

You are cordially invited to attend the virtual
William Paterson University and Passaic County Community College



5th Annual Conference ~ 2025

***“Future Ready – Fostering Student Success Amid
Challenge & Change”***

Monday, December 15th

8:45 AM – 4:15 PM

Free and on Zoom - Links inside this program

**Register for the conference [HERE](#) and be entered into a drawing for
one of 50 books by the keynote presenter, entitled [The New College
Classroom.](#)**

**Sponsored by
William Paterson University & Passaic County Community College**



Building on FOUR successful years, the FIFTH annual conference has chosen the theme as:

“Future Ready – Fostering Student Success Amid Challenge & Change”

As we navigate an era of uncertainty, the imperative to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for their success has never been stronger. Higher education must remain resilient, relevant, and responsive to equip students with readiness skills to be successful.

Anchored by presentations reflecting on the fast-changing world of students' lived experiences and how we, collectively, are adapting, sessions examine creating inclusive classrooms and pedagogy, as well as how technology, especially artificial intelligence, is changing our classroom interactions and our world.



Goals of This Conference

This is an opportunity to gather and learn (conveniently in a virtual medium) about evidence-based practices used at WP, PCCC, or elsewhere, that benefit students. It is also an opportunity to contribute to student success at our institutions by putting our purpose at the center of our thinking, building momentum for academic changes, and supporting student well-being and success. Finally, it explores what works for communicating with students, developing student belonging, teaching and learning, and assessing whether we have accomplished our goals.



William Paterson University **WHAT WORKS CONFERENCE**

2025 What Works Conference

“Future Ready – Fostering Student Success Amid Challenge & Change”

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Please register to enter a book raffle and to receive conference updates. You must log onto the Zoom sessions with your WPUNJ or PCCC Zoom account! See last page.

Please see below for the following:

1. **Schedule at a Glance**
2. **Schedule with Abstracts**
3. **Conference by Tracks and Themes**



SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE (full descriptions follow)

Titles are hyperlinked to Zoom rooms.

8:45 AM	Opening Comments , Joshua Powers and the What Works Committee
9:00-9:25 AM	RIP Sage of the Stage Elizabeth Brown, Payton MacDonald
	Leading for the Future: How Intentional Staff to Student Leadership Development and Mentorship Shape Future Ready Graduates , Leah Johnson
	Beyond Finding Sources: Teaching Digital Literacy through a Public Health Lens , Nicole Milano
9:30-9:55 AM	Fostering a Culture of Care: Empowering Student Well-Being Through Kindness-Driven Cause-Related Marketing Pedagogy , Bela Florenthal
	Beyond Defense: Upholding the Core Values of Higher Education , Carrie Hong, Payton McDonald, David Snyder, Satasha Williams, Mark Spuhler, WP undergraduate student; Mamadee Keita, WP graduate student
9:30-10:20 AM	Human Thinking with AI: Using Blackboard AI Conversation to Enhance Learning and Foster Critical Thinking , George Kacenga, Latifa Sebt; Ming Jian, with student presenter(s)
10:00-10:25 AM	Student and Faculty Perceptions of the Need for Memorization in Coursework , Heejung An; Cara Berg; Jenny Nesenjuk; and Sharon Puchalski
	Back in the Game: How a Sports Writing Course Revived <i>The Beacon</i> , Nick Hirshon; Sara Birns (undergraduate student), and Tommy Sherwood (undergraduate student)

10:30-11:20 AM	<u>Making Thinking Visible in the Age of AI: Process-Based Assessment for Student Ownership of Learning,</u> Lisa Egle
	<u>Humanizing Pedagogies as Praxis: Celebrating Identity through the Aspiring Educators Program (AEP),</u> Darlene Russell; Latifa Sebti; with student presenter(s)
	<u>From Classroom to Career: Powering Up Students for the Workforce,</u> Mary Alice Barrows; Alma Diaz; Jenny Nesenjuk; Sonia Wilson
11:30 AM-12:20 PM	<u>Empowering Student Success and Community Impact Through AI-Driven Strategic Communication Consultation,</u> Angie Yoo; Jungyun Won; Melissa Rosario; with student presenters; Two businesses (Janet Alzate and Orlando Cruz)
	<u>Understanding Adult Learners: Building Connection, Community, and Completion,</u> Kaca Res; Megan Bratkovich
	<u>Academic Freedom in Practice: Navigating Teaching and Learning in Challenging Times,</u> Ron Verdicchio; Wendy Christensen; Wendy Wright; with student presenter(s)
12:30-1:55 PM	<u>PLENARY: Transformative Teaching in the New College Classroom,</u> Christina Katopodis
2:00-2:25 PM	<u>Breaking Barriers with Artificial Intelligence,</u> Priya Nagaraj
2:00-2:50 PM	<u>A Clarion Call for Culturally Responsive Leadership in Multicultural Contexts,</u> Darlene Russell; Myranda Louis Jean; Sonia Wilson
	<u>Roundtable on Advancing Classroom Effectiveness: Differentiated Instruction and the Adult Learner,</u> Djanna Hill, James Miles
2:30-2:55 PM	<u>Engaging Students in Computer Science through Educational Robots: Building Future-Ready Skills,</u> Venkatanarayanan Sharma, Nan Wang, Adarsha Mishra, First year student, Computer Science
3:00-3:25 PM	<u>The Impact of AI Literacy Instruction on Student Awareness and Attitudes of Generative AI Use,</u> Tony Joachim; Cara Berg
	<u>Teaching with Podcasts in an Age of Disinformation,</u> Lena Delgado de Torres
3:00-3:50 PM	<u>Growth Mindset ---> Better Engagement,</u> Payton MacDonald
3:30-3:55 PM	<u>Creativity in the Age of AI: Prompt as Medium: Language as the New Brush,</u> Azadeh Amiri
	<u>Advancing Classroom Effectiveness: Inclusive and Creative Approaches for Student Engagement,</u> Djanna Hill; Melkamu Zeleke; Lauren Cedeno

Schedule with Abstracts

8:45-9:00

Welcome and Opening Comments

Joshua Powers, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and the WHAT WORKS organizing committee (Barbara Andrew, Moderator)

9:00- 9:25am

RIP Sage of the Stage

Elizabeth Brown; Payton MacDonald (25 min.)

Attend an interactive session exploring multiple pedagogical modalities that build students' background knowledge, support their learning processes, and foster collaborative and cognitive engagement.

Leading for the Future: How Intentional Staff to Student Leadership Development and Mentorship Shape Future Ready Graduates

Leah Johnson (25 min.)

This is a hands-on session where the participant will create an action plan or sketch of leadership skill development targeting a specific student, class, or group they have identified for such mentorship. The session takes a specific look at the participant's individual skill and strength and allows them to match it to the skill or strength that can be developed in the student or group. Lastly, participants will walk away with an implementation plan and timeframe to apply the plan with tangible outcomes and workforce integrations.

Beyond Finding Sources: Teaching Digital Literacy through a Public Health Lens

Nicole Milano (25 min.)

This session examines how college students evaluate the credibility and trustworthiness of digital information and highlights common gaps between technical fluency and critical interpretation. Participants will be introduced to a flexible framework and teaching strategies that support critical digital literacy across disciplines.

9:30-9:55am

Fostering a Culture of Care: Empowering Student Well-Being Through Kindness-Driven Cause-Related Marketing Pedagogy

Bela Florenthal (25 min.)

This session introduces a kindness-centered pedagogical model that integrates Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) case studies to enhance student well-being, engagement, and professional readiness. Grounded in the Positive Activity Model and aligned with Better Marketing for a Better World and Business for Good initiatives, the approach demonstrates how kindness-infused CRM experiences build academic, emotional, and ethical competencies. Participants will explore how reflective practices and CRM-

based learning foster the confidence, empathy, and adaptability students need to thrive amid ongoing change.

Beyond Defense: Upholding the Core Values of Higher Education

Carrie Hong, Payton McDonald, David Snyder, Satasha Williams, Mark Spuhler, WP undergraduate student; Mamadee Keita, WP graduate student (25 min.)

Higher education stands at a critical juncture, facing intense public skepticism and scrutiny. We must highlight the purpose of higher education, clarify the impact of research, scholarship and academic expertise, and build a unified front to advocate for our institution's value. This panel presentation is designed to develop a proactive strategy to reclaim and articulate the enduring contributions that universities make to society.

9:30-10:20am

Human Thinking with AI: Using Blackboard AI Conversation to Enhance Learning and Foster Critical Thinking

George Kacenga, Latifa Sebti; Ming Jian, with student presenter(s) (50 min.)

This panel session shares instructors' and students' experiences using Blackboard Ultra's AI Conversation to enhance learning and foster critical thinking. Presentations will cover the structure and application of Socratic Questioning and Role-Play, demonstrate how to design pedagogically sound AI Conversation topics, and share strategies for crafting effective prompts that align AI outputs with learning outcomes. We will also discuss how to guide students to think critically during AI interactions, showcase examples of student insights, and reflect on lessons learned from our experiments. Participants will leave with an information sheet outlining Blackboard's AI features and upcoming AI initiative.

10:00- 10:25am

Student and Faculty Perceptions of the Need for Memorization in Coursework

Heejung An; Cara Berg; Jenny Nesenjuk; and Sharon Puchalski (25 min.)

The 2023 NSSE/FSSE results revealed a significant gap between faculty and student perceptions of the need for memorization in coursework. To further examine this issue, the Senate Assessment Council administered surveys in April 2025 to both groups, exploring how they define and view memorization in learning. Findings from these surveys, gathered across multiple departments, will be presented along with potential implications.

Back in the Game: How a Sports Writing Course Revived *The Beacon*

Nick Hirshon; Sara Birns (undergraduate student), and Tommy Sherwood (undergraduate student) (25 min.)

A restructured Sports Writing course has become the catalyst for reviving William Paterson University's campus newspaper, *The Beacon*. Journalism professor Nick Hirshon will outline scalable approaches for helping students produce meaningful reporting despite structural constraints. Students from the course will briefly discuss

how reporting game stories, profiles, and features for *The Beacon* shaped their involvement in the newsroom and built their confidence as journalists.

10:30- 11:20am

Making Thinking Visible in the Age of AI: Process-Based Assessment for Student Ownership of Learning

Lisa Egle (50 min.)

When we allow or require students to use AI, how do we see their thinking and know if they're even learning? In this session, participants will explore practical strategies—including video reflections, think-aloud protocols and research process documentation—that make student thinking visible across disciplines and promote student ownership of learning. Attendees will see real student examples and reimagine one of their own assignments to shift from product-focused to process-focused assessment.

Humanizing Pedagogies as Praxis: Celebrating Identity through the Aspiring Educators Program (AEP) ***Darlene Russell; Latifa Sebti; with student presenter(s) (50 min.)***

This session highlights how humanizing pedagogies shaped the Summer 2025 Aspiring Educators Program (AEP) curriculum in the College of Education. AEP professors and high school scholars will define humanizing pedagogy and share course activities, learning experiences, and artifacts that embody this approach. Participants will leave with concrete strategies for integrating humanizing practices across their own curriculum.

From Classroom to Career: Powering Up Students for the Workforce

Mary Alice Barrows; Alma Diaz-Muhammad; Jenny Nesenjuk; Sonia Wilson (50 min.)

Discover how William Paterson University's new **PowerPaths Career Experience Program** helps students connect their coursework and campus experiences to the skills employers value most. Learn key insights from recent student and employer survey data and explore ways to partner with the Career Center to embed career readiness into courses and programs.

11:30- 12:20pm

Empowering Student Success and Community Impact Through AI-Driven Strategic Communication Consultation

Kyung-Hyan (Angie) Yoo; Jungyun Won; Melissa Rosario; with student presenters; Two businesses (Jane Alzate and Orlando Cruz (50 min.)

This panel showcases a cross-disciplinary, student-centered initiative that advances student success through experiential learning and community engagement in today's rapidly evolving academic and professional landscape. Supported by a national AI U Student Engagement Grant from Americas Small Business Development Center (with

support from Google), the project engages students in designing and implementing AI-powered social media campaigns for local small businesses.

Understanding Adult Learners: Building Connection, Community, and Completion
Kaca Res; Megan Bratkovich (50 min.)

Many regional public and smaller private institutions face declining numbers of traditional-age students—what some call the “demographic cliff.” To remain relevant, resilient, and financially sustainable, regional institutions must expand their focus to serve adult learners: returning students, working professionals, and those who started but never completed a degree. This session explores what faculty and student-serving staff can learn from how academic advisors provide relationship-centered and holistic support that strengthens belonging, motivation, and degree completion among adult learners.

Academic Freedom in Practice: Navigating Teaching and Learning in Challenging Times

Ron Verdicchio; Wendy Christensen; Wendy Wright; with student presenter(s) (50 min.)

This workshop explores how academic freedom shapes teaching and learning in a time of growing political, cultural, and institutional pressures on higher education. Faculty and students will examine how current challenges affect classroom dynamics, course content, and open inquiry and collaborate on strategies to sustain critical thought, mutual respect, and the shared freedom to teach and learn.

Plenary: 12:30- 1:45pm

Transformative Teaching in the New College Classroom

Christina Katopodis

Christina Katopodis is a Senior Postdoctoral Research Associate at CUNY’s Humanities Alliance. As a widely published, award-winning educator, she researches how humanities education can advance a just society and helps faculty build more equitable, engaging classrooms.

How do we make the transition from the hierarchical, inequitable, output-driven academy we inherited from the nineteenth century to a higher education that empowers all students to be their own best selves, modeling a more democratic, flourishing, and just society? How do we make this transition in our own classrooms? In this interactive talk, Dr. Christina Katopodis, coauthor with Cathy N. Davidson of the award-winning book, *The New College Classroom* (Harvard University Press, 2022), presents what the latest science of learning tells us about inclusive learning. She shares teaching strategies that anyone can adapt easily and effectively in every field and grab-and-go activities that educators around the world are using successfully every day to ensure their students’ lifelong success--and to revitalize their own commitment to a better world.

2:00- 2:25pm

Breaking Barriers with Artificial Intelligence

Priya Nagaraj (25 min.)

This session shows how AI can break learning barriers and transform higher-level courses by making complex concepts easier to grasp. Through real examples, it explores how AI-enabled content reshapes teaching strategies, boosts student outcomes, and fosters collaboration. By integrating AI thoughtfully, the approach aims to empower first-generation and underserved students, fostering equity and academic success.

2:00- 2:50pm

A Clarion Call for Culturally Responsive Leadership in Multicultural Contexts

Darlene Russell; Myranda Louis Jean; Sonia Wilson (50 min.)

This session will showcase the culturally responsive leadership practices of three Black women leaders in different divisions at WP. The presenters will discuss what it means to be culturally responsive leaders in 2025. This interactive session will devote time to attendees sharing their leadership approaches that are culturally affirming and posing questions.

Roundtable on Advancing Classroom Effectiveness: Differentiated Instruction and the Adult Learner.

Djanna Hill, James Miles (25 min.)

Adult learners bring varied experiences, motivations, and learning preferences, making differentiated instruction essential for effective teaching. This presentation will explore flexible approaches to content, process, and assessment—both on campus and online—to create inclusive, engaging learning environments. Presenters will discuss leveraging prior knowledge, integrating technology for personalized learning, and designing equitable, real-world assessments grounded in adult learning theories such as andragogy and transformative learning.

2:30- 2:55pm

Engaging Students in Computer Science through Educational Robots: Building Future-Ready Skills

Venkatanarayanan Sharma, Nan Wang, Adarsha Mishra, First year student, Computer Science (25 min.)

This session examines how educational robots can increase engagement, and develop essential skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and AI literacy in Computer Science classrooms. We will explore methods for integrating robotics into CS curricula to strengthen coding skills, algorithmic thinking, and teamwork while transforming students into active, hands-on learners.

3:00- 3:25pm

The Impact of AI Literacy Instruction on Student Awareness and Attitudes of Generative AI Use

Tony Joachim; Cara Berg (25 min.)

In Spring 2025, librarians developed an AI literacy session offered to all first-year students in thirty-four sections of Will.Power102. Before and after the lesson, students filled out questionnaires about their knowledge of generative AI usage and thoughts on its use in college. This presentation will discuss the content of the lesson and the results of the assessment, as well as describe implications for student usage of AI and practical applications.

Teaching with Podcasts in an Age of Disinformation

Lena Delgado de Torres (25 min.)

This session focuses on using podcasts to teach sociology courses. We will review how to use guided listening techniques to analyze podcasts in the classroom and how to distinguish scholarly podcasts from ones that are more geared towards entertainment.

3:00- 3:50pm

Growth Mindset ---> Better Engagement

Payton MacDonald (50 min.)

Growth Mindset ---> Better Engagement suggests incorporating Carol Dweck's seminal research on growth mindset during the first semester of a student's journey at WP. Dr. MacDonald will share a summary of Dweck's research, offer his observations from teaching the new UCC course MUSI 1001, Creativity and Innovation this fall semester, in which he used this approach and received positive feedback from his students, and facilitate breakout groups and individual reflections from the participants on how they might incorporate this theory into their own teaching.

3:30-3:55pm

Creativity in the Age of AI: Prompt as Medium: Language as the New Brush

Azadeh Amiri (25 min.)

Inspired by Sol LeWitt's conceptual art, this session shows how students use text-based instructions as AI prompts to create visual works. Participants will explore how small shifts in language transform AI outputs and spark conversations about creativity and authorship.

Roundtable on Advancing Classroom Effectiveness: Inclusive and Creative Approaches for Student Engagement

Djanna Hill; Melkamu Zeleke; Lauren Cedeno (25 min.)

This interactive workshop invites higher education professionals to collaboratively explore effective strategies for fostering inclusive, engaging, and innovative learning environments. Through shared dialogue and practical examples, participants will gain adaptable approaches to enhance teaching practices, support student success, and strengthen peer learning across disciplines.



Conference Planning Committee

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William Paterson University **WHAT WORKS CONFERENCE**

How to get onto the Zoom links (and to counter possible Zoom bombing):

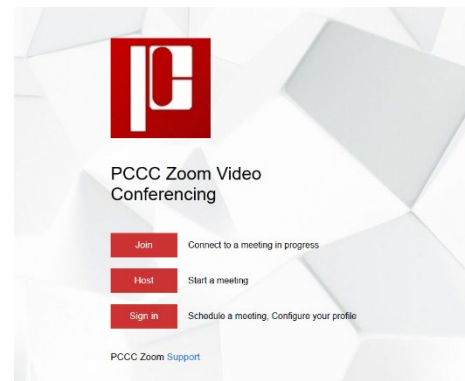
For WP faculty and staff, if you regularly use your WP Zoom account, make sure that you are using it on the *What Works Day*.

- If you have **never** used your WP Zoom account, create your WP Zoom account by logging in to <https://wpunj.zoom.us/> one time first. Then, you should be able to use the Zoom links (when you are logged into that account and click on the links).



For PCCC faculty and staff, if you regularly use your PCCC Zoom account, make sure that you are using it on the What Works day.

- If you have **never** used your PCCC Zoom account, create your account by logging into <https://pccc.zoom.us/> one time first. Then, you should be able to use the Zoom links (when are logged into that account and click on the links).



Please note that you will not be able to join the Zooms from other accounts (such as Gmail, for example).