

Plenary Session



Barbara Mistick, President, NAICU

Barbara Mistick has led NAICU since 2019, advocating for policies that expand access to higher education, including securing Pell Grant increases and institutional aid for private colleges. She spearheaded NAICU's first national economic impact study and strengthened support for campuses during the pandemic. With a 30-year career in education, public policy, and entrepreneurship, she has held leadership roles at Wilson College, Carnegie Mellon, and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.



Kirsten Keefe, The Institute for College Access & Success

Kirsten Keefe is the Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy – New York at TICAS, leading efforts to improve college affordability and economic justice. With over two decades of experience, she has held key roles at the Empire Justice Center, shaped financial justice policies, and served on federal and state advisory committees. A former legal advocate for low-income communities, and a former Peace Corps volunteer, she is dedicated to systemic change and equity.



Martha Snyder, HCM Strategists

Martha Snyder is an education policy specialist with extensive experience advising federal, state, and institutional leaders on postsecondary finance, student pathways, and education policy. A national leader in postsecondary finance, she has worked with policymakers to develop student-centered funding models. Previously, she served at the U.S. Department of Education and The White House Domestic Policy Council. She chairs two charter schools and actively supports student success initiatives.



Jonathan Fansmith, American Council on Education

Jonathan Fansmith directs federal policy engagement at ACE, advocating on issues including student aid, regulation, research, and tax policy. He represents colleges and universities before Congress, federal agencies, and courts, shaping public policy and coordinating government relations efforts for nearly 60 higher education associations. A recognized expert, he is widely quoted in national media and co-hosts ACE's dotEDU podcast. He also leads the Student Aid Alliance, serves on multiple education boards and advisory groups, and has received national recognition for his advocacy, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis.



Michael DiSiena, Cullen & Dykman LLC

Michael DiSiena is a partner in the firm's Higher Education practice group, advising colleges and universities on compliance, governance, accreditation, student affairs, privacy, and regulatory challenges. Formerly general counsel for a private higher education institution, he brings deep insight into institutional operations and strategy. His experience with the New York State Legislative Bill Drafting Commission adds a regulatory perspective to his counsel. A member of the National Association of College and University Attorneys and the University Risk Management and Insurance Association, he also serves as a director for local nonprofits supporting education.



Dr. Courtney Francis, State Policy Director, The Lumina Foundation

Courtney B. Francis, Ph.D. is the Strategy Officer for State Policy at Lumina Foundation, where she supports state efforts to increase educational attainment and eliminate racial disparities. Previously, she served as deputy director of higher education at The Hunt Institute and has extensive experience in policy, government, nonprofits, and higher education. She has worked in student and academic affairs at multiple state universities, legislative affairs for the Florida Department of Children and Families office, and leadership roles at the Florida Department of Education. Her research focuses on equitable access to higher education for diverse student populations.

SPEAKERS

3:30pm-4:30pm

Session A: Room 1A Strategic Communication for Higher Education



Jen Carnig, Spitfire Strategies

leads Spitfire's operations and strategy, shaping its vision for a more just future. A leading strategist on policing, police accountability, community safety, and the impact of AI on rights, she advises social change activists, philanthropies, and mission-driven organizations. With over 20 years of experience, she has led major campaigns, trained progressive communicators, and managed high-stakes projects, from securing justice for families impacted by police violence to advancing racial and environmental justice.



Michael Crawford, Spitfire Strategies

Michael works at the intersection of storytelling, culture, and social change, driving movements that won marriage equality and mobilized young voters. At Spitfire, he led the Campaign for Size Freedom, resulting in landmark NYC legislation, and helped Hip Hop Caucus leverage hip-hop for activism. He developed The South's Got Now/Decidimos to engage young voters of color in the Deep South and, as MoveOn's marketing director, built cultural strategies with celebrities and influencers. At Freedom to Marry, he shaped the digital narrative that helped secure marriage equality.

Session B: Room 1B International Student Recruitment & Retention



Dr. Lydiah Kemunto Bosire, 8B Education Investments

Dr. Lydiah Kemunto Bosire is the Founder and CEO of 8B Education Investments, a fintech platform dedicated to financing African students' access to world-class universities and equipping them to thrive in the global knowledge economy. A Kenyan national with over 18 years of experience in international politics, development, and human rights, she has held roles at the UN, the World Bank, and leading NGOs, most recently leading the UN-World Bank Partnership. She co-founded Oxford Transitional Justice Research and was a pioneer in the global youth HIV/AIDS movement.



Joann Ng Hartmann, MS, NAFSA

Joann Ng Hartmann, MS is the senior director for international enrollment management, international student and scholar services, and volunteer engagement at NAFSA: Association of International Educators. She provides strategic leadership for professional development, publications, and regulatory practice relationships affecting international student mobility. With over 25 years in international education, she has led student and scholar services at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, overseeing compliance, advising, and recruitment strategy. A longtime NAFSA volunteer, she has developed training curricula and presented at global conferences.



Kseniya Premo, Bond Schoeneck & King

Kseniya Premo defends clients against employment-related claims in federal and New York state courts and before agencies such as the EEOC, NYS Division of Human Rights, and the Department of Labor. She advises on employee discipline, disability issues, wage-hour compliance, workforce structuring, and policy development, including handbooks and internal investigations. With over a decade of experience in employment-based immigration, she assists employers and employees across industries with visa petitions, permanent labor certifications, and compliance matters.



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