so important to undergraduates, and why your institution should begin to address it as soon as students matriculate. You'll also learn about curricular and non-curricular approaches you can use to foster career preparation and retain students on your campus.

CI - First-Year Experience Reimagined: Co-Curricular Learning as a Retention Strategy

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Hailey Steuer

Margaret Basehart

University of Tennessee Knoxville

This session will discuss the impacts that the VENTURE living and learning community (LLC) has on the Haslam College of Business persistence and retention efforts. VENTURE is the second largest LLC at the University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK) with approximately 90 students per year. Haslam College of Business enrollment is 9,800 undergraduate students with a campus enrollment of 40,000. First-year students can apply to be a member of the community. The selective cohort engages in community and professional development events hosted by our team that have proven to impact their sense of belonging and overall retention at the university.

FD - From Concept to Campus: Bringing Big Ideas to Fruition

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Jillian Arizpe

University of Texas at Austin

Big ideas often stall at the starting line, especially when taxed with limited resources and evolving system structures. This interactive session guides participants in transforming their ambitious concepts into actionable plans that support first-year student success. Through collaborative brainstorming, attendees will identify available assets, pinpoint institutional supporters, anticipate roadblocks, and define actionable starting points. Borrowing adaptable ideas to enhance one's own efforts is encouraged! With peer insight, and a flexible program development approach, leave with practical strategies and renewed confidence to bring a "big idea" to the starting blocks.

CT - Strategic FYE Course Development Sparked by NISS Recommendation and Action

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Michelle Eaton

LaJuan Simpson-Wilkey

University of North Georgia

This session explores how a recommendation from the National Institute for Student Success (NISS) served as the catalyst for redesigning and implementing a strategic First-Year Experience (FYE) course. Attendees will learn how external feedback prompted institutional reflection, collaboration, and action to better support student success. Presenters will share the process of translating recommendations into a sustainable course model, including stakeholder engagement, curriculum design, and implementation strategies. This session is ideal for educators and administrators seeking to leverage external insights to drive meaningful change in student engagement and retention.

CT - Behind the Scenes: Facilitating a FYS Re-Design

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor



Christine Harrington

Laura Dorsey-Elson

Michael Sparrow

Morgan State University

To best meet the needs of today's learners, it's important to periodically revisit and reimagine the FYS curriculum. Take a peek behind the curtain at an HBCU to discover the step-by-step process behind a first-year seminar redesign. Learn how this institution approached the process in an inclusive yet accelerated way. We will discuss the role of assessment data, how the leadership team was recruited, strategies for productive meetings where the curriculum was revised in just a few months, and the implementation of the faculty development series. Participants will walk away with practical facilitation strategies they can use at their institutions.

CI - Transforming the First-Year Experience Through a Three-Step Orientation

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Samuel Brubaker

Stephanie Colvin

Brigham Young University-Idaho

In the past three years, BYU-I has reimaged the First-Year Experience by centralizing leadership, resources, and assessment-driven strategies. Grounded in Tinto's theory of student retention and supported by Gilani and Thomas's research on belonging, the university developed a three-step orientation model: (1) digital pre-campus orientation with mentor outreach, (2) a two-day immersive New Student Orientation, and (3) a semester-long BYU-I 101 course taught by faculty with embedded, paid peer mentors. Results are significant but practical enough for anyone to see similar results at their university.

CI - From silos to success: A shared leadership approach to FYE

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Candyce Reynolds
Kelly Myers
Brinley Stringer
Boise State University

Boise State University's First-Year Focus initiative demonstrates how shared leadership can transform institutional approaches to first-year student success. The program established a Coordinating Council bringing together academic leaders, advising, student programs, library, and teaching center staff to implement a comprehensive five-pillar framework addressing belonging, learner identity, academic skills, resource utilization, and purpose discovery. With a universal goal of 80% retention for all first-year populations, the initiative coordinates signature projects across high-enrollment courses, reaching thousands of students each semester. Through systematic assessment and data integration, this collaborative model maximizes impact while supporting faculty and staff in delivering evidence-based first-year experiences.

CT - Using Virtual Learning Communities to Improve First-Year Student Success

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Lara Lomicka
Chris Gulino
University of South Carolina

As institutions rethink how to support students' transition into the first year, virtual learning communities can help to strengthen belonging and academic success. This session highlights findings from a multi-course pilot using an online platform that integrates collaborative tools like flashcards, chat, shared notes, and peer interaction to connect students and supplemental instruction leaders. Drawing on data from more than 1,300 first-year students in high-DFW courses, we show how virtual communities increased engagement, encouraged SI participation, and contributed to reduced DFW rates. Participants will consider practices for scaling virtual communities to enhance retention, persistence, and early academic success.

 **CI - From Barriers to Pathways: Faculty Development for Gen Z First-Year Seminars**

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Chuan-Chin Chiao
Hsinyi Sindy Peng
National Tsing Hua University

Beginning May 2025, a leading STEM-focused research university in northern Taiwan has launched the Center for Exploration and Life Transitions (ExALT), the first initiative of its kind in Taiwan. As a central hub for student transition, ExALT builds community by developing shared curricular resources with senior undergraduates and preparing peer mentors who work with faculty in First-Year Seminars. Piloted across three colleges spanning STEM and the humanities, ExALT strengthens belonging and engagement for Gen Z learners. This session invites participants to consider how ExALT's experience might be adapted and re-created within their own institutions.

CI - Assigning for Success: Major-Based Residential Placement and First-Year Outcomes

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Garrett Tur
Joel Bynum
Ball State University

This session showcases Ball State University's model for enhancing first-year student academic outcomes through major-based residential assignments. By placing students in "cluster communities," the Living-Learning Community (LLC) program creates a stable and Living-Learning Communities through Housing and Residence Life. This presentation will provide data demonstrating that LLC participants consistently achieve higher GPAs and retention rates compared to their non-LLC peers who live on campus, or off campus. The discussion will cover strategic housing practices, the long-term benefits of this approach, and how this framework can be adapted to other institutional contexts to foster academic success.

CP - Major/Program-Specific FYE Courses: A Pathway to Student Success

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Joseph Sanchez
Victor Castillo
Texas A&M University

How does placing first-year students in major/departmental-specific learning communities influence success? This session examines the structure and impact of targeted FYE courses, with special attention to first-generation students. Presenters will share lessons learned, benefits, and challenges in developing and sustaining these communities, as well as implementation strategies such as stand-alone seminars, directed studies, and embedding FYE content into existing three-credit courses. Institutional data comparing first-semester GPA and one-year retention rates of participants versus non-participants will be presented. Attendees will gain insights into how major/departmental-specific FYE courses strengthen belonging, boost achievement, and support persistence.

V - FYE Abroad: THE High Impact Enrollment Management Initiative

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Grahaeme Hesp
FIE: Foundation for International Education

An enrollment management plan that neglects student retention is missing the most important part: student success. Study abroad develops essential life skills and when students begin their college experience immersed in a High Impact Practice learning environment, the transformation can be significant. This presentation looks specifically at the theory of HIPs, first year study abroad programs for students within an enrollment management and retention strategy, and how these components are blended to successfully create and implement the College of Charleston's pre-matriculated study abroad program as well as the University of Wisconsin-Madison's scholarship study abroad program.

CT - Evolving Foundational Skills: National Trends in the First-Year Experience

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor

Kate Lehman

Kevin Wenger

Jarrett B. Warshaw

University of South Carolina

Foundational skills such as writing, critical thinking, and information literacy are essential to first-year success and establishing lifelong learners. This session draws on results from the 2017 and 2023 National Surveys on the First-Year Experience to highlight trends in the FYE, especially in areas such as critical thinking, information literacy, and writing skills to consider how the foundational FYE relates to the larger purposes of higher education. Participants will explore how these findings can inform campus practice and institutional strategy in preparing students for academic and lifelong success.

CT - The Power of Reflection: Applying Five R's for Student Success

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Laurie Hazard

New England Institute of Technology

Student success practitioners play a vital role in fostering students' long-term academic achievement. This session introduces the Five Rs for Student Success—Recognize, Reach, Realize, Remove, and Results—a reflective framework designed to support first-year students as they navigate the transition to college. Grounded in research and practice, the framework emphasizes deep reflection, encouraging the development of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, self-advocacy, and problem-solving. By helping students reflect on their experiences, process challenges, and identify internal and external factors affecting their success, practitioners can empower them to take ownership of their growth and build the skills necessary for lasting academic success.

CP - Reenvisioning Student Support Services - The BEST Way

Room 602: Nooksack; Sixth Floor

Aliandra Burgos

Jimmie Baker

University of Central Florida

This session explores a reimagined TRIO Student Support Services model that centers relationship-building as the cornerstone of student success. Learn how shifting from service requirements to student-centered care drives engagement, growth, and impact. As part of this approach, students enroll in one of three pathways, allowing them to engage in ways that best align with their goals. Anchored by best practices and innovation, this presentation showcases a scalable model for TRIO Programs that prioritizes time, attention, and trust—true catalysts for student empowerment. Join us to learn more about Project BEST a TRIO/SSS program at the University of Central Florida!

CI - Breaking Down Barriers: Transforming Gateway Courses for First-Year Success

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Katie Easley

Western Michigan University

Stephanie Foote

Gardner Institute

The Gateway Course Redesign initiative at Western Michigan University represents a revolutionary approach to course redesign that directly addresses systemic barriers in critical first-year courses. Through faculty-led redesign of high-impact gateway courses, this three-year evidence-based process targets courses with high failure rates, significant equity gaps, and large enrollments. Western Michigan University's implementation demonstrates remarkable outcomes: record-breaking 82.1% first-time-in-any-college retention rates, substantial reductions in DFWI (D, F, Withdraw, Incomplete) rates across multiple disciplines, and significant financial returns on investment. This presentation explores how strategic course redesign creates pathways to success for traditionally underserved populations while simultaneously strengthening institutional performance and community.

CT - Supporting First-Generation Student Engagement in the 21st Century

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Jamil Johnson

University of South Carolina

The greatest experience I had was last summer in the McNair Scholars/TRIO Program at my school. Without it, I am not sure I would have made it to where I am now: About to graduate and applying to graduate school (Jayden). First-Generation students navigate our college campuses in what is sometimes called a "tumultuous journey," one filled with obstacles and gatekeepers that prohibit success. Yet, what is often not highlighted on a larger scale is the success that our first-generation students experience on our campus and how they successfully navigate through and around these challenges. Join us for an engaging discussion on the experiences of first-generation students in the 21st century, the numerous assets they bring with them to campus, and the ways campus staff creates a sense of belonging for our students. Attendees will also engage with research findings that can be applied to practice to increase first-generation engagement in high-impact practices.

CR - Cultural Experiences and Belonging: Perceptions within FYS and Academic

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Anda Zhao

Wayne South

Angela Angela

University of Northern Colorado

Departments Research has shown that students' feelings of connection and inclusion are positively related to achievement outcomes. However, many students do not feel instructors are responsive to their cultural experiences (i.e., perceptions of affirmation, marginalization, etc.). As many FYS are intentionally designed for connection and inclusion, including instructor professional

development, it is helpful to assess whether participation in FYS leads to higher affirmation and belonging and lower marginalization than within other course settings. This study examines differences in student perceptions of cultural experiences within FYS as compared to academic departments to help inform equity-centered pedagogy and cross-unit collaboration to support students.

CP - Making College Personal: Strengthening Learning Mindsets in the FYE Class

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Jessica Rabb

Nashville State Community College

In 2018, The College System of Tennessee (TBR) matched The University of Virginia's Motivate Lab and Nashville State Community College (NSCC) to translate learning mindset research into an impactful First-Year Experience class activity. The collaboration led to a class discussion and written reflection that reveal NSCC reinforces a student's personal values. This activity now serves as a template for making personal connections to NSCC degrees, courses, and resources. In this session, you will engage in this template and experience that making it personal can strengthen your college mindset too.

FD - Meaningful Career Development for All, Meet Students Where They Are

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Andrea Carr

University of Missouri-Kansas City

This dialogue will help improve First Year Experience (FYE) course content that integrates lifelong career development with a dual focus on major/career fit and NACE career readiness competencies. Designed to meet students at varying stages of career decision-making (from exploratory to very decided), participants will discuss possible uses of self-information and NACE competencies in student professional development. Participants will see how career development theory and NACE competencies can be embedded into FYE to improve curriculum. The session will offer adaptable course strategies and activities to help faculty and staff enhance career content in their FYE seminars.

CT - Piloting Corequisite Instruction to Address the Preparedness Gap

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Katy Hanggi

Allison Tharp

Tara Bray

Virginia Commonwealth University

This session addresses the preparedness gap among first-year students. At Virginia Commonwealth University, we have observed differences in students' preparedness and confidence in their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills, all of which impacts their success across their college coursework. Our discussion will focus on the creative, faculty-led ways in which VCU is addressing the preparedness gap through corequisite studio support. We'll share what worked, what didn't, and how we developed this with very little financial support. Attendees will engage in discussion about innovative ways to address the preparation gap and design activities to offer to engage these students.

CT - Hold Their Hand: Strategic Over-Support for At-Risk Students

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Lauri McLellan-Schoneck

Seminole State College of Florida

Drawing on nearly 25 years of my Adult Education experience, this session explores the value of strategic over-support for at-risk college students facing academic, personal, or life-related challenges. Many students arrive carrying "edu-trauma"—negative educational experiences, gaps, or life events that shape their self-agency and readiness. This session challenges the "sink or swim" philosophy and re-frames over-support as a strategic tool for student growth and resilience. Attendees will leave with actionable techniques for "holding students' hands", preventing missteps, building confidence without fostering dependence, and helping students navigate academic and personal challenges, ultimately increasing engagement, persistence, and success.

2:45 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.

CT - From Programs to Systems: Structuring FYE for Impact

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

J. Quinton Staples

College of Coastal Georgia

This session introduces a strategic framework developed by the College of Coastal Georgia to transition from fragmented first-year programming into a synchronized, assessment-ready First-Year Experience (FYE) model. Rather than centering a single intervention, the approach highlights how institutional alignment—across Academic, Social, and Institutional domains—can be intentionally assessed, structured, and scaled. Using process mapping, friction point analysis, and cross-unit synthesis, the model offers a methodology for designing outcomes, clarifying intervention ownership, and embedding best practices into the first-year. Attendees will gain practical tools and a phased timeline for building assessment infrastructure, streamlining institutional effort, and maximizing collective impact from day one.

CP - Developing & Assessing Course-Based Undergraduate Research in Science First-Year Experience

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Temperance Rowell

Virginia Tech

The need for providing undergraduate research experiences to build science identity, skills, and interest continues to rise. However, the feasibility of offering large groups of students with varying backgrounds research experiences is challenging. Our first-year experience developed a 2-credit course series curriculum offering CURE (course-based undergraduate research experience) to 170 interdisciplinary science first years, culminating in a conference-style poster presentation. We used complementary assessments that found >60% of students needed/wanted research experiences and that >70% of students rate a moderate to great gain in all 19 related research skills after their experience.

V - The Importance of Recognizing Academic Achievement in First-Year Student

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Eileen Merberg

Alpha Lambda Delta

Colleges and universities have programs in place for students who struggle academically during their first year and these are important components to the higher education landscape. But are we doing enough to support students who do well? Learn how recognizing and supporting successful first-year students can enhance your academic offerings and support the retention of high-achieving first-year students.

FD - Beyond the Icebreaker: Storytelling as a Catalyst for First-Year Belonging

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Jacob Vanderford

Texas Christian University

What if orientation wasn't just about schedules and swag, but stories? This session explores a narrative-based model for first-year engagement that uses personal storytelling to foster belonging and connection. Grounded in Schlossberg's Theory of Transition and Baxter Magolda's Learning Partnerships Model, this session offers a fresh approach to designing orientation programs that prioritize empathy, identity development, and peer connection. Attendees will gain a customizable framework, sample prompts, and practical strategies for integrating storytelling into their first-year experience initiatives. Whether you advise or design programs, this session invites you to reimagine connection as the most powerful form of retention.

CR - Empowering Low-Income Students for Career Success Starting the First Year

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Joseph Kitchen

Ronald Hallett

University of Southern California



Dusten Crichton

University of Nebraska Omaha

Jennifer Harvey

University of Nebraska Kearney

Colleges widely offer career support services beginning in the first year, yet little is known about whether or how such services work for low-income students, who make up a large share of today's undergraduates. Drawing on a 10-year mixed-methods study of low-income college student career development conducted in partnership with university practitioners, this session examines how career supports shape low-income students' career development. Findings show that proactive, coordinated, and relationally grounded supports—rather than transactional or cafeteria-style offerings—are most effective. Practitioners will share evidence-based strategies to foster equitable pathways for first-year low-income students' career development and success.



FD - From Marhaba to the Marketplace: A Holistic First-Year Experience

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

B.Neha Shariff

Isabel Rios Trevino

Zayed University

At Zayed University, the First-Year Experience (FYE) is rooted in the Arabic ethos of marhaba—a welcome that signifies belonging, generosity, and care. For a predominantly Emirati student population, this curated program connects cultural values with an integrated skills framework to guide academic adjustment and co-curricular exploration. Through a tailored FYE course, gamified engagement, and co-curricular transcripts, students are empowered to build support networks, explore passions, and develop capabilities aligned with industry needs. This session shares how a culturally grounded and skills-based model helps students acclimatize quickly and begin a transformative journey from orientation to employability.

CT - Building Resilience through Critical Thinking & Cognitive Dissonance in FYE

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Jennifer Lewis

University of Cincinnati

This session introduces the PEST Analysis framework (Political, Economic, Social, and Technological) as a tool for fostering resilience and critical thinking in First-Year Experience (FYE) classrooms. Amid shifting legislative, technological, and cultural landscapes, instructors face growing challenges in navigating ethical conversations. Through interactive activities and real-world examples, participants will explore strategies for facilitating respectful dialogue, encouraging cognitive dissonance, and reframing controversy as a learning opportunity. The session emphasizes empathy, intellectual humility, and values-based inquiry to help students critically engage with diverse perspectives and develop ethical reasoning skills essential for academic and professional success.

CT - From Onboarding to Observation: A 5-Stage Model for Instructor Development

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

Emely Cruz Arrazola

Kate Thibodeaux

Rebecca Gilmore

Keith Lopez

Colorado State University

Higher education professionals bring diverse strengths to the classroom, yet their backgrounds and experiences with facilitation can vary widely. In the First-Year Seminar context, this variability highlights the value of intentional training and ongoing support for Instructors. Colorado State University's Orientation and Transition Programs (OTP) developed a 5-stage Instructor development model: Instructor Kick-off, New Instructor Orientation, Instructor Summit, Bi-Weekly Meetings, and Classroom Observation that provides a consistent foundation for facilitators. This session will share the theoretical frameworks and practical structures that guide OTP's approach, offering attendees scalable strategies to support instructor development to enhance the student experience in the classroom.

CI - Peer Mentoring Glow-Up: Redesigning the Jax State Experience

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Olivia Fields*Jacksonville State University*

At Jacksonville State University, we recognized the need to reimagine how peer mentors support first-year students. This session will share the redesign of our Peer Mentor Program, highlighting the development of Peer Mentor Coordinators, the redesign of our credit-bearing course, and innovative approaches to student support. Learn how we gave our program a “glow up” to create stronger connections, more consistent guidance, and a sustainable structure that benefits both mentors and mentees. Attendees will walk away with practical strategies and creative ideas for enhancing peer mentorship programs on their own campuses.

CT - Building Bridges for Student Success: Mentorship Partners Across Institutions

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Yolanda Reyes-Guevara*Northwest Vista College*

Mentoring plays a critical role in fostering student success, retention, and a sense of belonging. For many community college students, transferring to a four-year institution can be overwhelming and confusing. A transfer mentor program helps to close the gap by pairing community college students with peers at the university who have been successful in navigating the transfer process. This session will explore the partnership between a community college and four-year institution in the development and design of a transfer mentor program that promotes persistence and a streamlined experience for students.

CI - A game-based simulation initiative to increase student success and retention

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Kevin Allen*E.I. Games*

A game-based simulation tool was utilized at two colleges with the goal of increasing success and retention among first year students. This tool was especially designed to address motivational triggers for departure of students at higher risk of dropping out, such as high school leavers, single mothers, returning veterans, and first-generation students. The simulation was implemented at Ball State University and Central Ohio Technical College. Results show that completing the simulation increases rates of orientation completion, course registration, class success, and ongoing enrollment. This is an easy-to-use tool that might be utilized at other schools to increase retention.

CP - Money Matters: Incorporating Financial Literacy Into First-Year Seminars

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Tharangi Fernando**Dustin Roberts***University of South Carolina*

Many first-year students arrive on campus with limited financial knowledge and struggle with managing budgets, credit, and loans. Building financial literacy is essential for navigating the demands of college and preparing

for life beyond graduation. This session will share data highlighting the importance of financial literacy in first-year seminars and introduce strategies designed to engage students, foster confidence in financial decision-making, and connect these skills to their academic success and well-being.

CI - Summer Success to First Year Success at Albany State University

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Kimberly Burgess**Quenton Matthews***Albany State University*

Summer Success Academy (SSA) is a 6-week living learning experience for incoming freshmen at Albany State University, an HBCU in southwest Georgia. SSA aims to acclimate students to the campus and college life through structured academic, experiential, and peer experiences designed to foster a sense of belonging, self-management, and resilience. Students also earn up to nine credit hours which also gives them an academic head start. The purpose of this session is to discuss participant outcomes in the first year and how their SSA experiences may have shaped self-efficacy, academic mindset, and day-to-day choices.

CT - From Classroom to Career: Immersive Interview Prep with AI-Powered VR

Room 602: Nooksack; Sixth Floor

Karman Tam**Stacy Welcome****Filecha Lucas***Houston City College*

This session highlights the integration of AI-powered Virtual Reality (VR) interview simulations into a First Year Experience (FYE) course to boost student confidence, reduce interview anxiety, and build career readiness. Grounded in research on experiential learning, the initiative supports first-year students in practicing real-world interview skills. The session features numerous video clips showcasing student participation, performance, reflections, and professional growth, offering insight into the tool's impact. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for implementation, including lessons learned and tips for scaling. This session demonstrates how immersive technology can transform early college experiences and bridge the transition from academics to careers.

CT - Community Building Using Supplemental Instruction at SLCC Summer Bridge

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Eduardo Trujillo Gonzalez**Carlos Salinas Tovar***Salt Lake Community College*

Salt Lake Community College's Summer Bridge incorporates Peer Mentored Supplemental Instruction (SI) to create a sense of belonging by implementing community-based activities and systems. From the use of Discord to the friendly competition between SI groups, SLCC's Summer Bridge Program creates an environment for students to stay engaged and express themselves leading to a higher academic performance and retention rate.

CR - "It's more than math, it's my life"

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Matteo Tamburini
Kayshish Pichette-Cline
Northwest Indian College

The title is a quote from a former student in NWIC's Foundations of Algebra class, collected as part of an NSF-funded research project. We harness the inherent geometric richness of Indigenous design as part of our curriculum, incorporating previous students' final presentations. This approach, refined over the past decade of practice, allows students to connect with the material in a more holistic way, so they can overcome their previous negative experiences with Mathematics. We will cover the curricular materials themselves, our process for developing them, and we will demonstrate the constructivist, active-learning pedagogical approach we use to implement them.

CI - Navigating Academic Intervention: Data, Dialogue, and Impact

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Morgan Ruebusch
Rebecca Keilty
Alyssa Stephens
University of South Carolina

Academic Intervention in the first college year is not always easy and involves many key campus partners, some of whom are working with very different resources and strategic goals. Keeping student success at the forefront, we have worked hard at the University of South Carolina to create intervention processes beyond our silos using a case management model. Through data analysis and a brief description of our work we will show the impact our early alert process has on first year retention.

CI - Community, Curiosity, and Career Readiness: A Year-Long Community College FYE

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Erin Davis
JoSann Lien
Rebekah Pichotta
North Idaho College

This presentation focuses on the challenges and opportunities of developing a successful community college FYE program. We will share North Idaho College's success launching a small program in the fall of 2021 and scaling up to a robust two-course sequence that focuses on relationship building and student retention. Presenters will share insights about the factors contributing to our success, including stories about the task force that envisioned the program, program goals and structure, challenges we have overcome, and successes that we celebrate. Attendees will walk away with a set of best practices for creating a program at their institutions.

FD - Building Whole-Institution First-Year Experience Initiatives: A Facilitated Global Dialogue

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Sharmila Rama
Ruth Melonie Geraldine Hoskins
University of KwaZulu-Natal

This facilitated dialogue invites participants to a global conversation on building whole-of-institution First-Year Experience (FYE) initiatives. Drawing on the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (South Africa) FYE Programme as a case of practice, the session invites participants to reflect on how institutional cultures, policies, and pedagogical frameworks shape student success and transition. Grounded in Kift's Transition Pedagogy, Lizzio's Five Senses of Success, and Fraser's social justice lens, participants will share insights, strategies, barriers and enablers. The session emphasizes cross-institutional learning and encourages participants to share contextual insights into approaches and strategies to support first-year students' transition, persistence, and success.

V - Tactical Methods for Career Readiness Success

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Mike Wysocki
Careers By the People

After speaking with thousands of high school and college students, Wysocki's presentation offers clear and concise tactical methods for students on how to prepare for the workforce. Wysocki tackles professional/soft skills, LinkedIn, networking, research, exploration, internships, part-time gigs and more in a fun down-to-earth manner. Wysocki's first book, *Careers By the People: Candid Career Advice from 101 Experienced Professionals* is a two-time award-winner and Amazon best-seller. Wysocki received extensive praise from educators. Wysocki has spoken to educators at ACTE conferences about his next book on how college students are preparing for the workforce. Wysocki integrates that research into the presentation.

CP - Hold On! What's Due?? Cognitive Overload & White Knuckle Effect

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Michelle Mullen
UMass Chan Medical School

Hold On! What's Due?? Cognitive Overload & White Knuckle Effect highlights how under-refined executive functioning skills undermine persistence for first-year and transitioning students. The "White Knuckle Effect" describes students clinging to college while overwhelmed, lacking skills to manage cognitive load. Focused Skills & Strategies Training (FSST), is a 12-session, evidence-based intervention that builds compensatory executive functioning strategies. Using implementation science and student-centered design, we show how FSST helps students move from surviving to thriving by strengthening self-regulation and goal-directed behavior. This session introduces campus staff with tools to reduce overload, enhance persistence, and reframe support for student success.

REFRESHMENT BREAK

3:45 PM – 4:15 PM PST
Columbia Ballroom Foyer, Third Floor

4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**CI - Retention Problem? Develop Strong FYE Instructors**

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Heather Hollandsworth

Virginia Tech

Your retention strategy starts in the FYE—and your FYE is only as strong as the faculty teaching it. Yet, FYE instructors often receive minimal training. Teaching the FYE isn't intuitive, so it's time to invest in the people leading it. This session presents a blueprint for training instructors to excel in the FYE mission. Drawing on experience implementing a comprehensive program—including a certificate track, plug-and-play lesson guides, community-building events, and pedagogical resources—participants will explore strategies for developing instructors who move the retention needle. Are you ready to build an FYE teaching force that elevates your program?

CT - Social and Emotional Intelligence: "Soft Skills" or Hard Core Competencies

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Joseph Cuseo

Marymount California University

Scholars have discovered competencies associated with college and career success that go beyond the traditional definition of "intelligence." In addition to strictly cognitive skills, humans display intelligence in multiple forms, including so-called "soft skills" such as social and emotional intelligence. Research on these forms of intelligence reveals that they are better predictors of personal and occupational success than intellectual test scores. This session explores how social and emotional intelligence can be developed in FYE courses and programs via topical (content) coverage, teaching/learning processes, instructor modeling, and teaching/learning practices that intentionally promote student belongingness by building instructor-student and student-student (peer) relationships.

CT - Anime Goes to College: Pop Culture in FYE

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Emilie Waggoner

University of Colorado Denver/Anschutz Medical Campus

Join us as we explore the popular First-Year Seminar course, Anime Goes to College, and learn how to create engaging, academically rigorous first-year experience courses that infuse college success skills, peer educator support, and student belonging. Participants will leave with the tools necessary to create courses that center popular culture topics within academic study while incorporating longstanding, data-backed curriculum centered in first-year student success.

FD - How can institutions better support dual enrolled students?

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Chris Caplinger

 *Georgia Southern University*

Dual enrollment is transforming the first-year experience for millions of students. The opportunity to earn college credit at little or no cost is attractive, and outcomes can be promising. Yet dual enrollment is not an unmitigated good for all students, and challenges around preparation, equity, and advising remain. How can colleges and universities work more effectively with students, parents and other stakeholders to improve learning and help students make more informed choices about majors, institutions and the transition to college? This facilitated discussion will invite participants to share experiences and strategies to better support dual enrolled students.

CI - The Whole First Year: Reimagining the College Degree Journey

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Ryan Maltese

Morgan State University

Morgan State has experienced unprecedented growth and success, but recent data show that freshmen are grossly underperforming putting many students in danger of academic probation after their first year. In response, Morgan has redesigned programs across the first-year lifecycle: onboarding, orientation, registration and enrollment. Participants will hear how we are reframing the first year with holistic advising and success-driven programs that better support our new students and transition them into the undergraduate experience.

CT - Cultivating a Culture of Empathy Amongst Faculty: Educating Our Educators

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Patricia Moran

The University of Texas at Austin

The percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary institutions has almost doubled in the last decade. Research has identified factors related to successful degree completion for students with disabilities and the need for empathy in the classroom. Developing curriculum for faculty aimed at creating empathic responses in the classroom can work to address this need. Through a series of videos, faculty and students were free to define empathy in their own words as well as reflect on lived experiences. The desired outcome of this project is to encourage empathy from faculty to increase inclusion for all on our campuses.

CT - Decentering Content, Signposting Transfer: Shifting Approaches to FYS Professional Development

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

Liz Burke**Ellen Crowell**

Saint Louis University

Although FYS are high-impact practice, both faculty and students may struggle to understand and internalize the overarching goals of this essential component of a student's first year. In this session, we will describe how our institution redesigned our approach to FYS faculty development to focus

on decentering disciplinary content and aligning around shared modes of inquiry as the central goals of our FYS. These efforts—which provide support before, during, and after the delivery of each FYS course, have been effective in helping both faculty and students understand and build upon mission-informed bedrock of our distinct institutional approach to the FYS.

CI - Mapping Success: Reflective Strategies in Summer Start

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Autumn Courtney

University of South Alabama

The University of South Alabama's Summer Start program introduced a concept-mapping project in CAS 190: Connect and Reflect, a required course that helps students transition from high school to college by fostering reflection, resource awareness, and relationship-building. Adapted from a successful Second-Year Experience initiative, the project replaced a previous, inconsistent presentation assignment with a structured, research-based activity. Students created individual maps, reflections, and group presentations around four objectives: College vs. High School, Learning Strategies, Success Habits, and Campus Support. Aligned with the LevelUP QEP, this initiative highlights how intentional reflection strengthens engagement, transitions, and institutional student success outcomes.

CR - Instructors and Peer Mentors Roles in FYS Return on Investment

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Jamil Johnson

Kevin Wenger

University of South Carolina Columbia

Masha Krsmanovic

University of Southern Mississippi

First-year seminars (FYS) are a cornerstone of student transition and success, yet scholarship often overlooks the unique impacts of instructors behind these courses. Using national survey data from 260 institutions, this study examines the relationship between instructor role, instructor training, and undergraduate peer mentor involvement with the perceived return on investment (ROI) of FYS courses. Results show notable differences by instructor type, consistent positive associations with instructor training, and the unique value of peer mentors in enhancing FYS outcomes. These findings highlight the importance of intentional staffing and preparation in shaping the effectiveness of FYS programs.

FD - Access to Success: FYE Programs in Community and Technical College

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Guava Jordan

WA State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Jennifer Zovar

Whatcom Community College

First Year Experience programs play a powerful role in helping community and technical college students thrive, whether through cohort-based learning communities, curriculum that ties to academic pathways, or approaches that foster belonging. In this dialogue, participants will share their most promising practices and success stories from these

programs. We invite community/technical college faculty, advisors, and administrators to celebrate what is working, explore how small shifts can make a big impact, and gather ideas to strengthen the student experience.

CT - Recruit, Retain, Repeat: Building a Lasting Orientation Leader Team

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Abby Silvers

Appalachian State University

This presentation will share a practical approach to recruiting Orientation Leaders who are passionate about welcoming and supporting incoming students and their families. I'll walk through strategies for outreach, selection, and engagement that build a strong team ready to serve and grow in the role. Our approach also focuses on retention through a thoughtfully planned training day, continuous development opportunities, and a feedback process that promotes confidence and growth. By emphasizing both recruitment and retention, we create a consistent team that delivers meaningful orientation experiences while helping OLs succeed, thrive, and develop valuable skills for their future.

CT - Reimagining Strategies for Success: Unlocking the Student Experience

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Meghan Kelly

Trent Morrell

Laramie County Community College

This presentation will share the history of college success courses at Laramie County Community College (LCCC) and how it culminated in the STRT 1000 Reboot Project which was a comprehensive redesign of the college's first-year success course. Grounded in the Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan (ACIP) framework developed by the Community College Research Center, the project aimed to enhance student onboarding and engagement through contextualized, Pathway-specific learning experiences. Attendees will learn how LCCC aligned curriculum with student aspirations, integrated career exploration, and built a sustainable model for course oversight and faculty support.

CT - Hands-On, Minds-On: Integrating Crafting into First-Year Programs

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Tara Coleman

Cheryl Bachelor Boothe

Kansas State University

This session explores how crafting—such as 3D printing, fiber arts, and live-action role-playing (LARP)—can enhance high-impact practices in first-year student programming. These creative activities foster engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking while building inclusive communities. Drawing on experiences from Kansas State University's Sunderland Foundation Innovation Lab, we'll share strategies for integrating crafting with or without a makerspace. Participants will leave with practical ideas for using creative play to promote persistence, reflection, and belonging, along with approaches to address barriers to inclusion and ensure accessibility for all students.

CT - Apoyando a las Familias de Habla Hispana (Supporting Spanish-Speaking Families)

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Robyn Brock*Florida State University*

New student orientation is a critical time for students and their families as they transition into the college environment. For Spanish-speaking families, language barriers can create additional challenges in understanding important information and navigating the campus. By offering resources such as bilingual staff, translated materials, and Spanish-language sessions, institutions can ensure that these families feel supported and included. This session will share how Florida State University improved their family orientation program by offering sessions to support Spanish speaking family members. After completing year three of an evolving approach, lessons learned and tips will be included!

CI - Study, Belong, and Succeed: Assessing FYS Outcomes with Institutional Research

Room 602: Nooksack; Sixth Floor

Amy Reese**Rebecca Jones***University of Health Sciences & Pharmacy*

Our university has been expanding major offerings/programmatic offerings and we needed an introductory course for all students. In Fall 2025, we are delivering a new 1-credit course, UHSP 101: First-Year Seminar. The course has three major outcome areas: study & academic skills, majors & careers, and wellness & belonging. We have partnered with our office of Institutional Research to coordinate pre- and post- surveys to complement three course essays across the semester. We will present a summary of our findings that assess the success of the seminar in fostering our three outcomes.

CT - Leveraging First-Year Seminars to Develop Students' Public Speaking Self-Efficacy

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Emily Boardman**Bella Grille***University of South Carolina*

A first-year seminar classroom is a crucial learning space for first-year students to be pushed to take risks within the comfort of a safety net. Public speaking courses and presentations for large lecture-style classes invoke stress and anxiety for many students. However, the FYS offers a unique opportunity for students to practice and gain these skills in a nonjudgemental environment while receiving feedback from peers and instructors. In this session, presenters will provide examples of course calendar scaffolding and strategic planning of lessons and activities to build up students' confidence early in their college careers.

CI - Fostering First-Year Belonging Through Peer-Led Learning

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Jessica Pearson*International Center for Supplemental Instruction (ICSI)*

While Supplemental Instruction (SI) is widely recognized for supporting student learning and persistence, emerging research highlights its equally important role in cultivating belonging among first-year students. This session, presented by the International Center for Supplemental Instruction (ICSI), explores how intentional SI design and leader training foster confidence, connection, and inclusion through peer-led collaborative learning. Participants will examine how SI normalizes help-seeking, reduces isolation, and supports first-year students in developing both academic and social confidence. Attendees will gain practical strategies for enhancing belonging within and through SI programs on their campuses.

CR - Centering Student Voice: Challenges Faced by First-Generation and MSI Students

Room 605: Shohomish; Sixth Floor

Megyn Jasmanq**Jean Rhodes****Alexandra Wertz***UMass Boston*

This session presents findings on the transition to college among first-generation students and those attending a Minority-Serving Institution (MSI), compared to peers at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Using an idiographic assessment, freshman and sophomore students at both universities identified and ranked their top challenges. Using a student-centered, idiographic approach, the study reveals meaningful differences in the types and salience of challenges across institutional and generational lines. Implications for designing more equitable and responsive support systems will be discussed, with a focus on improving outcomes for first-generation and minority students through targeted, data-informed campus interventions.

FD - Recruitment Reflections: what works, what can change, and what's next!

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Matthew Nolan**Natalie Meredith***Ohio State University*

Peer leaders, mentors, and educators shape the first-year experience and foster student success. Yet recruiting passionate student leaders can feel like navigating a maze, especially when trying to connect with Gen Z's evolving interests and expectations. What draws them to on-campus jobs today? How can we better communicate the value of these roles? This interactive session invites dialogue on the wins, challenges, and strategies behind student leader recruitment. Whether refining outreach or reimagining incentives, participants will share ideas to elevate their next recruitment cycle and leave with takeaways to elevate your next recruitment cycle.



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- Dr. Shannon Fairley-Pittman
Director, Global Network First Year Programs,
Northeastern University

See FYE Examples:

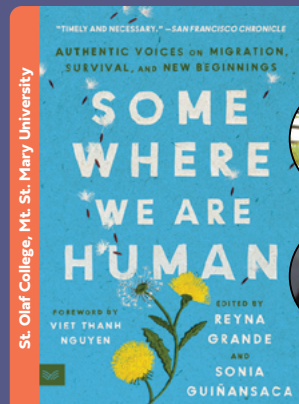
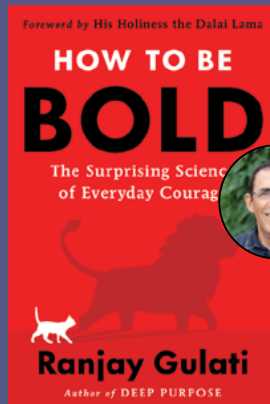
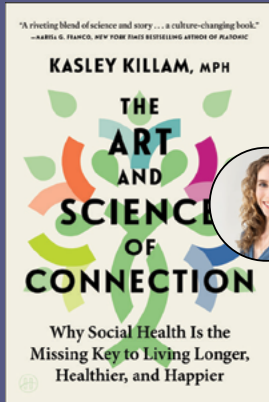


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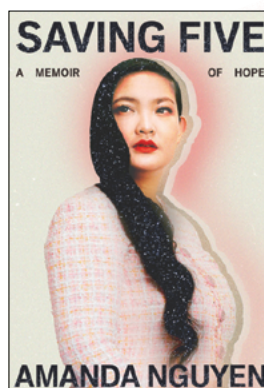
Doors open at 11:45 am

Elwha Ballroom

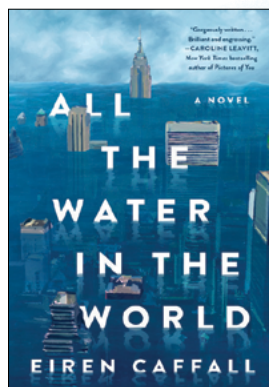
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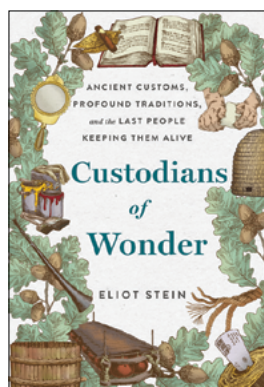
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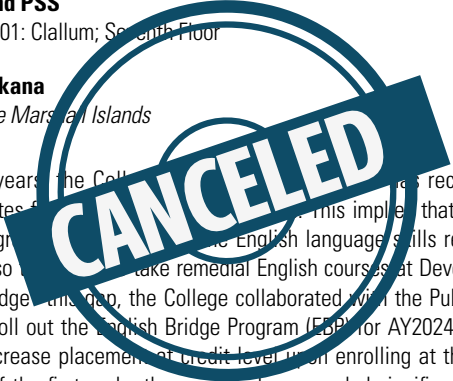
CI - Bridging the English Gap: A Successful Partnership Between CMI and PSS

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Gade Maitokana

College of the Marshall Islands

For several years, the College of the Marshall Islands has recorded low enrolment rates for students with limited English language skills. This implies that most RMI high school graduates do not possess the English language skills required for credit level, so they must take remedial English courses at Developmental level. To “bridge this gap, the College collaborated with the Public School Systems to roll out the English Bridge Program (EBP) for AY2024-2025. The goal is to increase placement of credit level upon enrolling at the college. At the end of the first cycle, the program has recorded significant success.



CT - Your New Assessment Assistant: Leveraging AI for Qualitative Analysis

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Danielle Powers

Taylor Clark

University of North Carolina Wilmington

Do you have qualitative data but lack the time or resources to analyze it? Artificial Intelligence can be your new assistant and quickly generate helpful analyses. This interactive session demonstrates how tools like Microsoft Copilot can assist with qualitative analysis in First-Year Seminar assessment. Using examples from open-ended survey questions and focus groups, we'll walk through step-by-step processes for generating themes and insights from student feedback. Participants are encouraged to bring a laptop to follow along with sample data. Leave with practical strategies, ethical considerations, and a clear understanding of how AI can enhance your assessment practices in FYE programs.

5:15 p.m. – 5:35 p.m.

CI - Embedded Study Skills Workshops: Practical, Relevant, Accessible

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Morgan Williams

College of Western Idaho

Traditional study-skills workshops often miss the mark for today's busy students. At the College of Western Idaho, we've introduced embedded workshops; short, in-class sessions that make skills like time management, note-taking, and memory retention immediately relevant. Join us to see how this model boosts engagement and supports student success.

CP - From Classroom to Culture: Transformative Student Experiences via China-Focused FYE

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Seth Batiste

Lone Star College (Ret)

Modeled after the University of South Carolina's nationally recognized First Year Experience (FYE), this proposal presents a China-focused initiative for 20

American students—including HBCU representation—immersed in 2–3 weeks of cultural and academic engagement at a Chinese partner institution, with excursions of 7–10 days. Sponsored by CUSEF, students can earn academic credit while gaining exposure to Chinese language, culture, and economy. Structured mentorship and guided reflection foster personal and academic growth. Likewise, Chinese exchange students in the U.S. benefit from an FYE-supported framework emphasizing belonging, resilience, and persistence. These cross-cultural experiences illustrate FYE's adaptability to promote global student success.

CP - Pens, Processors, and Possibility: Rethinking College Writing with AI

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Jill Maggs

Touro University

Integrating AI into a college writing course enhances student engagement, fosters critical thinking, and supports personalized learning. AI tools can assist with brainstorming, outlining, grammar correction, and style refinement, allowing students to focus on higher-order writing skills. By incorporating AI ethically, instructors can teach students to evaluate AI-generated content, recognize bias, and maintain academic integrity. The course design encourages collaboration between human creativity and machine assistance, preparing students for real-world writing contexts where AI is increasingly present. This integration not only improves writing outcomes but also cultivates digital literacy and responsible use of emerging technologies in academic environments.

FD - Connecting with Gen-Z: Strategies for Meaningful Classroom Engagement

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Megan Colascione

University of South Carolina

Michael Hood

National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transitions

Gen-Z brings a unique blend of digital fluency, social awareness, and a desire for meaningful connection; yet many traditional instructional and engagement approaches fail to meet their learning expectations. In this facilitated discussion session, attendees will share and learn from each other Gen-Z's learning preferences, communication styles, and the factors that influence their sense of belonging and learning. The session will highlight practical techniques such as incorporating student voice, leveraging technology with purpose, designing culturally responsive lessons, and building relevance through real-world problem solving.

CI - AI and Reading Comprehension Strategies in FYES

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Emily Clark

Gabriel Saxton-Ruiz

The University of the Incarnate Word

The University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) implemented Reading Academies as part of its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to strengthen reading comprehension and critical engagement among undergraduates. Grounded in benchmark courses and individualized tutoring—including AI-supported

interventions—this initiative emphasizes active reading strategies, goal-setting, and coaching. Assessment through pre- and post-testing using the Nelson-Denny Reading Test has documented measurable improvements in comprehension and vocabulary. This session highlights program design, implementation, and assessment, demonstrating how targeted reading interventions support first-year student success in First Year Experience courses and broader institutional goals for academic development and persistence.

CR - Belonging To Your Major: Identity Formation and Choices

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

Vincent Corbo

Southern New Hampshire University

Sense of belonging is a critical ingredient to student success. Recent studies have examined its impact on persistence, focusing on belonging to the school at large or the classroom. However, there is little data looking at students' sense of belonging to their major. Interestingly, the choice of major occurs at the same time as global identity formation. This project aims to see if sense of belonging differs between majors and how identity formation in general correlates with sense of belonging.

CT - High Impact Practices for Some College No Credential Students

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Debra Carter

The University of Kansas

Returning students from the Some College, No Credential (SCNC) population face unique social and academic adjustment challenges. This session reframes the "first year" as the "first year back" and explores High-Impact Practices (HIPs) adapted for adult learners navigating time poverty, caregiving, and online modalities. Drawing on Schlossberg's Transition Theory and recent SCNC research, we share tools for holistic advising, transparent assignments, virtual community projects, and ePortfolios. Participants receive adaptable templates and strategies to embed HIPs in entry courses and support reentry students' persistence, belonging, and success.

CP - Assessing Peer Mentoring Skills Perceptions for Science Undergraduates

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Temperance Rowell

Virginia Tech

Mentorship in undergraduate STEM experiences have been touted to help retention and student success, but direct evidence is still needed. Our peer mentors take courses focused on developing their peer mentor skills concurrent with participating in our community's peer mentor program. Therefore, we sought to find/adapt an assessment plan for our program to better understand self-perceptions of intended skills (i.e., Mentoring Competency Assessment) and reflective prompts 3 times throughout the academic year, in addition to end-of-year mentee perceptions. We found that many mentoring skills increased and some perceptions matched with their mentees, though it varied between students.

CR - First-year Seminar Survey Validation

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Kathrine Paget

Brigham Young University

To help monitor the program outcomes and the mental health of our students, we have opted to implement the use of a pre-/post- self-report survey that includes items on the outcomes of the course, including religious activity and access to campus resources, a sense of belonging, and general health, including sleep and mental. As this is a new survey, changed significantly from the previous one, we would like to know the structure of the survey. This will be analyzed using factor analysis.

CP - From Concepts to Connection: Active Learning for International Students

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Mary Kamela

University at Buffalo

Are you looking for ways to enhance first-year international students' experiential learning while still imparting important classroom content? Join this session for an exploration of how active learning strategies in an information literacy class for international students did double duty, helping students understand vital concepts while also breaking down language barriers and helping students build deeper relationships with their peers and instructors. Takeaways from pre- and post-test data, classroom assignments, and anecdotal feedback will provide insight into the efficacy of these pedagogical strategies, and the session will include practical takeaways to apply active learning into different first-year instructional contexts.

CI - Scaling First-Year Experience: INT W 1 at UC Santa Barbara

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Madeleine Sorapure

UC Santa Barbara

This presentation describes the structure, rationale, and initial assessments of a fully online, asynchronous, one-unit, P/NP course required of all ~ 4500 first-year incoming students in the College of Letters & Science at UC Santa Barbara. The course—INT W 1: Introduction to a Letters & Science Education—provides information that reinforces Orientation programming; teaches students about the practices and values of a liberal arts education; introduces students to faculty, research, and disciplinary knowledge; helps students understand how to navigate an R1 university; and gives students opportunities to reflect on their educational goals and strategies for success.

CR - Understanding Faculty Perceptions Supporting Undergraduate Students With Mental Health Challenges

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Jenna Jamieson

Southern Illinois University

College is a big adjustment for students, and it doesn't come without its challenges. This is a stressful time that presents new obstacles and frustrations that can lead to increased stress, anxiety, depression, and mental health challenges that may cause faculty to engage and support undergraduate

students with mental health challenges. In this hermeneutical phenomenological study, 12 participants were interviewed to learn about their lived experiences with students facing mental health challenges. Using Social Change Theory, data from the interviews considers how systemic changes such as policies or long-term outcomes may be relevant to address the themes outlined.

CI - Building Belonging: Designing and Launching a First-Year Experience Program

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Jacqueline Clark

McNeese State University

McNeese State University has launched the First-Year Experience (FYE) program, a transformative initiative built on scholarship, purpose, unity, and resilience (SPUR). FYE equips new students with resources, relationships, and resilience to succeed from day one. By partnering with Student Success Center, which offers tutoring, workshops, and wraparound support, the program creates intentional collaboration to engage first-year students—despite the absence of a required FYE course. This session highlights how we built FYE to integrate mentorship, cohorts, and academic support to foster belonging, share lessons learned, and provide strategies adaptable for institutions seeking to strengthen student transitions.

CP - Rooted to Rise: Reinforcing Foundational Curriculum Design

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor



Gregory David

Alicia Steffy

University of Florida

Join us to hear how First Year Florida reestablished our curriculum using student evaluations, benchmarking, and focus groups to assess and implement program wide changes. Learning Outcomes: Participants will be able to walk away with information on how UF's Center of New Student & Family Programs reestablished our First Year Seminar curriculum. Participants will understand how UF utilizes student data to inform decision making. Participants will gain a network of other professionals who are considering, interested in, or undergoing curriculum assessment.

CI - 360 Program: Proactively Engaging Vulnerable Students Through FYE

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Mary Parker

Haley Carney

University of Arkansas

The University of Arkansas 360 Program is a proactive, holistic advising initiative supporting most on-campus, first year, first-generation or Pell Grant-eligible students in three colleges at the university. Students are enrolled in special sections of the university's required FYE course and paired with staff and peer mentors for extra support during their fall semester and beyond. The targeted support students receive with financial literacy, academic success, social belonging, and wellness has increased student satisfaction and success and raised retention rates. Program staff present program design and structure, curriculum and activities, evaluation and lessons learned from nine years of program delivery.

CT - The Literacy Gap in Higher Education: What Can We Do?

Room 602: Nooksack; Sixth Floor

Maria Hamilton

Longwood University

Reading and literacy remain a topic of ongoing conversation and debate as scientific research and philosophy shape our views of how someone becomes a proficient reader. While decades of evidence highlight the importance of explicit instruction and practice in building neural connections in the brain, many students still struggle to achieve reading proficiency. This session shares some of that history while exploring research that influences current practice. We will unpack evidence-based strategies for increasing student comprehension and engagement that extend beyond the PreK-12 setting and explore a few success stories.

CI - Adapting the International Design Sprint for FYS at Brooklyn College

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Veronica Manlow

MJ Robinson

Brooklyn College

CUNY students have participated in fully online international Design Sprint in collaboration with partner universities in London starting in 2020. Faculty and career centers across 11 CUNY campuses participated. Students were placed in international interdisciplinary teams where they solved company challenges in an intensive 4 day period where they worked with a mentor and executives from firms presenting the challenges. On day 5 winning teams competed. Two projects have been realized: an educational kiosk created at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and a zero-waste collection of bags for Harris Tweed. We propose to create a new internal Sprint within the FYS.

CR - Location of FYE practitioners within South African Universities of Techno



Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Nosisana Mkonto

Luvuyo Kakaza

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

The transition from high school to university is often challenging for first-year students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, leading to high dropout rates. Universities are increasingly appointing staff to support student retention, yet the role of First-Year Experience (FYE) practitioners remains unclear. While FYE is well-established internationally, South Africa is only beginning to explore such initiatives. Existing research rarely highlights the specific contributions of FYE practitioners. Strengthening FYE practices is essential to better support students and improve retention, particularly within South African Universities of Technology (UoTs).

CI - Leveraging Institutional Data to Support First-Year Student Success

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Theophilus Clark

Winthrop University

This session explores how optimizing Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grading policies can significantly improve first-year student outcomes. Institutional data from 2021–2024 reveal that nearly half of students with GPAs just below 3.0 could have maintained scholarship eligibility with strategic S/U usage, while over 30% of students on probation could have avoided it. Many of these cases involved a single avoidable F that derailed a student's standing. By reframing S/U as a targeted safety net, we show how small policy and advising shifts can preserve scholarships, prevent probation, and strengthen first-year retention.

CR - First-Year Seminar Instructor Reflections Examined by Undergraduate Students

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Sarah Burcher

University of Alabama

First-Year Seminars (FYS) empower students transitioning to university by supporting academic success and well-being. Past research focuses on student perspectives, but less is known about instructor experiences, despite the importance instructor-student relationships can have on equitable outcomes and opportunities. With support from faculty, undergraduate student researchers led focus groups with FYS Instructors (N=14). Students were co-creators of the entire research process. Guided by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, themes and action-oriented strategies focused on instructor's reflections of student experiences while incorporating Student Co-Researcher perspectives. Findings demonstrate instructors' passion for student success and the need for continued collaborative reflective practice.

V - An Evidence-Informed Guide to Teaching FYE Like a Champ

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Regan Gurung

Oregon State University

What makes for effective and efficient teaching? How do you design a course to build student engagement, belonging, interest, and persistence? In this presentation I share what research suggests are the answers. To ensure a first-year seminar is successful involves strong course design and effective passionate teachers. Sifting through reams of research I give you the answers in one concise, high-energy session. Going beyond the wisdom of experience to focusing on those pedagogical techniques shown with extensive research to be effective, you will gather the key elements for strong faculty development including the most important elements of FYE course design.

V - Critical Thinking at Scale: Building Foundational Skills in FYEs

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

Aidan Kestigian

ThinkerAnalytix

J.L. Vertin

Doane University

Surveys show that over 70% of U.S. college faculty identify critical thinking as a core undergraduate outcome (Stassen et al. 2011; AAC&U 2009). Yet nearly half of college graduates lack proficiency in this essential skill (Van Damme 2022). To close this gap, a collaboration among education nonprofits, faculty, and academic leaders, is developing scalable, high-quality tools to strengthen critical thinking across First Year Experience programs. Participants will explore research findings, test the tools, and learn how to adapt them on their own campuses.

Excellence in Teaching First-Year Seminars



Sarah Vande Corput

College of Menominee Nation

Jordan Smith Undergraduate Student Fellowship Recipients

Stephanie Mora Gutierrez

University of Connecticut

Ryan Nuñez

College of Liberal Arts, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Jaclyn Layton

Butler University

Trey Marshall

Jacksonville State University

Zoe Kyrou

Marist University

CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

7:30 AM – 8:30 AM PST
Columbia Ballroom Foyer, Third Floor

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.**CT - From Silos to Seamless: Reimagining First-Year Success at Texas A&M**

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Meredith Malnar
Libby Daggers

Texas A&M University

Texas A&M University is reimagining its first-year student experience through a Seamless FYE initiative that unifies programming from admission through the first year. This session shares the institution's cross-divisional process, key findings, and bold recommendations—including an ongoing cross-functional committee, centralized engagement center, integrated communications hub, and longitudinal assessment strategy. Attendees will explore how institutional alignment, student voice, and strategic coordination can foster belonging and persistence. This presentation offers a replicable framework for institutions seeking to eliminate barriers and build a holistic, student-centered first-year journey.

CI - Scanning Success: Facilitating First-Year Success Using Individual Tracking Credentials

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Jansen Rouillard

University of Georgia Athens

This session highlights the use of individual tracking technology to assess and enhance first-year student engagement during orientation at a large R1 institution in the Southeast. By assigning individual credentials in partnership with student engagement offices, orientation staff built comprehensive profiles of student participation across multiple events in alignment with divisional and institutional priorities. These profiles provided early indicators of involvement, enabling staff to identify non-engagement patterns and initiate timely interventions. The initiative demonstrates stewardship of data from the moment a student officially joins the university community, and offers valuable lessons, insights, and potential strategies for scaling similar initiatives.

FD - Student Self-Determination: Strategies for Promoting Intrinsic Motivation through Choice

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Rebekah Skinner

Stevie White

Angela Vaughan

University of Northern Colorado

Consistent research indicates feelings of self-determination enhance student success. Increased motivation and achievement can be linked to higher levels of self-determination. A significant component of self-determination theory is autonomy. This session will share ideas around autonomy, or choice, in the first-year classroom and invite others to share their ideas. Choice in the classroom can be as uncommon as students designing attendance policies to easier tasks such as students choosing research topics. This forum will be divided into areas of discussion including classroom policies, instruction, and assessments. Providing students' choice in their educational experiences can lead to greater enthusiasm and commitment.

CT - Engaging Men in the First-Year and Beyond...

Room 401: Chelon; Fourth Floor

Jamil Johnson

Univeristy of South Carolina

At a recent convening of higher education practitioners and scholars, a question was asked: How many men are enrolled at your institution? On the surface, the question could be easy to answer, yet it is much more complicated. Today, men represent only 42% of students aged 18- to 24-year-old at colleges and universities, a decrease from 47% in 2011 (Fry, 2023). The challenge becomes once men enter our campus, how do we retain them and support their academic journey? Join us for an engaging discussion on research findings that support men in their first-year and beyond. These include enrolling in first-year seminars and other high-impact practices that strengthen their connection and sense of belonging to the campus community.

CR - Early Intervention for Academic Success

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

Sara Connolly

Sacred Heart University

This research-based presentation reviews the impact of an early intervention program on academic success and collegiate self-efficacy. Targeting students in competitive majors who received midterm grades of C or lower, participants attended four structured advising meetings and received newsletters. Results indicated that students in the program achieved higher GPAs and improved grades in courses of concern compared to non-participants. The findings suggest early intervention programs can be effective and should be explored further in various academic settings.

CT - Indigenous Data Sovereignty: First Year Foundation for Ethical AI Engagement

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Ronald Johnson

Jenny Serpa

Northwest Indian College-Nisqually campus

This session demonstrates how integrating Indigenous data sovereignty principles into first-year programming prepares students for ethical AI engagement while honoring Native knowledge systems. Drawing from successful upper-division coursework with Native American students, we explore practical implementation of First Nations OCAP® principles (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) in orientation programs and first-year seminars. Participants will learn strategies for addressing data colonialism concepts, developing cultural competency around intellectual property rights, and fostering critical thinking about AI ethics. This approach enhances academic success by building foundational skills in ethical reasoning, cultural awareness, and responsible technology use essential for contemporary higher education.

CI - Student Activism and the First-Year Seminar: Complex Histories, Possible Futures

Room 404: Entiat; Fourth Floor

Aims McGuinness

Anju Reejhsinghani

Pedro Morales-Almazan

University of California, Santa Cruz

This session considers the history and possible futures for the first-year seminar at a public midsize four-year institution. The University of California, Santa Cruz, was founded on the residential college model as a remedy to youth "alienation" at a time of intense activism and protest (1965). The "Core Course," or College 1, introduced first-year students to a small academic community and continues as a graduation requirement today. Using data on the first-year experience and insights from equity leaders, faculty, and staff, this presentation considers the Core Course in light of best practices taken by scholars and practitioners at peer campuses.

CI - Collaborating to Serve Exploratory Studies Students Through a First-Year Seminar!

Room 405: Kachess; Fourth Floor

Keith Lopez

Emely Cruz Arrazola

Kristin Michel

Colorado State University

For the past ten years, Colorado State University's Orientation and Transition Programs has collaborated with Exploratory Studies on New Student Seminars for Exploratory Studies (undeclared/undecided) students. The First Year Student Success and Exploring Major Tracks are 1 credit, 8-week seminar courses that support the success of students through helping students explore their transition to college, basic needs, interests, skills, values, who they are, well-being and strengths as they relate to major exploration and goal setting for their college experience. Learn about the history and structure of the program, who the courses serve, campus partnerships and student success data!

CP - Perking up FYE Courses with Data Informed Decisions

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Rob Derr

Terry Filicko

Clark State College

This session will examine how Clark State College uses both qualitative and quantitative research to assess and revise their First Year Experience Course at a macro and micro level to increase retention and completion rates. Based on the research conducted, the college completely revised both the course content and the course assignment. This session will help attendees better understand how to assess aspects of First Year Experience Courses and the assignments in the courses.

CT - Navigating the New Era: AI's Impact on the First-Year Experience

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Michael Hood

University of South Carolina Columbia

This presentation explores how artificial intelligence is impacting the first-year student's experience as it relates to professional, personal, and educational life. From personalized learning tools and to preparing for an interview at their dream internships, AI is transforming how students learn and engage. We'll examine the data to understand what is currently happening, discuss the impacts, what we might see in the future, what we can do now, and share practical takeaways for attendees and their institutions that can be implemented immediately.

CI - Discover, Learn, Belong: A Comprehensive Model for First-Year Seminars

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Chris Beneke

Jamie Bang

Bentley University

Bentley University's Falcon Discovery Seminar (FDS) is a required first-year seminar built on the motto Discover, Learn, Belong. Students discover by tackling wicked problems that spark curiosity and inquiry. They learn academic and AI literacy skills through modules led by Peer Leaders. They belong through a Dialogue Through Art project and Shared Experiences that connect them with classmates and the campus community. The semester culminates in lively presentations that showcase learning and engagement. This session will share the FDS framework, highlight assessment findings, and explore how its elements work together while meeting challenges of scale and changing student needs.

CI - Improving Growth Mindset, Agency, and Help-Seeking through Self-Reflection

Room 512: Willapa; Fifth Floor

Ross Markle

DIA Higher Education Collaborators

Student self-reflection is a powerful tool for engaging students in their own success. Through a structured process of identifying strengths and challenges, considering available supports, and creating an action plan, self-reflection fosters key mindsets central to a strong first-year experience (e.g., agency, help-seeking, growth mindset, self-efficacy). Drawing on an example reflection exercise implemented at several institutions nationwide, this session will

explore (a) how to design an effective self-reflection activity, (b) strategies for integrating reflection into existing FYE initiatives, and (c) additional ways to incorporate reflection and feedback to strengthen FYE efforts.

CI - Design Thinking as Part of a Holistic First Year Model

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Zoë Mertz
Dani Wall
Rachel Rea

University of Colorado Boulder

Discover how our First Year advising team brings design thinking to life in our first-year seminar, inspired by Stanford's D.School. Through hands-on exploration, ideation, and prototyping, students actively design their college journey. We'll share how our "Designing Your Leeds" course integrates with a holistic First Year Experience model, empowering advisors and FYE staff to support student agency and purpose. Attendees will engage in sample activities and collaborate on ways to embed design thinking into their own FYE programs. Join us to delve into practical tools, fresh ideas, and a renewed vision for the first year.

CP - Not Just a Bridge, But a Launchpad

Room 602: Nooksack; Sixth Floor

Nicholas Freeman
Diamond Boston

Florida State University

Florida State University's Summer Bridge Program (SBP), facilitated by the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE), supports first-generation and underrepresented students through intentional academic and holistic development. This session highlights the integration of SLS 1131 (Transitioning into College for Special Populations) for participants and HUM 4924/SLS 3606 (Engage 100 Peer Instruction & Transitioning Beyond College for Special Populations) for peer leaders. By embedding metacognitive strategies, mentoring, and identity-informed practices, SBP cultivates belonging, leadership, and academic success. Attendees will explore this dual-track model as a scalable framework for designing student-centered summer programs that launch students and leaders from day one.

CT - C the Difference: Grassroots to Manifestation of a University 101

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Alison Lee
Ashley Dodson
Craig Benson

University of Missouri

Over the past decade, a grassroots initiative at the University of Missouri-Columbia (Mizzou) evolved into Mizzou 101, a core first-year course designed to support student success and transitions. Initially created to assist undeclared students with major and career exploration, the course expanded through collaborative partnerships, strong campus champions, and evidence of positive student outcomes. By Fall 2025, the course had grown to 42 sections spanning multiple departments across campus. Guided by the 5C approach (Collaborating, Cultivating, Coordinating, Creating, and Co-opting), the course balances standardized learning outcomes with customization, offering a scalable model for first-year experience courses nationwide.

CI - Living and Learning in Community: A Successful Model for FYE

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Daniel Super
Jeremy Logsdon
Holli Drummond
Kirsten Hooks

Western Kentucky University

Western Kentucky University's Living Learning Community (LLC) initiative advances first-year student success through intentional integration of academic and residential life. Serving nearly 800 students annually, LLCs are organized by major, identity, or interest and they foster belonging, academic engagement, and retention. A rigorous assessment strategy using propensity score matching (PSM) demonstrates statistically significant retention gains for first-generation, Pell-eligible, and underrepresented students. The program is sustained through faculty professional learning communities, cross-divisional collaboration, and purpose-built infrastructure. This session will share WKU's approach and offer attendees practical strategies to implement, assess, and scale similar efforts within their own campus contexts.

CT - Bridging Promises: From Community to Campus Partnerships

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Dariana Zermeno
Richmond Promise

Ana Maciel
Contra Costa College

To combat high attrition rates among first-year Richmond Promise scholars at Contra Costa College, a strong partnership was formed in 2017 between Richmond Promise and the college's First Year Experience (FYE) Program - rooted in grant-funded innovation and shared commitment. This session will explore the evolution of this collaboration, the holistic support services developed to meet students' academic and personal needs, and the strategies used to institutionalize these efforts. Attendees will gain insight into how intentional partnerships can foster belonging, persistence, and long-term success for underserved student populations.

FD - Rethinking Readiness: Assessments, Remediation, and Resilience-Building Among Community College Students

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Rebecca Todd
Hillsborough Community College

Community colleges face persistent challenges in first-year retention, particularly when student readiness is narrowly defined through placement exams or remedial sequences. This interactive session reframes readiness as a shared institutional responsibility that extends beyond remediation to include academic recovery, mental health and wellness, and resilience-building supports for non-traditional and first-generation students. Participants will engage in facilitated discussion to examine evolving experiences with readiness assessments, redesigns of developmental education, and cross-unit collaborations between academic and student affairs. Together, attendees will exchange strategies and co-create actionable ideas to promote equity, persistence, and success among their unique student populations.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

CR - SCOL and Student Success: From Statewide Data to Local Impact

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

Amunoo Tembo

WA State Board for Community and Technic

Angela Dorsey

Olympic College

This session explores how statewide data initiatives can strengthen both institutional decision-making and classroom practice in the first-year experience. Washington State recently developed the College Success course attribute (SCOL) to systematically identify and track College Success/FYE courses across 34 community and technical colleges. SCOL highlights variations in course titles, credits, and offerings while enabling consistent tracking of sections, enrollment, and outcomes through a disaggregated data dashboard. A faculty member from Olympic College will share how completion data informs teaching practice. Together, these perspectives illustrate how linking statewide tracking with classroom experience can advance equity and improve student success.

V - A Comprehensive Picture of First-Year Success using NSSE & BCSSE

Room 702: Clearwater; Seventh Floor

James Cole

Jillian Kinzie

Indiana University

The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) provide actionable results, whether focused on the students' fall transition or their end-of-year success. BCSSE data and results include student-level data and summative reporting regarding the expectations and mindset of your entering first-year students. NSSE's focus on the first-year experiences in the spring provides important insights regarding participation in programs and activities that foster learning and personal development. We will also discuss 2 new pulse-type survey projects: Fall Check-In and NSSE Shorts. Discussion will focus on using these results to improve student success.

9:15 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

CT - From Audacity to Agency: Helping FYs Take the Academic Reins

Room 301: Ashnola; Third Floor

Sarah Hogue

Texas Christian University

First-year students often arrive on campus expecting adults to manage the details of their academic lives—just as parents, teachers, and counselors did in high school. When they email advisors or faculty with what can feel like “audacious” requests, it's really a lack of awareness about the balance between freedom and responsibility in higher education. This interactive session will share strategies, activities, and practical tools for turning dependency into ownership, helping students develop the agency, confidence, and accountability needed to thrive in their first year.

CR - Making the First Year Work: Quality Experiences and Coherent Outcomes

Room 302: Beckler; Third Floor

Kevin Wegner

University of South Carolina

Institutions often focus on participation in first-year initiatives, yet less attention is paid to quality and outcome coherence. This session presents two related studies examining these dimensions of the first-year experience. Using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement, the first study demonstrates that higher-quality high-impact practices are significantly related to improved perceived gains and student engagement. The second study introduces emerging research from the NRC using data from the National Survey on the First-Year Experience to develop and validate a First-Year Transition and Success outcomes scale and examine its relationships with key student success indicators. Practical implications for first-year design and assessment are discussed.

CR - Leveraging Reflection to Improve Low-income Students' Experiences in First-year Writing

Room 305: Chehalis; Third Floor

Ronald Hallett

University of Southern California

Jennifer Lambert

Dusten Crichton

University of Nebraska Omaha

Drawing from a 10-year external evaluation, this session highlights an innovative approach to teaching writing that has improved low-income students' academic outcomes and belonging. For 18 years, students in a comprehensive college transition program at a metropolitan university have been required to take an autobiographical writing course their first semester. The course supports students' abilities to write effectively by narrating their experiences and examining a variety of autobiographical writings. Students are exposed to multiple perspectives throughout the course as they engage with readings and review their peers' manuscripts. The presentation will include reflections from an instructor and the program director.

FD - Collaborations and Cohorts: Linking General Education Courses with FYE

Room 307: Methow; Third Floor

Jeremiah Allen

Jennifer Parada

Bellevue College

Bellevue College, the third-largest public education institution in Washington and number one in transfers to University of Washington and Washington State University, instituted a three-credit required FYE course for transfer-level students, designed and taught by faculty across academic divisions. Once the curriculum and program were well established, faculty lead an initiative to create combined courses to present FYE content in context of existing introductory courses, including Psych 100, English 101, and Introductory Biology, to better support students in their growth, success, and persistence. Join three of our innovative faculty in conversation about the challenges and opportunities implementing such faculty-led initiatives.

CI - Building Momentum: Seamless Pathways for First-Year Transfer Success

Room 401: Chelan; Fourth Floor

Garrett Gassman*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

This session highlights Momentum: An MCC & UNO Partnership, a cross-institutional initiative focused on creating a seamless, omnidirectional path for students transferring from Metropolitan Community College to the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Beginning with the first day of enrollment at MCC, Momentum addresses barriers that impact transfer student success in five key areas: student support, business and finance, academic pathways, communications, and data and infrastructure. Participants will learn how collaborative structures such as TAG Teams are driving systemic change, building intentional transfer pathways, and improving the first-year experience to set transfer students on a clear path to completion.

CT - Reimagining First-Year Experience: Equity for Neurodiverse Students Through Certifications

Room 402: Chiliwack; Fourth Floor

Kelly Way*University of Arkansas*

Neurodiverse students often encounter barriers in higher education that limit access to career opportunities. With emphasis on the first-year experience, we explore how early credentialing supports student engagement, retention, and equity. Major-specific certifications provide a bridge by validating both academic learning and practical skills through industry-recognized credentials. Using hospitality management as a model, this session examines certifications in event planning, food safety, and service excellence as tools to boost confidence, enhance employability, and promote inclusion for neurodiverse learners. Attendees will leave with strategies to align certifications with workforce needs and design first-year pathways where all students thrive.

CT - Contemporary students, contemporary solutions: Developing an Online FYE Seminar

Room 403: Cispus; Fourth Floor

Camille Abdeljawad Cook*Park University*

First Year Experience (FYE) credit-bearing seminars were initially developed with the traditional, on-campus learner in mind - but how can they be adapted for fully online learners? Can they support contemporary students, with unique challenges and competing priorities? The answer is YES! This session will share the process of developing an online, credit-bearing FYE seminar tailored to the contemporary student, including adult learners, student veterans, and students working full-time. One year in, the results are clear: online FYE for the contemporary student works, and it's moving the needle on student persistence.

FD - Divide & Mentor: Innovating and Diversifying Peer Mentor Programs

Room 407: Satsop; Fourth Floor

Emma Woelk**Alexandra Barron***St. Edward's University*

This dialog will focus on the development and continuous improvement of networks of multiple peer mentor programs to address diverse needs in the first-year population with an emphasis on collaboration between academic programs and residential life. We welcome participants interested in moving beyond a one-size-fits-all model of mentorship; those with experience collaborating between mentorship programs to meet a variety of student needs; and any interested colleagues trying to diversify, innovate or expand existing mentor programs.

CP - Improving STEM Retention Through Supplemental Instruction in Gateway Mathematics

Room 501: Chiwawa; Fifth Floor

Carrie Hutton**Whiting Indiana****Amanda Copeland***Calumet College of St. Joseph*

Mathematics is often the gatekeeper to STEM degrees, and for many first-year students—especially those from underrepresented or non-traditional backgrounds—gateway courses like precalculus can become a barrier to persistence. At a Hispanic-serving liberal arts college in Northwest Indiana, faculty identified precalculus as a high-risk course with historically low success and retention rates. In response, a targeted Supplemental Instruction (SI) program was developed to support student success and improve STEM retention. This session will explore the design, implementation, and impact of the SI model embedded within the precalculus course.

CR - Mixed Learning Communities and First-year Seminars

Room 502: Cowlitz; Fifth Floor

Kathrine Paget*Brigham Young University*

It is well known that learning communities and first-year seminars are beneficial to first-year students. But what impact does the extended proximity of embedding first-year seminars into learning communities add to the first-year experience, and are there specific groups of students who benefit more from this approach? Using a mixed methods approach, this question was addressed at Brigham Young University where some sections of their required first-year seminar are embedded within learning communities. Multi-level modeling in league with focus groups were used to see two sides of the story.

CT - Building Bridges: Summer Pathway for First-Generation Student Success

Room 505: Queets; Fifth Floor

Robbie Jones
Hannah Reed

University of North Carolina Wilmington

The UNCW Summer Bridge program provides incoming first-generation and underrepresented students with a tuition-free transition experience that integrates coursework, community building, and resource exploration. In 2025, the program adopted a new initiative: requiring all participants to complete the first-year seminar (UNI 101), co-taught by academic advisors. This intentional curricular integration provided students with early academic engagement, stronger advising relationships, and structured exposure to campus resources. This session will highlight the program's design, collaborative implementation, and student outcomes, while offering practical recommendations for adopting similar models to support equity, belonging, and persistence among first-year students.

CI - Cutbacks, Comebacks, and Collaboration: The TMU FYE Story

Room Quinault; Fifth Floor

Kayla Steltenkamp
Ana Herrera

Thomas More University

When staff lines shrink, collaboration must expand. At Thomas More University, budget cuts sparked a creative, campus-wide redesign of the First-Year Experience. Elevated as a strategic priority, FYE drew faculty, Student Life, Student Success, Admissions, Athletics, and others into shared responsibility. Graduate assistants and student workers filled staffing gaps, while faculty and peer mentors shaped programs in new ways. This session shows how resource limitations became opportunities to strengthen relationships, align initiatives, and weave engagement across the first-year journey. Participants will leave with practical strategies and a story of resilience through collaboration.

CI - Empowering Peer Leadership: Independent Instruction in First-Year Experience Courses

Room 601: Hoh; Sixth Floor

Norris Boyd
Kylie Lawrence

Florida State University

This presentation explores an innovative peer mentorship model within Engage 100, a first-year experience initiative that embeds undergraduate mentors directly into first-year success courses. The program features a tiered mentorship structure, with Level 3 Peer Leaders independently instructing their own courses following intensive training. This model offers scalable support, enhances student engagement, and provides relatable mentorship to first-time-in-college students. Preliminary assessment data shows high student satisfaction and strong retention outcomes, with many students citing their peer mentor as a key factor in their transition success, highlighting the value of consistent support from peers who have recently navigated similar transitional challenges.

FD - College-Based Communication Strategy and Practices: Building Engaged First-Year Student Communities

Room 603: Skagit; Sixth Floor

Mazen Hamadeh
York University

This session explores how the Communication and Marketing Team at Calumet and Stong Colleges supports the transition and engagement of first-year students at York University. Many incoming students are unfamiliar with university resources, community opportunities, and communication channels. Through intentional strategies—including digital campaigns, peer-driven messaging, and community-focused initiatives—the team fosters belonging, awareness, and engagement. Participants will gain insight into how tailored communication practices can empower students to navigate their first year with confidence and connection, offering models adaptable to other postsecondary contexts.

CT - Partnering to Evaluate Impact: Faculty-Student Mentoring, High-Impact Practices, and Learning

Room 604: Skykomish; Sixth Floor

Jolie Lewis James
Mason Jones

James Madison University

A team from James Madison University's Office of Transfer Initiatives, Center for Assessment and Research Studies, and the Office of Planning, Analytics, and Institutional Research came together to explore the impact of faculty mentorship during students' first semester on their likelihood of pursuing high-impact practices and their overall learning—for all students, and also for transfer students. We'll share information about how we shaped our collaboration, the data ecosystem that allowed us to do our work, the methods we used in our analysis, and early findings from the research.

CT - Pass the Baton: A Cure for Silos Syndrome

Room 605: Snohomish; Sixth Floor

Carlé Denise Smith Underwood

University of Alabama at Birmingham

Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Enrollment Management play crucial roles in enrollment and retention; however, this work is often done in isolation. This lack of coordination leads to duplicated efforts, inconsistent communication with students, and missed opportunities to provide timely support. For a tuition-dependent institution, those gaps directly affect the ability to serve students, meet institutional missions, and remain financially stable. Supporting the success of first-year students requires more than individual effort; it demands seamless collaboration. This session uses the metaphor of "passing the baton" to explore how institutions can synchronize their efforts to keep students "in the race."

CT - Fail Me Once? An Alternative to an Unsuccessful FY Seminar

Room 606: Twisp; Sixth Floor

Jennifer Hart
Curry College

What do you do when students don't successfully complete a required first-year seminar? This session offers one answer to this question by sharing the creation of and experience with an alternative version of a first-year seminar designed for students who needed a second chance to finish the

class. We will discuss the theory and pedagogy behind the alternative seminar, as well as what has worked and, perhaps more importantly, what hasn't worked since the alternative seminar was implemented. The session will include an opportunity to workshop your own approaches to challenges that arise when students are unsuccessful in first-year seminars.

FD - Often and Early!

Room 607: Wishkah; Sixth Floor

Amanda Brooks

Hayle Rose

Milwaukee Area Technical College

First-generation college students face unique challenges in navigating higher education, including academic, financial, and psychosocial barriers. This session will explore how internal campus resources (e.g. student engagement, mentorship, cultural space) and external support (e.g., family networks, community organizations) can work synergistically to improve student success and retention. Participants will engage in dialogue around best practices, resource integration, and institutional responsibility to support first-gen students through a holistic framework. This interactive conversation will highlight equity-minded approaches and promote collaborative strategies among educators, administrators, and student support professionals.

CT - Down the Drain and Up in Smoke: Looking at Addiction

Room 701: Clallum; Seventh Floor

David Chastain

Catalyst Consulting

Dr. Chastain uses his extensive personal and clinical experiences to present a broad look at how addiction can start, what dynamics contribute to ongoing use, and the range of harms active alcohol or drug use can cause. He also provides some practical insights regarding his own process of leaving his destructive use patterns in the past. Three important questions are answered: How does it start? What keeps it going? What serves the process of moving from active addiction to long term recovery?

CLOSING SESSION

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. PST | Room: Columbia Ballroom:
Third Floor

Katharine Pei

Washington University in St. Louis

Bringing it Home: Implementing Conference Insights at your Institution

This reflective and interactive closing session serves as the capstone to the Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience. Join a round table discussion with other conference attendees to identify conference learning moments, discuss and prioritize next steps, and create an implementation

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A semiannual refereed journal providing current research and scholarship on significant student transitions. The primary purpose of the *Journal* is to disseminate empirical research findings on student transition issues, including:

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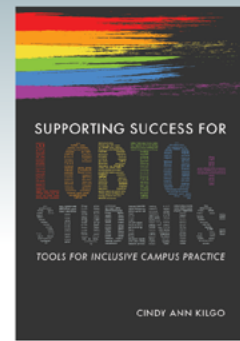
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Counting the Cost: An Exploratory Analysis of Student Debt, Perceived College Value, and Financial Stability for Graduating Seniors



Angie Miller Ph.D.
Indiana University Bloomington



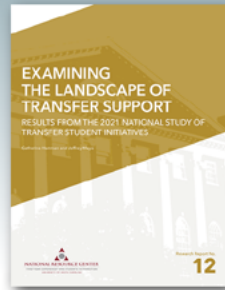
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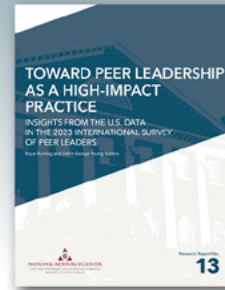
Candace Henry Ph.D.
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The Paul P. Fidler Research Grant is designed to encourage the development and dissemination of knowledge that has the potential to improve the experiences of college students in transition. The grant is named in memory of Dr. Paul P. Fidler, a faculty member at the University of South Carolina, whose pioneering research on student learning and success had a vital impact on work being done to promote the success of all students in transition.

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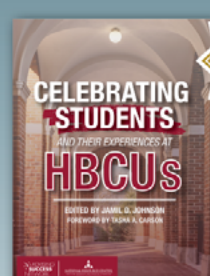
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John N. Gardner Institutional Excellence for Students in Transition

Award

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is committed to setting the standard for excellence in supporting students at critical junctures in the educational pipeline beyond the first year. We also seek to promote intentional and integrative connections within and across institutions and educational sectors to enhance the student transition experience. The award will be presented annually to institutions that have designed and implemented outstanding collaborative initiatives enhancing the entire undergraduate experience. Award recipients will have demonstrated the effectiveness of the initiative in supporting student success, learning, and development at a variety of transition points and in responding to unique institutional needs.

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- Presentation of a poster session during the conference featuring components of the award-winning initiative(s) and institution
- Recognition in a national higher education media outlet; in the National Resource Center's online newsletter (*Insights for College Transitions*); and on the Center's web page, listservs (i.e. NRC-LIST), and social media channels
- Distribution of press releases recognizing award recipients to national, regional, and institutional higher education media outlets



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*The University of South Alabama's
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FOR COLLEGE TRANSITIONS



Formerly *e-Source*, *Insights for College Transitions* is a free online resource that emphasizes evidence-based strategies for practitioner-scholars who support first-year students and students in transition inside and outside the classroom.

Insights accepts article submissions for the following columns taken per year bi-annually:

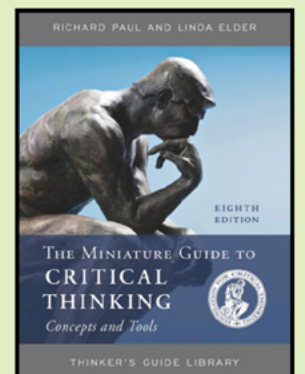
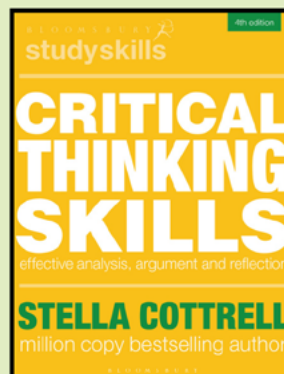
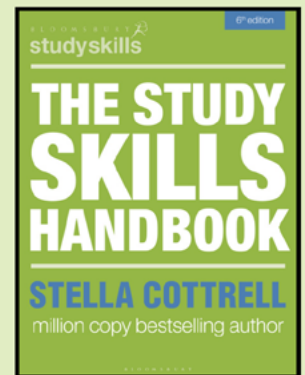
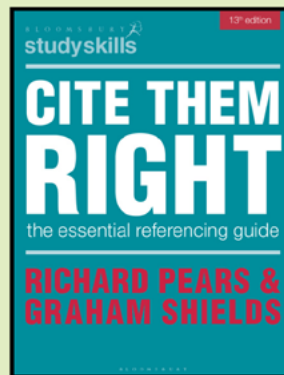
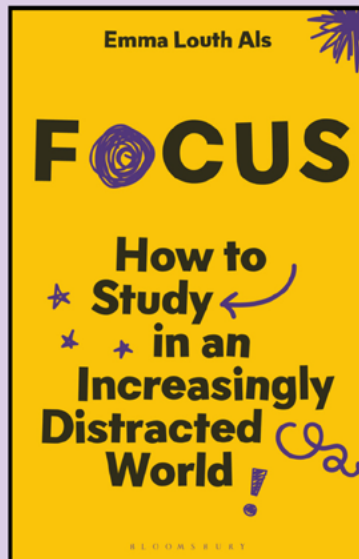
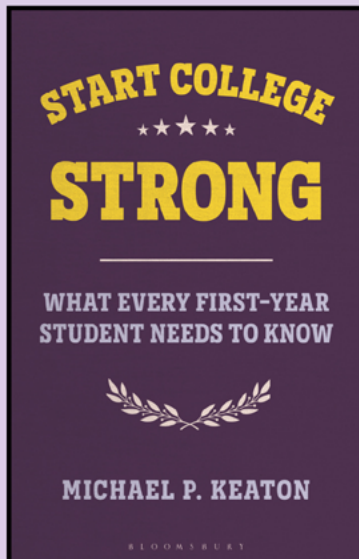
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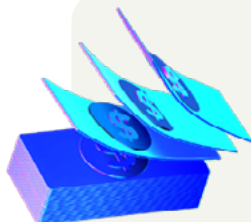
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¹Source: US News 2026 Best College Rankings | Category: First-Year Experience Programs

²Source: Intuit for Education 2025 Efficacy Research, based on a study of 60 high school students in Pennsylvania and Kansas

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AWARDS AND RECOGNITION



NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Excellence in Teaching

Sponsored by The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina, the award is given to an instructor who has achieved great success in teaching first-year seminars and who inspires student learning, development, and success. Universities were asked to submit one representative for their campus to be nominated for this award



Sarah Vande Corput

Dr. Sarah Vande Corput is an accomplished educator and leader with a strong focus on student success, curriculum development, and online learning innovation. Her dissertation, *Circle of Courage: Native American Higher Education Student Success Experiences*, explores Native American higher education success through the Circle of Courage framework. Dr. VandeCorput, Associate Professor at the College of Menominee Nation, has over a decade of faculty experience and has been instrumental in creating innovative academic programming.

Dr. Sarah is an active participant in the national dialogue on Native American higher education, serving on the American Indian College Fund Faculty Advisory Council and having presented at conferences for the American Indian College Fund and the Seven Generations Inter-Tribal Leadership Summit.

Outside of academia, Dr. Sarah operates a wellness consulting business, where she educates clients, creates natural wellness products, and engages in community-based wellness. Dr. Sarah's multifaceted career reflects her dedication to empowering individuals and communities through education, wellness, and leadership, fostering holistic success.

Semifinalists

Stephen Kromka
The University of Tampa

Chelsie Hawkinson
*University of Nevada,
Las Vegas*

Alexa Urra
*Florida International University
(FIU)*

Jennifer Borgo Raia
Coker University

**Pitchayaporn
Tantihkarnchana**
Virginia Tech

Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates



Penguin
Random House
COMMON READS

With the support and co-sponsorship of Penguin Random House, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is pleased to recognize individuals on the nation's campuses who are Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates involved in high-impact practices for first-year student success. Two award recipients are chosen in each of the following institutional categories:

- Two-Year Colleges
- Four-Year Colleges & Universities with less than 2,000 students
- Four-Year Colleges & Universities with 2,000 to 7,000 students
- Four-Year Colleges & Universities with 7,001 to 15,000 students
- Four-Year Colleges & Universities with more than 15,000 students



Sarah Todd

Sarah Todd (she/her) serves as the Director of Career Development and the Director of First Year Advising at Eastern University. As a career educator and academic advisor, she guides students as they take next steps towards their future goals and career readiness. In addition to leading the Center for Career Development, she writes FYE curriculum, trains and supports FYE instructors and TAs, and through coaching and advising, advocates for students' academic and career success. In her role as an adjunct, she teaches First Year Seminar (INST 150) as well as Young Adult Literature for the English department. Her engagement with first-years inside and outside the classroom inspired her solo article publication, "Becoming the Mentors We Needed: Formative First-Year Practices and Motivating Factors of Peer Mentorship in College" (2023). A lifelong Philadelphia-area resident, she loves spending time with her rescue dog, drinking Wawa iced coffee, and reading YA literature.



**Chicquetta
President Reed**

Chicquetta President Reed serves as the Director of First and Second Year Experience at Claflin University, where she provides strategic leadership in student engagement, retention, and transition initiatives. In this role, she develops and oversees programs that guide students through the critical first year of college while also addressing the unique challenges of the sophomore year; supporting academic persistence, identity development, and career exploration. She also serves as an adjunct professor in the School of Business and advises the freshman class, sophomore class, and the university's NAACP chapter. Mrs. Reed holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Winston-Salem State University and an MBA from Charleston Southern University. She is also a published author, motivational speaker, and Gallup Certified Strengths Coach. At the core of her work and success is her love for family, whose support and values continue to shape her leadership and passion for empowering students.



**Nicole
Juersivich**

Dr. Nicole Juersivich is the Associate Dean of Students for Academic Thriving at Nazareth University, where she leads academic advising, first-year experience programs, and student success initiatives. She directs the Academic and College Success (ACS) program and fosters a student-centered culture that integrates academic support, engagement, and retention strategies. Previously, she served as First-Year Experience Coordinator, Director of Academic Assessment, and Professor of Mathematics, bringing over two decades of experience as an educator, researcher, and administrator. She earned her Ph.D. in Mathematics Education from the University of Virginia, her M.S. in Mathematics from Virginia Tech, and her B.S. in Mathematics from Salisbury University. She is passionate about helping students discover their strengths, build meaningful connections, persist through challenges, and grow into their fullest potential and authentic selves.



Anna Eichner

Anna Eichner, M.A., is the Director of Academic Services and Student Success at Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Her early roles as career and academic advisor brought her face-to-face with the needs of underserved first year college students. In her current position as a director at Cedar Crest, she has devoted her career to re-imagining college processes to make higher education accessible to all. Anna has led college-wide change in the advising and onboarding of new students, leading to a reduction in summer melt and increased enrollment. When not in a multitude of meetings, she can be found hyping up her incredible staff for being the ones who make everything possible.



**Dusten
Crichton**

Dusten Crichton, Director of the Thompson Learning Community at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, leads initiatives that strengthen belonging, retention, and success for first-year students. His work is rooted in collaboration, partnering closely with colleagues, faculty, and staff whose creativity and commitment ensure that large-scale student success efforts become reality. His collaborative efforts have been central to building UNO's First-Year Initiative, expanding peer mentoring, embedding new seminars across every college, and modernizing advising structures to better serve students. Together, they are designing a first-year experience that is more equitable, coordinated, and transformative, with a special focus on At-Promise students. Crichton's leadership reflects both his personal dedication and the collective strength of the teams who share in this mission.



**Marie "Angie"
Castillo**

Marie "Angie" Castillo currently serves as the Lead Academic Advisor at Cochise College's Douglas Campus, where I've supported students for nearly nine years. I began my journey in higher education as Scholarship Navigator in the Financial Aid Department, which helped me understand how academic and financial guidance go hand in hand. In my current role, I focus on advising first-year, non-traditional and transfer students, helping them navigate their educational pathways with clarity and confidence. As a first-generation college graduate and single mother, I know firsthand the challenges many students face. My personal experience as a college student helped support my advising philosophy. I am student-centered; I know how it feels to want to earn a college degree in hopes of creating a better life for myself and my children. My service strategy is relationship-driven and grounded in trust and consistency. I strive to create a space where students feel seen, supported, and empowered to reach their goals. My commitment is to continue to support equitable access to all students while also focusing on student support success and retention and ensuring students feel they belong at Cochise College and can thrive.



**Sonia
Muñoz-Duran**

Sonia Muñoz-Duran is a higher education professional with over 15 years of experience in academic advising, program coordination, and student support services. At California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), she has played a key role in mentoring first-generation students and developing effective retention strategies, particularly through her leadership of the GenExcel Mentoring Program. Sonia's expertise also includes academic recovery and career development, with a strong track record of creating and scaling student success initiatives. Her academic background in criminal justice, highlighted by a Master of Science degree from CSULB, shapes her holistic and equity-minded approach to student support. Throughout her career, Sonia has served as a lecturer, academic advisor, and coordinator for programs like Supplemental Instruction, impacting hundreds of students each year. She is a dedicated advocate for inclusive, student-centered learning environments and is actively involved in campus-wide initiatives and committees supporting first-generation students.



Gregory David

Gregory David, M.Ed. serves as the Assistant Director for Transition Programs in the Center for New Student & Family Programs at the University of Florida. His work centers on fostering belonging, supporting students in navigating imposter phenomenon, and creating welcoming environments where all voices are valued. Guided by the belief in "being the change," Greg is committed to advocacy, empathy, and intentional listening in every interaction. He brings a wide range of experience across higher education, having also worked in Residential Life and Education, Student Leadership and Experience, Greek Life, and Career Services. Through each role, Greg has remained dedicated to helping students and families feel supported, connected, and empowered throughout their educational journey.



**Theresa
DeLos Santos**

Theresa De Los Santos serves as Director of the Orange Coast College MESA Program, oversees the Science and Engineering Tutoring Center, and manages the STEM Accelerator. A passionate advocate for first-generation and underrepresented STEM students, Theresa leads with compassion and vision, creating programs that combine academic counseling, tutoring, mentorship, and community-building. She believes in fostering spaces where students not only succeed academically but also feel a true sense of belonging from their very first semester. Beyond her professional role, Theresa is a proud mother of three, an avid reader, and a lifelong learner who finds joy in both personal and professional growth. She is continually inspired by the resilience, enthusiasm, and brilliance of the students she serves.



**Bennie
Moses-Mesubed**

Bennie Moses-Mesubed is the Associate Vice President for Strategic Equity Initiatives and Title III BRIDGES Director at Eastern Oregon University. She supports institution-wide initiatives in advising redesign, first-year experience transformation, experiential learning, co-requisite math & writing equity-centered support to improve persistence. She also oversees the MCC, International & Native American programs, Study Abroad, and Benefits Navigator. At EOU, she initiated the establishment of the Multicultural Center, the Celebrate, Educate, & Appreciate Diversity conference, the Mountie Allies program, and Kickstart Orientation, now Summer Bridge, which was recognized as a model for student success by the National Humanities Alliance. Her scholarship extends with presentations at NADOHE, the 44th annual FYE Conference, and the Conference on Community Writing. She also co-authored legislation expanding in-state tuition for COFA, and special immigrant visa holders. She is a doctoral candidate at Oregon State University, where her research examines how cultural mismatch and systemic barriers impact persistence among COFA, first-generation, and rural students.

Semifinalists

Skylar Marston-Bihl
The University of Puget Sound

Rachel Puopolo
UMass Boston

Noel Fuller
Texas State University

Jenna Heath
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Jacobie Backstrom
Lone Star College-Houston North

Jordan Smith Undergraduate Fellowships

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and DIA Higher Education Collaborators awards five fellowships to undergraduate students for the Jordan Smith Undergraduate Fellowship. The purpose of the Fellowship Program is to advance the leadership skills and knowledge base of undergraduate students so that they may in turn use what they learn at the conference to enhance and encourage first-year student development on their respective campuses.



Stephanie Mora Gutierrez

University of Connecticut

Stephanie is a psychology major at the University of Connecticut, where she is deeply committed to academic success and passion to help others. She is the founder of Care Collective, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals experiencing homelessness through in-person aid, resources, and community events. Stephanie empowers people to change their lives and make a positive impact on the world around them. Her work is rooted in empathy, resilience, and a belief in the power of transformation at any age. Raised by a family that taught her to never stop dreaming until her dreams come true, Stephanie brings hard work and consistency into everything she does.

Ryan Nuñez

University of Nevada

Ryan Nuñez is a Junior at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, majoring in History with a minor in Asian American Studies. A student leader and community advocate in Southern Nevada, he currently serves as the Lead Peer Mentor for COLA 100LA, the College of Liberal Arts' first-year student program, where he supports a cohort of 60+ peer mentors guiding over 4,000 students annually. In this role, Ryan supervises mentors on academic transitions, resource integration, and fostering a sense of belonging—directly advancing UNLV's retention, progression, and completion initiatives. He has represented student voices on the Dean's Student Advisory Council for three years and contributed to campus-wide programming through the Rebel Events Board, Honors College, Black Mountain Institute, and the Center for Academic Enrichment and Outreach (CAEO) since his freshman year. Through CAEO, Ryan has mentored underrepresented students across middle school, high school, and college through pre-college and college TRIO and AANAPISI programs. He has also served as a Rebel Ready Week and New Student Orientation Leader. Ryan aspires to pursue law or higher education leadership after graduation.

Jaclyn Layton

Butler University

Jaclyn Layton is a junior Strategic Communication major at Butler University in Indianapolis. She is passionate about all things creative, storytelling, and problem solving. Last year, she served as Butler's FYE Visual Storyteller for the Student Experience and Engagement Office, where she highlighted Butler first-year student experiences. This year she will serve as the Community Engagement and Annual Giving Intern in the Office of Advancement. Beyond academics, Jaclyn is involved in her sorority, Kappa Alpha Theta, where she enjoys building community and leadership as the VP of Education. She is also involved in several student focused organizations on campus. As a recipient of the Jordan Smith Undergraduate Student Fellowship scholarship, Jaclyn looks forward to broadening her perspective and building on her life-long learning journey. She is eager to explore how communication and culture intersect, bringing those insights back to enrich both her education and the Butler community.

Trey Marshall

Jacksonville State University

Trey Marshall, a Junior at Jacksonville State University from Brantley, Alabama, is majoring in Collaborative Special Education. He currently serves as a Gamecock Orientation Coordinator, Jax State Ambassador, and Vice President of the First Gen Society. Trey discovered his passion for supporting first-year students through his roles as a Gamecock Guide, Admissions Student Worker, and Gamecock Orientation Leader, each offering unique insight into the college experience. With a heart for mentorship and a dedication to student success, Trey plans to pursue a master's degree in Higher Education after graduation. He hopes to continue guiding and supporting students as they navigate their own college journeys.

Zoë Kyrrou

Marist University

Zoë Kyrrou is a junior at Marist University, majoring in Spanish with minors in Psychology and Theatre. She discovered her passion for working with first year students as an Orientation Leader following her first year at Marist. She spent her sophomore year as a Peer Mentor and the secretary of her Residence Hall Council, where she learned about student programming. She has also done work for Marist's Welcome Week and Transfer Orientation, helping students during their transition to college. Zoë continues to work with Marist's office of First Year Experience and is always seeking new ways to be involved on campus. Zoë plans to pursue a post graduate degree in Student Affairs and looks forward to making a career out of mentoring and supporting students during their college journey.



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📍 Providence, RI

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Region 5/Region 6 Conference

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Region 7/Region 10 Conference

📅 April 27-29, 2026
📍 Albuquerque, NM

Region 8/Region 9 Conference

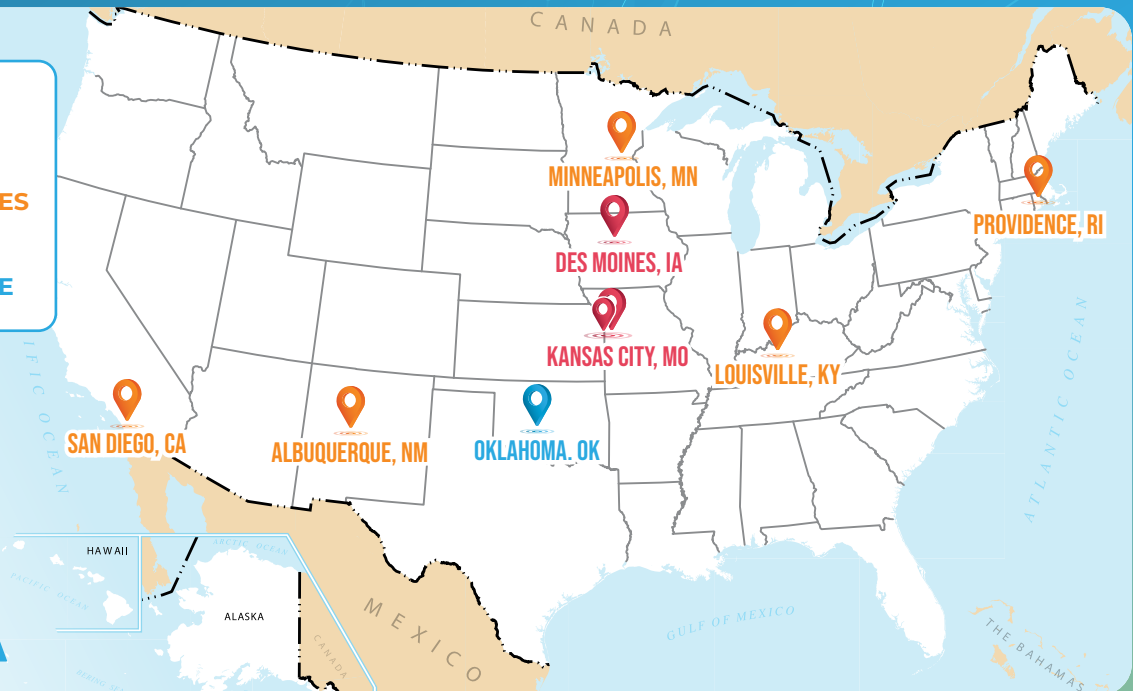
📅 May 17-19, 2026
📍 San Diego, CA

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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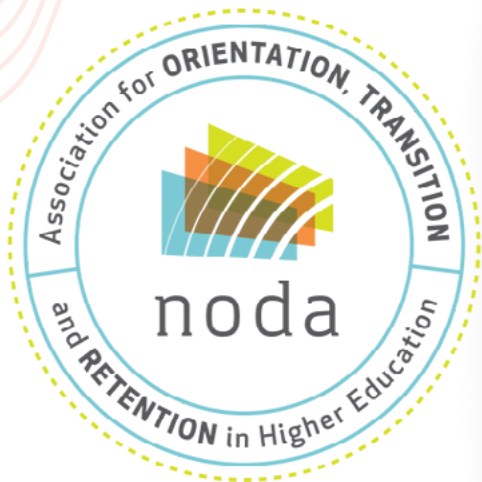
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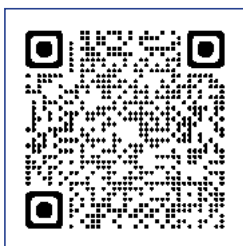
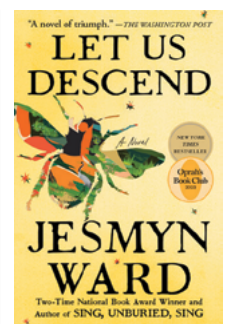
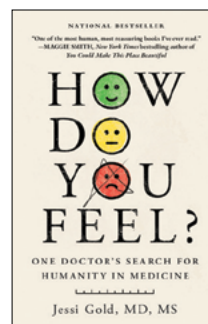
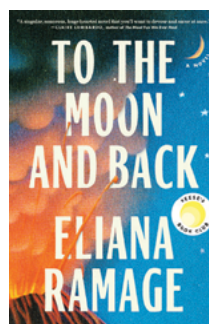
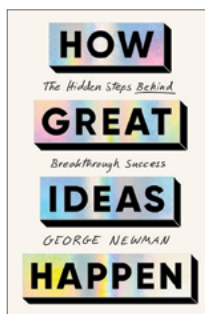
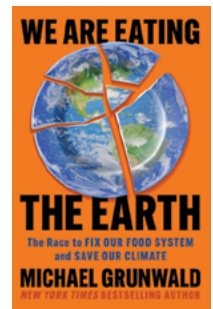
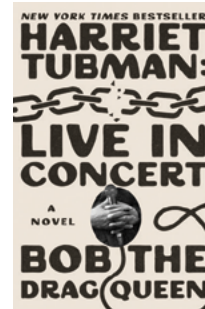
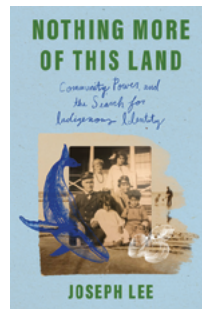
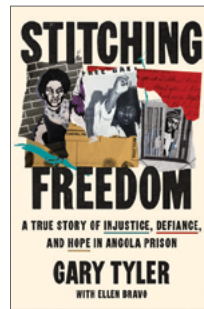
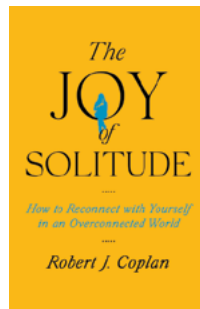
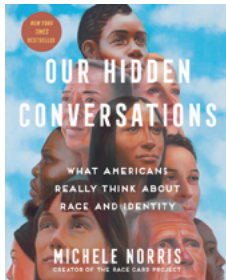
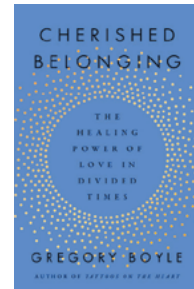
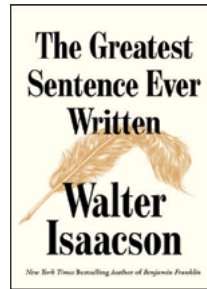
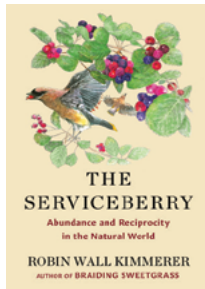
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Black, Tim	CampusESP	Connolly, Sara	Sacred Heart University
Blaher, Stephanie	University of Maryland Global Campus	Copeland, Amanda	Calumet College of St. Joseph
Bleicher, Elizabeth	Ithaca College	Corbo, Vincent	Southern New Hampshire University
Boardman, Emily	University of South Carolina	Coronado Castillo, Liz	St. Philip's College
Boston, Diamond	Florida State University	Courtney, Autumn	University of South Alabama
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Brewster, Michael	West Virginia University	Crandall, Suzannah	University of Wisconsin-Superior
Brock, Robyn	Florida State University	Crandall, Sam	Phoenix College
Brooks, Amanda	Milwaukee Area Technical College	Crowell, Ellen	Saint Louis University
Brubaker, Samuel	Brigham Young University -Idaho	Cruz Arrazola, Emely	Colorado State University
Bryant, Leah	DePaul University	Cuseo, Joseph	Marymount California University
Buch, Samir	Temple University	Daas, Karen	University of Texas at San Antonio
Bunting, Bryce	Brigham Young University		

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Daggers, Libby	Texas A&M University
Daniels, Reba	University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
Das, Rajeeb	Texas A&M University
David, Gregory	University of Florida
Davis, Erin	North Idaho College
Davis, Maurice	Montgomery County Community College
De Miguel, Zurine	California State University, Monterey Bay
Dela Cruz, Lisa	NODA-Association for Orientation, Transition, & Retention in Higher Education
Derr, Rob	Clark State College
Deutsch, Annika	Linn-Benton Community College
DeWeil, David	University of South Carolina
Dobbs, Christine	Panola College
Dodson, Ashley	University of Missouri
Dolan, Noel	Villanova University
Dones, Judy	University of Texas at San Antonio
Dorsey, Angela	Olympic College
Dorsey-Elson, Laura	Morgan State University
Duncombe-Paden, Djuana	Auburn University at Montgomery
Dunn, Dalvin	Texas A&M University
Easley, Katie	Western Michigan University
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Esambe, Emmanuel	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
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Fernandez, Danielle	California State University, Chico
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Foote, Stephanie	Gardner Institute
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Foster, Meg	Piedmont Virginia Community College
Fralick, Marsha	Cuyamaca College
Freeman, Shanti	Virginia Tech
Freeman, Nicholas	Florida State University
Fynan, Michael	Macmillan Publishers
Gardner, John	Gardner Institute
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Gassman, Garrett	University of Nebraska at Omaha

NAME	INSTITUTION
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Gilmore, Rebecca	Colorado State University
Go, Jennifer	Auburn University at Montgomery
Gochnauer, Andrea	Simon and Schuster
Gonglewski, Ava	College of Charleston
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Greeson, Sam	University of Kansas
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Grille, Bella	University of South Carolina
Grutsch, Morganne	University of Nebraska Omaha
Gulino, Chris	University of South Carolina
Gurung, Regan	Oregon State University
Haines, Karly	Palo Alto College
Hall, Deborah	Brigham Young University
Haller, John	University of Miami
Hallett, Ronald	University of Southern California
Hamadeh, Mazen	York University
Hamilton, Maria	Longwood University
Hanggi, Katy	Virginia Commonwealth University
Harmon, Brad	Furman University
Harper, Lindsay	Texas Tech University
Harrington, Christine	Morgan State University
Harris, Dominique	University of South Carolina
Hart, Jennifer	Curry College
Harvey, Jennifer	University of Nebraska Kearney
Hashimoto, Yukari	University of Nagsaki
Hashimoto, Tateo	Nishikyushu University
Hassler, Ryan	Pennsylvania State University Berks Campus
Hawkinson, Chelsie	University of Nevada Las Vegas
Hazard, Laurie	New England Institute of Technology
Herrera, Ana	Thomas More University
Hesp, Grahaeme	FIE: Foundation for International Education
Hill, Kimberly	University of Health Sciences & Pharmacy
Hogue, Sarah	Texas Christian University
Hohne, Maggie	Florida Gulf Coast University
Holden, Allison	College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
Hollandsworth, Heather	Virginia Tech
Hong, Barbara	North Shore Community College
Hood, Michael	University of South Carolina
Hooks, Kirsten	Western Kentucky University
Hopkins, Katie	University of South Carolina

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Horwitz, Amanda	Wayne State University	Kuesel, Lizzie	College of Charleston
Hoskins, Gregory	Villanova University	Kyllo, Jessica	James Madison University
Hoskins, Ruth Melonie Geraldine	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Lambert, Jennifer	University of Nebraska Omaha
Hudson, Alicia	Florida A&M University	Lampros, Molly	Clark College
Huerta, Juan Carlos	Texas A&M university - Corpus Christi	Langey, Merlin	Florida A&M University
Huggett, Sara	Virginia Tech	Larkin, Julie	FranklinCovey Education
Hulbert, Jenny	San Diego State University	Law, Kate	Boise State University - Boise, ID
Hulick, Daidre	Brigham Young University	Lawrence, Kylie	Florida State University
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Johnson, Michelle	University of Connecticut	Lomicka, Lara	University of South Carolina
Johnson, Elena	Oklahoma State University	Long, Jr., Reddgo	Unify America
Jones, Robbie	University of North Carolina Wilmington	Lopez, Victoria	Arizona State University
Jones, Mason	James Madison University	Lopez, Keith	Colorado State University
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		Merberg, Eileen	Alpha Lambda Delta

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Mitchell, Lynnlee	Arkansas Tech University	Reed, Hannah	University of North Carolina Wilmington
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Moore, Tchule	University of Missouri at St. Louis St. Louis	Reynolds, Candyce	Boise State University
Moore, Dylan	East Carolina University	Reynolds, Krystal	University of South Carolina
Moran, Patricia	The University of Texas at Austin	Rhodes, Tammy	University of North Alabama
Morin, Karrie	Connecticut State Capital	Rhodes, Jean	UMass Boston
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Morton, Katie	University of South Carolina	Riggers-Piehl, Tiffani	University of Missouri- Kansas City
Mullen, Michelle	UMass Chan Medical School	Roberts, Dustin	University of South Carolina
Murray, Joe	Florida Atlantic University	Roberts, Valonda	University of Missouri at St. Louis
Murray, Katie	Towson University	Robinson, MJ	Brooklyn College
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Treu, Ashley	Brigham Young University		
Trevino, Rios	Zayed University		
Tribble, Dana	Arkansas Tech University		
Tripp, Rob	University of North Carolina Wilmington		
Trojanowski, Marsha	University of Maryland Global Campus		
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Van Deventer, Megan M.	Weber State University		
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Vanderford, Jacob	Texas Christian University		



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