



**Ginsburg Center for Inclusion
and Community Engagement**

**20
25**



Academic Excellence Symposium for Faculty and Staff

United by Purpose, Driven by Passion:
A Collective Commitment to Student Success

Academic Excellence Symposium for Faculty and Staff

**United by Purpose, Driven by Passion:
A Collective Commitment to Student Success**

The 3rd Annual Academic Excellence Symposium for Faculty and Staff is a dedicated space for collaboration, learning, and professional growth, all in support of student success. This year's event features dynamic keynote speakers and engaging breakout sessions designed to equip faculty and staff with practical strategies to create supportive and effective learning environments. The symposium also includes the Dr. Valarie Greene King Lecture in honor of Black History Month, featuring "AI as a Tool for Inclusivity and Global Understanding." Through shared insights and meaningful discussions, attendees will explore innovative approaches to meeting the evolving needs of our students.



Table of Contents

Program Schedule	4
Dear Faculty and Staff	5
Keynote Speakers	6
Dr. Sarah E. Whitley	6
Melissa Tony Stires	7
Session Descriptions	8
Community Impact in Action: The Story of Downtown	8
Rooms of Reality with moderated discussion - Mental Health	8
Exploring the Basics of Neurodiversity	8
Creating Sites of Translation: Language Diversity in the Classroom at an HSI	9
Expanding Horizons! Adding a Global Experience to your Course	9
Student Voices: Enhancing Online and Mixed-Mode Learning Experiences	9
First Line of Defense: Dispelling Damaging Misconceptions about Student Veterans	10
AI training Basics of Prompting for Generative AI	10
Meet the Presenters	11
Dr. Ross Wolf	11
Dr. Deshawn Chapman	11
Dr. Haley Winston	12
Dr. L. Trenton Marsh	12
Natalie Madruga	12
Dr. Teresa Daly	13
Dr. Adam Meyer	13
Dr. Estrella Rodriguez	13
Dr. Wendy Howard	14
Dr. Olga Bedoya Arturo	14
Michelle Dusseau	14
Michael Kepner	15
Oliver McSurley	15

Program Schedule

Time	Event	Location
8:00AM	Check-in and Registration	SU - Pegasus Ballroom D-I
8:30AM	Welcome and Opening Keynote A Collective Commitment: Strategies to Drive Student Success Presented by Dr. Sarah Whitley	SU - Pegasus Ballroom D-I
10:00AM	Morning Breakout Sessions	Student Union
	Community Impact in Action: The Story of Downtown Moderated by Dr. Deshawn Chapman; Panelists: Dr. Ross Wolf, Dr. L. Trenton Marsh	SU - 218A
	Rooms of Reality with moderated discussion - Mental Health Issues Social Media Presented by Dr. Haley Winston	SU - Pegasus Ballroom ABC
	Creating Sites of Translation: Language Diversity in the Classroom at an HSI Presenter by Natalie Madruga	SU - 218D
	Exploring the Basics of Neurodiversity Presented by Dr. Terri Daly and Dr. Adam Meyer	SU - 221
	Expanding Horizons! Adding a Global Experience to your Course Presented by Dr. Olga Bedoya Arturo , Dr. Wendy Howard, Dr. Estrella Rodriguez , Oliver McSurley and Michelle Dusseau	SU - 224
12:00PM	Lunch Session: Dr. Valerie Greene King Lecture AI as a Tool for Inclusivity and Global Understanding Presented by Melissa Tony Stires	SU Pegasus Ballroom D-I
2:00PM	Afternoon Breakout Sessions	Student Union
	Student Voices: Enhancing Online and Mixed-Mode Learning Experiences UCF Student Panel	SU - 218A
	First Line of Defense: Dispelling Damaging Misconceptions about Student Veterans Presented by Michael Kepner	SU - 224
	Rooms of Reality with moderated discussion - Mental Health Challenges Social Media Presented by Dr. Haley Winston	SU - Pegasus Ballroom ABC
	AI training Basics of Prompting for Generative AI Presented by Melissa Tony Stires	SU - 218D
	Exploring the Basics of Neurodiversity Presented by Dr. Terri Daly and Dr. Adam Meyer	SU - 221

Dear Faculty and Staff

Welcome to the **3rd Annual Academic Excellence Symposium for Faculty and Staff**, where we come together **united by purpose** and **driven by passion** in our **collective commitment to student success**. As the educational landscape evolves, so do the needs of our students. The Academic Excellence Symposium is designed to equip faculty and staff with the tools and knowledge needed to foster engaging, supportive, and effective teaching, learning, and working environments—where we thrive as professionals and intentionally work to unlock the potential of every student.

This year's symposium features two dynamic keynotes focused on fostering universal teaching and learning environments that empower all students. You will also have the opportunity to attend a variety of breakout sessions, each designed to share best practices for meeting the changing needs of our student body and to spark meaningful conversations about the challenges and opportunities in higher education today.

The symposium also includes a special tribute to Black History Month—the Dr. Valarie Greene King Lecture. You won't want to miss “AI as a Tool for Inclusivity and Global Understanding,” as we explore how technology can bridge gaps, expand access, and create new opportunities for learning across cultures and communities.

Thank you for choosing to spend the day with us! Through collaboration and shared learning, we can cultivate an environment that champions academic excellence and student achievement. Your dedication makes this work possible, and we hope you find the symposium to be a valuable and inspiring experience.

Go Knights!



Dr. Andrea I. Guzmán
***UCF Vice President for Access and
Community Engagement***

Keynote Speakers



Dr. Sarah E. Whitley

Former Inaugural leader of the NASPA Center for First-Generation Student Success

Dr. Sarah E. Whitley is a dedicated to advancing educational outcomes for first-generation college students and fostering the systemic change across higher education that is necessary for success. As a first-generation college graduate and transfer student, she fundamentally understands the personal and generational impact that higher education can have on this important population.

In 2017, Sarah joined NASPA as the inaugural leader of the Center for First-generation Student Success, the national source for first-generation scholarly knowledge, data, insights, and professional develop-

ment. Sarah scaled the First Scholars Network, a multi-phase approach to systemic change serving 400+ institutions of higher education, designed through an intentional theory of change and continuous improvement framework. Understanding the need for professional development, Sarah established the First-generation Student Success Conference as part of the NASPA Conferences on Student Success in Higher Education. To elevate the identity, she partnered with the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) to establish National First-Generation College Celebration and a grant opportunity awarding funds to over 200 institutions. Most recently, Sarah served as executive vice president where she was engaged in advancing partnerships and fostering philanthropic support.

A frequent speaker and active scholar-researcher, Sarah is author to numerous publications including two acclaimed national landscape reports and a set of national data fact sheets on first-generation student success. Sarah established the Journal for First-generation Student Success, the first academic peer-reviewed journal on this topic, and CatalystFIRST, a speaking engagement service connecting first-generation success experts with conferences, events, and workshops across the country.

With over 20 years of experience, Sarah understands the challenges facing higher education as she has served as a faculty member, campus administrator, researcher, and association executive. In addition to her expertise on first-generation topics, Sarah's work and scholarship focuses on broad issues of inequality in higher education, systemic institutional change, strategic planning and continuous improvement, student transitions across the lifecycle, and university governance.

Sarah currently serves at NOVA Solutions. Sarah earned a Ph.D. in higher education from the University of Virginia, an M.Ed. in college student personnel administration from James Madison University, a B.S. in political science from Longwood College, and an A.S. degree from Richard Bland College. She is a 2010 graduate of the HERS Bryn Mawr Summer Institute. Sarah resides in Harrisonburg, VA with her partner, three children, and rescue pup.

Melissa Tony Stires

Protocol Expert and Leadership Innovator

Melissa Stires is an AI champion for non-technical talent, widely recognized as an Amazon Best-Selling Author, a preeminent voice in Public Speaking and Relationship Building, a Certified Advanced International Protocol Officer, a Leadership and Success Coach, and an esteemed speaker at Davos and Cannes Lions. Her strategic approach encompasses business development, orchestrating billion-dollar fundraising campaigns, marketing, and executive leadership within corporate, technological, and governmental arenas.

Her proficiency in cross-cultural communication and cultural sensitivity has facilitated her collaboration with, counsel to, and training of a diverse array of individuals, including members of royal families, politicians, non-profits, and business influencers across more than 35 countries. Melissa's illustrious career is highlighted by her role in significant initiatives, such as pioneering the first-ever educational partnership with Fortune Magazine's Global Forum and the landmark 40th Anniversary Celebration for HE Qaboos bin Said Al Said, Sultan of Oman, demonstrating her exceptional capability to navigate high-profile, high-stakes environments.

As Founding Partner & Chief Global Growth Officer for Mia AI, known as "Mia," Melissa continues to pioneer new frontiers. Her dedication to empowering women in AI and technology positions her as a trailblazer, seamlessly integrating traditional protocols with contemporary technological innovations to spearhead global strategies and expansion efforts.

Melissa's professional journey is further distinguished by her recent recognition as the College of Central Florida's Distinguished Alumnus 2023, adding to her impressive array of accolades. Although she considers herself a citizen of the world, she calls Central Florida home.



Session Descriptions

Community Impact in Action: The Story of Downtown

10:00AM - SU 218A

Moderated by Dr. Deshawn Chapman; Panelists: Elizabeth Grace, Dr. Ross Wolf, Dr. L. Trento Marsh

UCF's presence in the historic Parramore community creates opportunities for deep collaboration, but how can we ensure that our engagement is not only impactful but also genuinely welcomed and valued by those who call the community home? This session will share the evolving relationship between the UCF/Valencia Downtown campus and the Parramore community, highlighting intentional strategies for building trust, co-creating solutions, and addressing community needs with dignity and respect. Come to engage in dialogue about shifting from transactional interactions to transformative partnerships that amplify the voices and expertise of community members that fosters long-term impact and mutual growth.

Rooms of Reality with moderated discussion - Mental Health

10:00AM - SU Pegasus Ballroom ABC

Presented by Dr. Haley Winston

Rooms of Reality is an interactive event designed to challenge participants' perceptions of pressing social issues through immersive, hands-on experiences. This year's event features three themed rooms: the Mental Health Room, where participants engage in a group task while experiencing simulated challenges that reflect the impact of mental health conditions on daily life; the Groupthink Room, which explores the pressures of conformity and decision-making, incorporating social media influences to demonstrate how online environments shape opinions and behaviors; and the Reflection Room, a space for guided discussion and emotional processing, helping participants connect their experiences to real-world issues and consider meaningful action. Through these immersive scenarios, Rooms of Reality aims to deepen understanding of mental health, social influence, and collective decision-making, fostering critical reflection and inspiring change.

Exploring the Basics of Neurodiversity

10:00AM - SU 221

Presented by Dr. Terri Daly and Dr. Adam Meyer

With the term neurodiverse being more frequently used by students, it is important for UCF stakeholders to understand what the concept means. This session will highlight the fundamentals of neurodiversity and provide guidance for how faculty and staff can work with this population of students.

Creating Sites of Translation: Language Diversity in the Classroom at an HSI

10:00AM - SU 218D

Presented by Natalie Madruga

The myth of linguistic homogeneity is a phrase that refers to the negotiation of understanding communication that occurs between individuals, communities, and audiences. Oftentimes if we are presenting information in a classroom like setting, we work from the assumption that our audience members, or students, are working from the same level of understanding of the language that's being fore fronted in the room. Considering that UCF's surrounding metropolitan area's population is approximately 40% (or higher) multilingual, working from the linguistic homogeneity assumption does not accurately consider the audience members in our classrooms. This session will focus on language diversity in the classroom. It will begin by introducing milestone moments of incorporating language diversity, and provide participants to both discuss and reflect on what language diversity could be like in their prospective classes and disciplines.

Expanding Horizons! Adding a Global Experience to your Course

10:00AM - SU 224

Presented by Dr. Olga Bedoya Arturo , Dr. Wendy Howard, Dr. Estrella Rodriguez, Oliver Mc-Surley and Michelle Dusseau

In our increasingly complex and interconnected world, global experiences and cultural exchanges are not just beneficial; they are transformational. These opportunities empower students to cultivate the essential skills that will shape the next generation of leaders. In this session, we will uncover diverse strategies to enrich the curriculum, elevate the classroom experience, and foster student growth. Our aim is to ignite participants' creativity and inspire them to seize the exciting opportunities available through UCF Global, ultimately expanding their horizons and enhancing their potential for success.

Student Voices: Enhancing Online and Mixed-Mode Learning Experiences

2:00PM - SU 218A

UCF Student Panel

This panel discussion will provide UCF faculty and staff with insights into students' experiences in online and mixed-mode courses, highlighting both opportunities and challenges in digital learning. Participants will hear firsthand accounts of how students navigate virtual classrooms, build connections, and manage their academic success in these environments. The session will offer valuable perspectives to inform strategies for enhancing student engagement, support, and overall success in online and hybrid education at UCF.

First Line of Defense: Dispelling Damaging Misconceptions about Student Veterans

2:00PM - SU 224

Presented by Mike Kepner

In theory, veterans of the United States Armed Forces are revered, celebrated, and hailed as heroes. In practice however, veterans often face lazy stereotypes and damaging misconceptions in spaces ranging from the college classroom to the corporate boardroom. These misconceptions undermine understanding of who veterans are, what they need, and the unique value they bring to the classroom.

Through discussion and a student veteran panel, this session will introduce participants to Veteran Critical Theory (CVT), a framework that examines these issues, and provides practical strategies to dispel harmful typecasting, build stronger cultures of support, and foster a more nuanced understanding of the diverse student veteran population.

AI training Basics of Prompting for Generative AI

2:00PM - SU 218D

Presented by Melissa Tony Stires

This workshop will introduce participants to the fundamentals of crafting effective prompts, enabling them to harness the full potential of generative AI tools. Attendees will learn practical techniques to guide AI models in producing desired outputs, enhancing both teaching and administrative tasks. The session will explore real-world applications of AI in education, including ways to streamline workflows, generate creative content, and support student learning. Participants will also gain insights into common pitfalls and best practices for prompt engineering to ensure accurate and meaningful AI-generated responses. Whether you're new to AI or looking to refine your skills, this session will provide hands-on strategies to integrate AI effectively into your work.

Meet the Presenters



Dr. Deshawn Chapman

Manager of Office of Community Engagement - UCF CCIE

Community Impact in Action: The Story of Downtown

Dr. Chapman serves as the founding manager of the Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships at the University of Central Florida's College of Community Innovation and Education. In this role, she fosters strategic partnerships and spearheads collective impact initiatives that bring together leaders from various sectors to drive societal change. Dr. Chapman's commitment to service extends beyond her professional roles. She serves on multiple boards

throughout Central Florida and was recently appointed to the Steering Committee of the Education Knowledge Broker Network.

Dr. Chapman is the founder of The Educator's Collective, an educational consulting firm dedicated to equipping educators, parents, and communities with the tools needed to support children effectively. She also co-hosts the Be Ready Podcast, a platform where she and fellow educators—who are also mothers—discuss research, best practices, and emerging trends in education and child development. Through these initiatives, she continues to create spaces for meaningful dialogue and actionable strategies that empower communities.

Dr. Ross Wolf

Associate Provost and Professor - UCF Downtown Campus

Community Impact in Action: The Story of Downtown

Dr. Ross Wolf is Associate Provost at the University of Central Florida, serving as the academic and operational lead for the UCF Downtown campus. In addition to this role, he also serves as a Professor in UCF's Department of Criminal Justice. He has published over 80 peer-reviewed articles, professional articles, books, and book chapters on campus law enforcement, police administration and management, volunteer policing, police use of force, tourism policing, and international policing. He has worked with policing agencies throughout the United States, but also with the police in Aruba, Dubai, Hong Kong, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, St. Lucia, and the United Kingdom. He currently serves as a Board Member of the Downtown Orlando Partnership (DOP), with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) as an Executive Board Member of the International Managers of Police Academy and College Training (IMPACT) Section. He also serves on the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) Outreach Committee, and as board member and immediate past president of the Volunteer Law Enforcement Officer Alliance (VLEOA). Dr. Wolf was selected as a Fellow of the American Council on Education with the 2022-23 cohort on Hispanic Serving Institutions.





Dr. L. Trenton Marsh

Assistant Professor - UCF Department of Learning Sciences and Educational Research

Community Impact in Action: The Story of Downtown

Dr. L. Trenton S. Marsh received his doctorate in urban education at New York University's Steinhardt. His dissertation, "Success at a Price," received the 2015 Mitchell Leaska Dissertation Research Award and the 2016 Phi Delta Kappa Doctoral Dissertation Award. Dr. Marsh completed a two-year postdoctoral research fellowship at the National Center for Institutional Diversity at the University of

Michigan where he taught a qualitative research lab and explored experiences of students who participated in Wolverine Pathways, an equity and inclusion initiative at the university. His research interests include the conceptualization of student success, teacher-student interactions, the social context of education, and school choice with an emphasis on "no excuses" public charter schools. He also explores experiences of low-income students and families of color to help inform equitable pedagogies, policies and processes in education serving preK-12 and higher education students. Dr. Marsh's work was published in Urban Review, Boyhood Studies, GSE Perspectives on Urban Education and Education Week.

Dr. Haley Winston

Director, Civil Discourse and Engagement - UCF

Rooms of Reality with moderated discussion - Mental Health Issues | Social Media

Dr. Haley Winston is the Director of Civil Discourse and Engagement at UCF, overseeing the Civil Discourse and Engagement and Public Policy Events offices. She works with the Multicultural Student Center agency and LGBTQ+ Student Support Services. Haley holds a Doctorate in Education and Policy Studies from UCF. She teaches student success and leadership courses and has experience in civic engagement, student programming, and first-generation student retention.



Natalie Madruga

HSI Faculty Fellow and Instructor - UCF

Creating Sites of Translation: Language Diversity in the Classroom at an HSI

Natalie Madruga (she/her) was born in Key West, Florida. She is an Instructor for The University of Central Florida's (UCF) Department of Writing and Rhetoric, and the inaugural Faculty Fellow for the Office of Hispanic Serving Institution Initiatives (HSI). Natalie's HSI work is part of the objective for the office's Title V grant, Project POTENCIAL. She attended UCF as an undergraduate and graduate student (go Knights!), graduating with an MA in Rhetoric and Composition. While in her graduate program, she taught First-Year Writing courses as the Instructor of Record and conducted research for the First-Year Writing Program. Her research interests include public memory and memorialization, critical race theory, eulogistic rhetorics, and culturally-sustaining pedagogies, with a focus on Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Dr. Teresa Daly

Director - UCF Center for Autism & Related Disabilities

Exploring the Basics of Neurodiversity

Dr. Daly received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology with specialization in developmental disabilities from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. She started her 25+ years of experience serving individuals with autism spectrum disorders as an assistant in an inclusive preschool program. Prior to joining UCF CARD, she was Director of Training at Emory University Autism Center. While at Emory, she was Program Director of the nationally recognized Walden Toddler Program, an inclusive model demonstration program for the treatment of toddlers with autism. She is a licensed psychologist and board-certified Behavior Analyst, and has served as consultant to NEC-TAC on best practices for ASD.

She has been the recipient of multiple grants from agencies that include Autism Speaks, Georgia Childcare Council, the Parker Family Foundation and Department of Education. She presents locally, nationally and internationally on topics related to ASD, Incidental Teaching, and Early Intervention in ASD. She teaches future speech language pathologists at UCF. Her research and training interests include incidental teaching, social interaction, and early intervention. She enjoys reading mystery and crime novels, and spending time with her family. She has served on the PALS Board since 2003.



Dr. Adam Meyer

Director, Student Accessibility Services - UCF

Exploring the Basics of Neurodiversity

Adam is the Director of the Student Accessibility Services at the University of Central Florida. He has past experiences at Eastern Michigan University and at Saint Louis University while serving in this field since 2004. Adam has presented at numerous national conferences and multiple other state venues on a strategic framework for determining reasonable accommodations, the interactive process, rethinking documentation, \effective initial student inter-

views, disability language and various leadership and influence strategies for disability office personnel. Adam served on the Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) Board of Directors, now serves on the AHEAD external review team for campus program evaluations, and does consulting and presentations with other disability offices and their campuses.

Dr. Estrella Rodriguez

Instructional Specialist - UCF Office of Experiential Learning

Expanding Horizons! Adding a Global Experience to your Course

Dr. Estrella Rodriguez oversees submissions under the Global Learning (GL) course designation. She also coordinates International Internships for the UCF Barcelona and Costa Rica Study Abroad Centers. Her research focuses on providing opportunities for bilingual students in the second language classroom, with an emphasis on how these opportunities should include study abroad experiences to ensure global learning is accessible to all students.





Dr. Olga Bedoya Arturo

Director, Academic Support Services and Student Success - UCF Global

Expanding Horizons! Adding a Global Experience to your Course

Dr. Olga Bedoya Arturo is the Director of Academic Services and Student Success of UCF Global at the University of Central Florida (UCF). Since 2014, she has been responsible for leading the Academic services of the Global Achievement Academy (GAA) and the initiatives to support the academic and well-being of international students at UCF Global. Before joining UCF, Dr. Olga Bedoya

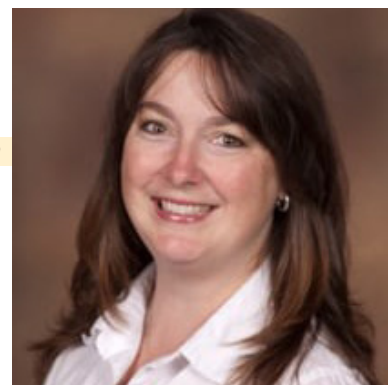
was the Director of Academic Resources at the Entrepreneurial Development Center at the Universidad Ices in Cali, Colombia.

Dr. Wendy Howard

Senior Instructional Designer and Director Pegasus Innovation Lab - UCF Center for Distributed Learning

Expanding Horizons! Adding a Global Experience to your Course

Dr. Wendy Howard is the Director of the Pegasus Innovation Lab (iLab) in the Division of Digital Learning at the University of Central Florida, which is an incubator of experimental projects focused on digital learning innovations aimed at positively impacting student success in online learning at the institutional level. With over twenty-five years of experience in both instructional design and teaching, her current research is focused on faculty development, collaborative online learning and global learning high impact practices online.



Michelle Dusseau

Senior Lecturer - UCF Nicholson School of Communication and Media

Expanding Horizons! Adding a Global Experience to your Course

Michelle Dusseau is a senior lecturer for the Nicholson School of Communication and Media, since 2005 she has been teaching courses in strategic and applied communication focusing on non-verbal behavior, intercultural and organizational leadership, and family communication. All of her courses are high impact and inclusive design certified by the college and university.



Oliver McSurley

Director, Study Abroad - UCF Global

Expanding Horizons! Adding a Global Experience to your Course

Oliver McSurley is the current Director for Study Abroad at the University of Central Florida. He is responsible for the management and strategic development of all student mobility initiatives at the university. Additionally, Oliver is a member of the senior leadership team for the International Affairs and Global Strategies division, a member of the university-wide International Affairs Committee, and an active participant in meeting UCF's vision for comprehensive internationalization.

Michael Kepner

Director, Military and Veteran Student Success - UCF

First Line of Defense: Dispelling Damaging Misconceptions about Student Veterans

As the Director of the Office of Military and Veteran Student Success at the University of Central Florida, Mike Kepner is focused on creating pathways and opportunities for military students throughout the university and Central Florida community. He has vast knowledge and insight within the veteran community and takes immense pleasure in supporting military, student veterans, and family members.

Mike retired from the United States Army in 2016 after serving 23 years to include multiple deployments around the globe for both combat and humanitarian missions. Having served at multiple levels of command and staff, Mike has spent a lifetime leading, training, and preparing service members for mission accomplishment and achieving their objectives. After retiring to Central Florida, Mike graduated from the University of Central Florida in 2019 with his Master of Arts in Educational Leadership and a Graduate Certificate in College Teaching and Leadership. Mike was recognized for his academic achievements and inducted into SALUTE - Veterans National Honor Society at the University of Central Florida.

Mike is passionate about community involvement, creating career pathways, and veteran advocacy. For his dedicated work in the educational space for veterans in 2018 he was recognized by the Orlando Business Journal as a Veteran of Influence and in 2022 he was honored as the Heroes for Kids Veteran of the Year. Mike continues to advocate for veterans and their families at every opportunity focused on creating purposeful relationships and strengthening opportunities for our veterans and their families.



**Thank you for attending the
2025 Academic Excellence
Symposium for Faculty
and Staff**

