

Welcome and Session Block 1

Tuesday, September 15, 2026

8:30–11:30	CHECK-IN Lobby • Pick up your printed program and conference passport. Your first passport stamp is available at check-in.
9:00–9:35	WELCOME + KEYNOTE Key West Ballroom (218) Welcome from Dr. Frame and introduction of our Keynote, Dr. Nina Leonard, who serves as Director of Academic Success Coaching at UCF. With over a decade of higher education experience, she brings expertise across admissions, advising, and student success.
9:35–9:40	TRANSITION TO SESSION ROOMS

CONCURRENT SESSION BLOCK 1 | 9:40–10:30

1

Building a Positive Working Environment

Carolyn Standner
Sanibel Boardroom (219)

Creating a positive interpersonal working relationship among colleagues is the key to overall excellence. This impacts efficiency and effectiveness and creates a successful working environment when employees work together.

2

Neurodivergent Navigators: Accessible Student Support

Erin Grainger and DJ Giles
Sand Key Meeting Room (220)

Discover practical strategies to better support neurodivergent students across campus. This interactive session equips student-facing professionals with accessible communication techniques, neuroinclusive practices, and example case studies to foster students’ Belonging, Engagement, Achievement, and Meaning (BEAM). Participants will leave with actionable tools and campus resources they can immediately apply in their daily interactions with students.

Session Blocks 1 and 2

Choose the session that best supports your goals.

SESSION BLOCK 1 | 9:40–11:30 • CONTINUED

3

Growing Where You’re Planted: Navigating Career Advancement Within One Institution

Tiffany Dodge
Cedar Key Meeting Room (223)

What if your next opportunity is already where you are? This session shares one professional’s journey from Graduate Coordinator (and Intern) to Coordinator to Assistant Director within the same department, highlighting the choices, relationships, opportunities, and lessons that shaped each transition. Participants will identify strategies for building skills, seeking opportunities, and preparing for their next role, then create a personalized professional growth plan to help turn their career goals into action.

4

The Roster Revolution

Diana Taylor and Chandini Balwant
Egmont Key Meeting Room (224)

Academic Success Coaching requires coaches to keep a pulse on their rosters. To do this, roster management is necessary. Roster management is a skill that can be developed and improved by coaches. This session will provide a collaborative environment for coaches to brainstorm and collect new ideas and practices to manage their rosters effectively and proactively.

10:30–10:40 TRANSITION • PASSPORT STAMPS • FEEDBACK WALL

SESSION BLOCK 2 | 10:40–11:30

1

Where Learning Meets Life: A Conversation with the Experiential Learning Team

Veronica Cusick, Dr. Quynh Dang, Dr. Marika Koch, and Dr. Estrella Rodriguez
Sanibel Boardroom (219)

Experiential learning plays a critical role in student success, career readiness, and degree completion, yet many students are unaware of the opportunities available to them. Join leaders from UCF’s Internship, Knight Shadow, and Study Internships Abroad programs for an interactive panel discussion designed for staff and Academic Success Coaches. Participants will explore the unique benefits of each program and learn practical strategies for guiding students toward experiences aligned with their academic and career goals.

Concurrent Session Block 2

10:40–11:30 • Continued

2

Communicating Through Conflict: Responding with Confidence in Difficult Situations

Samantha Fraley and Heather Murphy
Cedar Key Meeting Room (223)

Conflict within higher education is an inevitable part of operations. This interactive session explores practical communication strategies that help professionals respond with confidence, clarity, and empathy while maintaining appropriate boundaries and institutional integrity.

3

Achieve with Intention: Preparing for Your Next

Shemeca Smith
Egmont Key Meeting Room (224)

Professional advancement doesn’t have to be stressful or reactive. This session provides a practical framework to prepare for future opportunities through intentional skill development, authentic networking, and strategic career planning. Participants will leave with actionable tools for upskilling and promotion readiness, build meaningful professional connections, and navigate their next professional move with confidence and purpose.

4

Become a Handshake Influencer: Leveraging Handshake as a Tool for Student Success and Career Readiness

Sandra Leon-Barth, Mirtha Bailey, and Madhvi Acharya
Sand Key Meeting Room (220)

The Dixon Career Development Center (DCDC) has invested in a robust, interactive platform, Handshake, that effectively connects employers with both our students and alumni for networking, internships, events, and career-related opportunities. In this session, we will illustrate the inner workings of the platform and showcase how this one-stop-shop gives students easy access to connect with industry professionals and obtain major-related experiences.

Lunch Hour Activities

11:30–1:00

11:30–1:00

LUNCH

Boxed lunch in Key West Ballroom for the first 150 registered attendees. Resource fair and Say the Thing running alongside.

11:30–12:50

RESOURCE FAIR

Garden Key Meeting Room (221) • Passport collection and connection tables.

12:15 – 1:00

SAY THE THING

Key West Ballroom (218) • Let your fellow knights know you appreciate them!
Fill out [THIS FORM](#) and your appreciation will be shared with your chosen colleague

Concurrent Session Block 3

1:00–1:50

1

Civil Discourse Is a Work+ Skill: Turning Student Jobs Into Practice Fields for Constructive Engagement

Dr. Haley Winston, Lashay Vazquez & Esther Mandelbaum
Sanibel Boardroom (219)

Employers rank communication and collaboration across difference among the most valuable—and least developed—skills in early-career hires. Campus jobs are where students already practice these skills, usually by accident. This highly interactive session reframes student employment as the most underused dialogue lab on campus.

2

More Than a Training Model: Creating a Competency Cycle for Student Staff Success and Well-Being

Jasmine Collins, Tiffany Dodge, and Kelly Clark
Cedar Key Meeting Room (223)

Training shouldn’t be a checklist you finish and forget. This session walks through a competency cycle framework that treats student staff development as continuous and connected!

3

Perks, Plans, and Peace of Mind: UCF Benefits Explained

Sand Key Meeting Room (220)
Dee Minuto

Learn about employee benefits and campus resources you may be missing, from tuition waivers and leave options to retirement, professional development, wellness, and discounts. Come ready to ask questions and share resources you’ve discovered.

Session Blocks 3 and 4

Continue the afternoon program.

SESSION BLOCK 3 | 1:00–1:50 • CONTINUED

4

Positive Adaptation Through Transition & Change

Alaina Gonzalez and Dr. Nina Leonard
Egmont Key Meeting Room (224)

This session explores how Student Affairs professionals can adapt with purpose and agency during periods of organizational change. Participants will examine how leadership practices, team dynamics, and organizational culture influence adaptation, morale, and effectiveness during times of transition. Through the application of change management and transition theories, attendees will gain practical tools for understanding, navigating, and leading change in ways that support both staff well-being and student success.

SESSION BLOCK 4 | 2:00–2:50

1

Masked Up: How My Adult Neurodivergent Diagnosis Changed My Life in Higher Education

Kelly Clark
Sand Key Meeting Room (220)

Many neurodivergent professionals spend years masking their struggles to meet workplace expectations. This session explores how neurodivergence can show up in professional and student staff, while offering practical strategies to create more supportive, flexible, and welcoming teams where every mind can thrive.

2

From Applications to Arrival: A Guide for New Professionals Relocating for Work

Case Marshall
Sanibel Boardroom (219)

The presenter will share strategies for navigating the job search, evaluating relocation decisions, and adjusting to life in a new role and community. The session will provide a realistic look at professional transitions, highlighting both challenges and opportunities by drawing from personal experiences and strategies grounded in theory.

Session Block 4 and Closing

2:00–3:30

SESSION BLOCK 4 | 2:00–2:50 • CONTINUED

3

It Takes a Campus: Preapring Career-Ready Knights

Riya Patel and Emily Flositz
Cedar Key Meeting Room (223)

The Dixon Career Development Center strives to provide students with the support they need in “preparing for what’s next”: internships, graduate and professional school preparation, and career readiness. We understand that it takes our whole campus to meet their needs for success, therefore, we will introduce practical tools and resources designed to support your work with students.

4

Give a Duck: Building a Workplace Culture People Love

Taylor Sandifer
Egmont Key Meeting Room (224)

This session explores how the Dixon Career Development Center fosters belonging and engagement through a comprehensive employee lifecycle approach, including structured onboarding, staff assessments, peer recognition initiatives like our “Duck of Distinction,” professional development, and meaningful offboarding practices.

CLOSING ACTIVITY

3:00–3:30

WRAP UP + PRIZE DRAWING

Key West Ballroom (218)

We'll close the day in the same room where we started. We'll share highlights from the feedback wall, take three minutes to hear what the day meant to you, and wrap up with the passport drawing. You must be in the room to win, so bring your passport.

STUDENT SUCCESS AND WELL-BEING • 407-823-4625 • SSWB@UCF.EDU