



Ginsburg Center for Inclusion  
and Community Engagement

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# Academic Excellence Symposium for Faculty and Staff

Transforming Teaching and Learning: Advancing  
Student Success for the Next Generation

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**Transforming Teaching and Learning:  
Advancing Student Success for the Next Generation**

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The 4th Annual Academic Excellence Symposium is a dedicated space for UCF faculty and staff to strengthen our shared commitment to student success. This year's event invites participants to engage in inspiring testimonies, interactive breakout sessions, and a powerful demonstration on civility in practice designed to elevate teaching, learning, and collaboration across our university.

Signature sessions include **Knight Reels: Testimonies from Knight Nation**, where personal stories illuminate innovative approaches to education, and **I Don't Agree: Civility in Practice**, offering practical strategies for fostering respectful dialogue and constructive engagement. Together, these experiences create opportunities to share ideas, celebrate achievements, and build a culture of excellence that supports every Knight.



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# Program Schedule

Time	Event	Location
8:00AM	Check-in and Registration	SU - PEG Ballroom
8:30AM	<b>Breakfast and Featured Session</b> Welcome from Provost John Buckwalter, Ph.D. followed by <i>Knight Reels: Testimonies from Knight Nation</i>	SU - PEG Ballroom
10:00AM	<b>Morning Breakout Sessions</b>	Student Union
	► High-Impact Practices Unleashed: Faculty Shaping Student Success	SU - 218D
	► Building Pathways to Success: Supporting Student Veterans in Transition	SU - 218C
	► Your Content Matters: Make It Accessible and Reach Everyone!	SU - 221
	► Knight Safety with UCF PD	SU - 218A
	► "Rooms of Reality" with moderated discussion	PEG ABC
12:00PM	<b>Lunch and Featured Session</b> <i>I Don't Agree: Civility in Practice</i>	Student Union
2:00PM	<b>Afternoon Breakout Sessions</b>	Student Union
	► High-Impact Practices Unleashed: Faculty Shaping Student Success	SU - 218D
	► Emotional Intelligence: Applied Practices for Serving Today's Students	SU - 221
	► AI That Makes a Difference: Boosting Productivity to Support Student Success	SU - 218B
	► Knight Safety with UCF PD	SU - 218A
	► "Rooms of Reality" with moderated discussion	PEG ABC

# Dear Faculty and Staff

Welcome to the **4th Annual Academic Excellence Symposium for Faculty and Staff**. Thank you for choosing to spend the day with us and for your continued commitment to student success.

As higher education continues to evolve, our work requires both reflection and action. This symposium provides space for faculty and staff to engage with new ideas, share effective practices, and learn from one another as we consider how best to support today's students and the next generation. This year's theme, **Transforming Teaching and Learning: Advancing Student Success for the Next Generation**, invites us to think intentionally about how our roles and approaches contribute to student success across the university.

Throughout the day, you will hear from colleagues and invited speakers who bring insight and practical strategies to their work. The sessions are designed to encourage conversation and offer ideas you can apply in classrooms, programs, and offices.

The symposium also features an engaging lunch keynote session, **Civility in Practice**, which focuses on constructive approaches to communication, collaboration, and professional engagement that support effective teaching, learning, and community building across the university.

Thank you for the work you do every day and for your willingness to engage and lead alongside one another. I hope you find today's experience meaningful and energizing.

**Go Knights!**



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

# Featured Sessions and Speakers

## Knight Reels: Testimonies from Knight Nation

This featured session brings together 10-minute personal stories from UCF students and alumni that illuminate how teaching and learning can evolve to better support the next generation. These powerful narratives highlight real experiences, challenges, and innovations that shape student success across our community. Join us during breakfast to explore how lived perspectives can inspire transformative approaches in education.



### ***Michael J. Rovito, PhD***

#### ***Knight Reels Moderator***

Michael J. Rovito, PhD, CHES, CMHE is an Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of Central Florida whose work challenges how men's health is understood, measured, and addressed across the life course. His scholarship examines how masculinity, identity, and social norms shape help-seeking, risk, connection, and well-being, with direct implications for male student success and persistence in higher education.

Dr. Rovito has led and contributed to interdisciplinary research, scale development, and program evaluation efforts that move beyond individual blame to interrogate structural and cultural drivers of outcomes for men and boys. His teaching and service center lived experience as legitimate evidence for institutional change and academic excellence.

### ***Beatrix Alerte***

#### ***Featured Knight***

Beatrix Alerte is a senior Communication major here at the University of Central Florida and a transfer student who made the most of her time by building a meaningful and impactful college experience. She is a campus leader and creative focused on experiential



marketing, with involvement in volunteering, hosting workshops, studying abroad, interning in athletics, and supporting transfer and first-generation students as they explore their career paths. Through community-centered leadership and storytelling, Beatrice has found purpose in connecting students to opportunity. She plans to pursue a career in sports and brand experience, grounded in the pillars of community and social impact.

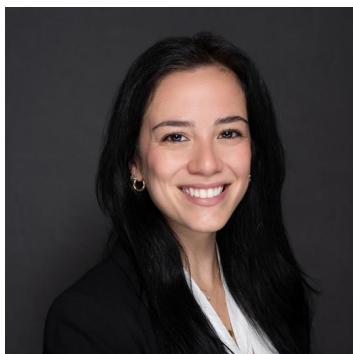
## **Austin Wilson**

### **Featured Knight**

Austin Wilson serves as Manager of Public Affairs in UCF's Office of Government and Community Relations, where he represents the university as a registered lobbyist before Florida's Executive and Legislative branches. He also helps promote the university to internal and external audiences, supports community engagement, and advances UCF's public profile. A



proud three-time Knight, Austin holds bachelor's degrees in political science and criminal justice and a Master of Public Administration, and previously served as Student Body Vice President and on the President's Leadership Council. His leadership and service have been recognized with the Order of Pegasus (2022) and UCF's 30 Under 30 Alumni Award (2023). Outside of work, Austin remains active in the community and church, enjoys time with family, golfing, reading, and cheering on the Knights in black and gold.



## **Ketty Dones**

### **Featured Knight**

Ketty is a proud first-generation professional who believes access to knowledge and the right tools can transform communities. She holds two master's degrees from the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Public Administration and Nonprofit Management and is deeply committed to helping nonprofits better serve the people who rely on them.

Her work centers on creating practical, people-first solutions, especially using accessible AI tools, to help small and mid-sized

nonprofits strengthen their operations, fundraising, and long-term sustainability. Ketty has provided hands-on technical assistance to organizations with budgets under \$500,000, supported the development of organizational bylaws, and helped teams build capacity without losing sight of their mission. In addition to her role with UCF's Applied AI Innovation Initiative, Ketty works with the Hispanic Heritage Scholarship Fund, where she remains closely connected to the power of education and scholarships in creating pathways for students and their families.



**Andrew Cherico**  
**Featured Knight**

Hello everyone! My name is Andrew Cherico I'm a senior studying broadcast journalism at the University of Central Florida! I was born with Spinal Muscular Atrophy a neuromuscular disability, that affects the muscle development in my body. I haven't let that stop me as I'm originally from Washington Heights, New York and moved down to Orlando to chase

my dream of becoming a sports journalist. Studying at UCF has opened so many opportunities for me to grow as an individual. Many of these opportunities are having an internship writing for CBS Knights 247, speaking at student success conferences and being a member of a multicultural fraternity.

## **I Don't Agree: Civility in Practice**

This featured session includes a demonstration exploring how civility, dialogue, and respectful engagement can strengthen teaching, learning, and community connections. This session offers practical insights for fostering constructive interactions, even in moments of disagreement, to support student success and collaboration across generations.

## **Dr. Lua Hancock** **I Don't Agree Moderator**

Dr. Hancock 30 years of experience working to create campus communities and empowering and serving college youth and educators. Additionally, Lua is sought after by non-profits and fortune 500 companies for consulting, executive coaching and keynotes in areas of leadership, change management, conflict resolution, strategic planning, assessment, and equity.



Lua has served as the past Vice President of Campus Life and Student Success at Stetson University. She is honored to serve currently as the Vice President for the Ginsburg Family Foundation as the lead of their youth leadership movement- Phoenix Generation.

Lua is a mom of a Junior at University of Central Florida studying Film and a first year student at Berry College studying Environmental Science.



## **Dr. Edwanna Andrews** **Session Speaker**

Dr. Edwanna Andrews serves as the Assistant Vice President for The Ginsburg Center for Inclusion and Community Engagement at the University of Central Florida (UCF). She provides executive leadership for initiatives focused on Civil Discourse and Engagement and Access and Academic Excellence, including TRIO and Pre-Collegiate Programs, focused on

supporting student success. With more than 20 years of experience in higher education, she also serves as an adjunct instructor, advancing student learning through teaching and academic mentorship.



***Mike Kepner***  
***Session Speaker***

Mike Kepner serves as the Director of the Office of Military and Veteran Student Success at the University of Central Florida, where he leads strategic initiatives to empower military-connected students to thrive academically, professionally, and personally. A retired U.S. Army senior leader with 23 years of service—including multiple global deployments supporting

both combat and humanitarian missions—Mike brings deep experience, insight, and commitment to the veteran community. His work centers on building pathways, partnerships, and opportunities to strengthen the connection between UCF and the broader military network, ensuring every military-connected Knight is equipped to succeed long after their time on campus.



# Session Descriptions

## High-Impact Practices Unleashed: Faculty Shaping Student Success

**Morning and Afternoon - SU 218D**

**Moderated by Kimberly R. Schneider, Ph.D**

\*Includes a facilitated student panel!

High-Impact Practices (HIPs) are nationally recognized strategies that enhance student learning, engagement, and success for all students, with particularly strong benefits for non-traditional students. This session will trace the history of HIPs, examine research on their impact, and share UCF's current data on participation and outcomes. We will highlight the critical role faculty play in steering HIPs and provide practical ways to get involved—from integrating HIPs into the classroom to mentoring undergraduate research. We will also share how faculty can strategically leverage HIPs to advance their teaching excellence, research opportunities, and professional development. Students will share insights on how HIPs have transformed their learning and career-readiness.

## Building Pathways to Success: Supporting Student Veterans in Transition

**Morning - SU 218C**

**Presented by Michael Kepner**

\*Includes a facilitated student panel!

Student veterans bring valuable leadership and experience to campus, yet many face unique challenges when transferring to a large university. This session explores common barriers to student veteran success—including academic navigation, identity transition, benefits utilization, and campus engagement—and highlights intentional pathways being built to support persistence, belonging, and degree completion.

Attendees will gain practical insights into how coordinated support, success coaching, mentorship, and career readiness initiatives can improve outcomes for transferring student veterans and strengthen institutional impact.

## **Your Content Matters: Make It Accessible and Reach Everyone!**

**Morning - SU 221**

**Presented by Daniel Molares and Azon Bonifaico**

Digital accessibility makes your content usable and inclusive for everyone. Your Content Matters: Make it Accessible and Reach Everyone! is a hands-on workshop that introduces key accessibility practices like alt text, headings, color contrast, and meaningful links. This session will include a demonstration of how to use tools such as UDOIT and the Canvas Accessibility Checker. Participants will also have open-lab time to apply what they've learned directly to their own course materials with support from our team.

**By the end of the session, participants will be able to:**

- Identify common digital accessibility barriers and apply best-practice techniques to correct them.
- Create accessible content using foundational principles.
- Use UDOIT and other tools to evaluate and remediate accessibility issues.
- Locate and leverage UCF accessibility resources to continue improving content accessibility.

## **Knight Safety with UCF PD**

**Morning and Afternoon - SU 218A**

**Presented by UCF PD - Threat Management Team (TMT) and Community Partnerships Unit (CPU)**

**Left of Bang!**

The first part of this combined presentation explores why the TMT unit was formed, its importance to both the team and the community, and their approach to threat assessment and threat management. It also describes the roles of each team member and shares a number of success stories.

**Becoming your own Knight**

The second part presents on how to be safe no matter where you are. Building on the principles of Avoid, Deny and Defend, to make informative decisions about personal safety.

## **“Rooms of Reality” with moderated discussion**

**Morning and Afternoon - SU Peg ABC**

**Presented by Civil Discourse and Engagement**

Rooms of Reality is an interactive, immersive experience that places participants inside environments where expectations feel misaligned, the rules are unclear, and moving forward requires constant adjustment. Rather than observing social challenges from a distance, participants experience them physically, emotionally, and collectively. Through a series of intentionally disorienting scenarios followed by guided reflection, the experience explores what it's like to navigate spaces that aren't designed with everyone in mind. Participants are invited to notice moments of friction, uncertainty, and adaptation, and to reflect on how those moments shape understanding, decision-making, and connection. Rooms of Reality encourages empathy, challenges assumptions, and invites participants to consider how recognizing and responding to discomfort can lead to more humane, inclusive ways of engaging with one another and the systems we inhabit.

## **Emotional Intelligence: Applied Practices for Serving Today's Students**

**Afternoon - SU 221**

**Presented by Dr. Michelle Dusseau**

This session highlights the importance of emotional intelligence when serving or teaching today's students, offering practical strategies to build self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication. Participants will explore applied practices that support student engagement, resilience, and success in increasingly complex learning environments.

## **AI That Makes a Difference: Boosting Productivity to Support Student Success**

**Afternoon - SU 218B**

**Presented by Kevin Yee, Ph.D.**

AI is transforming the educational landscape, but its greatest impact may be in the day-to-day work that supports students behind the scenes. This workshop shows UCF faculty and staff how to use Generative AI to improve efficiency, reduce workload, and redirect time toward personalized support and meaningful student interactions.

We will explore what GenAI is, how it works, where it excels, and where caution is warranted. You'll learn how to use UCF's secure AI tools effectively and how to craft prompts that produce reliable, useful output that will help create more engaging learning experiences and improve student outcomes.

**By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:**

- Explain how large language model AI works, including its strengths and limitations in educational contexts
- Log in to and use UCF's safe, approved AI platform (Microsoft Copilot)
- Apply foundational prompt engineering strategies to enhance productivity and teaching workflows
- Identify when AI is appropriate for instructional and administrative tasks—and when it isn't
- Describe what "co creating with AI" means and differentiate tasks best suited to human expertise
- Use AI to streamline everyday responsibilities, freeing time for quality instruction and interactions.



**Thank you for attending the  
2026 Academic Excellence  
Symposium for Faculty  
and Staff**

