

Ohio Women in Leadership

Live · Laugh · Lead

26th Annual Conference
ACE WOMEN'S
Network™
Ohio


University of
CINCINNATI

November 8, 2024



The ACE Women's Network-Ohio is a network of women administrators, faculty, and staff from colleges and universities across the state that is dedicated to the professional advancement of women. Through representatives, conferences, workshops, and other resources, we are committed to improving the status of women on our campuses and throughout higher education. In doing so, we support the mission of the Inclusive Excellence Group and the American Council on Education.

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ACE WNO would like to extend a special thank you to our host, the University of Cincinnati

CONFERENCE AT-A-GLANCE

Friday, November 8, 2024

7:30 - 8:15 A.M. **Registration, Check-In, & Informal Networking** | with Breakfast

8:30- 8:45 A.M. **Opening Remarks and Welcome**
Dr. Courtney Clarke and Dr. Sarah Wallis, State Co-Chairs
Dr. Kristi Nelson, Interim Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

8:45 - 9:45 A.M. **State of Ohio - Legal Updates: [Arcola Whatley](#)**
Executive Director and Deputy General Counsel, Cuyahoga Community College

9:45 - 10:00 A.M. **Break**

Concurrent Session I

10:00 - 10:45 A.M.

- [Women's and Gender Equity Centers](#) Presenter: Dana Bisignani
- [Empowering Women's Financial Well-being](#) Presenter: Dr. Martina Peng
- [Women Leading for Life and Laughter](#) Presenters: Dr. Rita Kumar & Dr. Brenda Refaei

10:45 - 11:00 A.M. **Break**

Leadership Panel

Moderator: Dr. Courtney Clarke

Panelists:

11:00 - 12:00 P.M.

- **Dr. Marianne Lewis**, Dean, School of Business, University of Cincinnati
- **Jennifer McCamis**, Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management and Undergraduate Admissions, Wright State University
- **Dr. Bleuzette Marshall**, Vice President, Equity Inclusion & Community Impact, University of Cincinnati
- **Dr. Karen Miller**, Provost, Executive Vice President, Cuyahoga Community College

12:15 - 1:00 P.M. **Lunch and Awards**

1:00 - 1:50 P.M.

Keynote: [Finding Humor in the Journey: Leading with Laughter and Resilience](#)
Keynote Speaker: [Holly Craider, Esq., Ph.D.](#)
Associate Vice President Curriculum, Assessment, and Accreditation Activities
Cuyahoga Community College

Concurrent Session II

2:00 - 2:50 P.M.

- [What if We Started Right Here, Right Now? Discovering Leadership Through Play and Presence](#) Presenter: Barbara Allen
- [Sliding vs. Deciding: Making Micro Moments Meaningful](#) Presenters: Bria Howard, Mika Karikari, Jessica Lee, and Tracy Settleberry
- [Empowering Women to Seek Leadership Positions: Balancing Volunteering with Work](#) Presenters: Victoria Cullen and Vikki Kowalczyk

3:00 - 3:30 P.M. **Door Prizes & Closing Remarks**

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ACE Women's Network Ohio 2024 Conference

WELCOME FROM THE ACE WNO STATE CO-CHAIRS

Welcome to our 26th annual American Council on Education Women's Network-Ohio (ACE WNO) conference! It is our genuine hope that today provides an open, authentic, and judgment-free environment, full of learning, networking, empowering, and realizing that we can truly do anything together.

It is that sense of comradery that allows ACE WNO to remain a strong organization with support from a number of organizations and individuals. This year, our conference was made possible by the leadership of the University of Cincinnati who graciously offered to serve as our host. We extend a special thank you to President Neville Pinto, Dr. Rita Kumar, and the entire University of Cincinnati family for their support of ACE WNO. A special Thanks to President Pinto for sponsoring our opening breakfast. We would also like to thank Dr. Kristi Nelson, Interim Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost for spending time with us at the conference.

We recognize the commitment and time provided by this year's ACE WNO Conference Leadership Panel Members: Dr. Marianne Lewis, Dean, School of Business, University of Cincinnati; Jennifer McCamis, Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management and Undergraduate Admissions, Wright State University; Dr. Bleuzette Marshall, Vice President, Equity Inclusion & Community Impact, University of Cincinnati; Dr. Karen Miller, Provost, Executive Vice President, Cuyahoga Community College. We appreciate their dedication to our mission and to providing insightful commentary during today's session.

While we celebrate our partnerships with executive leaders, we, too, celebrate the accomplishments of those rising in the ranks. Throughout the year, we distributed professional development awards and Campus Conversation Grants to women throughout the state. Congratulations to all of our award and scholarship recipients; each will be revealed and honored at the conference.

As we prepare to enjoy the conference with all of you, we encourage you to intentionally make time to meet new friends, network with colleagues, and form new partnerships. We are stronger together!

With kindness and in service,



Dr. Courtney Clarke

Associate Dean of Social Sciences
Western Campus of Cuyahoga Community College



Dr. Sarah Wallis

Director of Programs
AAC Mentors

LIVE · LAUGH · LEAD

ACE Women's Network Ohio 2024 Conference

WELCOME FROM DR. KRISTI NELSON



Dr. Kristi Nelson

Interim Executive Vice President
Academic Affairs and Provost
University of Cincinnati

ABOUT UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

Mission Statement

The University of Cincinnati serves the people of Ohio, the nation, and the world as a premier, public, urban research university dedicated to undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, experience-based learning, and research.

We are committed to excellence and diversity in our students, faculty, staff, and all of our activities. We provide an inclusive environment where innovation and freedom of intellectual inquiry flourish.

Through scholarship, service, partnerships, and leadership, we create opportunity, develop educated and engaged citizens, enhance the economy and enrich our University, city, state and global community.

Leading urban public universities into a new era of innovation and impact

The University of Cincinnati has pioneered bold change for 200 years. Next Lives Here, which builds on our past, is meant to disrupt academia's conventional ways of thinking and doing, to define our next 200 years. It outlines an inventive framework that includes three platforms supported by nine pathways. We intend to use this inventive framework to ignite the curiosity of our students, inspire our faculty and staff, and unleash ingenuity to create an inclusive environment that provides freedom to learn, explore, and innovate.

Living Our Values

Inclusion

Intentionally engaging people and the contribution of diverse ideas.

Innovation

Challenging existing practices and paradigms and discovering the unknown.

Impact

Positively transforming our community and society in measurable ways.

ACE WOMEN'S NETWORK - OHIO EXECUTIVE BOARD 2024-2025

Dr. Courtney L. Clarke,

State Co-Chair
Cuyahoga Community College

Dr. Sarah C. Wallis,

State Co-Chair
Union Institute & University

Dr. Nanette L. Smith,

State Co-Chair Elect
Rhodes State College

Dr. Holly Craider,

State Co-Chair Emeritus
Cuyahoga Community College

Amanda Watkins

Wright State University

Dr. Shantelle K. Jenkins

Ohio University

Erika Hill

Cuyahoga Community College

Dr. Rita Kumar

University of Cincinnati

Dr. Desiree Polk-Bland

Columbus State Community College

Dr. Ladorian Latin

Franklin University

ACE WNO 2024 AWARDS

The ACE Women's Network-Ohio has created four state-wide professional awards designed to recognize the diverse groups who participate in the Network. Listed below are the distinct eligibility and criteria for each award. All awards value individuals who have contributed to the advancement of women colleagues by selectively implementing one or more of the "IDEALS" described by the ACE Inclusive Excellence Group:

- Identifying women leaders
- Developing their leadership abilities
- Encouraging the use of those abilities
- Advancing women's careers
- Linking women leaders to other women and to mentors, and
- Supporting women as they pursue their professional aspirations

Excellence in Higher Education Leadership

Recognizes an outstanding woman leader who has made significant contributions to higher education in Ohio. This is the Network's highest external honor. The award winner should have served as a role model and leader to other women in the field of higher education through her demonstrated commitment to the leadership development and advancement of women on her campus and in the community.

Excellence in Higher Education Research

Recognizes an outstanding woman leader who has made significant contributions to higher education research or publication in Ohio. This award highlights outstanding research and/or publication efforts advancing knowledge in the field of higher education (administration, faculty, leadership, representation in fields/majors; research can be faculty, student, or community focused). Priority focus area includes women in higher education.

Professional Development Scholarships

In an effort to provide women from Ohio institutions of higher education with the opportunity to gain leadership expertise, the Network has established scholarships to support participation at conferences or workshops, membership in professional organizations, and other opportunities for professional development. The awards are to be used to reimburse registration and/or travel expenses.

Campus Conversation Grants

Each year ACE WNO allocates funding based on budget surplus to support women's leadership development activities on campuses in Ohio that foster continued conversation and collaboration. The Executive board can award up to seven Campus Conversation grants that Institutional Representatives (IRs) can apply for to help reimburse costs for materials, marketing, refreshments, etc.

LEADERSHIP PANEL BIOS



Dr. Bleuzette Marshall

Vice President, Equity Inclusion & Community Impact
University of Cincinnati

Bleuzette Marshall is the Vice President for Equity, Inclusion and Community Impact. In this role, she manages the university's compliance programs and inclusion efforts – providing strategic leadership for the retention, advancement, and recruitment of diverse talent and building mutually rewarding partnerships in the broader community.

She created and is the convener of the region's Chief Diversity Officer's Roundtable with corporations, community organizations, colleges, health systems, and law firms to serve as a resource and think tank to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within the region.

Previously, she was the Senior Director of Development for Provost & Student Affairs at the UC Foundation. Under her leadership, \$20 million was raised for university-wide scholarships and programs.

Bleuzette is an alumna of the University of Cincinnati and its prestigious Darwin T. Turner Scholars Program. She earned a B.A. in Psychology, a M.Ed. in Educational Foundations, and a Ph.D. in Educational Studies. She is the co-creator of the B.A.S.E. Mentoring Program and the founding president of the UC African American Alumni Affiliate (4A).



Dr. Marianne Lewis

Dean, School of Business,
University of Cincinnati

Marianne W. Lewis is dean at the Lindner College of Business, University of Cincinnati and prior at Cass (now Bayes) Business School, City University of London. She is passionate about Women's Leadership, launching related academic and community initiatives in Cincinnati, London and Dubai. Her latest book Both/And Thinking: Embracing Creative Tensions to Solve Your Toughest Problem, published by Harvard Business Review, received the 2023 Thinkers50 Breakthrough Award. Lewis has been recognized among the world's most-cited researchers in her field (Web of Science) and received the Decade Award (2021) from the Academy of Management Review. Her work also appears in such media outlets as Harvard Business Review, Fast Company, Newsweek, and MarketWatch.



Jennifer McCamis

Associate Vice President,
Enrollment Management and Undergraduate Admissions,
Wright State University

Jen McCamis is the Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management and Admissions at Wright State University. With more than 20 years of experience at Wright State University, Jen has held roles in all areas of admissions including as a recruiter in the Cincinnati area, Director of Admissions Operations, and Interim Chief Admissions Officer. Jen is a strong advocate of opportunity for higher education in Ohio and currently serves as the President of the Ohio Public University Admissions Council and sits on several boards in the Dayton area. As a two-time Wright State graduate, with a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication and an MBA, and third generation Raider, Jen is inspired every day by the students she gets to meet and the access driven mission of the institution. She is also a proud mom of two high school aged sons who constantly challenge her to look at the world with a different lens.



Dr. Karen Miller

Provost, Executive Vice President
Cuyahoga Community College

Possessing over 30 years of higher education experience, Dr. Karen Miller is the Provost and Executive Vice President of the Access, Learning & Success Division at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C). As Provost she oversees all academic and enrollment operations at the College, including: operations for Tri-C's four campuses; accreditation; curriculum; faculty affairs and faculty development; and all enrollment management and student affairs services. Serving as a key executive for the College, Dr. Miller led the creation and implementation of the College's shift to an academic discipline-based academic infrastructure, which became effective fall of 2024.

Dr. Miller is a recognized leader in higher education, and presents at numerous conferences, including the American Association of Community Colleges Annual Convention, the Institute for Higher Education Policy & Lumina Foundation, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers Strategic Enrollment Conference, and the National Noel Levitz Retention Conference. Karen serves as the College's representative to the League for Innovation in the Community College and is also a graduate of the League's Executive Leadership Institute.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Dr. Holly Craider, Esq., Ph.D.

Associate Vice President
Curriculum, Assessment, and
Accreditation Activities
Cuyahoga Community College

Dr. Holly Craider is the Associate Vice President of Curriculum, Assessment, and Accreditation Activities and an adjunct faculty member in the Business Administration department of Cuyahoga Community College. With 20 years of experience as a higher education professional, she has worked in the areas of admissions, financial aid, student success, recruitment, eLearning & Innovation, student affairs, and academic affairs. At Cuyahoga Community College, she has spent the last 15 years serving in the roles of Student Success Specialist, Recruitment Specialist, Interim Manager of Next Generation Learning, Director of the College Information Center, Interim Assistant Dean of eLearning, Dean of Student Affairs, Interim Dean of Academic Affairs, and her current position. Craider also serves as a Peer Reviewer for the Higher Learning Commission.

Craider has been a regular presenter for professional organizations including the ACE Women's Network of Ohio, the American Association of Community Colleges, the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience, American College Personnel Association, and the National Career Development Association. She also provides public speaking coaching to individuals and businesses. Her areas of research include appreciative inquiry in regard to first-generation community college students and the utilization of communication as a means to motivate and uplift students and higher education professionals.

Dr. Craider is a Ralph M. Besse Teaching Excellence award winner, a graduate of both the John Rouche and HERS Wellesly leadership institutes, and a member of the Greater Cleveland Partnership inaugural leadership program. Craider has a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from Kent State University, a Juris Doctorate from Akron Law, and recently passed the Ohio Bar Exam. She will take her oath of office on November 12th.

STATE OF OHIO: LEGAL UPDATES



Arcola Whatley

Executive Director of Legal Services
Institutional Equity & Deputy General Counsel
Cuyahoga Community College

Arcola A. Whatley serves as Deputy General Counsel at Cuyahoga Community College and adjunct instructor for the Paralegal Degree Program. She was formerly a Clinical Professor for the Pardon Clemency and Expungement Clinic at Cleveland State University Law School and the Reentry Clinic and First Amendment Practicum at Case Western Reserve University's Kramer Law Clinic. Ms. Whatley has broad experience in public interest and civil litigation law from her experience as an Attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and as an Assistant Director of Law for the City of Cleveland. She is licensed in both Maryland and Ohio and before the U.S. Tax Court. In her spare time, Attorney Whatley enjoys yoga, photography, theatre, travel and hiking. She currently lives in Bratenahl, with her dog, Scarlett.

PRESENTER BIOS AND SESSION DESCRIPTIONS



Barbara Allen

Assistant Director, Change Management
Columbus State Community College

What if We Started Right Here, Right Now? Discovering Leadership Through Play and Presence

What if we let go of perfection and simply started where we are? In this engaging workshop, we'll explore how improvisation can unlock vibrant, empowered leadership. Together, we'll practice being fully present, trusting ourselves, and embracing the unexpected to lead with creativity and confidence. This is a space where laughter and openness will guide us toward new discoveries about ourselves and how we lead.

Through fun and interactive games, we'll learn how being present and trusting the process can foster personal well-being and professional growth. We'll value the power of spontaneity, letting go of rigid structures to invite new ideas and approaches to leadership. The session will be filled with moments of lightness and connection, as we brainstorm, laugh, and share our own stories to inspire and lift one another.

Aligned with the "Live. Laugh. Lead." theme, this session will help you cultivate resilience, tap into your unique strengths, and develop a mindset of openness and curiosity. It's all about starting right now, as you are, and realizing that you're already enough.

Barbara Allen celebrates the joyful connections between inclusion and leadership in all she does. For over 25 years, she has worked in higher education in many different capacities focusing on spaces where "everyone matters". She especially loves working closely with students, staff and faculty to build community. Her favorite contribution is her current work with Change Management and Belonging leading college-wide compassion and care initiatives to support the extended community using creative expression including storytelling.

Barbara has been an improvising artist and educator for over 14 years as a founding member of both Columbus Unscripted and Sassy Do Improv. She celebrates the practical applications and connections between improvisation and leadership and has worked with The Columbus Blue Jackets, The Child Development Council of Franklin County, The Praxis Communities of Southern Ohio, The Wild Goose Creative, The Theatre Roundtable of Columbus, The State of Ohio Training Association (SOTA), The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), The United Way of Central Ohio Neighborhood Leadership Academy, Ohio Dominican University and The Ohio State University. She was humbled and honored to share improv as an invited speaker at TEDx Columbus Women 2013 and was a featured teller Spring 2015 at the Speak Easy's Annual celebration of story, The Big Easy. Barbara was named Columbus State's Legacy in Leadership Award winner for 2018 and a Columbus State Champion for her service in 2022.



Dr. Martina Peng

Department Chair,
Accounting, Finance, and Risk Management
Franklin University

Empowering Women's Financial Well-being: Strategies for Your Financial Success

In alignment with this year's conference theme, "Ohio Women in Leadership: Live. Laugh. Lead," this presentation aims to empower women by equipping them with the knowledge and practical tools necessary to enhance their financial well-being. As we embrace the journey of personal and professional growth, understanding your personal finance becomes a crucial component of leadership for women.

Key takeaways from this session include:

1. Personalized Financial Systems: Learn how to develop a financial system tailored to your unique goals and circumstances, enabling you to manage your finances effectively.
2. Invest Wisely: Gain a foundational understanding of investments, including how to build a strategy that resonates with women investors, addressing their specific challenges and aspirations.
3. Overcoming Fear: Discover practical strategies to conquer the fear of investing, empowering you to make informed decisions that align with your financial objectives.
4. Budgeting for Control: Master the art of budgeting to maintain control over your finances, allowing for both stability and the freedom to pursue your dreams.

Dr. Martina Peng, Certified Financial Planner™, is the Department Chair for Accounting, Finance, and Risk Management at Franklin University, where she also oversees the B.S. Financial Planning program. She holds an MBA from the State University of New York at Buffalo and a Ph.D. in Consumer Finance from Ohio State University. Dr. Peng's research delves into financial decision-making, financial behavior, and retirement planning. An active contributor to the financial planning industry, she has served multiple leadership positions, including President, on the Board of Central Ohio Financial Planning Association and Women's Initiatives of the National Association of Personal Financial Advisors.

PRESENTER BIOS AND SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Inclusive Leadership:

Women Leading for Life and Laughter



Dr. Rita Kumar

Professor of English and Director of Honors
University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash



Dr. Brenda Refaei

Professor in the English and Communication
Co-Director, College Learning + Teaching Center
University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash

Inclusive leadership in academic settings leads to better outcomes where women can thrive. Inclusive leadership helps to break down barriers so that women can unleash their true potential. When women with diverse experiences have space to express themselves, they will foster innovative ways to address the issues facing higher education. Inclusive leaders intentionally create environments that support women with diverse experiences to feel their contributions will be valued by the institution. Inclusive environments need to be built around a culture of respect and inclusion, which leads to a space where thoughts and opinions can be shared irrespective of gender. Generally speaking, women leaders have been found to employ empathy and better communication skills to create collaborative approaches to problem-solving. When women are in leadership roles, they not only bring a diverse perspective, but serve as powerful role models for future generations. In this interactive session, we will review the characteristics of inclusive leadership that support women based on current leadership research. Participants will apply strategies to develop each of the characteristics of inclusive leadership. Participants will reflect on their own current leadership practices to see where they might adapt them to become more inclusive. A vital component of inclusive leadership is building a community of inclusion, which can be done through an inclusive mentoring program. We will review how participants can build an inclusive mentoring program at their institution that helps build a culture of inclusivity.

Rita Kumar, Ph.D., is a Professor of English and Director of Honors at University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash. Her research interests include problem-based learning, inclusive classroom practice, and faculty development. She serves on the Executive Board of the Women's Network, American Council on Education Women's Network-Ohio. Dr. Kumar is co-editor of *Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Strategies for Teaching*. Her work on equity and inclusion has been published in *Inside Higher Ed*, *To Improve the Academy*, and the *Journal for Research and Practice in College Teaching*.

Brenda Refaei, Ed.D., is Co-director of the UC Blue Ash College Learning + Teaching Center and a Professor in the English and Communication Department where she teaches developmental, first- and intermediate English composition. Dr. Refaei is co-editor of *Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education Strategies for Teaching*. Her work on equity and inclusion has been published in *Inside Higher Ed*, *To Improve the Academy*, and the *Journal for Research and Practice in College Teaching*.

PRESENTER BIOS AND SESSION DESCRIPTIONS



Victoria Cullen

Assistant Director,
University Honors Program
University of Cincinnati



Vikki Kowalczyk

Assistant Director,
University Honors Program
University of Cincinnati

Inclusive Leadership: Women Leading for Life and Laughter

Women tend to be the first to volunteer for leadership roles for the good of our personal and professional development, as well as for the good of our peers whom we are serving. We find ourselves deep into a variety of projects that regularly are outside of our 9-5 roles on campus, which is not always recognized, but seemingly expected, and can come at the cost of our mental and physical well-being. Women volunteer for a lot of reasons, especially when the volunteer role is related to our career or advancing the field. Being a volunteer in a professional organization or on campus also helps women advance in their careers through the initiative and continued professional development. For many positions, volunteer leadership roles are the closest women get to supervision, which is often a requirement for promotion.

This session will share the stories of two women who regularly volunteer to serve in peer leadership roles and have shared the same campus experience back-to-back. They will share their experience of supporting one another and how they leaned on the other volunteer co-lead, as well as the team they are leading. Attendees will be invited to share their own experiences as we know there are many ways to be the best leader we can be while maintaining our mental health and work-life balance. Some strategies will be offered to support peers, dealing with difficult people, ways to set boundaries, and have conversations with supervisors to ask for assistance in other areas for the duration or portion of the volunteer role. When times get tough sometimes the only options are to laugh or cry, so let's choose to laugh and share together!

Victoria Cullen (she/her) is from Cincinnati, Ohio and is a proud graduate of the University of Montana-Missoula, where she had a strong focus on women and gender studies, student food insecurity and addressing barriers of rural education. Victoria has served on numerous non-profit boards and campus organizations. She was recently recognized by the City of Covington with the Heart of the Community Award for her tireless efforts in bridging community activism with environmental projects. At UC, she enjoys supporting students in various biomedical research opportunities in partnership with the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

Vikki Kowalczyk (she/her) has been in higher education for over 10 years including FYE programming, advising, and program management across 5 institutions in 3 different states. She has served in volunteer leadership roles at the institutional, local, and state levels with sights on national or regional organization leadership roles. She is excited to share her experiences with other women in Ohio!

PRESENTER BIOS AND SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Sliding vs. Deciding: Making Micro Moments Meaningful

This session will provide participants with a dedicated space to pause, reflect, and recharge. Participants will be introduced to a range of strategies focused on rest and renewal, offering practical tools to help restore energy and well-being, particularly focused on taking advantage of small moments while transitioning from one activity to another. By the end of the session, participants will have had the opportunity to engage in strategies, reflect on which strategies work for their individual needs, and leave feeling recharged and equipped with effective approaches to maintain balance and resilience in their personal and professional lives.

Session Objectives:

- Participants will explore a variety of strategies and practices designed to enhance rest, relaxation, and overall well-being, tailored to diverse needs and preferences.
- Participants will engage in dedicated time and activities to reflect on their experiences, challenges, and successes, fostering deeper self-awareness in personal and professional growth.
- Participants will gain practical tools and techniques to rejuvenate their energy levels, ensuring they feel refreshed and ready to tackle their professional and personal responsibilities.



Bria Howard, Visiting Assistant Professor, Bria Howard is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Cincinnati in the College of Cooperative Education and Professional Studies. She primarily teaches career exploration courses with students from all different majors within the College of Arts and Sciences. Bria has worked in Higher Education Professionally for 7 years and is dedicated to fostering an inclusive, communal, and fun environment for learning that ignites students to strive for systematic change. Bria received her master's degree in student Affairs in Higher Education from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, and her Master of Social Work from the University of Cincinnati. Outside of work, Bria loves buying and playing with stationary, listening to podcast/audiobooks, exploring coffee shops and watching horrific reality TV. Additionally, Bria is preparing to welcome a 3-month-old puppy into her life at the end of October!



Mika Karikari, Associate Director of Resident Education and Development, Dr. Mika Karikari is the Associate Director of Resident Education & Development at the University of Cincinnati, with 15 years of experience in student affairs. A dynamic speaker and dedicated educator, Mika earned her PhD from Miami University, focusing on Black women leaders and Black Feminist Leadership. She's passionate about authentic leadership and creating spaces where people can truly thrive. With experience in residence life, career services, and more, Mika knows how to bring out the best in her teams. Outside of work, you'll find her reading, baking up something sweet, watching sports, or hanging with her favorite crew—husband Emmanuel and their two energetic boys, Kash and Blaze.



Jessica Lee, Assistant Professor, Jessica Lee is an Assistant Professor in the College of Cooperative Education and Professional Studies at the University of Cincinnati. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Sciences and Political Science from the University of Connecticut, followed by her Master of Arts degree in College Student Personnel at Bowling Green State University. Her professional background consists of residence life, academic advising, first-year programming, fraternity and sorority life, career coaching, experiential learning, and teaching career development courses to freshmen through graduate students. She has worked at the University of Cincinnati in Lindner Career Services and College of Cooperative Education and Professional Studies since 2016. She enjoys spending time with her husband, Jason, and two sons, Arthur and Ethan. You'll typically find her trying to recharge by taking a nap, doing 10-minute mental health walks outside, or listening to audiobooks while commuting.



Tracy Settleberry, Visiting Assistant Professor, Dr. Tracy Settleberry is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the College of Cooperative Education and Professional Studies. Tracy earned a BS and MA in Art Education from Miami University, and a PhD in Human Development and Family Science from The Ohio State University. Although Tracy no longer teaches art formally, she loves incorporating art and creativity into every aspect of life—including the professional development courses she is currently teaching at UC. When she's not teaching, Tracy is with her four kids embracing life, making a mess, and at the same time, trying to get everyone to all of their activities on time.

PRESENTER BIOS AND SESSION DESCRIPTIONS



Dana Bisignani

Director, UC Women's Center
University of Cincinnati

“Women’s and Gender Equity Centers: From Women’s Empowerment to Transformative Power & the Radical Potential of Joy”

In her essay, “Toward a Woman-Centered University,” Adrienne Rich argues that women must not merely protest their exclusion from male-dominated arenas but question the very institutions and practices as they were formed. In other words, women “must choose what we will accept and what we will reject” of the models already defined for us – and often without us – including leadership.

From their start in 1960, campus-based women’s and gender equity centers (WGECs) have been drivers of change, transforming not only their institutions but the students within them, and mentoring generations of women leaders. WGEC practitioners have long balanced the challenging work of both “binding wounds” and “changing the world” (Davie, 2002), serving as critical sites of women’s community-building, learning, and leadership.

Too often, traditional women’s leadership and gender equity programs focus on how women leaders might alter themselves to fit existing molds of executive leadership rather than inviting them to re-envision how leadership and power might operate. As counter sites, WGECs challenge us: What must we learn if we wish to be vibrant, innovative, and resilient leaders, even in what feel like apocalyptic times? What must we unlearn if we wish not just to empower but to transform those around us, including those we mentor and lift as we climb? What must we build within ourselves if we are to sustain this work?

Having rebuilt two now-thriving campus-based women’s centers in two different states and led successful campaigns as a community organizer, Dana will share what she’s learned about resilience, the role of irreverence and joy, and how we lead with hope. She’ll explore how women might better equip ourselves with the tools and strategies to work in solidarity with one another to transform ourselves, our communities, and our world.

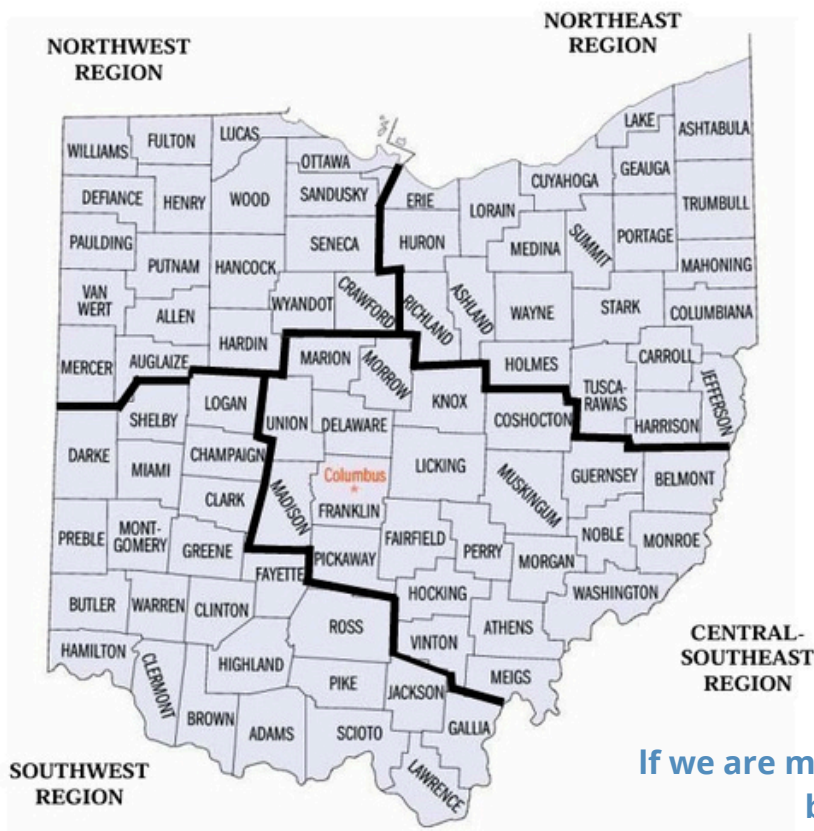
Dana Bisignani (she/her) has 20 years’ experience working in higher education and more than ten working as a social justice educator and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) trainer and practitioner. Currently, Dana is Director of the Women’s Center at the University of Cincinnati (UC) where she is also adjunct faculty for the Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and a former Staff Senator. Outside her role at UC, she serves as Co-Chair of the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) Women’s Centers Committee, which represents women’s and gender equity center practitioners nationally. Before joining the staff at UC, Dana was Coordinator of Gender and Sexuality at Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM) where she oversaw their Women’s Center and Rainbow Dragon (LGBTQ+) Center. She has taught writing, gender studies, and labor history at both MSUM and Purdue University, where she earned an MFA in poetry and pursued doctoral research. Locally, Dana is a new member of the Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls and a veteran community organizer, having worked on successful campaigns and projects in several states. A first-generation college student from Chicago’s South Side, Dana is a long-time community organizer who has worked on successful campaigns in multiple states. In her free time, she enjoys reading and hiking, and is fueled by coffee and Led Zeppelin.

INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

The institutional representative (IR) is a key person in the development and implementation of the strategic plans of the ACE State Network in each state. Each institution of higher education in the state should appoint an IR to represent and serve as an advocate for the interests of women's leadership development and advancement in higher education at the institution. The IR's appointment recognizes the critical role she has already played at her institution with regard to the identification and development of women leaders on her campus and signals the institution's support for the advancement of women into key leadership positions in higher education. The institutional representative may wish to appoint a committee of women to work with her on her campus.

Institutional Representative (JR) - REGIONAL REPS Roles and Responsibilities

- Maintain two-way communication with the ACE WNO Statewide Executive Board IR Committee for promotion, acknowledgement and strategizing regarding the activities of the IRs in your region.
- Hold a quarterly group phone conference with IRs in your region, with an agenda developed in collaboration with the ACE WNO Statewide IR Committee. The agenda will focus on reminders of best practices and resources available to promote the ACE WNO mission, success stories, idea brainstorming, etc.
- Several times during the quarter, reach out to individual IRs as needed to support, acknowledge or encourage their participation.
- Attend and encourage other IRs to attend the ACE WNO annual November conference (promote registration, help coordinate carpooling if needed, participate in any IR break-out session to be coordinated by the Executive Board IR Committee, etc.).



[Learn more about Institutional Representatives](#)

If we are missing an IR from your College at the link below, please consider joining!

<https://www.aceohiowomen.org/plugins/content/content.php?content.136>



THANK YOU

for attending the
26th Annual ACE Women's Network Ohio Conference.

For more information, visit aceohiowomen.org

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Join us next year at the
27th Annual ACE WNO Conference
Date: November 2025
Location: TBA