2026 IUC Collaborative Initiatives Summit

THANK YOU to our Speakers and Moderators:

Jim Bennett
Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor, Ohio Department of Higher Education

Jim Bennett has served as Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to three state higher education system Chancellors and one University President. Currently, Jim serves as Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor to the Chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE). In this capacity, Jim is responsible for directing and overseeing all administrative and operational functions of the Cabinet-level state agency, guiding the agency's comprehensive policy agenda, and leading the Department's Senior Staff.

Earlier in his career, Jim served as the Vice Chancellor of Finance and Data Management and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at ODHE, where he oversaw all financial activities for the Department. Jim has held prior positions as Section Chief, Senior Higher Education Analyst, and Higher Education Analyst at the Ohio Office of Budget and Management (OBM). Jim holds a Bachelor of Science degree, a Master of Science degree, and a Master's degree in Public Policy and Management, all received from The Ohio State University.

Laura Lanese
President and CEO, Inter-University Council of Ohio

Laura has been President and CEO of the Inter-University Council of Ohio since December 2022 and advocates on behalf of the IUC's Presidents' Council, comprising the presidents of Ohio's 14 public universities. Prior to joining the IUC, Laura was a leader and a member of the Ohio House of Representatives, where she served as Assistant Majority Whip and Chair of the Higher Education Committee. Additionally, Laura worked as an Assistant Attorney General with the US Department of Justice and as an attorney with the US District Court. She also served in both the Ohio Air National Guard and the US Army Reserve. Laura received her LLM from Georgetown University, her JD from The Ohio State University, and her BA from Miami University. She is the author of four books, one on Ohio State football and three on local history. She and her husband Mike live in central Ohio and have three adult children.

Jennifer March-Wackers
Executive Director, IUC Purchasing Group, and Staff Lead, IUC Collaborative Initiatives

Jennifer March-Wackers is the Executive Director of the Inter-University Council of Ohio Purchasing Group (IUC-PG) and Staff Lead for IUC Collaborative Initiatives, where she advances strategic collaborations among Ohio's public universities in HR, IT, Business/Finance, and other operational areas to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and strengthen services. Since 2016, she has led IUC-PG in developing partnerships that deliver measurable value across higher education. Prior to her work at the IUC, she directed shared services programs for local governments in Connecticut as Director of Municipal Services at the Capitol Region Council of Governments. Jennifer holds a master's in public policy from Trinity College (Hartford) and a bachelor's in political science from the University of Mount Union. She is a Prosci certified change management practitioner. Jen frequently speaks on collaboration, procurement, and shared services in higher education and the public sector.

Keynote:

Darren Pulsipher, PhD
Professor of Computer Science at Vanderbilt University and Chief Enterprise Architect

Dr. Darren Pulsipher is a globally recognized technology leader, author, educator, and keynote speaker specializing in artificial intelligence, digital transformation, enterprise architecture, and organizational modernization. He serves as a Professor of Computer Science at Vanderbilt University and as a Chief Enterprise Architect, where he has spent more than three decades helping government agencies, higher education institutions, and private-sector organizations navigate complex technology transformations and achieve measurable business outcomes.

Breakout Session Moderators and Speakers:

Dr. Matthew Akers

Special Assistant to the President for Government Relations, University of Akron

Dr. Matthew P. Akers holds a dual role at The University of Akron, serving as special assistant to the president for government relations in the Office of the President and as associate director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics in the Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences. As special assistant to the president for government relations, Akers represents the University in interactions with local, state, and federal elected officials, community leaders, and University stakeholders. As associate director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, Akers assists with the management of day-to-day activities of the Institute, including programs, projects, events, student scholarships and internships, and other activities. He also contributes to academic components of the Institute, including teaching courses.

Akers earned his B.A. in English from The University of Akron and his Ph.D. from Drew University in Madison, N.J. He resides in Doylestown, Ohio, with his wife, Elisabeth, and their four children.

Joseph Baker

Vice President for Policy and Operations, Inter-University Council of Ohio

Joe is a dedicated public servant and policy expert with over a decade of experience navigating the complexities of Ohio state government. Joe previously served as the Director of the Common Sense Initiative (CSI) in the Office of Governor Mike DeWine, where he led a team focused on streamlining Ohio's regulatory landscape. Under his leadership, CSI successfully worked to eliminate unnecessary regulatory text, modernized outdated regulations and statutes, and successfully advocated for the passage of the "Innovate the Code" legislation. Prior to his appointment as Director at CSI, he served as a Business Advocate, where he evaluated rules and public comments for business impact and recommended rule improvement opportunities to state agencies. Joe has a deep understanding of the legislative process rooted in his years as a staffer in the Ohio Senate. Joe holds a Master of Public Affairs from the University of Missouri and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Cleveland State University.

Justin Bettura

Chief Information Security Officer, Youngstown State University

Justin Bettura serves as Chief Information Security Officer at Youngstown State University, bringing more than twenty years of information technology experience, including five years in healthcare and one in banking before joining the university. Over fourteen years at YSU, he has advanced through progressively responsible roles — from systems administration through infrastructure leadership — before assuming responsibility for the university's information security program. Justin has built and matured the institution's security and risk governance practice, establishing the frameworks through which the university identifies, manages, and makes informed decisions about technology risk, and is known for a pragmatic, partnership-driven approach that treats security as an enabler of the university's mission. He holds the CISSP, CISA, and CRISC certifications.

A lifelong resident of Trumbull County, Justin is the proud father of two sons and served as a youth baseball coach in their league. He earned both his bachelor's degree and his Master of Business Administration from Youngstown State University.

Nick Ciofani

Executive Director, Government and Community Relations

Nick Ciofani serves as Executive Director of Government and Community Relations for Kent State University, where he leads efforts to strengthen partnerships between the organization, public officials, community stakeholders, and regional leaders. In his role, Nick collaborates closely with government agencies, civic organizations, and community partners to advance and promote Kent State and its priorities in Kent, Columbus and Washington, D.C. Previously Nick worked as Deputy Director for Government and Community Relations for the Ohio Lottery and before that as Deputy Chief of State for Congressman David Joyce.

Amoaba Gooden, PhD

Vice President, Division of People, Culture and Belonging, Kent State University

Amoaba Gooden serves as Vice President for the Division of People, Culture, and Belonging and is a Professor of Africana Studies at Kent State University. In her leadership role, Dr. Gooden oversees the executive management of human resources and employee engagement initiatives, as well as the development and implementation of policies and programs that support faculty and staff across the university.

Dr. Gooden holds a bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Guelph, as well as master's and doctoral degrees from Temple University. She is the editor of Gender and Sexuality in Ghanaian Societies (Lexington Press) and a special edition of the Southern Journal of Canadian Studies: Constructing Black Canada - Becoming Canadian. Her scholarly work also appears in publications such as African Canadian Leadership: Perspectives on Continuity, Transition, and Transformation, S'Tenistolw: Moving Forward in Indigenous Higher Education, and Wagadu: Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies.

Matthew Grushon

Director, Procurement and Contract Services, Wright State University

Matt Grushon is a higher education administrator and procurement professional with broad experience in contract administration, policy development, business operations, and institutional compliance. His 20+ years at Wright State University spans procurement and contracting, operational improvement, supplier management, and the development of policies and processes designed to support effective stewardship of university resources.

In addition to his procurement responsibilities, Matt has been involved in a range of university business and operational initiatives, including athletics and Nutter Center operations, revenue-generating partnerships, ticketing and event operations, and cross-functional projects involving finance, legal, compliance, and campus leadership. He brings a practical, collaborative approach to balancing institutional objectives, regulatory requirements, financial considerations, and long-term operational needs.

Sara Harrison

Associate Vice President of Procurement Services, University of Cincinnati

Sara Harrison is the Associate Vice President of Procurement Services at the University of Cincinnati. Prior to this role, she served as the Executive Director of Procurement and Payable Services at the University of Dayton. Sara's career began at Procter & Gamble, where she held various leadership positions in supply network operations. Her career has been marked by significant achievements in defining innovative and sustainable supply chain solutions. Sara holds an MBA from the University of Dayton and a BS in Industrial & Systems Engineering from The Ohio State University.

Wesam Helou

Vice President of Information Technology & Chief Information Officer, Cleveland State University

Dr. Wesam Helou is a Cabinet-level CIO leading enterprise technology transformation in complex public higher education environments—driving ERP modernization, cybersecurity risk elevation, AI governance, and repositioning IT from a support function to a strategic institutional asset. A proven leader in higher education, he partners with the president, provost, and board to align technology strategy with academic mission, enrollment priorities, and long-term institutional resilience. A human-centered, people-first leader, results-driven and committed to diversity and inclusion, he builds high-performing organizations grounded in trust, accountability, and diversity of thought—translating strategy into measurable outcomes and sustained institutional impact. He holds a Doctorate in Business Administration from Cleveland State University, with a focus on Information Technology, a Master's in Engineering Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and a B.S. in Biomedical Engineering from Wright State University.

Nicole Hoyer

Director of State Relations and Government Relations Network Manager, Miami University

Nicole has represented Miami University's interests at the state level since 2021, while engaging university students, faculty, and staff in the legislative process. She is also actively involved in economic development and industry relations to promote university workforce initiatives, such as Work+ and the Hometown Talent Initiative, across the state. Nicole co-leads the Government Relations Network with the Director of Federal Relations.

Before joining Miami University, Nicole spent five years in the Ohio Senate, where she worked for the President Pro Tempore. She began her career as a 2016 Ohio Legislative Service Commission Fellow with the Senate Majority Caucus. Nicole graduated from Miami University in 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. While at Miami, Nicole was active in the Government Relations Network, Project High Flight, and the Alpha Omicron Pi sorority.

Anthony Mansoor

Senior Director & Chief Information Security Officer, Cleveland State University

Anthony E. Mansoor is a senior technology and cybersecurity executive leading enterprise security, risk management, and digital transformation initiatives in complex public higher education environments. As Chief Information Security Officer at Cleveland State University, he drives cybersecurity strategy, identity and access management modernization, data governance, compliance, and institutional resilience initiatives that enable innovation while protecting the university's mission. He is a trusted advisor to executive leadership, partnering across academic and administrative divisions to align technology risk management with strategic priorities, regulatory requirements, and long-term organizational objectives. A collaborative, people-focused leader, Anthony is committed to building high-performing teams and fostering a culture of security, accountability, and continuous improvement. He is recognized for translating complex technical and regulatory challenges into practical business solutions, guiding large-scale transformation efforts including cloud adoption, enterprise application modernization, AI governance, and cybersecurity program maturation. Through strategic leadership and strong stakeholder engagement, he helps position technology and information security as institutional enablers that support student success, operational excellence, and sustainable growth.

Lawrence McWilliams

Director, Procurement Department, Kent State University

Larry McWilliams joined Kent State University in March 2003 as a senior purchasing agent. Since then, Larry has assumed steadily progressive roles in the Procurement Department and has been Director since 2023. In his twenty-three-year career at Kent State, Larry has made many profitable contributions to all facets of the procurement business function including competitive bidding, contract management, process development and improvement, data collection and analysis, cost savings and efficiency, e-procurement, and strategic sourcing and planning. These, in tandem with his professional certification as a Certified Purchasing Manager (C.P.M.), his knowledge of public university procurement policies and practices and State of Ohio and Federal procurement laws, as well as the many relationships he has cultivated in his years of public purchasing in Ohio, all contribute greatly to his success at Kent State.

Larry holds a master’s degree in history from Cleveland State University and a bachelor’s degree in humanities from Gannon University.

Nicole Meadows-Hale

Assistant Director of Procurement, NEOMED

Nicole Meadows-Hale is a procurement professional with more than 20 years of experience. She currently serves as Assistant Director of Procurement at Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED), where she oversees a broad range of procurement and business functions, including purchasing, contracting, travel, P-Card administration, utilities, construction, and conference services. Prior to joining NEOMED, Nicole spent more than a decade in progressively responsible procurement roles with Signet Jewelers. She holds an MBA from Bowling Green State University and a Bachelor of Arts from Hiram College and is passionate about making procurement more strategic, approachable, and effective through collaboration, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Katie Overholser

Strategic Procurement Manager, IUC Purchasing Group

Katie Overholser serves as the Manager of Strategic Procurement for the Inter-University Council Purchasing Group. She manages various cooperative procurement processes by conducting re-bid or new RFP specifications and negotiations that result in IUC-PG contracts for member use. Katie manages data collection, analysis and reporting related to individual university and collaborative Purchasing Group spend, conducts market analysis, and develops market intelligence summaries tracking metrics of usage and cost savings/avoidance for contracts.

Jessica Palatka

Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Miami University

Jessica Palatka, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, is an expert in Human Capital Management (HCM) with distinguished service across academia, federal government, defense sector, and private industry. Her leadership is recognized for aligning complex organizational requirements with strategic mission outcomes, delivering measurable improvements in efficiency, workforce engagement, and institutional resilience. As the Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer for Miami University, Ms. Palatka leads all HR functions throughout the university, including HR strategic programs and partnerships, operations and services, and compliance.

Ms. Palatka is an Adjunct Associate Professor teaching undergraduate courses in HCM, is a published author, and serves on the Executive Board of Directors for the United Sommelier Foundation, a 501(c)(3). Ms. Palatka is a doctoral student at Miami University, studying Educational Leadership. Ms. Palatka earned a bachelor's in Management Science and Statistics, Decision and Information Technology and a master's in Human Resources Management from the University of Maryland. She earned a post graduate certificate from Cornell University in Human Resources.

Joshua Thomas

Senior Director, Infrastructure Engineering & Operations, Ohio University

Josh Thomas is Senior Director of Infrastructure Engineering & Operations at Ohio University, where he leads teams responsible for the university's core technology infrastructure and enterprise architecture. He has more than 25 years of experience in information technology, including leadership roles across higher education, nonprofit organizations, and private industry.

Craig Woolley

Chief Information Officer, Louisiana State University

Craig Woolley joined Louisiana State University as the ITS Chief Information Officer in early August 2020. Craig has more than 37 years of leadership experience in higher education IT and has been recognized for improving IT organizations using customer service and technological tools to enhance the user experience of students, faculty, and staff. In his previous role as CIO at Wright State University, Craig supervised the Computing and Telecommunications Services Division; chaired the Data Governance, Digital Accessibility, and Program Effectiveness Committees; and participated in the President's Leadership team and Provost Council.

Prior to WSU, Craig acted as Assistant Vice President for the University of South Florida IT, where he participated in the implementation of a large-scale virtual applications portal that served 60,000 users. Craig obtained both his BS in Engineering Technology and M. Ed. in Instructional Technology at USF, where he also oversaw IT for the Colleges of Education (1995) and Arts and Sciences (2000).

April Worrell

Director of Business Services, Rhodes State College

April Worrell serves as Director of Business Services at Rhodes State College, where she manages Business Office operations and leads efforts to strengthen the College's bursar functions, financial processes, and student-account services. She brings a strong educational foundation in management and accounting, along with practical experience in higher education administration.

April began her career in higher education as an adjunct instructor and returned to the field in 2017 as a Staff Accountant. Since then, she has advanced through progressively responsible positions, including Senior Accountant, Assistant Controller, Controller, and Director of Business Services. She earned a Bachelor of Business Administration with a concentration in Management from Concord College, now Concord University; a Master of Business Administration from Webster University; and a Master of Science in Accounting from the University of Phoenix.

James Yukech

Associate Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Youngstown State University

Jim Yukech has served as Associate Vice President and Chief Information Officer at Youngstown State University for the past ten years, following a distinguished tenure as Deputy CIO and Vice President of IT Relationship Management at Bon

Secours Mercy Health. At YSU, Jim has led the transformation of IT services into a nimble, forward-thinking organization that places students at the center and aligns closely with the university's mission. He and the YSU IT leadership team are recognized for their collaborative approach, building strong partnerships not only across the campus community but also with peer institutions throughout Ohio.

A lifelong resident of the Youngstown area, Jim has been deeply engaged in his community, serving on and chairing multiple boards, including the Youngstown Business Incubator and Hospice of the Valley. He earned both his Bachelor of Engineering and Master of Engineering Management degrees from Youngstown State University.

Jim resides in Boardman with his wife, Colleen Kelly. He is the proud father of four adult children and two adult stepsons, as well as two grandsons. Together, Jim and his family are passionate supporters of Youngstown State University and Ohio State University athletics, attending football and basketball games as a family tradition throughout the years.