

RCCA Conference 2022

Keynote Speaker Biographies



James Kvaal, *Senior Fellow, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement*

James Kvaal was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the under secretary on September 14, 2021. Kvaal formerly was president of The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS), a research and advocacy nonprofit dedicated to affordability and equity in higher education. TICAS is nationally recognized for its research and policy recommendations on student debt.

Kvaal served in the Obama Administration as the deputy domestic policy advisor at the White House and deputy undersecretary at the U.S. Department of Education. He led efforts to cut student loan monthly payments, hold career colleges accountable for excessive debts, and make community colleges tuition-free. He helped organize the White House Summit on College Opportunity, which featured more than 100 college presidents and other leaders committing to actions to help more students graduate from college. He also has served in senior roles in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

Kvaal taught at the University of Michigan's Ford School of Public Policy, and graduated with honors from Stanford University and Harvard Law School.



Chris Baldwin PhD, *Senior Fellow, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement*

As a long time advocate for student success, Chris Baldwin has spent 20 years promoting practices and policies that streamline and accelerate student pathways to a postsecondary credential while increasing equitable outcomes. Baldwin joined the National Center for Inquiry & Improvement (NCII) in 2022 to continue this important work. His focus is supporting institutional efforts to implement guided pathways – especially at rural community colleges – and establishing leadership development programs to create a pipeline of college leaders to equitably expand student success.

Prior to NCII, Baldwin led his own consulting business through which he partnered with college and state leaders to advance the college completion agenda. He has also served as associate vice president at Jobs for the Future (JFF), directing efforts to expand the number of Student Success Centers nationally. This work followed four years as the founding executive director of the Michigan Center for Student Success, a previous stint at JFF leading the state policy component of the Achieving the Dream initiative, and a senior leadership role as vice president at Owens Community College.



Dr. Twyla Baker, *President, Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College*

Dr. Twyla Baker is an enrolled citizen of the Three Affiliated Tribes of North Dakota. Born and raised on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, Dr. Baker left home for several years and built a life away from the reservation, though she maintained strong ties to her home community. Viewing life through an Indigenous lens, her world view informs nearly everything she does professionally and personally. Dr. Baker is raising her children to know, see, and carry on their Tribal life ways as they were taught to her by her parents and community. Dr. Baker has spent a lifetime establishing her credibility among her Tribal people and with external constituencies. She has published creative and scholarly works in various media, and has made appearances on CNN, MSNBC, and BBC offering commentary and insight on numerous topics impacting Indian Country in the U.S.

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Lisa Avery, *President, Linn-Benton Community College*

Since 2020, Lisa Avery has served as president at Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC) in Albany, Oregon. LBCC's service area includes small towns, rural and remote locations. Prior to LBCC, Avery was campus president in the Portland Community College District and vice provost in the Community Colleges of Spokane District.

Leah Barrett, *President, Northeast Community College*

Leah A. Barrett is the president of Northeast Community College in Norfolk, NE. She has worked in higher education since 1992 and holds a Doctor of Education in executive leadership from St. John Fisher College and earned bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Wyoming. Barrett serves on the RCCA board of directors.

Kathy Booth, *Project Director, Educational Data & Policy, WestEd*

Kathy Booth is project director of Educational Data & Policy at WestEd, where she leads projects that translate data into action. Booth's work includes designing California's Cradle to Career System, tools to support the implementation of guided pathways reforms, research on the economic returns to college, and user-friendly dashboards on community college and adult education outcomes.

Vince Bowhay, *President, Independence Community College & Linn-Benton Community College*

Dr. Vincent Bowhay currently serves as the sixteenth president of Independence Community College in Independence, Kansas. Bowhay was a 2021-2022 Aspen New Presidents Fellow. His most recent book, *The Proper Role of Higher Education in a Democratic Society*, re-examines the role higher education plays in preparing students to lead communities.

Jonathan W. Carrier, *Assistant Professor, University of Wyoming*

Jonathan W. Carrier, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of higher education administration at the University of Wyoming. During his career in higher education, Carrier has served in the roles of counselor, advisor, faculty, department chair, school chair, assistant director, academic dean, CARE Team member, and Title IX investigator. In addition to his teaching and advising roles as an assistant professor, Carrier pursues scholarly work in the areas of adult education, leadership, and issues pertaining to community colleges.

Melinda Carroll, *Vice Chancellor, Enrollment Management, North Central Texas College*

Melinda Carroll is the vice chancellor of Enrollment Management at North Central Texas College (NCTC). Carroll has spent her professional career serving and supporting the communities served by NCTC. She leads the regional strategy focused on talent development which powerfully leverages the Red River Promise campaigns, partnerships, and tools with a focus on the rural counties that feed into NCTC.

Marta Yera Cronin, *President, Columbia Gorge Community College*

Dr. Marta Yera Cronin currently serves as the president of Columbia Gorge Community College (CGCC). She is the college's first female president and Oregon's first Latina community college president. Prior to coming to Columbia Gorge Community College in 2018, Dr. Cronin spent her first 17 years in higher education at Indian River State College (IRSC) in Florida, a three-time Aspen top ten nominee and winner in 2019. She began her career there in 2001 as a faculty member in teacher education, working her way up to department chair, first dean of the IRSC School of Education and, finally, vice president of Academic Affairs. Prior to that, she was a K-12 classroom teacher in Florida, having taught French and reading for a total of 11 years.

Dr. Cronin has served on several Florida Department of Education committees and advisory groups and as the Florida delegate for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in Washington, D.C. Currently, she serves on the American Association of Community Colleges' Commission on Small & Rural Colleges, The Dalles Community Outreach Team, and the Hood River County Economic Development Group. Dr. Cronin is a board member on the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District board of directors and the Rural Community College Alliance and serves as the vice chair of the East Cascades Works Workforce board. She has also been involved in several state and national COVID recovery efforts, representing the college on the American Association of Community College/National Governor's Association Reskilling and Recovery Network and through Oregon Governor Brown's North Central Region Equity in Recovery Council.

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J. Kyle Dalpe, *President, Western Nevada College*

J. Kyle Dalpe, Ph.D., was appointed as interim president of Western Nevada College in March 2022. WNC is a rural college with campuses in Carson City, Fallon and Minden. Previously, he served as provost at the college. Dalpe has worked in higher education for more than 25 years.

David H. Devier, *President, Glen Oaks Community College*

David H. Devier has completed 46 years in higher education serving as a professor for 21 years and in administrator roles for 25 years including deanships, vice president/provost, and president. He holds a bachelor's degree from Ohio Northern University, a master's degree from Kent State University and a Ph.D. from Ohio State University.

Ryan Dressler, *Principal - Advantage Capital*

Ryan Dressler is a strategic leader focused on raising awareness about New Markets Tax Credits, expanding their usage in different sectors, and overall New Markets Tax Credit programmatic growth.

Jacque Eidson, *Director, National Higher Education Benchmarking Institute*

Dr. Jacque Eidson serves as director of the National Higher Education Benchmarking Institute (NHEBI) and their flagship project, the National Community College Benchmark Project (NCCBP). Jacque is also a lecturer for the University of Kansas, a peer reviewer for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), and serves on the Governance Committee for the American Association of University Women (AAUW).

Maggie P. Fay, *Senior Research Associate, Teachers College, Columbia University*

Maggie P. Fay is a senior research associate at the Community College Research Center. In her role, Fay contributes to research reforms to developmental education, the high school to college transition and guided pathways reforms.

Matt Gotschall PhD, *College President, Central Community College*

Dr. Matt Gotschall has worked in rural community colleges for over 30 years in a variety of roles, from full-time faculty to member to online education, division and campus and college leadership. Dr. Gotschall serves as treasurer for the Postsecondary International Network, an organization of leaders from college and polytechnics representing multiple counties and focusing on workforce education.

Maureen Isimbi, *Associate Education Designer, Education Design Lab*

Maureen Isimbi is passionate about access to education, both formal and informal education, especially in underserved communities. She believes great education is practical, affordable, enjoyable, flexible, and most importantly, human. Isimbi strives to innovate continually and learn how to improve education systems around the world. As an assistant education designer, Isimbi primarily supports education designers who are leading the BRIDGES Rural initiative and the Lab's Participate operations. She also enjoys helping across different Lab teams to understand and contribute to the realization of the Lab's vision.

Steve Jurch, *Director, Center for Policy and Practice, Association of Community College Trustees*

Steve Jurch is the director of the Center for Policy and Practice at the Association of Community College Trustees. He is a demonstrated leader, accomplished manager, and educator with over 20 years of experience in workforce development. Jurch holds a bachelor's in nutrition and fitness from Florida State University and a master's in health, physical education, and recreation from Murray State University.

Umika Kumar, *Research Assistant, Teachers College, Columbia University*

Umika Kumar is a research assistant at the Community College Research Center, where she focuses on equitable program onboarding and how colleges are implementing guided pathways reforms—including the Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan framework—across the country.

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Rachel Rush-Marlowe, *Senior Research Associate, Teachers College, Columbia University*

Rachel Rush-Marlowe is a passionate education policy professional with expertise in higher education topics such as federal student aid, student loan default, rural community college issues, college leadership, and postsecondary data collections. She has worked at a variety of education organizations, including the Association of Community College Trustees, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, New America, and she served as a contractor for the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. In 2020, Rush-Marlowe founded ResearchEd, and began providing research services to postsecondary institutions and affiliated organizations across the country. ResearchEd is currently engaged in projects with the Aspen Institute, Association for Public and Land Grant Universities, the Community College League of California among others.

Jonathan McCullough, *Executive Vice President for Advancement, Northeast Texas Community College*

Dr. Jonathan McCullough is the Executive Vice President at Northeast Texas Community College and Foundation Director. In his 23 years with the NTCC Foundation, he has raised over \$100 million dollars and been instrumental in securing scholarships for every graduating senior in the NTCC service district along with developing the Work4College Program.

Matt McGraw, *Associate Vice President, Mountain Gateway Community College*

Dr. Matt McGraw is a life-long resident of Appalachia and is the Associate Vice President at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College in Clifton Forge, Virginia. He holds degrees from Concord University, Mountain State University, and Old Dominion University. He has worked in higher education for 20 years, holding positions in Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Institutional Effectiveness, and Research. He is a Fulbright Scholar (Russia), a Hammond Grant Recipient (Denmark), an Appalachian Leadership Institute Fellow, an A.I.R. Duckwall Scholar, and a Council of Graduate Schools Fellow. Publication topics include leadership competencies of college leaders, crisis management in community colleges, and non-academic barriers facing college students.

George McNulty, *President, Gogebic Community College*

Dr. George McNulty has been President since July 2019 and was previously the Vice-President of Student Affairs at Colby Community College in Colby, Kansas. He has a Master of Arts in Counseling and Educational Psychology and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership, both from the University of Nevada, Reno, where he began his career in higher education 22 years ago. Dr. McNulty is a member of the Rural Community College Alliance board.

Heather Nunamaker, *Regional Employment & Training Coordinator, College of Eastern Idaho*

As a workforce development professional, Heather Nunamaker is dedicated to seeing people connect their individual potential to their big picture goals; and connecting employers and industry partners to pipeline solutions. Nunamaker believes in influencing behaviors to achieve desired results. Through her role as an instructor and 15 years in leadership/management and customer service, she has taught, coached and guided people in varying circumstances and environments to build and identify skills, overcome barriers, and find success.

Emily Pettit, *VP Strategic Partnerships, The Virtual Care Group*

Emily Pettit has served on the Student Services frontline for 25 years at two and four year, public and private institutions. Most recently she has been the chief student affairs officer and Title IX coordinator at a university in Georgia. With degrees in counseling and instructional design, Pettit has enjoyed developing and implementing initiatives to support student success with a keen eye toward wellness and retention. As the new vice president of strategic partnerships at the Virtual Care Group, she is shifting her care and concern for students from the micro level (on campus) to the macro level (supporting colleges nationally) to focus on the wellbeing of all college students.

W. Reed Scull, *Associate Professor, University of Wyoming*

W. Reed Scull is an associate professor and coordinator for the Higher Education Administration program at the University of Wyoming. He has worked as a professional staff and administrator in higher education for over 20 years, and has served as a faculty member since 2017. Scull's research interests include community colleges and DEI issues in rural contexts.

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Sean Robins, *Policy Associate, Association of Community College Trustees*

Sean Robins is the Policy Associate at the Association of Community College Trustees leading the Strengthening Rural Community Colleges Initiative. He is a purpose-driven policy leader and education advocate with a career built around evaluating systems and creating policies, systems, and programs that remove obstacles and drive positive change for students and their families. Sean holds a B.A. in political science from Furman University and M.Ed. in education policy and leadership from American University.

Michelle Taylor, *Senior Research and Data Analyst, National Higher Education Benchmarking Institute*

Michelle Taylor serves as senior research and data analyst for the National Higher Education Benchmarking Institute (NHEEBI) and their flagship project, the National Community College Benchmark Project (NCCBP). Taylor has supported community college partners for nearly 10 years. In addition to her expertise regarding the historical context of the NCCBP, Taylor is an expert in data collection, analytics and reporting functions.

Todd Sloane, *Director, Workforce and Career Solutions, Finger Lakes Community College*

Todd Sloane has over 20 years' experience co-designing workforce development training and pathways in New York State. As the director of Workforce and Career Solutions at the Finger Lakes Community College he has led the BRIDGES core team to think about different ways of creating and delivering programs to learners throughout their service areas to maximize measurable impact and provide support services tailored to be responsive and pro-active in meeting learner needs.

Debbie Smarr, *Dean of Strategic Enrollment Management and Analytics, Grayson College*

Dr. Debbie Smarr is the dean of Strategic Enrollment Management and Analytics at Grayson College where she has served in a leadership role for the last 11 years. Her focus is on building the relationships, strategies, and tools to facilitate a regional talent approach under the work of the Texoma Promise. Previously, Dr. Smarr held leadership roles at Southeastern Oklahoma State University where she leveraged her expertise in technology implementation to support strategic university initiatives.

Sarah Smith, *Director of Institutional Research, Laramie County Community College (Wyoming)*

Sarah Smith has worked in the field of Institutional Research (IR) for nine years. She earned a master's degree in library and information science from Drexel University and a bachelor's degree in sociology with a minor in statistics from the University of Wyoming. Smith currently works at Laramie County Community College as the IR director.

Miriam Swords Kalk, *Sr. Education Designer, Education Design Lab*

Miriam Swords Kalk contributes her background in learning science, behavioral science, and design thinking to the Education Design Lab's work. As senior education designer, she focuses on the Single Moms Success Design Challenge and the BRIDGES Rural Design Challenge, collaborating with multiple community colleges from across the country to boost educational outcomes and economic mobility. Kalk's expertise in learner motivation and engagement underpins her approach to designing equitable education models. Centering on the experiences and needs of new majority and historically underrepresented learner populations, she helps partners build solutions that enable learners to thrive through combining work, school, and life.

Lynn Tincher-Ladner, *President and CEO, Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society*

The president and CEO of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Dr. Lynn Tincher-Ladner spends her time connecting many of the nation's hardest-working college students to life-changing scholarships and family-sustaining employment. She tells her children that it's "the best job on the planet." On most days, you'll find Dr. Tincher-Ladner serving as the champion of both community colleges and community college students. She uses data collected from her innovative research to tell their stories and to advocate for the support of remarkable students and quality institutions of higher learning.

Alexandria M. Wright, *Senior Research Associate, Economic, Labor Market & Education Data, WestEd*

Dr. Wright has been engaged in the field of regional economic development and labor economics for 15 years. Her work focuses on emphasizing strategic planning and workforce innovations to build resilient economies in rural America and American Indian Nations. She has served at three college districts as director for economic and workforce development.