

CAMPUS ACTIVITIES *programming*[®]

Vol. 56, No. 1

SUMMER 2026

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

AS YOU READ THE NACA 2026-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN, I hope you feel the same sense of energy and possibility that we feel across the Association right now. This is an exciting time for NACA, and I am grateful for the opportunity to help carry this work forward alongside our Board, our volunteers, and each of you.

At the center of everything we do is a simple but powerful idea: Campus Activities matter. Through the Case for Campus Activities, we continue to affirm that the work happening across campuses is not just programming. It is connection. It is belonging. It is student success. When students find their place, they are more likely to stay, to engage, and to thrive. That impact is real and it continues to guide our work as an Association.

In the coming year, much of our focus will be on listening, testing, and learning. Whether we are exploring future conference models, strengthening local engagement, or expanding professional development opportunities, our approach will be grounded in member input. We know that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution, and we are committed to building experiences that reflect the needs of our members.

You will begin to see this work take shape in both small and meaningful ways. Some changes will feel familiar. Others may feel new. All of them are intended to better align NACA with how you are working today, while also preparing us for where higher education is going. At the same time, we remain committed to the experiences that bring our community together. Across all of our work, our goal is to support you in creating programs and experiences that resonate with students and strengthen campus communities.

What makes this work possible is the strength of this community. NACA has always been a place where ideas are shared, relationships are built, and leaders are developed. That will not change. If anything, it will become even more important as we move forward.

Thank you for the work you do each day. Thank you for your partnership, your insight, and your willingness to grow alongside us. I look forward to what we will accomplish together.



Jameson Root, CAE

jamesonr@naca.org

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Across all of our work, our goal is to support you in creating programs and experiences that resonate with students and strengthen campus communities.

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MISSION

NACA empowers members to amplify the campus experience through inclusive learning, meaningful connections, and engaging entertainment that transforms college communities.

VISION

To create college communities where everyone belongs.

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

HELLO NACA FRIENDS! I can't believe I get to say this: greetings from your friendly neighborhood NACA Board of Directors Chair! As someone who first volunteered with NACA as an undergrad, this is a surreal, joy-filled full-circle moment for me.

Whether you're reading this between meetings and events, between classes, or between much needed naps, I'm glad you picked up this issue of Campus Programming. Our work is fast-paced, creative, and sometimes a little chaotic – but it's also where the good stuff happens. We get to help students find their people, their passions, and their place on campus. Every day we get to live out The Case for Campus Activities. That's a pretty incredible gig.

It's an especially exciting time for NACA as we implement our 2026–2029 Strategic Plan. Over the next few years, our work will be guided by four big focus areas:

- **Conference Experiences:** Rethinking NACA conferences so they're even more member centered, with meaningful engagement, on-trend business connections, and intentional networking that doesn't feel forced.
- **Regional Engagement & Local Experiences:** Showing up in new and creative ways across the regions so members can access valuable, localized experiences and volunteer opportunities closer to home.
- **Training, Education, & Member Development:** Making NACA your go-to home for learning, with tangible, competency-based resources and experiences that help campus activities professionals grow at every stage.
- **Building Communities Where Everyone Belongs:** Championing campus activities as a driving force for belonging, persistence, and student success, and making sure our work truly reflects and supports all of our communities.

You'll see these priorities pop up all year long – in our events, resources, volunteer roles, and in the stories and strategies featured in this magazine. NACA is committed to bringing this plan to life in ways that feel real, practical, and energizing on your campus, no matter your size, location, or staffing.

As you flip through this issue, I hope you discover ideas that make you think, “We could try that,” or “We already do that – and we can level it up.” Borrow freely, adapt boldly, and don't be afraid to experiment.

Thank you for the energy, care, and creativity you bring to your campuses and students every single day. I'm honored to serve as your Chair as we step into this new strategic direction together, and I can't wait to see how you help build college communities where everyone belongs.

See you soon - hopefully at a NACA event!



Jason Meier

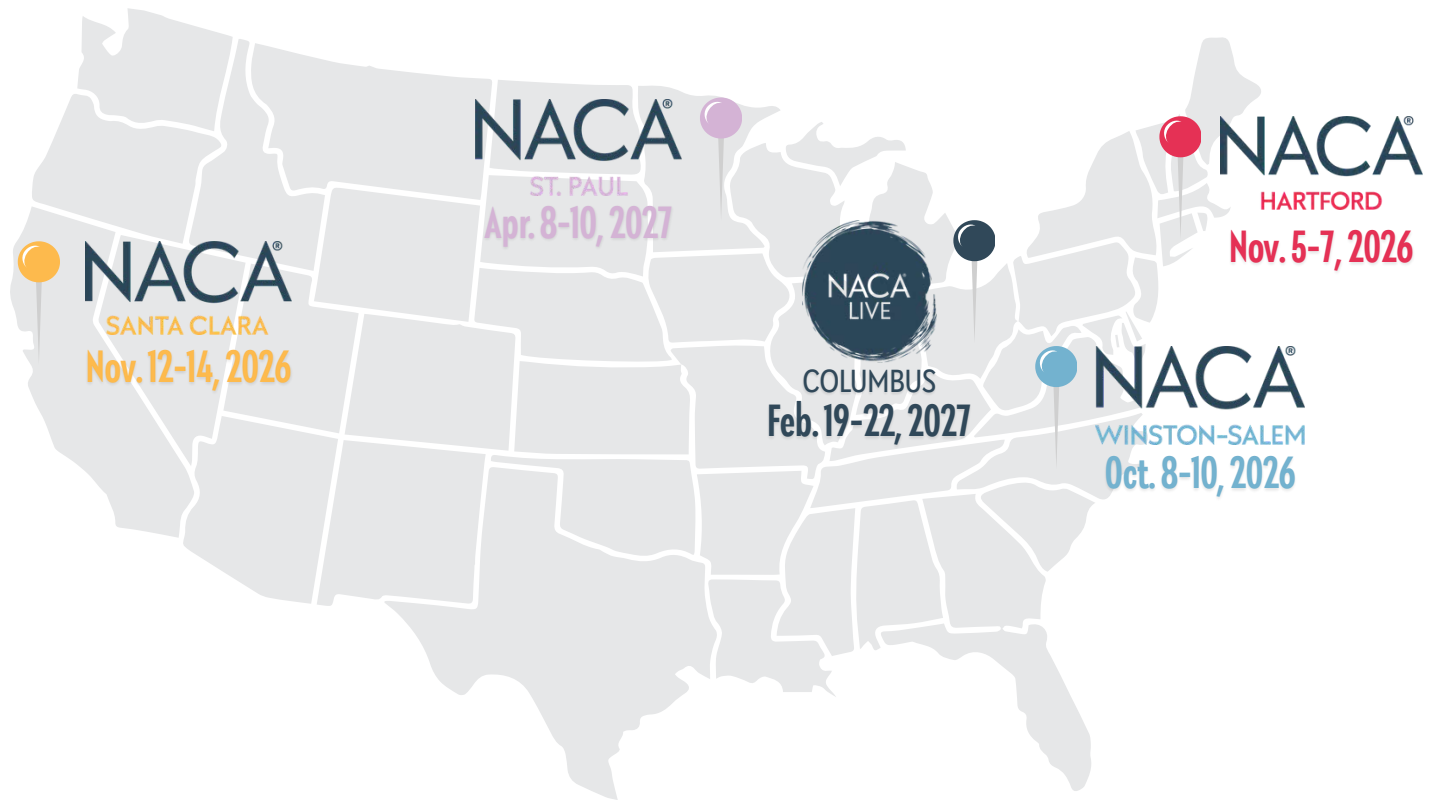
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We get to help students find their people, their passions, and their place on campus. Every day we get to live out The Case for Campus Activities. That's a pretty incredible gig.

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2026-27 EVENT SCHEDULE



NACA Winston-Salem (NC) • Oct. 8-10, 2026

NACA Hartford (CT) • Nov. 5-7, 2026

NACA Santa Clara (CA) • Nov. 12-14, 2026

NACA Live in Columbus (OH) • Feb. 19-22, 2027

NACA St. Paul (MN) • Apr. 8-10, 2027

[Learn More & Register](#)



Member schools get **ONE FREE CONFERENCE REGISTRATION** to Winston-Salem, Hartford, Santa Clara, or St. Paul during the early registration period!

Members: Help Spread the Word!

Tell prospective members how your NACA membership has benefited you! Share NACA's social media posts and refer potential members to us.

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- One year of membership (at your current level).

How Do I Amplify?

Submit your referral to us at naca.org/amplify



Shoutout to members Courtney James, DePaul University and Melissa Kish, Sigma Delta Tau National Sorority! Thanks to their Amplify referrals, we've welcomed new members into the NACA community.

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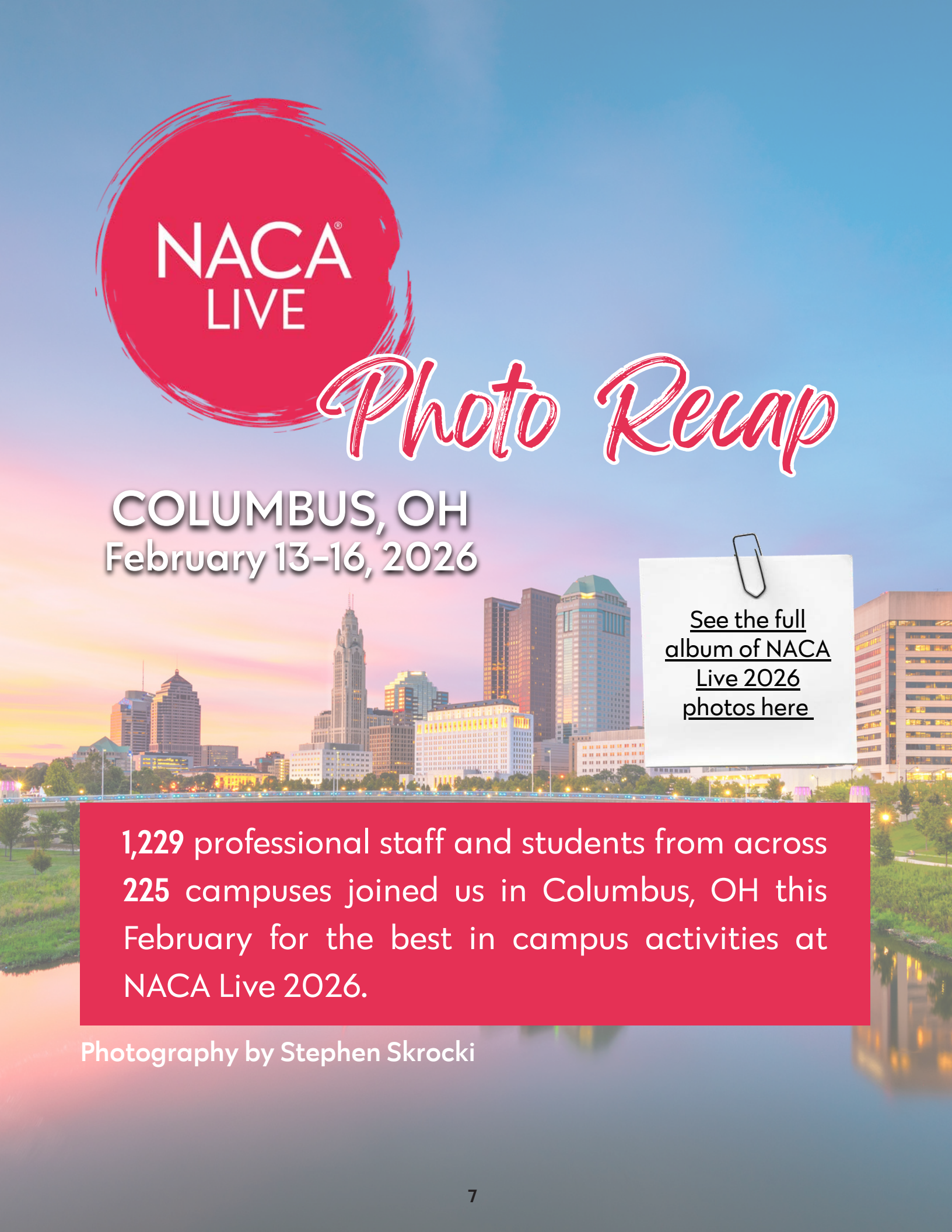
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- One Institution = One Membership
- One Free Early Bird Conference Registration
- Research & Tools to Help You Make the Case for Campus Activities
- Talent & Vendor Directory: Easily Source Your Programming Needs
- Connect & Learn with Campus Activities Professionals Nationwide
- Professional Development, Scholarship, & Volunteer Opportunities



My involvement with NACA has directly supported my institution's goals by enhancing the quality, intentionality, & impact of campus programming... Having access to NACA resources, conferences, & professional networks, I've been able to bring back innovative programming ideas, industry best practices, & assessment strategies that strengthen student engagement & campus life.

Cheyenne Mitchell • University of Louisville

The background of the entire page is a photograph of the Columbus, Ohio skyline at dusk. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, and the city lights are visible. In the foreground, there's a body of water reflecting the lights. A large red circle with a brushstroke effect is in the upper left. A white paper with a paperclip is on the right. A red box with white text is at the bottom left.

NACA[®]
LIVE

Photo Recap

COLUMBUS, OH
February 13-16, 2026

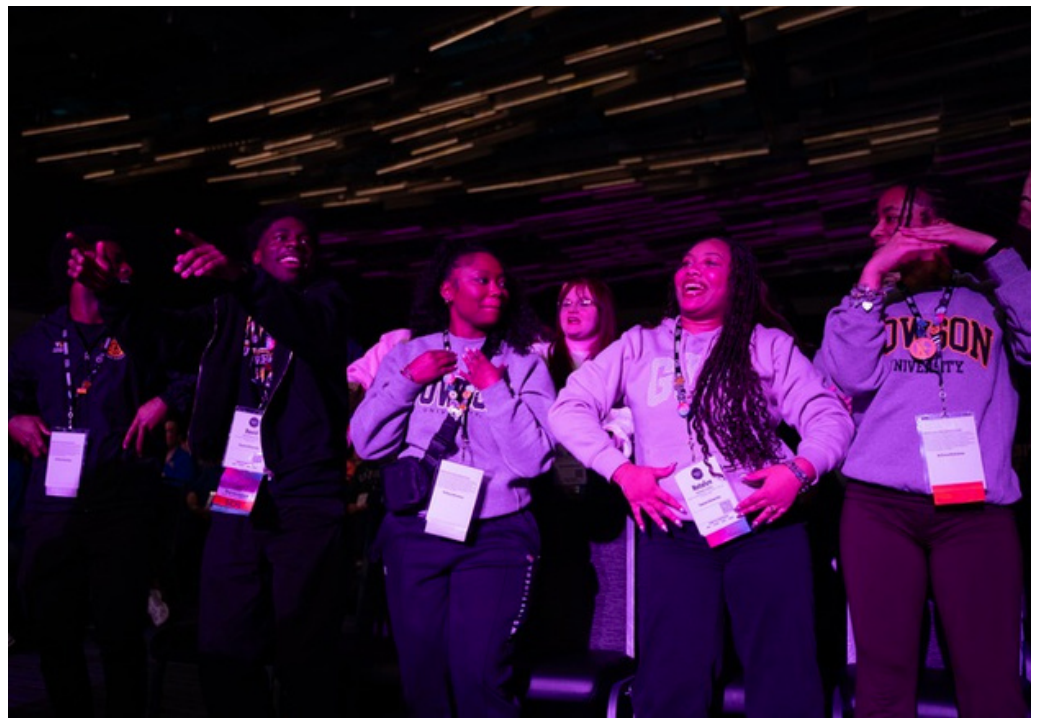
See the full
album of NACA
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photos here

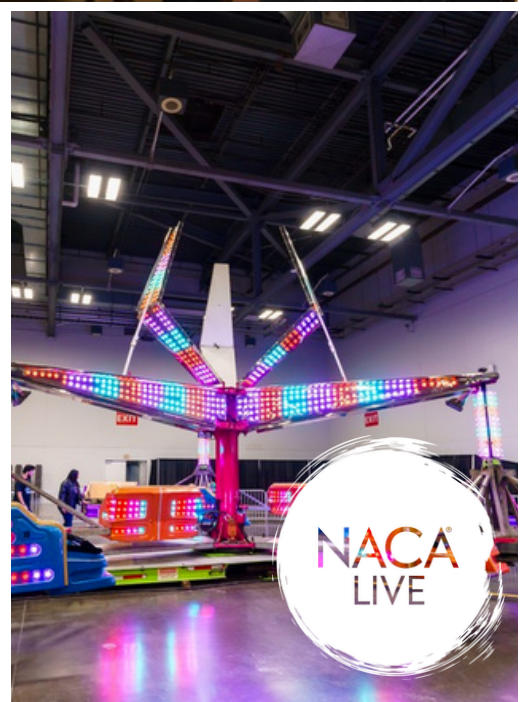
1,229 professional staff and students from across 225 campuses joined us in Columbus, OH this February for the best in campus activities at NACA Live 2026.

Photography by Stephen Skrocki













**We're coming back
to Columbus, OH!
Feb. 19-22, 2027**

The Best in Campus Activities.
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So You Want to Work in Higher Education – Now What?

Lucas Beal



RIGHT BEFORE YOU GRADUATE, you find yourself deep in the job search process, trying to figure out what best fits you — especially when it comes to building a career in higher education. Sometimes we land the job we always wanted. Other times, we take a job out of necessity — and surprisingly, it turns out to be exactly what we needed, because no two days look the same when you work in higher education. Then there are moments when you accept a position that doesn't quite align with where you wanted to be, whether in terms of location, timing, or both. You start asking yourself: What is the job market looking for? What does life after graduation actually look like for me?

Finding a job can feel like a fight. It is stressful, overwhelming, and at times discouraging — especially when you are still learning the ropes. Trust me, I have been there more times than I would like to admit. In this article, we will explore the post-degree job market through the lens of higher education and discuss what navigating it truly entails.

The Changing Landscape of Degrees and Employment

Since 2014, there has been a steady increase in the number of students earning their bachelor's degrees. With more graduates entering the workforce and a growing emphasis on employment since 2010, the job market has had to evolve — and over the past several years, that evolution has been significant. Positions that once required a master's degree or higher are now open to candidates with just a bachelor's degree. Many of us were told growing up that a degree guaranteed a good job, and that more education meant better opportunities. While education still matters, the landscape is far more nuanced than we were led to believe. Within higher education specifically, jobs began to grow, and by 2018, positions in the field had increased by approximately 13,800.

Timing, Location, and Cost of Living

When searching for a job — especially within higher education — there are several key factors to consider: timing, season, location, and cost of living. When I began my own job search after earning my master's degree in Higher Education, no one talked to me about any of these things. No one explained how they could impact my salary, how being location-bound could help or hurt me, or even when the best time of year was to apply within higher education.

Before diving into applications, take a step back and think about what you want and where you want to be. Are you open to relocating, or do you want to stay close to home? If you are moving somewhere new, how far are you willing to live from campus or the office? Are you looking for something within walking distance, or are you comfortable with a commute? It is also worth thinking about the functional area you would like to work in and the lifestyle that comes with it. For example, if you work in residential life, there is a chance you may live on campus. If you work in student engagement, you may find yourself working weekends and late nights. Asking questions about campus climate and culture during the interview process can help you get a much clearer picture of what the day-to-day experience actually looks like.



While these questions are framed through the lens of higher education, they apply equally to anyone pursuing a career in corporate America or any other field. When researching companies outside of higher education, the same level of intentionality matters. Look into whether the company has offices in multiple states, ask about benefits, and research their mission and values. Find out if they offer educational programs or tuition assistance, if continuing your education is something you want to pursue. Review their diversity statement to determine whether their commitment to inclusion aligns with your own values. These details matter — and taking the time to investigate them before applying can save you from accepting a position that was never the right fit to begin with.

Timing also matters more than most people realize. Spring is generally the best season to apply for jobs within higher education, as more positions tend to be available. During the winter months, campuses are already mid-semester and fully operational, making it harder to bring someone new on board. Starting at the beginning of a new semester is typically a smoother transition for everyone involved.

Understanding the Climate — Both Locally and Globally

While thinking about timing and location, it is equally important to consider what is happening in your state and in the world around you. Being aware of the broader climate — politically, socially, and economically — can help you identify opportunities that align with your values and long-term goals.

State laws, for example, directly impact how educational institutions operate. Public institutions are required to follow state law, while private institutions have a bit more flexibility, though they are not exempt. If a state's laws and policies do not align with what you are looking for, or if you feel they could become a problem down the road, that is critical information to factor into your decision. The legislative climate of a state will shape an institution's culture and direction for years to come. This is especially important to understand because many offices within higher education — such as DEI offices, volunteer programs, and sexual violence awareness initiatives — are funded through state grants. Those offices must not only adhere to the guidelines of the grants they received, but also ensure that their work is aligned with state law. Grants could be reduced or eliminated entirely if an institution failed to meet those requirements, which meant the stability of entire

departments depended on the political climate of the state.

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Do Your Research

Researching the institutions you are applying to is one of the most important steps in the job search process — both for your benefit and theirs. It is essential to understand the values of the office and organization you want to work for. Does the institution prioritize diversity? Is it an LGBTQIA+ friendly environment? How does it support staff members with families? It is also worth asking what professional development looks like and whether there is funding available to support you as a new professional — including opportunities to attend conferences such as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA), or Association of College and University Housing Officers - International (ACUHO-I). Taking time to review the institution's strategic plan can give you a sense of where they are headed and what they are prioritizing over the next several years. These are all questions worth knowing the answers to before you ever walk into an interview.

The people interviewing you will also want to know that you took the time to learn about their institution. Being able to speak to how their values align with yours not only makes you a stronger candidate — it demonstrates a work ethic that sets you apart. It shows that you were willing to do the work, seek out information, and come prepared. The more I applied for jobs, the more research I did, and it made a tremendous difference. It helped me ask better questions, gave me a clearer picture of the people I would potentially be working with, and helped me make more informed decisions about where I actually

wanted to be. Doing this homework before graduating can save you a great deal of time — and prevent you from pursuing positions that were never the right fit.



Entry-Level Opportunities and the Reality of Starting Out

Every year, people leave their jobs for a variety of reasons — some return to school, some move up, and others leave their field entirely. These departures create openings, particularly at the entry level, and give mid-level professionals room to advance. After graduation, most of us are simply looking for a position that covers our bills and still leaves a little room to breathe.

One example of a strong entry-level opportunity in higher education is a hall director position. Because housing is often included as part of the compensation package, this role can allow you to live on campus and significantly reduce your living expenses — giving you the chance to save money while gaining valuable experience. Most other entry-level positions in higher education are coordinator or assistant director roles. At smaller institutions, these titles can sometimes overlap in responsibility, meaning you may find yourself doing similar work regardless of what the position is called. While many candidates are now entering the field with master's degrees, having an advanced degree does not always translate directly into a higher-level position or significantly higher pay — which is something worth understanding before you begin your search.

What nobody told me when I was starting out was how much of your paycheck disappears before it ever reaches you. Insurance, taxes, and other deductions can significantly impact what you actually take home. I thought I had made smart choices early on because the pay seemed good, but I had not accounted for the full picture. Working two jobs to stay afloat was

something I experienced firsthand, and it led to burnout faster than I ever expected. The old saying that a degree guarantees financial stability simply does not hold the same weight it once did.

Why This Conversation Needs to Happen More

The post-graduation job market is a topic that deserves far more attention than it receives — especially as a growing number of graduates are the first in their families to earn a degree. The job search process has changed dramatically, and there is a large pool of people entering it without knowing where to start.

One resource that often goes underutilized is the graduate assistantship. Having a graduate assistantship is valuable because it gives real insight into how offices within higher education function — but you have to be willing to show up and do the work. The experience and connections built through a graduate assistantship, or even through undergraduate involvement, serves as a strong foundation when searching for full-time positions. Additionally, attending professional conferences as a graduate student is incredibly beneficial. It exposes you to the broader field, helps you understand what professional development looks like at various institutions, and gives you the language to ask the right questions when interviewing.



Having honest conversations about the importance of research, timing, location, cost of living, and the broader state of the world can genuinely change the trajectory of someone's career. Whether you are an undergraduate student, a graduate student, or someone looking to make a career change, these conversations matter. The more informed you are going in, the better equipped you will be to make decisions that truly serve you — not just right now, but long into the future.

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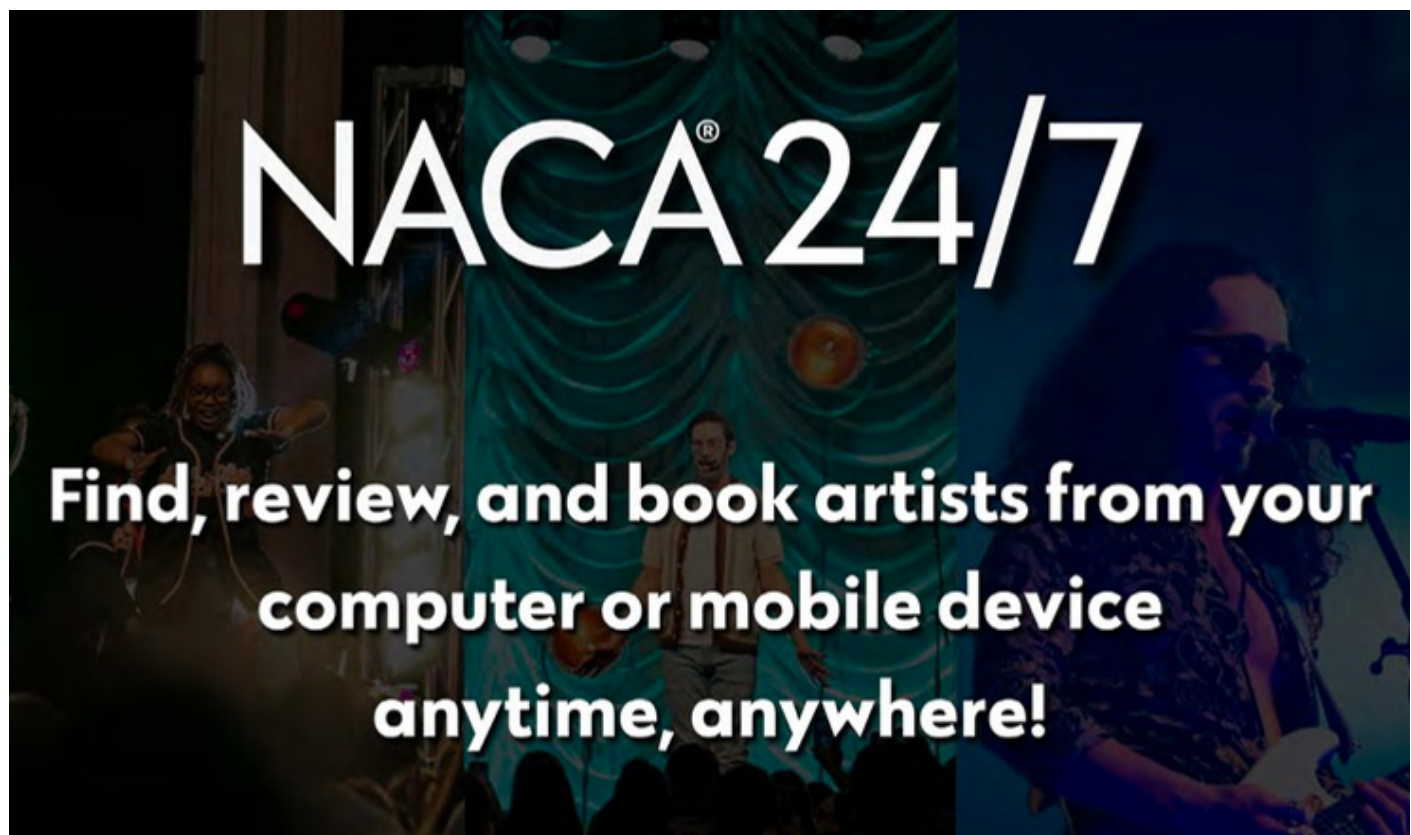
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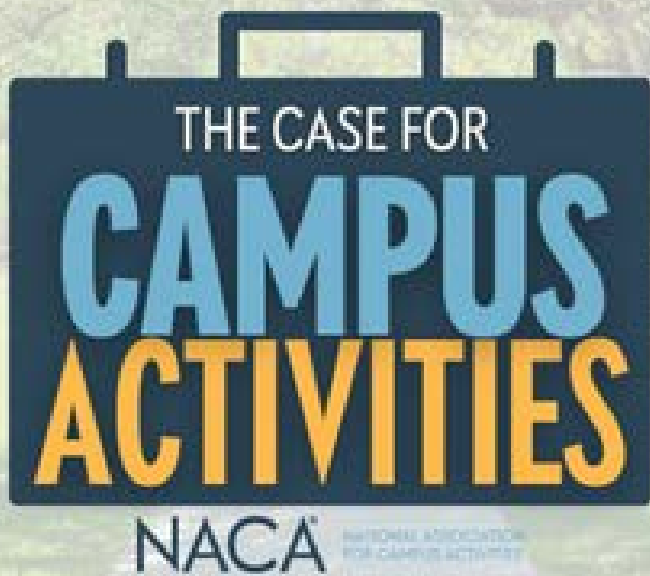
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Lucas Beal

Lucal Beal is the Assistant Director of Student Engagement & Activities at Albion College, where he has spent two years supporting student groups and fostering a vibrant campus community. Lucas has served as an advisor to the Union Board and is an active member of the Orientation Committee. Lucas was selected as a National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) Fellow, reflecting his commitment to excellence in campus activities. He is passionate about helping students discover new beginnings and finding their place on campus.





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J.B. Bailey • Coordinator of Events • University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

"It's already helping us advocate smarter, plan better, and create a more intentional student life experience."

Jarrick Brown • Director of Student Life & Campus Community • Univ. of Colorado Denver

"It's all about giving us the language – and confidence – to talk about why what we do matters."

Jason Meier • Associate Dean for Student Engagement • Harvard College

"I found this particularly helpful in training my new professionals, justifying funding and efforts with campus leadership, and contributing to learning outcome language. This was a HUGE contribution to the field and our profession."

Andrea Junso • Director of Campus Activities • Gustavus Adolphus College

2026
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Achievement Award Winners



Michelle Whited
Illinois State University
FOUNDERS AWARD



Steve Ransom
Prairie View A&M University
LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP AWARD



The Great Duboi
The Circus Estates
CAMPUS LEGEND AWARD



Maia Almeida
Bridgewater State University
**C. SHAW SMITH NEW
PROFESSIONAL AWARD**



Telvin James
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
**PATSY MORLEY OUTSTANDING
PROGRAMMER AWARD**



Jerome Scott II
University of Florida
**FRANK HARRIS
OUTSTANDING STUDENT
GOVERNMENT ADVISOR AWARD**



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ACHIEVEMENT AWARD: PROGRAM**

YOU BELONG HERE



Belonging by Design: How Low-Barrier Programming Better Engages Students

Nicole Luebbers

WALK INTO ALMOST ANY CAMPUS conversation, about student engagement today, and one word keeps coming up: belonging.

It's not a buzzword anymore, but rather a retention strategy. Research shows a greater sense of belonging is associated with higher academic performance, persistence, and is protective for mental health. Yet, one in ten college students report lacking a sense of belonging on campus.

At the same time, campus activities teams are facing a frustrating reality. Attendance can be inconsistent. Only the same students show up again and again. High-effort events do not always translate into broader engagement. And all of this is happening under tighter budgets and reduced staffing.

So, the question many campuses are wrestling with isn't whether to prioritize engagement. It's how to do it in a way that actually reaches more students without burning out the team behind it.

How Student Engagement Has Evolved

One of the biggest shifts happening on campuses is the change in how students want to engage.

According to the most recent Healthy Minds study, one in three college students report anxiety or related conditions. Plus, more than 64% of college students

report feeling lonely – making them four times more likely to experience severe psychological distress. As a result, many students aren't skipping events out of indifference. They're skipping because high-energy, high-pressure environments feel inaccessible. Events that require students to walk into a room full of strangers and be “on” can be genuinely difficult for a growing portion of the student population. For these students, the hesitation is not about interest. It is about comfort.

Still, the desire for connection hasn't gone away. It's simply shifted toward experiences that feel easier to step into. Students are looking for environments where they can show up alone or with friends, participate passively or actively, engage without pressure or expectation.

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...the desire for connection hasn't gone away. It's simply shifted toward experiences that feel easier to step into.

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These low-barrier experiences are expanding who participates, especially among first-year students and those not already connected to campus organizations.

Shared Experiences Still Matter – A Lot

Even in a world shaped by streaming and digital connection, shared, in-person experiences haven't lost their pull.

Gen Z went to the movie theaters an average of 6.1 times in 2025 – more than any other generation. And for the second year in a row, they ranked seeing a movie as their top weekend activity when cost and transportation aren't barriers. Research from one report found that both Gen Z and Gen Alpha strongly prefer watching films with friends over viewing alone.

That insight is important for campus programming. Students are not opting out of shared experiences. They are opting into ones that feel accessible, familiar, and low-pressure.



What High-Retention Campuses Are Doing Differently

Among the top 250 institutions by retention rate, 237 host movie-based programming – averaging around 15 events per year. That's not a coincidence.

When movie events are treated as isolated moments, they can feel disposable. When they're part of a consistent programming rhythm, students start to anticipate them. They become part of the campus routine. Attendance stabilizes and often grows, because students know what to expect and build the event into their schedule.

Consistency builds familiarity. Familiarity builds attendance. And over time, that rhythm builds connection.

High-performing campuses also tend to layer their approach – pairing low-key, regular screenings with occasional signature events that create bigger campus moments. Institutions like Virginia Tech and

the University of Maryland have reported single-event attendance in the 200 to 300-plus range when screenings are elevated into experiences. That balance is key. Neither type of event alone accomplishes what both together can.

Why Low-Barrier Programming Works

The common thread in programs that consistently expand participation is friction reduction. That means removing the barriers that quietly keep people away: cost, time commitment, social pressure, the sense that you need to bring a group to feel okay being there.

As one campus partner from Middle Tennessee State University put it: *"Our movie program is an important component of our campus community. It provides a socially safe environment for students to come out and enjoy campus life whether they are attending with friends or on a solo adventure."*

That kind of environment matters most for the students who aren't showing up anywhere else.

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Students are not opting out of shared experiences. They are opting into ones that feel accessible, familiar, and low-pressure.

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Who Isn't in the Room?

Low-barrier programming creates space for students who might feel overwhelmed by higher-stakes events – first-years still figuring out campus, students navigating anxiety, people who simply don't have a built-in friend group to drag along.

Some campuses are even intentionally curating and promoting 'solo-friendly' events in response to direct student demand. It's a small shift in framing that can open the door for a surprisingly large group of people.

Building Inclusive Experiences in a Changing Landscape

Programming teams are being asked to create spaces where students feel seen and represented, while also navigating changing expectations around how those experiences are labeled.

Flexible programming formats make this easier to navigate. A broad film catalog, for example, naturally allows campuses to highlight diverse voices, cultures and perspectives without requiring formal labels. This form of representation is critical when Hispanic, Asian and Black students report the highest levels of isolation on campuses (in that order). As Kennesaw State University described it, *"It provided a common topic for everybody to engage with each other and share their thoughts and opinions. It promoted a sense of an inclusive, shared experience and mutual engagement."*

A Practical Path Forward

There is no single solution to student engagement. But there is a clear direction. The campuses with the strongest outcomes aren't choosing between high-impact events and accessible programming. They're doing both.

In practice, that might look like a monthly movie series that gives students a reliable touchpoint, a mix of casual screenings and larger themed experiences, or programming designed specifically with non-engaged students in mind.

The goal isn't just higher attendance numbers. It's broader participation. Because the real measure of success isn't how many students show up – it's how many students feel like they belong when they do.

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Nicole Luebbers

Nicole Luebbers is a sales director at Swank Motion Pictures, where she partners with colleges and universities nationwide to support student engagement through campus programming. With more than 20 years of

experience working alongside higher education professionals, she brings deep insight into the evolving challenges and priorities shaping student life, including belonging, retention and engagement.

Swank Motion Pictures is a trusted partner in campus entertainment and engagement. For over 85 years, Swank has helped campuses nationwide use movies and TV shows to build community – offering public performance licensing, the latest Hollywood releases and innovative programming tools that bring students together. Interested in bringing movie events to your campus? Contact Swank at 1-800-876-5577 or visit swank.com/colleges

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Navigating the New Majority: Connecting All Students Through Purposeful Programming

Jeanette Padilioni

THE LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION is always evolving and redefining itself. The changes we see around us are a direct reflection of the current political, economic and societal status. As times change, we can also see a change in the demographic of college age students begin to be redefined as well. In a recent study published by Forbes, it was found that non-traditional students now make up the majority on most college campuses. As more non-traditional students enroll at their prospective institutions, the question now being raised is: how well are these institutions equipped to navigate their needs? It can be argued that the support and inclusion of non-traditional students is not as outwardly expressed as it can be. The notion of unpreparedness could potentially cause non-traditional students not to develop an affinity and a sense of belonging to the institution's community. This article will explore how a programming board's initiatives could be the catalyst for inclusion and begin to close the gap on the challenges these students face.

Who Is a Non-traditional Student?

The definition of a non-traditional student can be interpreted in a few different ways. This article will utilize the National Center for Education Statistics criteria as the working definition of a non-traditional student. The National Center for Education Statistics has identified three key components that will result in a student's status to be classified as non-traditional. Any student who falls into one of three criteria will be considered a non-traditional student.

1. Enrollment Patterns: Students who delayed enrollment in post-secondary education by one year or more after high school, or who attended part-time.

2. Financial & Family Status: Students who have dependents other than a spouse, students who are single parents, students working full time while enrolled, or students who are financially independent of their parents.

3. High School Graduation Status: Students who did not receive standard high school diplomas but earned some type of certification of completion, including GEDs.

“

As more non-traditional students enroll at their prospective institutions, the question now being raised is: how well are these institutions equipped to navigate their needs?

”

Core Characteristics & Challenges of Non-Traditional Students

Non-traditional students (National Center for Education Statistics) are faced with a multitude of challenges that can range from financial strain, work commitments, balancing family and home life, while still trying to cultivate a healthy student status in the institutions they attend. In order to be better prepared to support these students, one may look to the andragogy model or Adult Learning Theory developed by Matthew Knowles for the framework of characteristics of non-traditional students that can lend an insight in identifying where these students need the most support and resources. Under andragogy, there are six key characteristics of non-traditional students to keep in mind.

1. **The Need to Know:** Need to understand the relevance of what they are learning. Students are more likely to engage in learning when they can see how it can impact their personal and professional development.
2. **Self Concept:** Non-traditional students have a sense of independence and prefer to take control of their educational journeys as opposed to being passive.
3. **Prior Experience:** Past lived experiences and various upbringings will influence how a non-traditional student interprets new information and how they will implement this information into their daily routines
4. **Readiness to Learn:** Non-traditional students find motivation to learn when it can be directly linked to their current roles and responsibilities.
5. **Orientation to Learn:** Non-traditional students enjoy real world application of problem solving that provides hands on experience.
6. **Motivation to Learn:** Non-traditional students learn best when they have personal connections to the information they are learning.

The six key characteristics of non-traditional students help to identify students needing assistance in navigating economic and familial commitments, connecting information from the classroom to their real world experiences, while maintaining a sense of independence. As student affairs professionals, we pride ourselves in our ability to identify and create environments that help serve and satisfy the greater needs of our students. By identifying key characteristics of non-traditional students, universities can better predict where and how to support these students and increase a sense of belonging on campus.

Programming Boards Bridging the Gap

Programming boards have the unique ability to teach, practice, and exercise fundamental skills such as advocacy, wellness, networking, and relationship building through the programming they host. Challenging programming boards to begin to serve the needs and interests of non-traditional students could potentially be the catalyst to making their college experiences more cohesive and fulfilling - by utilizing the already identified characteristics and challenges as guides to design programs that help connect the dots between their experiences in college and assisting in helping non-traditional students feel more included and welcomed into programming spaces.

The inclusion of non-traditional students can lead to an increased infusion of co-curricular efforts in programming that is particularly designed to accommodate their varying needs, while still being available for all to enjoy. As these programs will naturally be highly collaborative, campus programming boards can partner with offices and departments such as the career center, basic needs centers, advising, and alumni relations. Collaborations such as these would help increase departments' visibility and help students understand and better utilize the services institutions already have in place to support them.

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By identifying key characteristics of non-traditional students, universities can better predict where and how to support these students and increase a sense of belonging on campus.

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Programming boards can help non-traditional students become more informed and empowered to navigate their institution's services while maintaining their sense of independence through challenge by choice. Increasing opportunities for co-curricular programming would also serve as a way for students and professional staff to engage in more social and academic settings which will help improve student success, while enriching the campus culture.



Challenging programming boards to offer more inclusive programming for non-traditional students can also be an avenue of creativity and birth to new institutional traditional programming.

Over time through intentional programming and assessment, institutions can start to become better equipped to anticipate and be able to serve all students who enter their campuses, improving the overall sense of belonging and contributing to building a healthy and thriving community.

Recommendations

- Learn more about the individualized needs of non-traditional students that are present on campus through assessment.
- Designate a position or liaison position on programming boards for non-traditional student representation.
- Be mindful of program scheduling being accessible to all students.

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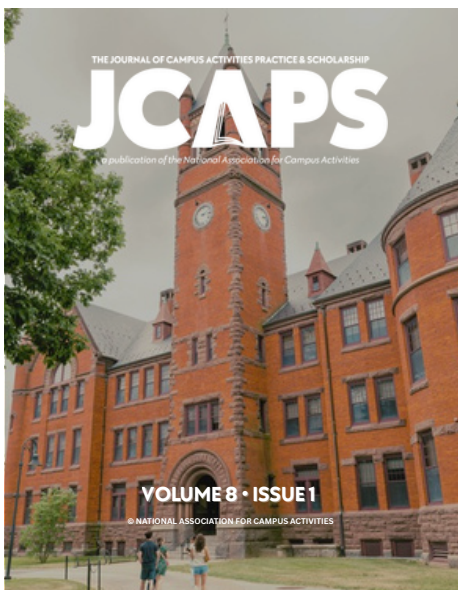
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Jeanette Padilioni



Jeanette Padilioni is a Program Coordinator of Campus Activities from Temple University (PA) where she serves as one of the co-advisors to the Main Campus Program Board (MCPB).

Jeanette specializes in large-scale institutional programming that connects all students and the surrounding neighborhood, fostering a sense of community and collaboration. She is a 2025-26 NACA fellow representing the Mid-Atlantic Region.



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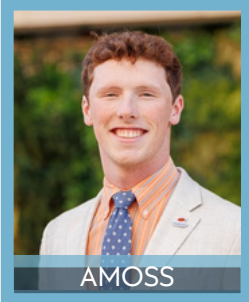
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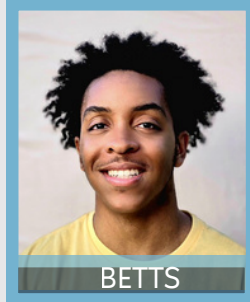
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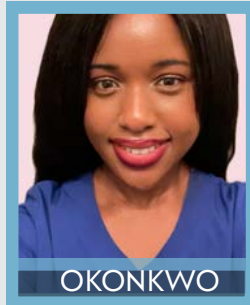
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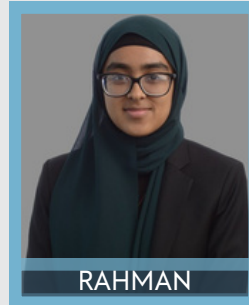
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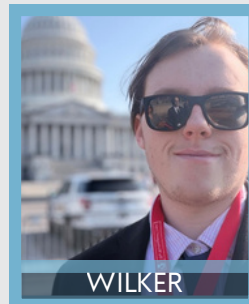
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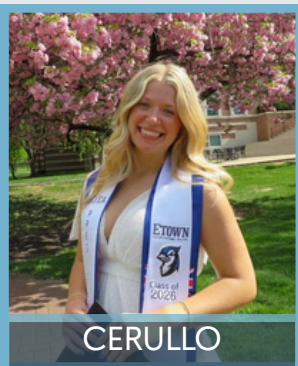


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Shaping Experiences That Build Friendships Without Hazing

Todd Shelton

HAZING HAS NO PLACE IN STUDENT organizations, yet it remains a persistent challenge across campus communities. From student clubs and organizations to club sports and athletics, hazing undermines the very experiences campuses aim to create – belonging, leadership development, and meaningful involvement. Campus Activities professionals and student leaders are uniquely positioned to shape these experiences. By setting clear expectations, modeling values, equipping peers, and fostering positive group cultures, you play a critical role in preventing hazing before it begins.

Federal Legislation: An Important Shift

In December 2024, the federal Stop Campus Hazing Act was signed into law to strengthen transparency and prevention efforts in higher education. The law requires institutions to publicly report hazing incidents, increasing accountability and awareness across campus communities. For student organizations, this represents an important shift – one that reinforces the expectation that belonging should never come at the expense of safety or dignity. For Campus Activities professionals and student leaders, it provides an opportunity to lead proactive educational efforts and ensure peers understand both the risks of hazing and the resources available to them.

This legislation is especially relevant to those who advise, support, and lead student organizations. Hazing can cause serious physical, emotional, and psychological harm, often hidden beneath traditions or misunderstood as “team building.” Campus Activities professionals and student leaders can help reimagine what connection and initiation look like by centering experiences on inclusion, shared purpose, and positive group development. By integrating hazing prevention education into leadership training, organization registration processes, and event planning, you can help build cultures that reflect the values of respect and accountability.

Collaboration is Key

Prevention is most effective when it is coordinated across campus. Campus Activities offices serve as a central hub for student engagement and are well-positioned to collaborate with partners in campus recreation, athletics, fraternity and sorority life,



counseling services, and campus safety. Together, these groups can align policies, share consistent messaging, and implement educational strategies that reach students in every corner of campus life. Whether supporting a student organization, advising a club sport, or partnering with athletics, a unified approach reinforces that hazing prevention is a shared responsibility.

Ultimately, creating a hazing-free campus culture starts with the environments we intentionally build. When Campus Activities professionals and student leaders work together to prioritize well-being, lead with integrity, and create positive experiences, they help ensure that involvement is what it should be – safe, meaningful, and transformative.

“

Campus activities professionals and student leaders can help reimagine what connection and initiation look like by centering experiences on inclusion, shared purpose, and positive group development.

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Todd Shelton

Todd Shelton serves as the executive director of the Hazing Prevention Network. With two decades in nonprofit management, Todd has a breadth of experience as an award-winning executive and volunteer. He is a leader within the Anti-Hazing

Coalition which advocates for state and federal legislation to increase education, transparency and individual accountability around hazing.

What Theory Doesn't Teach You: Advising & Supervising Running Start Students

Samantha Penjaraenwatana
Sims, M.Ed.



WORKING WITH STUDENTS in higher education can be an impactful and rewarding experience. My journey into this field may be similar to yours. We may have shared experiences serving as an orientation leader, coordinating events on a programming board, or using our voices in student government. But one thing is for sure, we enjoyed our student leadership experience so much that we chose to continue this work in a full-time professional capacity.

I have a decade of experience supervising students across public and private four-year universities, as well as a public community college. While the responsibilities of supervising and advising students may appear similar, the backgrounds and skills of these students can vary significantly across institutions. As a student affairs professional with a master's degree in Student Development Administration, my graduate degree emphasized student development theory and practice. Theory plays a key role in understanding how students grow through their academic and social experiences in college. However, our graduate degree does not necessarily teach us how to supervise and advise college students.

As a student affairs professional working in Student Life at a public community college, a significant portion of our student population consists of Running Start students. The Running Start program is a partnership between colleges and the local high school. This program allows high school juniors and seniors to attend college for free and earn credits that count for both high school and college. As full-time Running Start students, these students can earn an Associate's degree at the same time as they earn their high school diploma (Cascadia College, 2026). Running Start students comprise the majority of our student leaders and are the primary participants in our campus events. This article shares my personal

insights, strategies, and lessons learned while supervising and advising these non-traditional students.

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While the responsibilities of supervising and advising students may appear similar, the backgrounds and skills of these students can vary significantly across institutions.

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Time Commitment

College students have competing priorities such as family commitments, clubs, volunteering, and other extra curricular activities. For Running Start students in particular, these responsibilities are even more complex, as they must also attend high school classes, participate in sports, and maintain their social connections.

While supervising these students, I noticed time plays a significant role in their level of commitment to the job. Many students prioritize academic work and family responsibilities over the opportunity to gain work experience. Even when they commit to a position, their availability depends on these “other” commitments. For my students, their office hours and shifts depend on the schedule of their parents. Some of my students must adjust their schedule depending on when their parents are available to pick them up or drop them off to campus.

As a supervisor, I learned that figuring out a work schedule is just one example of a time management skill they are learning. By giving my students the opportunity to “test” their new schedule during the

first two weeks of the quarter while attending classes, they can determine whether they need more time for studying or working. This approach allows students to practice their schedule and discover what works best for their individual needs.

Manage Expectations

Start the conversation on expectations early with students. For many Running Start students, this is their first ever job. These students are unfamiliar with workplace etiquette, job responsibilities, time management, etc. As a result, they are looking at us for mentorship, growth, professional development, and to also have a good time.

To set students up for success, it is important to start with the foundation. During the first few days of their job, we review the job description, key tasks and responsibilities, and any guidelines/bylaws, while also leaving time to answer any questions. I also ask students to sign a contract outlining their responsibilities. If a student struggles to complete their tasks later in the year, I refer back to their contract of responsibilities and create a performance improvement plan to help them get back on track.

Setting expectations is important, but it is also important for students to spend time discussing expectations for their teammates, for me as their advisor, and for themselves. During the conversation of expectations, I tell my students that this is the time for them to make mistakes and learn from these mistakes. It is equally important to be transparent when you make mistakes as an advisor as well. We are not perfect, and we should not expect perfection from our students.

Another strategy for managing expectations is scheduling weekly one-on-ones with students. I schedule weekly one-hour check-ins with each student to talk about their classes, overall wellbeing, current projects, and ideas for future initiatives. These

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I tell my students that this is the time for them to make mistakes and learn from these mistakes. It is equally important to be transparent when you make mistakes as an advisor as well. We are not perfect, and we should not expect perfection from our students.

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meetings provide consistent support and help keep communication open.

My biggest takeaway in managing expectations is that clarity is kindness. By being clear about expectations, it helps students understand their roles, reduces confusion, and minimizes unnecessary stress.

Takeaways

While this article focuses on personal insights into supervising and advising non-traditional students, many of these takeaways can be applied to working with any student population.

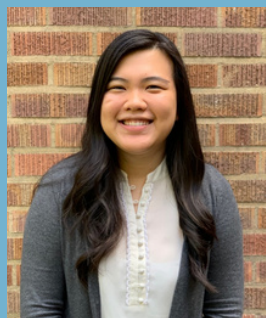
1. Recognize a student's competing priorities and understand how their time constraints can affect their commitment to the job.
2. Students are learning time management skills on the job by balancing between academics, work, and personal life.
3. Provide a clear job description and regularly review responsibilities.
4. Encourage open conversations about expectations for their teammates and for us as their advisor.
5. Inform students that mistakes are part of the learning process.
6. Remember that clarity is kindness.

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Samantha Penjaraenwatana Sims



Samantha is the Student Life Advisor at Cascadia College in Bothell, WA. At Cascadia, she advises the student marketing team, student clubs, and the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society. With experience supervising students across public and private

four-year universities as well as a public community college, she brings a thoughtful and student-centered approach to her work. Samantha is dedicated to fostering a welcoming community environment and supporting students in developing leadership skills, building meaningful connections, and cultivating a strong sense of belonging.



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More Than a Title: The Real Power of Student Leadership

T'Chynna Carpenter

ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES, leadership titles carry weight. President. Chair. Coordinator. Director. These labels often come with visibility, recognition, and influence. But the truth is, the real power of student leadership goes far beyond what's printed on a nameplate or listed in an email signature.

Student leadership is not about the title... it's about impact.

Too often, leadership is misunderstood as authority: the ability to make decisions, run meetings, or delegate tasks. While those responsibilities matter, they are only the surface. The most effective student leaders understand that leadership is rooted in service, consistency, and the ability to create meaningful experiences for others.

Leadership is Service First

At its core, student leadership is about showing up for people. Whether it's planning a campus-wide event, supporting a struggling member of your organization, or advocating for student needs, leadership requires a service mindset. It's not about being in charge – it's about taking responsibility.

The leaders who make the greatest impact are the ones who ask:

- Who is being left out?
- How can we make this better for everyone?
- What does our campus truly need right now?

When leadership shifts from self-focused to community-focused, organizations become stronger, more inclusive, and more effective.

Influence Without a Title

Some of the most powerful leaders on campus don't hold executive positions at all. They are the ones who bring energy to meetings, step up when help is needed, and inspire others through their actions. This highlights an important truth: leadership is not assigned, it's demonstrated.

Students who understand this don't wait for permission to lead. They take initiative, they collaborate, and they contribute. Titles may open doors, but character and work ethic are what sustain influence.

The Responsibility Behind the Role

Holding a leadership title does come with responsibility, but not just operational responsibility. There is also a cultural responsibility. Student leaders help shape the environment of their organizations and, in many cases, the campus as a whole.

A leader sets the tone:

- How do members feel when they walk into a meeting?
- Are diverse voices welcomed and heard?

- Is the organization building community or just hosting events?

The answers to these questions reflect leadership more than any title ever could.

Growth Through Leadership

Student leadership is also a powerful space for personal development. It challenges individuals to manage time effectively, navigate conflict, communicate clearly, and adapt quickly. But growth only happens when leaders are willing to be reflective.

Strong leaders don't just ask, "Did the event go well?" They ask:

- What could we improve next time?
- Did everyone feel included?
- Did this align with our purpose?

This level of reflection transforms leadership from a role into a learning experience.



Legacy Over Recognition

Titles are temporary. Every student leader will eventually pass the torch. What lasts is the impact they leave behind — the culture they built, the people they empowered, and the standard they set.

The most meaningful question isn't, "What title did you hold?" It's, "What difference did you make?"

Student leaders who focus on legacy prioritize mentorship, sustainability, and long-term growth. They ensure that the organization doesn't just function while they are present, but thrives after they are gone.

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Every student leader will eventually pass the torch. What lasts is the impact they leave behind – the culture they built, the people they empowered, and the standard they set.

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Redefining Leadership on Campus

It's time to shift how we view leadership in campus programming and student organizations. Titles should not define worth or capability. Instead, leadership should be recognized through action, dedication, and impact.

When students understand that leadership is more than a title, they begin to lead with purpose. They create stronger organizations, more engaging programs, and more connected campus communities.

Because at the end of the day, leadership isn't about the position you hold. It's about the people you serve and the change you create.

T'Chynna Carpenter



T'Chynna Carpenter serves as the Co-Curricular Coordinator and Trojan Activities Board Advisor at Virginia State University, where she is passionate about fostering student engagement, leadership development, and campus belonging. As a proud alumna with a background in Health and Physical Education, she is dedicated to creating impactful experiences that support students both inside and outside of the classroom. Through mentorship, innovative programming, and leadership initiatives, T'Chynna strives to empower students to grow personally, professionally, and academically while preparing them for success beyond college.

When Engagement Turns into Exhaustion

Ti-Ana Pyatt

ACROSS MANY INSTITUTIONS, student engagement has become interchangeable with constant programming. Traditions, pop-up events, late-night programming, collaborations, awareness weeks, and social programming are all competing for students' attention. While the purpose of this programming is rooted in community, belonging, and engagement, the pressure to constantly create events can unintentionally create exhaustion for students and student leaders.

As institutions continue to prioritize student engagement and belonging, campus programming boards and student affairs professionals are often expected to increase involvement opportunities and boost attendance. Usually, this creates fuller calendars. The assumption that more programming equals more engagement and a stronger sense of belonging deserves further attention. Student involvement has been widely acknowledged as an important piece of student development. Alexander Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement demonstrates that students learn and develop through the quality of physical and psychological energy they invest in their collegiate experience. While involvement remains crucial to creating a sense of belonging, institutions may unintentionally confuse meaningful engagement with overinvolvement.

The Pressure to Program Constantly

The expectation to continuously program has become normalized within campus activities and student engagement offices. Many campus programming boards feel the pressure to be highly visible throughout the academic year to demonstrate relevance, justify funding, and maintain student interest. This typically results in packed programming calendars where multiple organizations are competing for the same limited student attention. Institutions continuously emphasize the importance of campus involvement on belonging and retention, while encouraging increased engagement opportunities and attendance numbers. In this type of environment, visibility begins to matter more than being intentional. This creates pressure to consistently market events, highlight strong attendance by sharing photos on social media, and maintain an active presence online.



Following the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions reintroduced and expanded programming to rebuild campus culture. While these efforts are well-intentioned, they also contribute to a culture where constant activity becomes linked to successful engagement.

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The assumption that more programming equals more engagement and a stronger sense of belonging deserves further attention.

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The Hidden Costs of Overprogramming

While campus involvement remains crucial to student development, research has shown that a high level of involvement does not protect students from exhaustion (Salmela-Aro & Read, 2017). Salmela-Aro and Read (2017) identified a group of “engaged-exhausted” students who demonstrated both strong engagement and high levels of emotional exhaustion. This is relevant to student leaders in campus programming environments who are often balancing their academics, jobs, student organization duties, and personal responsibilities. Campus programming boards often operate in fast-paced environments that require them to constantly plan, market, and execute numerous events throughout the academic year. While these experiences can positively impact leadership development and a sense of belonging, they can also contribute to fatigue when students are unable to slow down or step away from their responsibilities.

Overprogramming can limit creativity within student organizations. When programming boards are expected to consistently execute the “perfect” event, student leaders may focus more on being active than creating intentional experiences that align with students’ needs. Programming then becomes transactional and centered on filling calendars and boosting attendance numbers rather than creating meaningful connections across campus. The effects of overprogramming also extends to the broader student population. Student organizations continuously compete for attendance. When multiple events are taking place at once, students may be overwhelmed with the amount of event options. Over time, this programming overload can contribute to a decline in attendance, disengagement, and makes it difficult to determine which events are most meaningful for students’ needs. Olson et al. (2025) found that over 73% of university students reported moderate to high stress levels and nearly one-third experienced frequent symptoms of burnout. Within Campus Activities, these findings raise questions about intentionality, sustainability, and how institutions define successful student engagement.



Prioritizing intentionality, student wellbeing, and collaboration can create student engagement opportunities that are more impactful than overwhelming. When the focus shifts from “how often” to “how meaningfully” students are engaged, campus programming can more effectively support belonging and retention. The goal of Campus Activities should not be to fill calendars, but to create environments where students are able to thrive.



Conclusion

Campus programming will continue to play an important role in building community, developing leadership skills, and creating meaningful experiences for students. However, the culture of constant programming is creating harmful environments for students, leading to burnout and exhaustion. There is an opportunity for institutions to shift the culture of over-programming to more sustainable and intentional engagement.

Creating a meaningful experience does not require more events. Instead, it will require institutions and campus activities professionals to rethink how success is defined within campus programming.

“

Overprogramming can limit creativity within student organizations. When programming boards are expected to consistently execute the “perfect” event, student leaders may focus more on being active than creating intentional experiences that align with students’ needs. Programming then becomes transactional and centered on filling calendars and boosting attendance numbers rather than creating meaningful connections across campus.

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Recommendations

- Conduct semester programming audits to identify competing campus initiatives and overlapping events.
- Evaluate engagement beyond attendance numbers, including student feedback and students' perceived sense of belonging.
- Staff and student leaders should critically evaluate and discontinue programs that no longer align with organizational mission, purpose, or student needs.
- Create intentional space within programming calendars that allows time for students to rest and recover.
- Encourage collaboration between campus organizations to reduce event duplication and create more meaningful experiences.
- Establish realistic expectations for student organizations regarding event frequency, marketing, and campus visibility while reinforcing the importance of quality over quantity.

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Ti-Ana Pyatt

Ti-Ana Pyatt is the Assistant Director for Student Engagement at Clemson University. In her role, she advises TigerLive Entertainment, Clemson's student programming board, as well as Central Spirit, the university's spirit and traditions organization focused on athletic engagement. She supports these groups in planning and executing major campus events such as the Homecoming Float Build, Tigerama Concert, First Friday Parade, and Moonlight Breakfast. Additionally, she leads a comprehensive training initiative for faculty and staff advisors of student organizations, providing education on expectations, university policies, and best practices in student organization advising.

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Project Management in Higher Education: It's What We Do (And Why We Should Start Doing it Intentionally)

Adonica Reed

IN STUDENT AFFAIRS, we plan events, manage budgets, coordinate stakeholders, and assess outcomes — yet few of us call it what it is: project management.

Every program, leadership retreat, or university event we deliver has a scope, timeline, budget, and measurable objectives. Still, most divisions rely more on intuition, teamwork, and institutional memory than on structured methodologies. The truth is, we've always been managing projects — just not intentionally or consistently through a shared professional framework..

The Hidden Project Managers of Higher Education

Step inside any student affairs office, and you'll find professionals balancing overlapping priorities: onboarding student leaders, organizing large-scale events, developing assessment plans, coordinating volunteers, and presenting reports to senior administration. These aren't "extra duties." They are complex, multi-phase projects that impact student engagement, retention, and success.

The challenge is that higher education rarely trains or labels these professionals as project managers. Without shared frameworks, our outcomes can depend more on personality than process. And while we often "get it done," we sometimes do so at the cost of sustainability, clarity, or staff well-being.

Why Adopting PMI Principles Matters

The Project Management Institute (PMI) provides a global foundation for managing complex work — one that higher education can benefit from greatly.

According to the Project Management Institute's Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide), effective project management is built on five process groups: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring, and closing.

When we map student affairs work to this framework, we see immediate alignment — our programs already move through these same phases, often without formal recognition.

PMI's framework emphasizes:

- Defined scope: Clear expectations, deliverables, and success criteria.
- Stakeholder engagement: Transparent communication from planning to close-out.
- Risk management: Anticipating what could derail progress before it happens.
- Quality assurance: Ensuring the final product aligns with intended outcomes.

For student affairs professionals, adopting these principles can transform the way we plan programs, lead teams, and measure success. Project management doesn't replace our student-centered mission — it reinforces it by creating systems that make our work more intentional, equitable, and sustainable.

From Event Planning to Strategic Execution

Think about your institution's largest campus traditions — welcome week, orientation, homecoming, family day, or major student leadership events. Behind each is a web of logistics, budgets, partnerships, and evaluation processes. These are projects by every professional standard.

Using project management tools can simplify and strengthen this work:

- A project charter clarifies purpose, goals, and stakeholders before planning begins.
- A RACI chart (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) defines roles to prevent burnout and confusion.
- A close-out report turns experience into transferable documentation for future staff and student leaders.

When adopting even a few PMI tools over the past year, our teams reported improved communication, reduced duplication, and stronger collaboration across departments.

Bridging Two Professional Worlds

Student affairs and project management are not opposites — they're complementary.

Student affairs professionals bring empathy, inclusion, and developmental theory; project management contributes structure, risk awareness, and accountability. Together, they create environments that are both people-centered and process-driven — exactly what higher education needs to thrive in a time of limited resources and growing expectations.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) emphasizes data-informed decision-making and cross-functional collaboration as key components of student success initiatives. Integrating project management frameworks supports those same outcomes by creating scalable, repeatable processes that drive efficiency and accountability.

Likewise, the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) encourages institutions to develop holistic co-curricular experiences that connect learning and engagement. Project management processes provide the scaffolding to design, execute, and evaluate those experiences effectively.

Call to Action: Lead Intentionally

Student affairs professionals are already project managers — it's time to own it.

Although many higher-education institutions advertise "Project Management" roles within colleges of business for degrees or certifications, as well as in IT or facilities, the functional responsibilities mirror those found in student affairs — defining scope, coordinating stakeholders, managing budgets, and closing out with lessons learned. Recognizing these similarities makes the case for consciously embedding project-management frameworks within student affairs practice.

By embedding project management training into staff development and integrating PMI tools into daily practice, we strengthen not just our programs, but our profession.

Doing this work intentionally ensures that our events, initiatives, and student experiences don't just succeed — they scale, sustain, and inspire.

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Adonica Reed

Adonica serves as Associate Director for Campus Activities at Southeastern Louisiana University, where she leads programming for Campus Activities and special projects for the Division of Student Affairs. With more than

eight years of experience in higher education and student affairs — including oversight of fraternity and sorority life, student government, student organizations, leadership development, and international and multicultural student engagement — she is passionate about integrating project management principles to enhance collaboration and institutional impact.

PERSPECTIVE FROM THE FIELD

The Case for NACA

Ken Abrahams

MANY ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS do an excellent job advocating for their members, and NACA is no exception. The recent compilation and release of *The Case for Campus Activities* is a strong testament to that commitment. It clearly articulates the value that a vibrant campus community brings to colleges and universities. For those of us who have spent time in student affairs, this is not theoretical – we’ve seen it firsthand.

Over the years, student engagement offices have evolved alongside shifting campus populations and changing student needs. Offices that once focused primarily on programming support and leadership development now often find themselves operating food pantries or helping students secure housing. Senior administrators frequently assign these teams additional responsibilities that lack a natural home elsewhere, further stretching already overextended – and often under-supported – staff.

As campuses have changed, so has NACA. The association has expanded its libraries and online offerings, encouraged members to submit ideas for educational sessions that reflect current trends, and engaged in meaningful discussions about challenges like the demographic cliff. NACA has not stood still.

That said, one area where the association could be stronger is in making a more explicit and compelling case for its own value. Perhaps this perspective comes from my background in the for-profit world, where clearly communicating value is not optional – it’s essential. In a competitive environment, organizations must constantly articulate what they do, how they do it, and why it matters. In corporate terms, it’s the “value proposition.” NACA, in my view, should be more deliberate in extolling the benefits of membership and active participation.

So here is my case for NACA.

In conversations with some of the Association’s founders over the years, it’s clear that NACA was originally created to solve two very specific challenges. First, bringing talent – especially well-

known musical acts – to campus was prohibitively expensive. Second, it was nearly impossible to preview performers before booking them. If NACA were founded today, it’s unlikely those concerns would rank anywhere near the top. Instead, institutions are grappling with budget constraints, the demographic cliff, staff and student burnout, and the complexities of serving an increasingly diverse student population. To its credit, NACA in 2026 is engaging with many of these issues.



What sets NACA apart, however, is its unique stakeholder structure. In the alphabet soup of higher education associations, very few place students at the center the way NACA does. Unlike most professional organizations, NACA hosts conferences where a significant portion – often the majority – of attendees are students. In many ways, students are not just participants; they are a core constituency.

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In the alphabet soup of higher education associations, very few place students at the center the way NACA does.

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And that matters, because today’s students need more support than ever. Many arrive on campus underprepared for the realities of college life. Some have had obstacles removed from them rather than



learning to navigate challenges independently. The influence of social media and constant connectivity has contributed to rising concerns around mental health, self-image, and interpersonal conflict. At the same time, many students lack critical soft skills – such as engaging in face-to-face conversations, communicating effectively with authority figures, and clearly articulating their needs.

NACA plays a vital role in addressing these gaps. By placing students in environments that challenge them – often outside their comfort zones – the Association fosters growth and skill development. Importantly, this growth occurs in a supportive setting, surrounded by peers who are navigating similar experiences. At a time when campus resources are stretched thin, NACA provides accessible, cost – effective opportunities for both students and staff to learn from experienced practitioners and industry experts in a concentrated, high-impact format.

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Yet, in the post-COVID landscape, conference attendance has declined – a trend that is difficult to reconcile with the current needs of students. If anything, the demand for in-person engagement has increased. Students benefit immensely from connecting with peers from other institutions and regions, sharing ideas, learning what works (and what doesn’t), and building networks of support.

This is precisely the moment when NACA’s value should be most evident.

Joining NACA, however, is only part of the equation. Engagement is what unlocks its true benefits. A membership unused is no different from a gym membership that goes untouched – it holds potential but delivers no results. Simply being affiliated with NACA is not enough; institutions and individuals must actively participate, attend events, and leverage the resources available.

Now is the time not just to join NACA, but to fully engage with it – to take advantage of the programs, the people, and the opportunities that form the backbone of this remarkable association.



Ken Abrahams

Ken Abrahams went to his first NACA Conference in 1979 as a Sophomore at Connecticut College and has been involved with the Association ever since. He has attended more than 300 conferences, written for

Campus Activities Programming Magazine, and served in a variety of volunteer positions, including being on the Board of Directors. NACA is and has been his professional home for 40 years.



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