



**SACUBO**  
WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FORUM

## **2021 Women's Leadership Forum – Speakers**

**A View of Leadership at Several Universities: One Woman's Journey**

[Dr. Sharon L. Gaber](#)

**Panel/Break Out Group Discussion: Leading at All Levels – How They Got Here and What They Learned Along the Way**

[Marta Perez Drake](#) (Moderator)

[Veronica Salazar Mendez](#)

[Shawn Charles](#)

[Sarah Cody](#)

**From Success to Significance: A Leader's Journey**

[Karren Alexander](#)

**Leading from Strength: Negotiation Strategies for Women**

[Christina Cutlip](#)

[Molly McCormack](#)

**Panel Discussion: Leading the Discussion on the Future of Higher Education**

[Jamie Loftin](#) (Moderator)

[Susan Maddux](#)

[Diana Kuhlmann](#)

[Nicole Trufant](#)

[Ruth Johnston](#)

**A Seat at the Table**

[Dr. Karrie Dixon](#)

## **Dr. Sharon Gaber**

### **A View of Leadership at Several Universities: One Woman's Journey**

Sharon L. Gaber, Ph.D., is the fifth chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Known as North Carolina's urban research university, it leverages its location in the state's largest city to offer internationally competitive programs of research and creative activity, exemplary undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, and a focused set of community engagement initiatives. UNC Charlotte maintains a particular commitment to addressing the cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health, and social needs of the greater Charlotte region.

With a student population soon to exceed 30,000 (due to a 33% increase in enrollment since 2009), it is the fastest-growing — and third largest — institution in the 17-member University of North Carolina System. Its diverse student body, 37% of whom are first-generation college students, comes from 47 states and 105 countries.

An academic with a background in city and regional planning, Gaber was named by Education Dive one of five higher education leaders to watch in 2018 and beyond. She is recognized nationally for her efforts as president of the University of Toledo to increase enrollment, improve graduation and retention rates, keep education affordable, increase research funding, improve connection to the surrounding metro region and make the campus environment diverse and inclusive. Prior to her five years in Toledo, Gaber served as provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Arkansas. She has also been an interim provost at Auburn University and a faculty member and administrator for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Gaber earned an A.B. in Economics and Urban Studies at Occidental College. She received an M.P.L. in Urban Planning from the University of Southern California and a Ph.D. from Cornell University in City & Regional Planning.

Gaber is the author of articles on regional and urban planning, public policy and the social dynamics that affect community decision-making. She also is co-author of a book on planning research methods. Deeply engaged in community and regional activities, she has served as the Mid-American Conference representative on the Division 1 NCAA President's Forum and as a member of the NCAA Strategic Plan Committee. She was named a YWCA Northwest Ohio Milestone award recipient for women's leadership in 2020.

Officially the first woman to serve as chancellor of UNC Charlotte, Gaber follows the trail blazed by founding educator Bonnie Cone, who led the institution from 1946-1966 through several stages of growth.

## **Marta Perez Drake**

### **Panel/Break Out Group Discussion: Leading at All Levels – How They Got Here and What They Learned Along the Way**

For almost 30 years, Marta Perez Drake has advocated for the higher education community in a number of roles. Most recently, Marta served as Senior Vice President at NACUBO, where she worked for over 15 years. In addition, Marta has worked for the Council of Graduate Schools, the American Council on Education, and on two college campuses, Duke and Georgetown Universities.

For the past year, Drake has been pursuing a lifelong dream of obtaining and completing her PhD in Communication Studies. She started off as part-time in 2019, then decided in January of 2020 to enroll full-time at George Mason University in northern VA. Besides taking courses of her own, she also teaches “Communication 101” to undergraduate students and is working on a NIH-funded research project to promote COVID testing and vaccination among vulnerable populations, including low income Latinx communities.

Drake plans to complete her final semester of coursework this spring, along with her graduate certificate in Women and Gender Studies. Drake’s research focus is in organizational and strategic communication with a focus on gender. Her recent work has focused on women’s leadership effectiveness during the first 6 months of the COVID pandemic and conducting a feminist critical analysis of #SayHerName within the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Her dissertation will focus on the challenges and benefits related to e-Mentoring from a gendered lens.

Drake holds a BA from Duke University and an MA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She also completed Georgetown’s Institute for Transformational Leadership certificate program in 2017. In addition, Drake obtained her certification as a health and life coach in early 2021. She also serves as the co-chair for the Duke DC alumnae Women’s Forum and Duke’s regional alumni board.

Drake lives just outside of Washington, DC, with her husband and daughter, a high school senior. Marta also has a son who is completing his junior year at the Ohio State University. Marta enjoys yoga, meditation, journaling, walking her rescue dogs George and Rita, and also being an avid participant of the Peloton community.

## **Veronica Mendez**

### **Panel/Break Out Group Discussion: Leading at All Levels – How They Got Here and What They Learned Along the Way**

Veronica Mendez has served as the Chief Financial Officer and Senior Vice President for Business Affairs at the University of Texas at San Antonio since January 2019. With over 18 years of experience in higher education, Mendez provides leadership in finance, human resources, and strategic and business intelligence initiatives.

As UTSA's Senior Vice President for Business Affairs, Mendez provides oversight and stewardship of the university's financial resources. A key member of the Senior Leadership Team, she helps to advance UTSA's vision to become a student success exemplar and nationally competitive research university. During UTSA's 2020 pandemic response, Mendez's division of Business Affairs was critical to facilitating the success of key functions in the university's response and recovery plan. Under her leadership, the division played a significant role in ensuring continued university operations during this challenging time.

As the university's Chief Financial Officer, Mendez leads the effort to ensure the success of other ongoing initiatives, including the Campus Master Plan and the expansion of the Downtown Campus. In January 2021, one of these ambitious initiatives became reality, with the groundbreaking on UTSA's Downtown Campus of the \$90 million School of Data Science and National Security Collaboration Center. Additionally, she oversees administration and operations, budget and financial planning, business contracts, facilities, financial affairs, housing and campus services, human resources, major capital projects and real estate, public safety, and space management.

Immediately prior to joining UTSA, Mendez served as the Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer at the University of California, Merced, where she made significant contributions to the success and momentum of the Merced 2020 Project.

Mendez looks forward to furthering UTSA's mission as a nationally recognized research university and Hispanic-thriving institution.

## **Shawn Charles**

### **Panel/Break Out Group Discussion: Leading at All Levels – How They Got Here and What They Learned Along the Way**

Shawn Charles has extensive experience in higher education finance. She began with Southern University at New Orleans over 20 years ago, and she has been on a progressive path ever since. She has served in several capacities including but not limited to Grant Accountant, Chief Accountant, and Associate Comptroller. Leading the Finance team, Charles currently has direct oversight for Financial Services such as Treasury, Student Accounts Receivable, Disbursements, Collections & Billing, as well as Payroll, Accounts Payable, and Grants.

Charles serves on the SACUBO Board as the HBCU and Diversity Coordinator, the Board of Directors for the Louisiana Asset Management Pool (LAMP), the Paul S. Morton Scholarship Board as Treasurer, and she is President for the New Orleans, Louisiana Chapter of the Association of Governmental Accountants. Added to that, Charles has been instrumental in the development of the SACUBO Women's Leadership Forum (WLF) and the program's success and popularity for the past five years providing helpful insight and support, and currently serves as the Co-Chair for the 2021 Women's Leadership Forum. She is a proven leader with high values on empowerment and transparency.

## **Sarah Cody**

### **Panel/Break Out Group Discussion: Leading at All Levels – How They Got Here and What They Learned Along the Way**

Sarah Cody has worked in higher education for 13 years, at both public and private institutions. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Accounting & Finance from Lubbock Christian University and a Master of Science in Personal Financial Planning from Texas Tech University. She is also credentialed as a Certified Research Administrator (CRA). She joined the Red Raider family in 2011 and is currently leading post award research efforts as Managing Director. Cody has also been honored to become an alumna of the Texas Tech President's Leadership Institute.

Cody is an active member within the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA), Society of Research Administrators International (SRAI) and the Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP). Her activities range from presenting at annual conferences to participating in working groups dedicated to improving efficiencies and reducing administrative burden. She has also served as a committee member for SACUBO's Women's Leadership Forum for the past 2 years.

Sarah has been married for 12 years and is a mother of 5-year-old and 2-year-old girls.

## **Karren Alexander**

### **From Success to Significance: A Leader's Journey**

As the world's only Canologist™, Karren Alexander teaches people how to lift the limits off of their beliefs, ignite their career or life dreams, and extinguish negative thoughts and behaviors. Alexander enjoys teaching people how to be victorious, win, succeed, and achieve what may be deemed impossible. As an employee in the federal government, Alexander was recognized as a thought leader and achiever. She led teams for over 25 years implementing significant process improvements saving the government millions. She received numerous back-to-back awards including being honored with the "Achiever of the Year" award by the National Association of Government Accountants.

Alexander has a Master of Science degree in Accounting and worked over 35 years for the United States Department of Agriculture as a Senior Manager. Although she is an Accountant, she utilizes her gift of teaching to educate employees and leaders in the Government and private sectors. Alexander is the owner of PAMD International, LLC and the Canology™ Institute serving as a sought-after keynoter and motivational speaker, leadership and teams trainer, coach, and financial trainer. Alexander is an Amazon #1 Best Selling author. Her book is titled *Invisible Hand: Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges*.

## **Christina Cutlip**

### **Leading from Strength: Negotiation Strategies for Women**

Christina Cutlip is a Senior Managing Director for the Institutional Financial Services division of TIAA ([www.tiaa.org](http://www.tiaa.org)), a Fortune 100 financial services organization. She is the head of the Client Engagement and National Advocacy team, which is responsible for expanding relationships with industry and government associations, while also focusing on client engagement.

In 2011, Cutlip was recognized as TIAA's Working Mother of the Year by Working Mother magazine and received an Outstanding Volunteer Award in 2016 from The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) State Fund Network for her contributions to higher education. She was appointed by the Secretary of Labor to the Department of Labor ERISA Advisory Council for a three-year term from 2013 - 2016. Cutlip is on the board of The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and chairs the board of Almasi Collaborative Arts, a non-profit organization that strives to create and facilitate artistic collaborations between African and American artists and American artistic institutions. She serves on the board of retirement healthcare provider Emeriti, the Board of Trustees for Grinnell College and on the advisory councils of WISER and ERIC.

Cutlip earned a B.A. in Economics from Grinnell College, an MBA from Regis University, and a PhD in Organizational Leadership from Northcentral University. As a FINRA registered representative and principal, she holds Series 7, 24, and 51 licenses while maintaining accident, health, life and variable annuity licenses. Additionally, Cutlip has obtained the Certified Employee Benefits Specialist (CEBS) professional designation.

## **Molly McCormack**

### **Leading from Strength: Negotiation Strategies for Women**

Molly McCormack is a Managing Director for the Blue Ridge Market in TIAA Client Relationships. In this role, McCormack is responsible for the integrated relationship team for the states of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. This broad role has overall responsibility for all aspects of the territory which includes the development of strategic business plans, providing leadership for the integrated, cross-functional teams, and executing on business plans to meet customer needs while achieving strategic and financial goals.

McCormack is passionate about leadership and ensuring that she is fostering the type of environment where her team and business partners feel enabled to succeed and comfortable to share their thoughts and ideas. She believes that this along with supporting mobility and making good hiring decisions has allowed for her success as a member of TIAA's leadership team.

McCormack has 22 years of experience in the financial industry and has been with TIAA since 2005. Prior to her current position, as a Regional Managing Director within the Wealth Management division at TIAA, she was responsible for charting the overall high net worth client strategy and direction for the region. In this role, she led Wealth Management Directors and Senior Managers responsible for over \$100 billion in assets under administration. Previously, as Senior Wealth Management Director at TIAA, McCormack was responsible for leading, coaching, and enabling a large team of wealth management advisors dedicated to providing comprehensive financial planning and holistic solutions to a high net worth client base with more than \$20 billion in assets under management. Prior to joining TIAA, she spent five years at Charles Schwab, where she held foundational roles in financial services.

McCormack attended Regis University. She holds FINRA Series 7, 63, 65, and 24 registrations, in addition to maintaining licenses in life insurance and health insurance in the states of North Carolina. She also holds the Accredited Investment Fiduciary® (AIF®) professional designation.

Outside of work, McCormack enjoys spending time with her husband and two sons, volunteering with the local Ronald McDonald House and Habitat for Humanity, and engaging in Business Resource Groups like Achieve and Our Corps.

## **Jamie Loftin**

### **Panel Discussion: Leading the Discussion on the Future of Higher Education**

Jamie Loftin is the Assistant Vice Provost for Distance Education Administration at the University of Arkansas's Global Campus. She oversees accounting, human resources, technology, and facilities for the university's online and continuing education school. Prior to joining the Global Campus, Loftin served as the Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration and Director of Accounting in the Sam M. Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas. Loftin worked in human resources, corporate accounting, and financial analysis for Arkansas Best Corporation (ArcBest) and Sparks Health System before she started her career in higher education. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Corporate Finance from Arkansas State University and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Arkansas. Loftin holds the Society for Human Resource Management – Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP) designation, and she is also a Certified Management Accountant (CMA) and Certified Financial Manager (CFM).

Loftin was named one of the "Top Forty Under 40" by the Northwest Arkansas Business Journal in 2013 and was named "Employee of the Year" in 2009 by Walton College. She is an active member of the U of A Women's Giving Circle, a group who collectively determines how to use pooled resources to positively impact the U of A campus, with an emphasis on the enrichment of women's lives, through an annual grants and award process. Loftin is also an active member of SACUBO and has served on the board and on various committees. She has been married to her husband Jeff for 19 years, and they are the parents of 16-year-old girl/boy twins, Kate and Cameron.

## **Susan Maddux**

### **Panel Discussion: Leading the Discussion on the Future of Higher Education**

Susan A. Maddux joined Furman University as vice president for finance and administration in November 2018. She came to Furman from Presbyterian College, where she had served as vice president for finance and administration and chief financial officer since 2013.

As Furman's chief financial and administrative officer, Maddux oversees all financial planning and execution, accounting operations, debt management and the endowment, as well as the departments of Budget and Resource Management, Facilities and Campus Services, and Human Resources.

Before joining Presbyterian College, Maddux spent 19 years in the finance and administration office at Converse College. She initially served the college as controller (1994-2005), and then as vice president for finance and administration and chief financial officer (2005-2013).

Prior to her career in higher education, Maddux worked as a certified public accountant at Ernst & Young in Spartanburg (1991-1994). She is a graduate of Converse College and received a master's in professional accountancy from Clemson University.

Maddux serves as Secretary on the board of the National Association of College and University Business Officers and as the President of the Southern Association of College and University Business Officers. She is a volunteer coach with the Special Olympics, as well as a member of the audit committee at Spartanburg Day School.

## **Diana Kuhlmann**

### **Panel Discussion: Leading the Discussion on the Future of Higher Education**

Diana Kuhlmann, CPA, is a native of Olpe, Kansas and graduated from Emporia State University, Emporia, KS in 1985 with a Bachelor of Science in Business and an MBA in 2019. She began her career in public accounting in 1986 with Grant Thornton in Wichita, KS moving to Agler and Gaeddert, Chartered in Emporia in October 1988. In December 1993, she was hired as Internal Auditor by Emporia State University. She became Assistant Budget Director for ESU in 1995, Budget Director in 1997, Associate Vice President for Fiscal Affairs and Budget Director in January 2006, Interim Vice President for Administration and Finance in January 2017, and Vice President for Administration and Finance in June 2017. Her areas of responsibility include financial operations, budget, payroll, human resources, facilities and contract oversight.

Kuhlmann is active in the Central Association of College and University Business Officers (CACUBO), having served on their Audit Committee for 4 years, 2 years as Chair, and 2 years on the Business and Finance Committee. She has served on multiple Annual Meeting committees, including chairing the 2013 Annual Meeting Committee, and has served on the CACUBO Board since 2013, serving as President for 2019-2020. She is currently 1st Past President of the Board. Kuhlmann has also been serving on the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) Board of Directors since 2018. She received the NACUBO Rising Star award in 2002, a recognition of future leaders in higher education.

Kuhlmann currently serves on the Newman Regional Health Finance Committee, the Emporia Area Chamber of Commerce Finance Committee, and the Board of Directors for the Olpe State Bank. She is an accompanist/choir member, a member of Saint Ann's Altar Society, chairs the Pastoral Council for St. Joseph Catholic Church in Olpe, and is currently co-chairing a parish capital campaign. She is a past member of the Emporia Area Chamber of Commerce as treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee, Board of Directors and Board of Trustees for the Emporia Community Foundation, Flint Hills Community Health Center Finance Committee, Leadership Emporia Alumni Association Board, Board of Rebuilding Together (formerly Christmas in April-Emporia Area, Inc.), and the United Way of the Flint Hills Board of Directors, having also served as chair of the Finance Committee and as Board President of this organization.

Kuhlmann and her husband, Steve, reside in Olpe, KS. They have 2 married daughters and 2 toddler granddaughters. Her family is the light of her life. Time with family is her greatest joy. She also relishes time with friends, flower gardening, playing piano, and cooking meals with her husband.

## Nicole Trufant

### Panel Discussion: Leading the Discussion on the Future of Higher Education

Nicole L. Trufant, CPA, serves as the Senior Vice President of Finance and Administration at the University of New England (UNE). Trufant leads all functional areas of finance and general accounting, resource planning and budget, human resources, campus and facilities management, institutional research, legal affairs, student financial services, information technology services, auxiliaries, security, and conference services. Before that, she has held a variety of administrative positions at UNE, including Vice President of Finance and Administration, Vice President of Fiscal Affairs, Associate Vice President of Fiscal Affairs, Interim Director of Human Resources and Associate Controller, and Director of Internal Audit. Prior to joining higher education, she worked in private industry and in public accounting. She currently serves on the board of NACUBO and is chair of EACUBO. She is a frequent speaker at NACUBO, EACUBO, and other national higher education leadership summits.

Trufant has published articles in *Business Officer Magazine* and been featured on NACUBO podcasts. Nicole is a CPA, and she holds a BS in Accounting and BA in Sociology from the University of Southern Maine, an MSM in Management from New England College, and is a graduate of Harvard's University's Graduate School of Education Institute of Executive Management.

## **Ruth Johnston**

### **Panel Discussion: Leading the Discussion on the Future of Higher Education**

Ruth Johnston serves as NMSU system Vice Chancellor to help set system-wide strategy, drive operational effectiveness and continuous improvement, while creating a climate of accountability. Johnston oversees Human Resources, Audit Services, Environmental Health & Safety and Risk Management, Real Estate and Water Resources, and Data Security. Prior to this role, Johnston served as vice chancellor for University of Washington (UW) Bothell Planning and Administration where she provided leadership for administrative, financial, facilities, IT, human resource operations, and governmental and community relations. Prior to UW Bothell, Johnston spent most of her career at the University of Washington Seattle in leadership roles across the institution.

Johnston holds a doctorate in organizational development and higher education, a master's degree in human relations, and a bachelor's in counseling psychology. Johnston serves as president on the Western Association of College & University Business Officers board of directors and the board of the National Association of College & University Business Officers. She teaches a variety of classes and workshops, and she has consulted with higher education institutions, associations, and some federal agencies.

## **Dr. Karrie Dixon**

### **A Seat at the Table**

Dr. Karrie G. Dixon was named 12th Chief Executive Officer and 7th Chancellor of Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) on Dec. 14, 2018. Prior to this appointment, she served as interim chancellor since April 9, 2018.

Dixon is a transformational leader in the University of North Carolina (UNC) System, a public, multi-campus university encompassing 16 constituent higher education institutions. For more than 20 years, she has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to improving the lives of others through higher education.

That commitment continues as Chancellor of ECSU. Her focus on increasing enrollment, leveraging resources, enhancing all aspects of the ECSU campus, and strengthening stakeholder engagement has produced results.

ECSU has experienced positive growth since Dixon's arrival. Enrollment climbed nearly 40% in just 18 months. Her administration has expanded the academic degree program offerings which include launching an Unmanned Aircraft Systems degree program, an online master's degree in education, and an online bachelor's degree in homeland security. Under her leadership, the university has increased its fleet from two to 12 aircraft for ECSU's signature aviation program.

In addition to building renovations and campus beautification, Dixon has committed to enhancing all aspects of the campus including the overall culture and student experience. Under her leadership, a new university strategic plan was developed in 2019 and will be used to guide the institution's successful efforts through 2025. With Viking Pride, Dixon is transforming ECSU to an institution focused on accountability, commitment, and excellence.

Prior to her appointment at ECSU, Dixon served as a senior administrator at the UNC System Office since 2008. She was promoted to serve as Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs as well as Chief Student Affairs Officer, where she was tasked with overseeing and shaping system-wide policy to ensure overall success for the 220,000+ students enrolled across the state.

For nearly 10 years, she provided the UNC System Office with her expertise in academic policy, while leading various student success initiatives and managing processes to increase student access, enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. She fostered innovative collaborations among the UNC System, the NC Community College System, the state's independent colleges and universities, and the NC Department of Public Instruction. She was instrumental in leading multiple projects and policy changes that have greatly impacted students in the UNC System and statewide.

Prior to joining the UNC System, Dixon served a total of 10 years combined at two other UNC System campuses. Most recently, she was an assistant vice provost at North Carolina State University (NCSU). In this role, she enjoyed leading discussions with graduate students interested in careers in higher education leadership and serving on dissertation committees.

In 2020, Dixon was named to the newly formed national Women in Aviation Advisory (WIAAB) board by U.S. Dept. of Transportation Secretary, Elaine L. Chao. In 2019, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper awarded Dixon The Old North State Award, one of the highest honors granted by the State of North Carolina, which is awarded to “individuals who have shown dedication and service beyond expectation and excellence to the Great State of North Carolina.” She also was named by the HBCU Campaign Fund, as one of “The Ten Most Dominant HBCU Leaders of 2020.” Before arriving at ECSU, Dixon was named a 2016-17 American Council on Education (ACE) Fellow. Her host campus for the academic year was Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC.

Dixon received the 2013 Distinguished Alumni Award from the College of Education and the Black Alumni Legacy Award in 2014 at NCSU. Dixon is a member of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ (AASCU) Millennium Leadership Initiative, class of 2013. She also received the Triangle Business Journal’s “40 Under Forty” leadership award in 2014. And, she was recognized as a recipient of the 2015 Alumni Distinguished Service Award from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Dixon holds a bachelor’s degree in Communications and Public Relations from NC State University, a master’s degree in Speech Communications and Rhetoric from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and a doctorate of education from NC State. She and her husband have two daughters.