



2026 Joint Conference Agenda
The Anchor Effect: Grounded Leadership for Uncertain Times
A-B Technical Community College, Mission Health Conference Center
March 11-13, 2026

Wednesday, March 11

1:00 – 5:00 pm		Pre-Conference Workshops – Mission Health Conference Center
1:00 – 1:15 pm	Setting the Strategic Stage Elizabeth McKinley and Chris Perry, Co-Directors, East Hub, NC Teaching and Learning Hubs	
1:15 – 2:45 pm	AI Governance and Policy Implementation for Academic Integrity Dr. Lane Freeman, Director of Online Learning, North Carolina Community College System	
3:00 – 3:45 pm	Credit for Prior Learning and Credit Mobility: Frameworks for Increasing Student Completion and Recognizing Non-Traditional Learner Pathways Dr. Seth Kamen, State Director of Credit Mobility, North Carolina Community College System	
4:00 – 4:45 pm	Strategic Development of the Center for Teaching and Learning: Governance Models and Resource Allocation Strategies Dr. Jennifer Marquis, Dean of Teaching and Learning, and Kristi Reed, Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning, Craven Community College	
4:45 – 5:00 pm	Wrap-Up and Next Steps Elizabeth McKinley and Chris Perry	

Thursday, March 12

8:30 – 9:00 am Lobby	Registration, Check In, and Refreshments	
9:00 – 9:20 am Mission Health Conference Center	Conference Opening and Welcome; Sponsor Message from Simple Syllabus Dr. LaTonya Nixon, Vice President of Student Services, Beaufort County Community College & NCSDDA President; Randy Ledford, Vice President for Learning, Mitchell Community College & NCACCCIA President; and Dr. John Gossett, President, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College	
9:20 – 10:15 am Conference Center	Opening Plenary – Job Quality as Our Lever: Stronger Communities, Stronger Economies Across North Carolina Molly Blankenship, Associate Vice President for Strategy and Impact, Jobs for the Future	
10:15 – 10:30 am Conference Center	Break with Refreshments	
10:30 – 11:30 am		
Conference Center Main	Workforce Pell in Action: What Colleges Need to Know for High-Quality Implementation	
Conf. Center Breakout 1	TRIO STILL Matters	
Conf. Center Breakout 2	Learning how to RESET: Providing a Space on Campus for Students in Recovery	
Elm 207	Implementation of a Practical Nursing Pathway for CCP Students	

11:30 am – 1:00 pm	Lunch and Networking in Conference Center; Sponsor Message from Watermark
1:00 – 2:00 pm	Breakout Session #2
Conference Center Main	Updates from the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC)
Conf. Center Breakout 1	Evidence on 8-Week Course Implementation
Conf. Center Breakout 2	Leading with Trust: Strengthening Relationships Across the College
Elm 207	Improving Financial Aid Communications and Early Student Engagement
Elm 208B	Anchoring Excellence, Uniting Leadership
Elm 214	Anchoring Student Futures: Reimagining Human Services Pathways
2:00 – 2:20 pm	Break with Refreshments
Conference Center	
2:20 – 3:20 pm	Breakout Session #3
Conference Center Main	The Power of Collaboration in AI Implementation: Insights from PASS
Conf. Center Breakout 1	The CORE of Student Success
Conf. Center Breakout 2	From Model Selection to First-Term Rollout: Dev Ed Implementation
Elm 207	Transforming Health Sciences Education at Wilkes Community College
Elm 208B	Student Success by Design: One College, Many Paths
Elm 214	Panther Pathways: Feeding Mind, Body and Spirit
3:30 – 4:20 pm	Afternoon Plenary - Transformation During Transition; Sponsor Message from Coursera
Conference Center	Dr. Brian S. Merritt, Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Torry Reynolds, Associate Vice President of Student Services; and Dr. Andrew Gardner, Associate Vice President of Workforce Strategies, North Carolina Community College System
4:30 – 5:00 pm	Association Meetings
Conf. Center Breakout 1	NCSDAA Meeting
Conf. Center Breakout 2	NCACCIA Meeting
Friday, March 13	
8:30 – 9:00 am, Lobby	Networking and Refreshments
9:00 – 9:10 am	Morning Opening; Sponsor Message from Instructure
Conference Center	
9:10 – 10:10 am	Morning Plenary - How Excellent Community Colleges Are Changing the Game
Conference Center	Dr. Pascale Charlot, Managing Director, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program
10:10 – 10:25 am	Break with Refreshments
Conference Center	
10:25 – 11:20 am	Breakout Session #4
Conference Center Main	Establishing Targeted Support Plans for Students
Conf. Center Breakout 1	NCCCS Dashboards and Reports Supporting Propel NC
Conf. Center Breakout 2	Leading Through Transformation
Elm 207	Counterbalance at the CORE: How Connection Becomes an Anchor
Elm 208B	Creating Psychological Safety & Workplace Empathy in Times of Change
Elm 214	Supporting New Instructors Through Faculty Mentoring
11:30 am – 12:20 pm	Voices from Our Campuses: A North Carolina Community College Student Panel; Sponsor Message from ACUE
Conference Center	
12:20 – 12:35 pm	Conference Final Remarks/Door Prize Finale

General Session Descriptions

Opening Plenary, Thursday March 12, 9:20 – 10:15 am, Mission Health Conference Center Main Hall

Job Quality as Our Lever: Stronger Communities, Stronger Economies Across North Carolina

Molly Blankenship, Associate Vice President for Strategy and Impact, Jobs for the Future

Please join us as we explore job quality as a lever for economic advancement and regional prosperity across North Carolina. Drawing on fresh findings from the American Job Quality Study: 2025 State of the U.S. Labor Force—a first-of-its-kind survey of more than 18,000 workers across industries, demographics, and employment types—this plenary session will explore what makes a job “good” and why it matters for the learners you serve. Together, we will dive into the five dimensions of job quality—financial wellbeing; workplace culture and safety; growth and development; agency and voice; and work structure and autonomy; and connect job quality to postsecondary outcomes and highlight practical strategies your institutions can use to partner with employers, redesign programs and pathways, and use data to prioritize not just any job, but quality jobs for graduates.

Afternoon Plenary, Thursday, March 12, 3:30 – 4:20 pm, Mission Health Conference Center Main Hall

Transformation During Transition

Dr. Brian S. Merritt, Senior Vice President/Chief Academic Officer; Dr. Torry Reynolds, Associate Vice President of Student Services; and Dr. Andrew Gardner, Associate Vice President of Workforce Strategies, NC Community College System

Hear directly from leadership at the North Carolina Community College System Office on how the Great 58 can lead transformation during a time of transition. As the System navigates a presidential transition in summer 2026, implementation of a unified Canvas LMS, a new system strategic plan, Workforce Pell and evolving federal policy and funding conditions, and state priorities such as Propel NC, System Office leaders will discuss opportunities to empower colleges to drive change and prepare for the future of work in the Community College 3.0 movement.

Morning Plenary, Friday, March 13, 9:10 – 10:10 am, Mission Health Conference Center Main Hall

How Excellent Community Colleges Are Changing the Game

Dr. Pascale Charlot, Managing Director, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

Join Pascale Charlot, Managing Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, for a plenary session centering the ultimate objective of leading higher education reform that increases post-graduation student success outcomes at scale. This presentation examines the strategies used by Aspen Prize-winning colleges to identify, implement, and sustain institutional reform that delivers economic mobility for more students while developing much needed talent for regional economies.

Closing Plenary, Friday, March 13, 11:30 am – 12:20 pm, Mission Health Conference Center Main Hall

Voices from Our Campuses, a North Carolina Community College Student Panel

Katherine Hackney, Agribusiness Major, Alamance Community College; Kelley Peele, Business Administration Major, Surry Community College; Marley Ward, Psychology Major; Carteret Community College; Vanessa Watkins, Business Administration Major, James Sprunt Community College; and Jessie Weir, Engineering Major; Randolph Community College. Moderators: Dr. LaTonya M. Nixon and Dr. Torry Reynolds.

This year’s Joint Conference will close with a panel discussion from our most important guests, our North Carolina Community College System students. Panelists from a variety of backgrounds will share their unique experiences along with their insights into their community college journey. The session will highlight the challenges and triumphs the panelists have faced, offering a fresh perspective on the impact of community college education.

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Breakout Session Descriptions

Breakout Session #1, Thursday, March 12, 10:30 – 11:30 am

Conference Center Main	<p>Workforce Pell in Action: What Colleges Need to Know for High-Quality Implementation, <i>Iris Palmer, Director, Community Colleges, New America</i></p> <p>As Workforce Pell rolls out nationwide, states, colleges, and system leaders are grappling with how to implement it in ways that expand access while maintaining program quality and supporting long-term economic mobility. This session will provide a practical overview of Workforce Pell implementation and highlight key challenges and opportunities, drawing on early conversations with the field. Participants will learn about the current requirements for Workforce Pell, emerging trends in states, and how colleges are thinking about implementation. Attendees will leave with concrete insights and considerations to inform institutional planning as Workforce Pell moves from policy to practice.</p>
Conference Center Breakout 1	<p>TRIO STILL Matters, <i>Dr. LaTonya M. Nixon, Vice President of Student Services, Beaufort County Community College</i></p> <p>This session will equip TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) professionals with practical, ethical, and student-centered strategies to continue providing high-impact support during periods of funding uncertainty or reduction.</p>
Conference Center Breakout 2	<p>Learning How to RESET: Providing a Space on Campus for Students in Recovery, <i>Heather Pack, Director of Student Support Services, A-B Technical Community College</i></p> <p>With the escalation of deaths by overdose and the vast increase in mental health challenges, A-B Tech sought a way to fill the gap by providing a safe space for students to find connection. This session will talk about the different models of addiction, impact of mental health challenges, and what can be replicated on other campuses around the state.</p>
Elm 207	<p>Implementation of a Practical Nursing Pathway for Career and College Promise Students at Gaston College, <i>Dr. Lori Metcalf, Dean of Health and Human Services, and Ashley Long, Associate Dean of Health and Human Services/Nursing, Gaston College</i></p> <p>Many pathways are open for Career and College Promise (CCP) students to earn credentials. However, enrollment in nursing programs has not been an option for students still enrolled in high school due to limitations from clinical sites. Gaston College embarked on a pilot program to allow CCP students to enter the practical nursing program as a dual-enrollment pathway, allowing for concurrent completion of required high school coursework and college coursework necessary for the practical nursing program. This session will focus on planning and implementation of the pilot project, results to date, and lessons learned.</p>

Breakout Session #2, Thursday, March 12, 1:00 – 2:00 pm

Conference Center Main	<p>Updates from the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC), <i>Angela Anderson, Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Academic Success and Registrar, East Carolina University; Jenn Gardner Selby, Executive Director of Transfer Success & Higher Education Partnerships, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College; Dr. Travis Teague, Vice President of Academic Affairs, South Piedmont Community College; Dr. Ted Zerucha, Associate Vice Provost for General and Experiential Education, Appalachian State University; and Dr. Torry Reynolds, Associate Vice President of Student Services, North Carolina Community College System Office</i></p> <p>The Transfer Advisory Committee, a collaborative team from the state's public colleges and universities focused on creating student transfer opportunities and the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA), will present updates from the past year and share proposed revisions to the CAA. Time will be provided for attendee Q&A.</p>
Conference Center Breakout 1	<p>Evidence on 8-Week Course Implementation: Enrollment, Retention, and Student Success, <i>Dr. Sarah Deal, Director of Research, Belk Center; and Dr. Emily Smail, Director of Research and Evaluation, NCCCS</i></p> <p>This presentation will highlight findings from coordinated research examining the design, implementation, and outcomes of 8-week (half-semester) course models. Presenters will begin by outlining systemwide trends, the growing adoption of the 8-week format, and collaborative efforts to share knowledge among colleges exploring or expanding this approach. They will then discuss results from recent analyses, including how students' course-taking patterns (e.g., full semester only, half semester only) relate to subsequent enrollment, a quasi-experimental model showing an increase in retention of first-time students at a college that heavily uses 8 week courses, characteristics of courses most likely to revert back to 16-week formats, and comparative success rates between A-term and B-term enrollments. The session will conclude with an overview of forthcoming research priorities and an invitation for audience input on emerging questions.</p>

Conference Center Breakout 2	<p>Leading with Trust: Strengthening Relationships Across the College, <i>Gabby McCutchen, Provost, Arts & Sciences and Scott Northern Wake Campus; Michelle Jackson, Dean, Liberal Arts; and Jackie Swanik, Dean, Mathematics & Sciences, Wake Technical Community College</i></p> <p>Community college leadership has transformed dramatically since the COVID-19 inflection point in March 2020, and our ability to build strong, trusting relationships has never mattered more. In Arts and Sciences at Wake Tech, our leadership team took this challenge head-on by engaging in monthly discussions of <i>The Thin Book of Trust</i> and using its four dimensions of trust as a practical framework for strengthening how we work together. This session shares what we learned by applying this model with each other, our direct reports, and our colleagues across campus. Participants will explore the four dimensions, reflect on trust within their own teams, and discuss real strategies for improving collaboration, communication, and organizational climate. Join us for a candid, practical conversation designed for leaders navigating today’s complex community college environment.</p>
Elm 207	<p>Improving Financial Aid Communications and Early Student Engagement, <i>Brenda Burgess, State Director of Student Aid; and Andrea Simpson, Business Systems Analyst Student Financial Aid, NCCCS</i></p> <p>Community college students often receive financial aid information later than students admitted to four-year colleges, creating uncertainty and competitive disadvantages. Delayed award notifications, fragmented workflows, and late catalog approvals limit the institution’s ability to engage students early. Addressing these challenges will increase transparency, reduce enrollment indecisiveness, and strengthen student confidence during the decision-making process. This session will outline strategies to deliver earlier financial aid award notifications to admitted students, align financial aid timelines with four-year institutions, improve coordination across offices to ensure timely catalog and policy approvals, establish clear systems, workflows, and priority dates, and engage students earlier and more consistently throughout the enrollment cycle.</p>
Elm 208B	<p>Anchoring Excellence, Uniting Leadership, <i>Dr. Jeff Parsons, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Chief Academic Officer; and Dr. Carmen Nunalee, Executive Vice President/Vice President of Student Success, Stanly Community College</i></p> <p>Stanly Community College united leadership across divisions to meet students’ academic needs, expand instructional bandwidth, and strengthen course quality. By shifting advising duties to professional staff, faculty could focus on teaching and learning, supported by the Center for Teaching & Learning, and integrate career development in their work as mentors. Faculty training in Quality Matters and the ACUE Certificate in Effective College Instruction has transformed course design, embedding employability skill-building across the curriculum. With a bold goal to train 95% of full-time faculty and key adjuncts, the college is advancing readiness for the labor market while anchoring excellence in instruction. Participants will explore how practices across divisions can create sustainable structures that elevate both faculty and staff capacity and student outcomes for early momentum, persistence, and completion.</p>
Elm 214	<p>Anchoring Student Futures: Reimagining Human Services Pathways for Psychology-Bound Changemakers, <i>Betsey Zook, Workforce Analyst, NC Center on the Workforce for Health; and Porscha Orndorf, Chair, Social & Human Services, A-B Technical Community College</i></p> <p>Across North Carolina, many students enter community colleges wanting to “change the world” and pursue psychology, counseling, social work, and other helping professions. Yet traditional academic sequences rarely match today’s behavioral-health workforce needs—or students’ desire for early, meaningful engagement. This session highlights how the Behavioral Health Workforce Collaborative, working with statewide leaders, is redesigning Social and Human Services pathways through stackable workforce credentials, updated curricula, new apprenticeships, and developing articulation agreements with university social work programs. Recent legislative initiatives impacted mental health, IDD, and substance use services by expanding early-career worker opportunities and making applied experience during college more valuable than ever. This session will show how colleges can respond, build capacity, and incorporate early-exposure options while engaging student development staff in recruitment, readiness screening, mentoring, and advising. Participants will learn how to connect students’ desire to “help people” with concrete roles, support urgent community needs, and improve retention.</p>
Breakout Session #3, Thursday, March 12, 2:20 – 3:20 pm	
Conference Center Main	<p>The Power of Collaboration in AI Implementation: Insights from PASS, <i>Travis Teague, Vice President of Academic Affairs and CAO, South Piedmont Community College; Dr. Lane Freeman, Director of Online Learning, NCCCS; and Keegan Anderson, Vice President of Instruction and CAO, Mayland Community College</i></p> <p>Several CAOs from around the state of North Carolina participated in the PASS program and completed a statewide project focused on implementing artificial intelligence in education. This project brought together several colleges to discuss strategies and implementation plans for integrating AI across their local campus. A key outcome was the creation of a practical AI Faculty Handbook, offering clear guidelines and best practices for incorporating AI tools in</p>

the classroom. An additional outcome will be to share how the PASS academy experience demonstrated the importance of not forgetting the power of collaboration when it comes to successfully implementing teaching and learning strategies. This session will highlight the work, techniques used in colleges across the state, and the support from the NCCCS for AI integration in our college classrooms. Outcomes include areas of focus for colleges around AI and a suggested implementation guide for colleges.

The CORE of Student Success: An Innovative, Holistic Model Pairing Engagement and Academic Data to Transform Student Support, Sarah Shannon-Mohamed, Director of Onboarding and New Student Programs, Central Carolina Community College

Conference
Center
Breakout 1

This session introduces an innovative, next-generation model for holistic student support by pairing engagement data with academic indicators through the CORE Framework—Connection, Ownership, Resources, and Engagement. Building on the Holistic Support Wheel, this approach moves institutions beyond counting participation to understanding the full student experience. Participants will learn how Central Carolina Community College evolved from tracking surface-level engagement to using integrated data, quadrant analysis (GPA × engagement), and CORE scoring to reveal patterns, equity gaps, and early predictors of success. Using a dual-lens method that aligns institutional intent with student reality, the session highlights practical tools—data storytelling, behavioral indicators, regression insights, and proactive CORE-informed strategies—that have transformed programming, mentoring, and early intervention. Attendees will leave with a replicable blueprint for implementing holistic, data-driven, and proactive support systems that strengthen belonging, persistence, and overall student success.

From Model Selection to First-Term Rollout: Insights from the 2025 NC Developmental Education Implementation, Ashley Parrott, State Director of Developmental Education and College Readiness; and Dr. Emily Smail, Director of Research and Evaluation, NCCCS

Conference
Center
Breakout 2

This presentation will share early insights from ongoing work examining developmental education model selection and implementation across North Carolina Community Colleges. Presenters will describe the final models adopted by institutions and offer an initial look at enrollment patterns observed during the first term of full implementation. The session will also address frequently asked questions related to model design, placement, and operational considerations. Attendees will be invited to discuss emerging challenges, promising practices, and contextual factors shaping early outcomes, informing subsequent phases of research and technical assistance. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of emerging data trends associated with the new developmental education models and of common implementation challenges and effective practices across colleges, providing guidance for continuous improvement.

Transforming Health Sciences Education at Wilkes Community College: Innovative, Stackable Pathways for Student Success, Tammy Beck, Dean, Health Sciences, Wilkes Community College

Elm 207

Wilkes Community College (WCC) is implementing a comprehensive redesign of Health Sciences education to meet North Carolina's growing workforce needs. This session highlights how WCC is building flexible, scalable, and workforce-aligned pathways through the New High School Degree initiative, expansion of Reconnect strategies, and the creation of a new AAS Health Science degree. The AAS Health Science pathway provides a unified foundation that applies across all Health Sciences disciplines and offers multiple points of entry for CCP students, adult learners, Continuing Education participants, and undecided students. The pathway includes stackable certificates and diplomas, an accelerated option for Dental programs, and an off-ramp for students who do not continue in limited-admission programs but still need a marketable credential. The college is expanding work-based learning through new Health Sciences pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship models, developed in partnership with local employers to support workforce readiness and address clinical capacity challenges. Additionally, WCC is scaling its successful Reconnect strategy to re-engage stopped-out learners and increase completion rates.

Student Success by Design: One College, Many Paths, Dr. Ashley Morrison, Vice President of Instruction and Student Services; Dr. Melissa Recknor, Associate Dean of Student Services; Alan Unsworth, Dean of Instructional Support, Surry Community College

Elm 208B

Student success is strongest when colleges are intentionally designed to support learners who enter, pause, return, or shift direction along their educational journey. This session highlights how coordinated pathway design, including CE to CU alignment, a one stop onboarding and registration model, integrated advising, and instruction connected to academic support, creates a seamless, whole college student experience. By examining aligned pathways, clear progression points, and connected academic and student facing processes, the session illustrates how Surry Community College created an integrated model that meets the needs of all learners. Participants will explore how the college aligns structures, practices, and data to understand where students experience transition points and how institutional processes respond. The emphasis is on institution wide design that aligns pathways, instruction, and student facing processes. The session examines how these structures function as one college system supporting students across many paths.

Panther Pathways: Feeding Mind, Body, and Spirit Through Holistic Support, *Zomar Peter, Associate Vice President for Students; Rosa Davis, Campus Life Coordinator; and Bill Bondurant, Associate Dean for Student Services, Craven Community College*

Elm 214

Craven Community College believes that supporting students means more than delivering quality education—it requires meeting them where they are, physically, mentally, emotionally, and especially during times of need. We recognize the importance of strong support systems for students, faculty, and staff, understanding that meaningful connections foster personal growth, development, and academic success. Through intentional investments in networking and collaboration with community partners, we are committed to strengthening and sustaining holistic well-being across our campus community. In this presentation, we will share the genesis, evolution, and impact of two key initiatives: The Panther Food Pantry: An overview of its alignment with our 2023–2028 Strategic Plan, including grant funding, budgeting, and community partnerships; and Mental Health Resources and Referrals: A look at both on-campus and community-based services designed to support mental and emotional well-being. We will share photos and testimonials that illustrate the lived experiences and meaningful outcomes of our work.

Breakout Session #4, Friday, March 13, 10:30 – 11:20 am

Establishing Targeted Support Plans for Students, *Heather Pack, Director of Support Services; and Megan Triplett, Interim Director of Financial Aid, A-B Technical Community College*

Conference Center Main

Offering and leveraging Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) is essential for enrolling and retaining all students. But standing up and using a CPL program is not a siloed experience. It involves offices and people from across the college and the community. This session explores how you can conduct an inventory of your campus climate, policies and practices to assess your readiness to offer or expand your CPL program. Pulling from national best practices and successful institutional models, attendees will walk through various policy and procedural steps from the student, faculty and institutional journey to determine where there may be roadblocks or opportunities. Additionally, the session will review NCCCS's commitment to CPL and provide an introduction to the new resources available to assist the community colleges. Faculty and staff who work in academics, student success, and enrollment management are encouraged to attend.

Empowering Decision Making: NCCCS Dashboards and Reports Supporting Propel NC, *Dr. Bill Schneider, Vice President of System Effectiveness; and Elizabeth Stoddard, Director of Analytics and Reporting, NCCCS*

Conference Center Breakout 1

Our community college system is advancing its commitment to workforce alignment and labor market returns for students through Propel NC. As part of this initiative, the System Effectiveness (SE) team has developed a suite of analytical tools designed to support data-informed decision-making at the state and college levels. In this session, SE team members will introduce key resources that illuminate labor market outcomes for community college students. Highlights include: Regional Labor Market Analysis Reports offering localized insights into employment trends and opportunities; New public-facing dashboards that track wage outcomes for community college exiters; and Enhanced dashboards that provide deeper, more actionable data for institutional planning.

Leading Through Transformation: Building Stability, Culture, and Momentum in Times of Organizational Change, *Dr. Lisa Johnson, Vice President of Learning and Workforce Development/CAO; and Lisa Carlson, Vice President of Student Success, Randolph Community College*

Conference Center Breakout 2

North Carolina community colleges are navigating extraordinary levels of transition, including shifting student needs, workforce shortages, evolving instructional demands, and increased pressure to demonstrate student success outcomes. At Randolph Community College, these challenges have occurred alongside major internal changes, including transitions in key leadership roles, vacancies, and the adoption of a One College Model that seeks to streamline communication, reduce silos, and create a unified student experience. In the midst of this change, RCC launched its first Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan, a comprehensive institutional framework that aligns recruitment, retention, completion, and workforce outcomes across instruction and student services. Shortly after, the college introduced a new culture initiative and the REAL Leadership Academy to support employee development, strengthen collaboration, and reinforce a shared sense of purpose. This session will explore how RCC has worked to cultivate stability while simultaneously implementing significant structural and cultural shifts. Presenters will share how clear communication, cross-divisional alignment, and intentional relationship building have supported progress during a time when teams were stretched thin and expectations were high. Participants will gain insights into the practical realities of leading through complexity, sustaining momentum in enrollment and student success, and building a culture that is resilient, mission-centered, and ready for the next chapter of institutional transformation.

Counterbalance at the CORE: How Connection Becomes an Anchor for Student Success, *Dr. Erika Lytle Lett, Associate Vice President of Student Success, A-B Technical Community College*

Elm 207

In times of uncertainty, students need more than access, they need anchors. This presentation explores how the Counterbalance grant was leveraged at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to build a holistic student support model that stabilized, connected, and empowered students navigating academic and life challenges. Rather

than addressing a single barrier, this work centered on proactive outreach, coordinated coaching, and intentional connection to resources that support persistence and well-being. Grounded in relational leadership and care-centered practices, the initiative demonstrates how institutions can serve as steady anchors for students during moments of disruption, transition, and stress. Attendees will learn how a flexible, human-centered approach to student support can foster belonging, strengthen retention, and create momentum toward completion. This session invites participants to reflect on how intentional leadership can transform uncertainty into opportunity, for students and institutions alike.

Elm 208B **Creating Psychological Safety & Workplace Empathy in Times of Change**, *J. Dwayne Garnett, Associate Director of Student Onboarding and Success, Central Carolina Community College*
Discover the keys to unlocking leadership effectiveness to lead with purpose, where we integrate value-based leadership, Trusting Environment Practices, and the SOAR Analysis framework. Gain insights into aligning personal and organizational values to boost motivation, morale, and reduce conflict, all while fostering Emotional Safety for genuine expression. Dive into SOAR Analysis to capitalize on strengths, identify opportunities, and achieve desired outcomes, crafting a leadership style that cultivates trust, innovation, and sustainable success.

Elm 214 **Supporting New Instructors Through Faculty Mentoring: Intentions, Perspectives, and Lessons Learned**, *Dr. Sarah Parlier, Director of Teaching and Learning, Blue Ridge Community College*
This session is for Instructional leaders looking to implement a faculty mentoring program at their institution. The Mentoring Program at Blue Ridge Community College is completing its fourth year and has been successful in supporting 37 new instructors while also creating interdepartmental community and supporting ongoing faculty development. This presentation will provide an overview of the purpose and goals of the program and will also detail the financial, technological, and personnel logistics involved in its administration. Both new instructors and mentor instructors' perspectives will be shared along with lessons learned and recommended practices.

Thank you to our 2026 Joint Conference Sponsors!

