



UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

22nd Annual Women's Leadership Institute

Wednesday, April 30, 2025

8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Social Media Tag: #WLI25

A Journey Beyond Limits

Schedule of Events

8:15-9:00	Check-In and Networking Location: Russell House Lobby and Ballroom
	Donation Drop Off Location: Russell House 2 nd floor lobby
9:00-9:30	Welcome Location: Russell House Ballroom
9:30-10:30	Morning General Session Keynote: Dr. Mary Alexander, Vice Provost at Baylor University Location: Russell House Ballroom
10:45-11:45	Concurrent Sessions, Round 1 Location: Various Rooms on 2 nd and 3 rd floor of Russell House
12:00-12:30	Lunch Location: Russell House Ballroom
12:30-1:30	Afternoon General Session Women Leaders in Higher Education Panel Location: Russell House Ballroom
1:45-2:45	Concurrent Sessions, Round 2 Location: Various Rooms on 2 nd and 3 rd floor of Russell House
3:00-4:00	Concurrent Sessions, Round 3 Location: Various Rooms on 2 nd and 3 rd floor of Russell House
4:10-4:30	Wrap-Up, Door Prizes and Networking Location: Russell House Ballroom

Special thanks to all of our outstanding speakers who have donated their time and expertise to help women across the state fulfill their needs, learn new skills, and obtain professional development. This program would not happen without their contributions.

Conference Notes

Check-In

Please check-in using the QR code on your table. Check-in is required. You should receive an auto email back confirming you have checked in. If you have a problem with the QR code, please find a committee member to check in.

Seat Capacity

Please be sure to get to the desired concurrent sessions early and please do not keep your bags on spare seats. There are a limited number of seats in each room and once a room reaches seat capacity, attendees will need to select another session. Please do not block doorways or walkways, it is a fire hazard. Attendees that are not in a seat will be asked to select another session.

Breakfast Menu

A selection of muffins, Danishes, fruit and yogurt. Coffee, tea, hot chocolate, and apple cider are available and will be refreshed throughout the day.

Lunch Menu

A selection of boxed lunches. Salads have been provided for those who requested vegan and gluten-free options. Please refrain from changing out cookies or chips from the boxes on the buffet table. If you did not note a food restriction, please leave salads for those who did.

Additional Food Notes

There are water fountains located throughout the Russell House, please feel free to bring a refillable water bottle.

There is a food court on the first floor with a variety of options if the provided meals do not work for you.

Supporting the Local Community and Denim Day

Each year WLI selects a local organization to support through donations from WLI participants. April is Sexual Assault Awareness month and the last Wednesday in April each year is Denim Day. Today is that day! Denim day encourages individuals to wear denim *to* combat the idea that rape and sexual violence are the fault or responsibility of the survivors. According to the SC Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault 42.3% of SC women and 29.2% of SC men experience intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking in their lifetimes.

This year WLI is supporting [The Hive Community Circle](#). The Hive is a local non-profit that is a survivor-driven helping women and girls in South Carolina overcome the trauma of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. They have requested donations that focus on cleaning supplies. Thanks for dropping your donations at the drop-off location in the lobby.

Professional Headshots

The USC social media team will be taking free headshots for conference attendees from 8 a.m.- 1 p.m. in room 201 and along the 2nd floor hallway. Please pop in to have your photo taken. They will be emailed out after the conference.

Podcast Interviews

Sign up for a 15-minute interview with the *WGST Unboxed* student podcast! This podcast is produced by students in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at USC and will be an opportunity for conference attendees to reflect and share their own journey in higher education. Please sign up for a 15-minute interview via the QR code. These will take place in room 301 from 10:30 a.m.- 1:30 p.m. and from 2:30 p.m.- 3:30 p.m.



Relax and Refresh Time

The ballroom will remain open during the concurrent sessions for WLI attendees to use. Take time to network with colleagues and make a new friend for the journey! Decompress with provided coloring sheets or make a friendship bracelet. Or if you need time to check your email, please make use of the space.

Join the Planning Team!

Do you work at USC-Columbia? Do you want to help plan WLI in the future? Join the planning team! Check-in for WLI using the QR at your table, check the box on the form indicating that you want to be on the team! We will follow up over the summer!

Planning Team Members:

Kimberly Dressler and Bridget Leslie, co-chairs
Peggy Binette, Dawn Campbell, Lydia Frass, Melissa Gilbert, Caroline Hulett, Rushondra James, Jung-hwan Kim, Hannah Patterson, Megan Plott, Kim Rose, Beck Sullivan, Kymi Taylor, Michaela Taylor, Justine Truc, Kathia Valverde, Gloria Washington, and Donna Watts

Honoring Committee Retirees

Many thanks to our members who have served on this volunteer planning committee and have retired since our conference in 2024!

- Bridget Leslie
- Peggy Binette
- Sheila Heatley
- Melissa Lowe
- Maria Sophocleous

Russell House Notes:

Room 309 is the Prayer and Meditation Room
Guest wi-fi is available if you aren't connected to the USC network normally

Save the Date!

*The 23rd annual WLI is tentatively scheduled to take place on Wednesday, April 29, 2026.
Registration will open at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, April 1, 2026*

Keynote Speaker

Mary Alexander, Ph.D.

Vice Provost for Administration and Operations at Baylor University
Founder of the Women's Leadership Institute at the University of South Carolina

Location: Russell House Ballroom



Dr. Mary Alexander As the vice provost for administration and operations, Mary Alexander is responsible for the annual budgeting process for academic units, the financial components of hiring, execution of strategic initiatives, and providing financial analytical support to the provost, vice provosts, deans, and directors in the academy. She also works with various stakeholders and project teams across the university in support of the strategic plan.

Prior to her employment at Baylor, Mary Alexander served in a similar role as vice provost for academic affairs and chief of staff at the University of South Carolina, where she provided administrative leadership in budget development, forecasting, internal grant processes, and strategic planning for areas reporting to the divisions of academic affairs. Additional responsibilities included managing the faculty and staff hiring within academic affairs, the office of military affairs, ROTC, the office of continuing education and conferences, and community engagement. At USC she also served as the chair of the Classroom Enhancements Committee, a member of the Provost Advisory Committee on Women's Initiatives, a member of the space and needs committee, a member of capital planning committee, an ex-officio member of Faculty Senate budget committee and was the University's Emergency Management Situation Unit Leader.

She earned her B.A., M.P.A., and Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina and began her career in higher education in 2009 at the University of South Carolina. She is a member of several professional organizations and taught several master-level courses in public administration at the University of South Carolina, including Human Resource Management and Administrative Leadership. Alexander was recently recognized with the national leadership award for the Advancement of Women in Higher Education from the American Council on Education.

Thank you to the College of Information and Communications for sponsoring this session.

Concurrent Sessions: Round One

10:45am-11:45am

Navigating Your State Benefits | Room 203

Conference Track | Clearing It Up: Human Resources for Me

Session: Navigating the benefits offered through the state can be complex at times. Our health and financial needs are also ever-changing. Understanding your benefits and navigating them throughout your career requires your attention and participation. Learn about PEBA, and the valuable insurance and retirement benefits offered through the state.



Presenter: Jennifer Dolder is the Employer Services Director at the S.C. Public Employee Benefit Authority (PEBA). As the director of Employer Services with the South Carolina Public Employee Benefit Authority (PEBA), Jennifer is responsible for providing education and support to employers participating in the state retirement and insurance benefits. She regularly encourages employers to promote and share the value of PEBA benefits with their employees. Jennifer grew up in Irmo, SC, and is a 1999 University of Tennessee graduate. She has served South Carolina since 2001.

25Live - It's Not As Scary As You Think! | Room 205

Conference Track | Navigating USC Campus Resources

Session: Come and learn all the tips and tricks, 25Live experts, Hannah Patterson and Melissa Gilbert use to combat the "25Live scaries"! In this session, we will review best practices, procedures, and processes for how to book space within Russell House and Academic buildings and give you the courage you need to conquer all of your scheduling frustrations and fears. After all, 25Live isn't as scary as you think!



Presenters: Hannah Patterson has served as a Russell House Event Coordinator since 2023. Over this time, her responsibilities have evolved to include serving as the primary scheduler and planner for all Russell House locations and the primary student organization liaison for academic space. In short, she works all day, every day in the University's favorite software: 25Live! When she's not at the Russell House, Hannah can be found serving on her child's PTO Board, spending time with her family, or sitting in traffic on I-26.



Melissa Gilbert has a BS in History from Lander University and a MBA from the Moore School here at USC. Melissa has worked at the University over 20 years, and serves as the Assistant Registrar for Scheduling where she oversees academic scheduling for the University and is the administrator for the academic side for our space management software and facilitating 25Live requests for the General Purpose Classrooms on campus. Outside of her work at the University, Melissa loves traveling, reading, spending time with her nephews and niece, baking, concerts, and attending Gamecocks athletic events along with the occasional trip up the road to see Charlotte FC.

Overcoming the Yes Trap: Protect Your Peace, Power & Purpose Room 229 (Theater)

Conference Track | Healthy Mind: Building Resiliency

Session: In this engaging and practical session, women leaders will explore how overcommitment and people-pleasing quietly sabotage their effectiveness, energy, and leadership potential. Using research-backed insights, neuroscience, and real-world stories, participants will uncover why it's so hard to say "no"—and how to start saying "yes" more intentionally. With tools like the Y.E.S. Audit and interactive boundary-setting exercises, this session equips leaders to pivot from pressure to purpose and reclaim the peace, power, and presence they need to thrive—at work and at home.

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

- Recognize the hidden costs of overcommitment and how saying "yes" too often drains energy, clarity, and leadership impact.
- Understand the neuroscience behind people-pleasing and how social pressure, fear, and fatigue influence decision-making.
- Use the Y.E.S. Audit to make smarter, purpose-driven decisions aligned with values and energy.
- Practice setting healthy boundaries with confidence using real-life scenarios and proven communication scripts.
- Make the Power Pivot from reactive people-pleasing to intentional, purpose-driven leadership that protects peace and maximizes impact.



Presenter: Robyn Woods is a Leadership Development Consultant and strategic advisor dedicated to helping leaders navigate change, build resilience, and amplify their impact—both personally and professionally. As the visionary founder of Wine & Mastermind, a results-driven training and development company, Robyn has built an empowering community where ambitious women come together to learn, grow, and elevate both their careers and personal lives. Robyn's influence extends beyond her consulting and community-building efforts. She is the author of *Boss Moms Move Differently*, a powerful guide for driven mothers seeking to redefine motherhood, prioritize their well-being, and design a life aligned with their deepest values. Through her work, Robyn inspires individuals to break free from limiting beliefs, embrace change as a catalyst for growth, and lead with intention in all areas of life.

Building Your Tribe Through Strategic Relationships | Room 302

Conference Track | Building Your Brand

Session: Do you feel like everyone else is more connected than you? Are you eager to elevate your career to the next level? Join us for an engaging session where we will explore strategies to build strategic relationships through informal mentors, peer-to-peer connections, and impactful short-term interactions. Learn how to make authentic connections, leverage LinkedIn and social media, and use volunteerism to forge meaningful relationships. Discover how genuine curiosity and care can help you build lasting connections. Practice storytelling in a fun environment to create new professional relationships. By the end of this session, you will have the tools to make new connections and build a supportive network of professional relationships.



Presenter: Dr. Erica Lake began her academic journey at Mississippi State University, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Public Relations) and a Master of Science in Counselor Education (Student Affairs). She later completed her Ph.D. in Education Administration (Higher Education) at the University of South Carolina.

Lake serves as the Vice Dean for Organizational Development and Innovation in the USC College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management. Before this role, she served as the Interim Assistant Dean for Opportunity and Engagement and spent seven years as the Director of Corporate Engagement. Prior to joining the college, Lake was the Associate Director for Employer Relations at the University of South Carolina Career Center for over eight years. Lake has been actively involved in professional organizations, serving as President of the Southern Association of Colleges and Employers (SoACE) from 2019 to 2022. She is an avid USC Women's Basketball and Gamecock football fan.

Thriving Through Menopause | Room 303

Conference Track | Healthy You: A Healthier You in Life's Murky Middle

Session: Rationale: Menopause is a natural life transition, yet many women feel unprepared for the physical, emotional, and social changes it brings. Accessible and accurate information that helps women feel supported and empowered during this phase of life is needed. This session addresses that gap by providing a welcoming space to learn, reflect, and connect. Goals: This presentation will offer a clear, evidence-based overview of menopause, addressing common symptoms, non-hormonal and hormonal treatment options, and lifestyle strategies to enhance quality of life. The session uses storytelling, humor, and practical tools to foster understanding and empowerment.



Presenter: Dr. Miles has been a dedicated nurse since 1995, beginning her journey with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Boston College. With a rich clinical background, she has spent most of her career in Labor and Delivery and Women's Health.

Mindfulness Meditation: A Tool to Connect with Purpose and Rediscover Joy Room 305

Conference Track: Healthy Life: Self Care For You

Session: Join us for a session where we will practice mindfulness meditation, including journaling, to connect with your "magnetic north," the principles that guide your decisions, relationships, and life. We will explore various meditation styles and discover a way to reconnect with joy.



Presenter: Marguerite O'Brien (she, her, hers) received a B.A. in International Studies and a Master's in Social Work from the University of South Carolina. A lifelong learner, she is pursuing a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration. Marguerite has worked in student affairs and college health and well-being for 17 years and is active in the field, serving as a Member at Large on the American College Health Association Board of Directors.

Along with ACHA colleagues, Marguerite created the Healthy Campus Framework and Inventory and the National Faculty/Staff Health Assessment. She has also co-created a resiliency series and develops and leads mindfulness meditation sessions on campus.

Marguerite has been in the wellness and fitness industry for over 30 years and is a certified personal trainer and fitness/Yoga instructor. Her areas of interest include empowering people to become the best version of themselves, promoting the well-being of body, mind, and spirit, and using a social justice lens to inform her work. Marguerite is trained in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and True Colors™. She enjoys spending time with her husband, traveling, reading, and eating delicious food.

Women in Athletics | Room 315

Conference Track: Breaking Barriers

Session: Join our panel discussion of experiences of women in higher education working in a male dominated athletic field. Hear about their respective roles and how they are able to exceed, shatter, and disintegrate barriers within the world of athletics.



Facilitator: **Jessica Wright-Wilkins** has served as a Russell House Event Coordinator at the University of South Carolina for nearly three years. Before joining USC, she gained valuable experience working with major sports organizations, including the Charlotte Hornets, the Myrtle Beach Pelicans, and Tepper Sports & Entertainment. Her passion for venue management and athletics continues to drive her professionally, and she is currently advancing her expertise through USC's graduate program in Sport and Entertainment Management. Outside of work, Jessica enjoys reading, playing board games and spending quality time with her family.



Panelists: **Maria Hickman**, Maria Hickman is the Executive Associate Athletics Director, SWA, and Director of Inclusive Excellence for the University of South Carolina Athletics Department.

Her primary responsibilities include serving as the sport administrator for women's basketball and beach volleyball. Hickman also has oversight of sport administrator meetings, creation and oversight of department inclusive excellence committee, as well as academics and student-athlete development. In her role as senior woman administrator (SWA), Hickman participates in SEC governance. Hickman is currently a member of the NCAA Beach Volleyball Committee.



Lindsay Sprague, Lindsay Sprague is the Chief Financial Officer of the Gamecock Club, a 501c3 that supports the University of South Carolina Athletics Department and its student-athletes. She began this role in July 2024 but has served the organization since 2008 in a number of different capacities including operations, gift administration and membership services.

In addition to her work with the Gamecock Club, Lindsay was the head coach of the Carolina Dance Team for 18 seasons, recently closing out her tenure this spring. During her time as head coach, she led the team three consecutive national titles at NDA College Nationals from 2021 to 2023.

A native of Durham, North Carolina, Lindsay earned a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her diverse experience in multiple roles with athletics underscores her commitment to excellence in supporting student-athletes and enriching the University of South Carolina's athletic community.



Megan Kennington, Megan attended USC for two years (2003-2005) in undergrad during which she got her start in athletics as a men's soccer team manager. When she returned for grad school in SPTE (2009-2010), she linked back up with men's soccer which helped kick start her career by transitioning into her first full-time role in athletics as an administrative assistant for soccer and track.

After a year of admin work, she found her home in Event Management which she has worked in since 2012. She has undergone the evolution from several titles into her current role as Senior Associate AD. During this time, she has been directly responsible for a variety of sports and hosting championships including the NCAA WBB Tournament, Manchester United vs Liverpool match in 2024, SEC Softball Tournament, SEC Equestrian Championships and currently oversees Football and Women's Basketball.

Outside of work, Megan is married to her husband, Paul of 12 years, a 5-year-old daughter Cora and two Australian Shepherds, Luna and Hazel.



Charlie Ball, Charlie Ball-Burrell was named Associate Athletics Director for Academics at the University of South Carolina on August 12, 2022, and later promoted to Senior Associate Athletics Director in December 2024. Ball is also a distinguished graduate of the 2024 USC Pipeline Academy for Leaders (PAL) program.

In her role at South Carolina, Ball oversees the Athletics Department's academic support program and staff that benefits Gamecock student-athletes in their pursuit of graduation, including providing resources such as tutoring, study hall, course advisement and tracking of NCAA eligibility. Since arriving at the University of South Carolina, the Gamecocks have had record breaking gpas in football, track, baseball, softball and equestrian.

Ball attended Alcorn State University and later graduated from Mississippi State University in 2008 with a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education. She earned a Master of Art degree in Higher Education and Student Personnel from the University of Mississippi in May 2020.

The Mississippi native has two sons, Albert and Cedric, Jr and enjoys traveling, sporting events, car shows and all things food and fellowship.

Plenary Panel: Women Leaders in Higher Education

Location: Russell House Ballroom

The Women Leaders in Higher Education Panel is a facilitated panel highlighting female leaders from three different higher education institutions in the Midlands. The panelists will share thoughts on a range of topics. If time permits, questions will be taken from the audience.

Facilitator: Patricia Bennett is from South Carolina's upstate. Ms. Bennett graduated from Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio. Not well known in this part of the country but has an illustrious history as being one of the first colleges to allow Americans of African descent to gain higher education. At Oberlin, Ms. Bennett majored in Government and Communications. She returned home a couple of years after graduation to find her way in her hometown. She worked at the NBC affiliate in Greenville as a reporter/producer before moving to Columbia to work for state government in community relations and public information.. She's worked at radio and television stations throughout the Midlands with the bulk of her career at South Carolina Educational Television as a producer/host. She has retired from SCETV and is enjoying her life doing exactly what she wants.



Panelists: Anna Edwards, Ph.D.- Chief of Staff, University of South Carolina

Anna Edwards serves as Chief of Staff for President Michael Amiridis. In this role, she serves as the primary liaison between the president for internal and external matters. Her work includes the championing of presidential initiatives and strategic planning. Prior to this role, Dr. Edwards served the Division of Student Affairs & Academic Support for more than 20 years.

Edwards most favorite roles are wife to Josh, and mom to three – two daughters - a rising college freshman, a high school sophomore and, and 4th grade son. Edwards earned her doctorate in educational administration and master's in higher education and student affairs from the University of South Carolina and a bachelor's in political science and speech and communication studies from Clemson University.



Sandra Rouse, Ph. D.- Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at Columbia College

Dr. Sandra Rouse serves as the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at Columbia College. She has 27 years of experience in higher education, serving institutions in North and South Carolina.

Dr. Rouse attained her doctorate in Higher Education Administration from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She holds a M.F.A in Creative Writing from Liberty University, a M.Ed. in Student Personnel Services with a Counseling emphasis from the University of South Carolina and a B.A. in Psychology with a second major in Dance from Columbia College. Dr. Rouse enjoys making jewelry and serving as a judge for Miss America preliminary competitions. An avid reader, she has a personal goal of becoming a novelist of historical fiction. Dr. Rouse and her husband, Todd Berry, reside in Columbia.



Donna Zeek, Ph.D.- Director of Curriculum and Dean of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies at Midlands Technical College

Dr. Donna Zeek is Director of Curriculum and Dean of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies at Midlands Technical College. She manages development and revision of all academic programs, general education curricula, and articulation and transfer agreements at MTC. Donna graduated from the University of South Carolina with bachelor's and master's degrees in Philosophy, as well as a PhD in Higher Education Administration.

Concurrent Sessions: Round Two

1:45pm-2:45pm

Keeping the Promise - Investing and Managing the South Carolina Retirement System's Assets | Room 203

Conference Track: Clearing It Up: Human Resources for Me

Session: This session will explore the differences between defined benefit and defined contribution retirement plans; why defined benefit plans are prevalent in the public sector, but have all but disappeared



Presenter: **Michael Hitchcock** is the Chief Executive Officer of the South Carolina Retirement System Investment Commission. The RSIC invests and manages over \$45 billion in assets for the South Carolina Retirement System, a defined benefit pension plan serving approximately.

Communicating Within USC | Room 205

Conference Track: Navigating USC Campus Resources

Session: Join this session to learn about the resources available for communicating on campus, as well as best practices for making sure your message gets heard.



Presenter: **Dana D. Woodward** is a communications professional with dual degrees in Advertising and English from the University of Florida. Currently serving as the Associate Director of Academic Affairs Communications, Dana considers herself a Swiss army knife of communications with experience in marketing, event management and promotion, social media strategy, media relations, paid advertising and more. She can usually be found holding either coffee, a book, a cat or some combination of the three.

Higher Calling: Leadership Strategies from High Performing and Ambitious Women in Higher Education | Room 229 (Theater)

Conference Track: Healthy Mind: Building Resiliency

Session: This workshop, based on interviews with 11 college presidents from diverse four-year institutions across the United States, explores strategies for leadership ascension and success in higher education. It examines the experiences of women who have risen to the presidency, offering insights from both internal and external perspectives. Additionally, the session will provide practical guidance on adapting similar strategies for career advancement.



Presenter: **Rushondra J. James**, LMSW, Ph.D., is the Assistant Dean for Student Success in the College of Information and Communications at the University of South Carolina. She has over 15 years of experience in higher education.

Dr. James earned a Bachelor of Arts in Broadcast Journalism, with a minor in Sociology, magna cum laude from Howard University. A licensed social worker in the state of South Carolina, she also holds a Master of Social Work and a Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies from the University of South Carolina.

In her current role, Dr. James provides executive oversight for student success initiatives, including academic advising, retention efforts, campus partnerships, and career services. She also serves as the college's scholarship administrator. Prior to joining the College of Information and Communications, she worked in the College of Social Work, where she established student services processes and administrative structures for the Bachelor of Social Work program.

Dr. James' research interests include access, persistence, and graduation outcomes for underrepresented students, as well as women's leadership in higher education. Her doctoral dissertation examined the career trajectories of 11 current and former women presidents of colleges and universities.

Beyond her professional responsibilities, Dr. James served as the 2022–2023 President of the University of South Carolina Staff Senate and as a member of the Provost's Advisory Committee for Women's Initiatives Professional Development Committee. She is also an active member of the National Association of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA).

A dedicated advocate for community service, Dr. James is the President of the Young Woman's Auxiliary of the South Carolina Baptist Education and Missionary Convention and an active member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.

Above all, she believes in the power of kindness.

Leverage Your LinkedIn - Develop your LinkedIn to Facilitate Social Capital Room 302

Conference Track: Building Your Brand

Session: LinkedIn is where the professional world connects—are you making the most of it? Join us for a practical session packed with simple yet powerful tips and tricks to make your profile shine. You'll walk away knowing exactly how to tell your professional story, connect with the right people, and open doors to exciting opportunities. No fluff, just practical tips you can use right away to get noticed!



Presenter: Kelli Carroll serves as the Mentorship and Student Experience Manager in the Career Center at USC. As a Career Development Professional and Certified Personal Branding Strategist, Kelli Carroll's mission is to help others recognize how great they actually are and help them share that with the world! Toot your own horn!

Within this role, Kelli oversees the university-wide Mentorship Hub platform and formal mentorship program, the newly rebranded SpursUp Job Shadow program, and the Richter Professional Development Scholarship & Mini-Grant fund.

Kelli also enjoys sharing her knowledge and expertise through speaking and training engagements of different types. She has spoken at multiple domestic and international conferences and presented workshops for a wide variety of ages and skill levels, from high school students to senior career professionals. Some topics that Kelli is known to speak on include Practical Uses of AI in Career Development, Leveraging your LinkedIn, Social Capital, Building your Career Toolkit, and more. She welcomes opportunities to speak at conferences, events, on podcasts, and more.

Life in Motion: Caring for Your Heart While Juggling It All | Room 303

Conference Track: Healthy You: A Healthier You in Life's Murky Middle

Session: Cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains the leading cause of death among women, yet it is often overlooked in conversations about women's health—particularly among those in the prime of their careers and personal lives. Amid the demands of work, family, and daily responsibilities, cardiovascular health sometimes takes a back seat. Participants will gain insights into gender-specific risk factors, the impact of chronic stress, and the importance of social connections and self-care in maintaining heart health.

This engaging and informative session will empower attendees with actionable strategies to support their cardiovascular well-being, helping them prioritize their health while balancing life's many demands.



Presenter: Dr. Jewel Scott is a family nurse practitioner with nearly two decades of experience providing primary care in federally qualified health centers across urban and rural communities. As a clinician, she is dedicated to partnering with patients to manage chronic conditions and promote preventive health.

Her research focuses on how structural and social determinants of health, mental health, and well-being shape cardiovascular risk factors in young women. Beyond her research, Dr. Scott is actively involved in community outreach and education, serving as a member of the American Heart Association Prevention Science Committee and Vice President of the Midlands of SC Black Nurses Association.

Dr. Scott earned her Ph.D. from Duke University and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh before joining the USC Gamecock family. In her free time, she enjoys exploring the beautiful Carolina beaches.

Beyond Boundaries: Uncovering the Root Causes of Burnout | Room 305

Conference Track: Healthy Life: Self Care For You

Session: In this session, we'll explore the importance of setting and maintaining boundaries to prevent and manage burnout. While we all recognize the value of boundaries, we often struggle to implement them effectively. Together, we'll dive into identifying the root causes that may be hindering our ability to set those boundaries. We'll also explore practical tools to help us better understand burnout, its underlying causes, and strategies for prevention and management.



Presenter: **April Hicks** has over 25 years of experience in Learning and Development across various fields. Passionate about personal, professional, and leadership development, she specializes in helping individuals and organizations cultivate emotional intelligence through science-backed methodologies. With a background in psychotherapy, April integrates cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) concepts, communication skills, and strengths-based perspectives into her work. She empowers individuals and teams to recognize and confront cognitive biases, fostering environments that support both personal and professional growth while promoting healthy workplace cultures.

For the past 15 years, April has focused on community health worker (CHW) workforce development, co-leading initiatives at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health that contributed to the development of national CHW standards and evidence-based training programs.

Blending psychotherapy with adult learning and organizational development, April designs engaging trainings that foster emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and communication skills. Her work prioritizes empathy, psychological safety, and creating environments where individuals and teams thrive both individually and collectively.

First Gen, Next Gen Leadership | Room 315

Conference Track: *Breaking Barriers*

Session: Experience the journey of the First-Gen Center at the University of South Carolina, from its founding to its thriving community of students, faculty, and staff. Discover why a dedicated space for first-generation students is essential, while also exploring the value of connecting with continuing-generation peers, campus leaders, and community partners to build social capital and strengthen support networks. You'll also gain practical strategies for developing your own social capital as a woman in leadership.



Presenters: **Dr. LaNae Budden** is a proud first-gen college graduate and is responsible for leading the First-Generation Center and connecting first-gen students with resources to successfully navigate their progress towards graduation.



Dr. Shelley Dempsey serves as the inaugural Assistant Provost for Graduation and Retention at the University of South Carolina. In this role, she has the unique opportunity to partner with academic and administrative areas from throughout the campus to remove barriers for students and make USC a place that supports all students in their degree attainment. Most recently she spearheaded the effort to start USC's inaugural First-Generation Center to serve more than 20% of our student population, while collaborating with our esteemed faculty on their research, pedagogy, and mentorship of students.

Dr. Dempsey has used her innovation and creativity to build numerous programs and initiatives at the University with past experience in Student Affairs, the Moore School of Business, the Alumni Association, and now in the Office of the Provost. She has also served in various leadership roles on campus and with national leadership organizations. She is also the 2024 recipient of the University of South Carolina's Martin Luther King, Jr. Social Justice Award and the 2024 NASPA Palmetto Award for Inclusive Excellence.

Dr. Dempsey completed her Ph.D. in Education Leadership and Policy, with research on prosocial behaviors, civility, and work engagement. She also enjoys teaching in the area of Education Leadership and Policy. Her students are some of her favorite people she's met at the university, and she values her ongoing connection with many of them. If you're one of them---reach out and tell her what you're up to! Outside of campus, Dr. Dempsey is active as a volunteer and advocate for women and children experiencing homelessness.

Concurrent Sessions: Round Three

3:00pm-4:00pm

Title IX Uncovered: Its Impact, Purpose, and How to Seek Support | Room 203

Conference Track: Clearing It Up: Human Resources for Me

Session: Title IX Uncovered: Its Impact, Purpose, and How to Seek Support is an interactive presentation that educates attendees on their rights at the university related to discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct. Participants will learn details on the history of Title IX and reflect on the ability to provide access to education. This presentation will also apprise attendees of the support and options available to them through the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX. Additionally, this presentation will encourage open, honest dialogue to empower its participants to treat members of our community with dignity and respect.



Presenter: Kionna-Alycia Keels just celebrated her two-year anniversary as the Education Specialist for the Office of Civil Rights & Title IX. A veteran educator with over twenty years of experience in the K-12 sector, Kionna is National Board Certified and greatly enjoys her current role in Higher Education. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree through USC's College of Education. Married to a fellow educator, Kionna relishes being the mother of twins and a goldendoodle.

Tips and Tools For Practical Improvement, Room 205

Conference Track: Navigating USC Campus Resources

Session: You really can get things done better, faster, and with less hassle. Learn about the Office of Organizational Excellence's improvement approach and gain practical ideas you can use immediately, regardless of your role. This session provides simple tips, tools, and strategies for individuals and teams to enhance effectiveness both at work and beyond.



Presenter: Maegan Gudridge joined the Office of Organizational Excellence as a senior associate in June 2024. Her extensive experience at the University of South Carolina, beginning in 2005, includes leading communications efforts, organizational change and improvement projects that foster student and employee success. Maegan earned a master's degree in mass communication from the University of South Carolina and a bachelor's degree in arts management from the College of Charleston.

We Can't Pour From an Empty Cup: A Dialogue on Navigating Multi-Layered Responsibilities while Prioritizing Self-Care | Room 229 (Theater)

Conference Track: Healthy Mind: Building Resiliency

Session: This session is designed to empower individuals with practical strategies for navigating challenges related to relationships, personal and family dynamics, healthcare, education, and social justice issues. With a strong emphasis on mental health awareness and protection, participants will learn how to recognize signs of emotional distress, build resilience, and prioritize their well-being while facing life's complexities. The session fosters a supportive environment that encourages open dialogue, self-care, and proactive mental health practices as essential components of personal and community growth.



Presenter: A native of Sumter, South Carolina, **Dr. Andrea M. Fleming** is an educator, expert trainer, mentor, entrepreneur and life-long learner with nearly 30 years of experience as a clinical mental health counselor specializing in substance use disorders treatment. Along with her extensive background working in community behavioral health settings, she counseled children and families as a Military and Family Life Counselor with the Department of Defense, and she is also a Leadership Institute alum with Southeast Addiction Technology Transfer Center sponsored by the Morehouse School of Medicine.

Dr. Fleming was the first African-American board member appointed to serve with the South Carolina Clinical Mental Health Counselors Association (SCCMHCA), served as Co-Chair of the Supervision Interest Network for the Southern Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (SACES), and is an appointee to the South Carolina Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors Certification Commission. A culmination of these experiences inspired her to launch her consulting business, The Gold Standard, LLC, where she acts as the principal consultant to behavioral and mental health agencies.

Dr. Fleming completed her doctoral studies in the Counselor Education Program at the University of South Carolina and was a fellowship recipient with the Grace Jordan McFadden Professors Program. In the spirit of full-circle moments, she is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Counselor Education Program and Associate Director with the Grace Jordan McFadden Professors Program. In addition to her professional engagement, Dr. Fleming enjoys serving her community and is a proud Life Member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated. In her leisure time, she loves traveling, attending music concerts, spending time with family, friends, and most importantly, relishes in the honor of being the caretaker of her 95 y/o Mother.

Your Brand, Your Power | Room 302

Conference Track: Building Your Brand

Session: Developing a strong personal brand is essential for advancing your career, securing leadership opportunities, and making a lasting impact. This interactive session will empower you to strategically market yourself for promotions, new roles, or professional influence. Learn how to craft your narrative, leverage social media, and showcase your expertise in a way that aligns with your career goals. You'll walk away with the tools to confidently build and communicate your personal brand.



Presenter: Michaela Taylor has spent the last 6 years working in higher education marketing and communications. She's a visual communicator at heart, font snob, storyteller and creative solution enthusiast. Currently, Michaela works as the senior social media strategist for the University of South Carolina.

The Journey to a Healthier You: Understanding Your Mental Health | Room 303

Conference Track: Healthy You: A Healthier You in Life's Murky Middle

Session: Join us for an enlightening session that delves into the critical distinctions between mental illness and mental health, empowering participants to assess their own mental well-being. We will explore the intricacies of mental illness, with a particular emphasis on depression and anxiety as they manifest in women, identifying key symptoms to watch for. The session will also cover the importance of early detection and intervention and equip attendees with practical coping strategies to enhance their mental resilience. The importance of seeking help, and the benefits of mindfulness, therapy, and medication will also be reviewed. Engage in open discussions, interactive activities and gain valuable insights on mental health.



Presenter: Tiffany Howard is a behavioral health expert and a licensed professional counselor. Born in the north but bred in the south, Tiffany has a passion for taking mental health topics and making them relevant and accessible to diverse communities. Her personal and professional mission in life is the same: to be and provide a light in darkness, to be and provide a safe space and to be and provide a resource for people and surrounding communities. Professionally, Tiffany contributes to this mission as the Director of Outreach and Engagement within Counseling and Psychiatric Services at the University of South Carolina.

Personally, Tiffany contributes to this mission by living out her favorite quote, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Tiffany has been featured as the subject matter expert on several platforms including podcasts, multiple news and radio outlets, the Education Dive publication with experts in the telehealth field and more. Howard holds an Ed.S in Counselor Education from the University of South Carolina and a BA in Psychology from Winthrop University.

What's For Dinner? Practical Nutrition Tips for Women | Room 305

Conference Track: Healthy Life: Self Care for You

Session: This interactive session will explore the essentials of women's nutrition, focusing on practical strategies for maintaining a balanced diet while navigating the demands of a busy schedule. Whether you're juggling work, family, or personal commitments, we'll discuss time-saving tips and nutrient-dense meal ideas to help you stay energized and healthy throughout your day.



Presenter: Katie Graham serves as the University of South Carolina's Registered Dietitian. She provides nutrition education to students through 1:1 sessions, cooking classes, and by-request workshops. With her Master's degree in Community Nutrition, she has experience in developing, implementing, and evaluating community-based nutrition education programs and resources. She is also a Certified Diabetes Care and Education specialist and Eating Disorder dietitian who utilizes a HAES and anti-diet approach.

The Power of Perspective: Generational Influences on Workplace Dynamics Room 315

Conference Track: Breaking Barriers

Session: How might your chronological age provide you with a unique mindset for interaction within the workplace? Considering the economic, social, cultural, and technological experiences that have influenced your career choices and how they differ from both your older and younger colleagues could be critical in successfully communicating with your colleagues. With 4 -5 generations now actively engaged in full-time employment, the multigenerational workplace is here to stay. Attend this workshop to learn about differing working styles from a generational lens, including preferences for communication and resolving conflict.



Presenters: **Kim Pruitt** serves as the Director for Organizational and Professional Development at the University of South Carolina, where she leverages over 25 years of private and public executive-level experience to drive transformational change through organizational development (OD). She believes that strong institutions are built on thriving cultures, and her work focuses on equipping leaders and teams with the skills to foster collaboration, navigate change, and drive results.

Through strategic learning initiatives, leadership development, and OD consulting, Kim ensures that culture is not just a concept but a key driver of institutional success. Passionate about delivering an exceptional employee experience, she partners across the university to strengthen engagement, leadership, and business-critical planning. A proud Seahawk from UNC Wilmington, Kim is now honored to champion OD's impact as part of the Gamecock community.



Robynn Pease, Ph.D. has been serving as the inaugural Staff Ombuds at the University of South Carolina (USC) since January 2024. Prior to her arrival, Robynn served over five years as the Faculty and Associate Ombuds at Oregon State University (OSU), where she consulted with staff, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students. At OSU, she also served as the Assistant Director of the Family Resource Center, director of the Academic Affairs Office of Work-Life and the founding director of the Greater Oregon Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (GOHERC), assisting staff, faculty, and students with dependent care needs across the lifespan. Additional professional experience includes employment as the director of the Office of Work Life at the University of Kentucky (UK).

Robynn holds a doctorate in Sociology from UK with expertise in gerontology and social inequalities and has taught as an adjunct faculty member for the College of Social Work and Department of Sociology at UK and Morehead State University. She is a trained mediator, an active member of the International Ombuds Association and a certified long-care ombudsman in Oregon and Kentucky.

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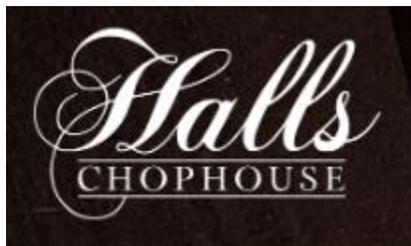


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