



Kentucky Graduate Profile Institute

Thursday, May 14, 2026

Perkins Conference Center at ECU



Graduate Profile Institute

Thursday, May 14, 2026

9:00-9:30 a.m.

COMMUNICATING THE GRADUATE PROFILE

Dr. Melissa Bell, Vice President of Academic Excellence, Council on Postsecondary Education

9:30-10:45 a.m.

STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICA & REFLECTIONS

Whitney Godwin, Senior Education Consultant, GALLUP

In partnership with Lumina Foundation, Gallup's State of Higher Education study provides an in-depth look at the mindsets and motivations of U.S. adults without a college degree, exploring what drives or deters them from pursuing higher education. While interest in higher education remains strong, significant barriers persist. The study identifies financial strain, limited program flexibility, and mental health challenges as the leading reasons adults delay or discontinue their education. This presentation will unpack these findings, highlighting the motivations and expectations that shape adults' decisions to return to learning. Attendees will gain insights into how financial and emotional wellbeing influence enrollment and completion, which can help inform strategies to boost engagement, affordability, and student support—critical factors for increasing credential attainment and meeting workforce needs. Ultimately, the session will translate Gallup's national data into actionable insights for advancing student success across the higher education system.

11:00-12:00 p.m.

THE FUTURE OF THE KENTUCKY GRADUATE: ALIGNING EDUCATION, CAREER AND COMMUNITY

In an era of rapid workforce shifts, the Kentucky Graduate Profile serves as a vital roadmap for student success. This session offers a rare look at how academic competencies translate into professional excellence -- Employers will share the high-demand skills driving Kentucky's economy, faculty will reveal innovative ways these skills are being embedded and assessed in the classroom, and students will provide a candid perspective on how these tools and Graduate Profile framework empower them to navigate their journey from campus to community. Don't miss this "all-sides" discussion where we tackle how we can better prepare the next generation for a lifetime of civic and professional success.

Moderator: Dr. Melissa Bell, Vice President of Academic Excellence, CPE

Panelists:

- *Amanda Balser, Assistant Professor in Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy, Eastern Kentucky University*
- *Jacqueline Jackson, Professor in Veterinary Technology, Owensboro Community & Technical College*
- *Zach Morgan, Workforce Development Director, Kentucky Association of Manufacturers*
- *Katie Raney, Director, Kentucky Society for Human Resource Management*
- *Michael Wheeler, University of Kentucky graduate and CPE Student Representative*

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NETWORKING LUNCH

Enjoy a midday break to exchange ideas and expand your professional network with fellow attendees in a collaborative setting.

1:00-4:30 p.m.

INTEGRATING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INTO ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Lara Schwartz, Founding Director of the American University Project on Civic Dialogue

Lara Schwartz will lead this session in transforming classrooms into hubs for meaningful exchange. Grounded in the frameworks from her book, *Try to Love the Questions: From Debate to Dialogue in Classrooms and Life*, participants will move beyond traditional debate to design curricula that prioritize inquiry and understanding across differences. Following her keynote, she will lead a workshop that will provide faculty with the tools to integrate civic dialogue into program-level goals, ensuring students develop the essential skills to navigate complex public discourse with both rigor and empathy.

4:30 p.m.

CLOSING REMARKS AND NEXT STEPS

Dr. Melissa Bell, Vice President of Academic Excellence, CPE

KENTUCKY GRADUATE PROFILE 10 ESSENTIAL SKILLS

 Communication	 Professionalism
 Critical and Creative Thinking	 Civic Engagement
 Quantitative Reasoning	 Collaboration and Teamwork
 Interpersonal Relations	 Knowledge Application
 Adaptability and Leadership	 Information Literacy

Graduate Profile Institute

2026 Plenary Speakers



MELISSA BELL

Vice President of Academic Excellence, Council on Postsecondary Education

Dr. Bell joined CPE in 2006, serving a number of roles until being promoted to Vice President in 2019. Dr. Bell works closely with the state's chief academic officers and associate provosts to address the state's most pressing postsecondary issues. Her work focuses on promoting teaching and learning through the Graduate Profile, Faculty Leadership Academy, academic program approval and program review. She holds a Ph.D. in public administration from the University of Kentucky's Martin School of Public Policy and Administration and a master's degree from the university's Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce.



WHITNEY GODWIN

Senior Education Consultant at Gallup

Godwin is a highly driven and solutions-oriented education, purpose and leadership content expert with more than 12 years in in events, recruitment, retention, student success, outreach, marketing, communications and program development in both higher education and the K-12 space. Passionate about student success and holistic wellbeing, she helps leaders, students, faculty, staff, alumni, and communities thrive through exploring their purpose, and uniquely identifying and applying their strengths and values to create a positive impact on their lives and the world around them. Whitney has been a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach for several years. She uses that knowledge coupled with her experience in higher education, student success, and faculty, staff and alumni engagement to contribute to the organization's success. She holds a Master of Science in journalism (MSJ) and a Bachelor of Science in journalism from West Virginia University.



LARA SCHWARTZ

Director of the Project on Civic Dialogue at American University

Schwartz specializes in dialogue across differences, constitutional law, civil rights, politics, communications, and policy. Drawing on her experience as a legislative lawyer, lobbyist, and communications strategist, Lara encourages students to approach complex questions from multiple perspectives, listen generously to one another, and challenge themselves and support one another. Prior to this, Lara served several roles, most recently as Director of Strategic Engagement at the American Constitution Society for Law & Policy. She has appeared on national and local radio and television programs, written op-eds published in national papers and local papers of record, and is the author of *Try to Love the Questions: From Debate to Dialogue in Classrooms and Life*.



Scan the QR code for access to the Kentucky Graduate Profile Resource Center. This site provides postsecondary faculty and staff resources to incorporate and assess the 10 Essential Skills in academic and co-curricular programming. Enjoy access to:

- Graduate Profile Implementation Guide
- CPE Videos and webinars
- Levels of Mastery Charts for all 10 Essential Skills
- Curriculum Development Toolkit
- and more!