

**Syracuse University's Undergraduate Advising Conference**  
**May 15, 2025, Life Sciences Complex**  
**Holistic Student Support: Finding the Balance Needed to Thrive**  
**Presentation Abstracts and Presenter Bios**

**Keynote: Eight Ways to Care for Ourselves and Our Students**

**Mary Grace A. Almandrez**

It can be challenging to provide holistic student support when we, ourselves, need support. Intrapersonal reflection and productive interpersonal interactions can greatly influence how we care for ourselves and our students. This dynamic session invites participants to consider eight strategies to inform their advising, mentoring, and coaching.



**Mary Grace A. Almandrez** serves as Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion at Syracuse University, where she leads efforts to cultivate a campus community that is welcoming to all through strategic initiatives, partnerships, and institutional planning. With a career spanning leadership roles at the University of Rhode Island, Brown University, and the University of San Francisco, she brings extensive experience in student affairs, organizational development, curriculum, and policy implementation. In addition to her administrative leadership, Almandrez is a dedicated educator, consultant, and presenter, actively engaged in national diversity organizations. She holds degrees from the University of San Diego, McDaniel College, and the University of San Francisco, with additional training from Harvard's Institute for Educational Management.

**Concurrent Sessions:**

**1A. Gratitude at Work: Benefitting YOU and Your Students**

—*Mary Suits, Academic and Career Advisor, College of Arts & Sciences/Maxwell*

Advising is an ever-evolving field, but one thing that will always remain the same is the need for resilience in students and staff. Practicing gratitude is known to help build resilience, improve health, increase empathy and self-esteem, reduce aggression, increase social connection, and more. In this session we will explore and practice gratitude as a tool to promote our own success and longevity while also enhancing our interactions and support to students.

**Mary Suits** has been with Syracuse University since December 2023 in the College of Arts and Sciences and Maxwell as a front-line academic and career advisor. Prior to joining the SU team, Mary earned her bachelor's degree in human resource management from SUNY Oswego and master's degree in higher education administration and student affairs with a graduate certificate in academic and career advising from Kent State University, as well as worked full-time in career services and corporate recruiting environments. Mary is an advocate for self-care as well as personal and professional development.



**1B. Partnering for Success: How CLASS can Support You and Your Students**

—*George Athanas, Associate Director, Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS)*

Calling all glass house dwellers. How many of us have talked about the importance of time management and tackling procrastination in our conversations with our students, knowing that it is an area we could use a little improvement on



ourselves? This session has a dual purpose: to learn about services that the Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS) offers (including academic coaching) and how we might work with you, while we share elements included in the coaching program that even staff might find valuable. CLASS provides and facilitates comprehensive, high-quality academic support services, but only accomplishes these goals in partnership with campus offices and academic departments. Working together with advisors is a proven strategy to achieve these ends.

**George Athanas** has worked at Syracuse University for over 20 years, including positions at the Office of Student Living, Center for International Services, and Student Center and Programming Services. He has been the associate director at CLASS since August 2022. In his current role, he is responsible for many of the operational

aspects of the office and oversees the staff responsible for CLASS academic programming and academic expectations. George holds academic degrees from the University of New Hampshire (Community Development), the University of Massachusetts Lowell (Community Social Psychology) and Michigan State University (Higher Adult and Lifelong Education).

### **1C. Standardizing Transfer Credit Processes to Improve Student Experience**

—*Juniper Tiedermann, Assistant Director of Transfer Services, College of Arts & Sciences*

The University is trying to become a destination for transfer students, recognizing the enrollment cliff, families trying to be more cost effective, and changing demographics. In light of this, the College of Arts and Sciences and Maxwell School have collaborated with Admissions and the Registrar's office in order to streamline this process for staff, students, and faculty, in order to increase student yield. Starting immediately after admission, students are presented with a high level of detailed information regarding their credits, their graduation requirements, and career advising. This is done by utilizing both Slate and Onbase to create centrally accessible documents, which both Admissions and schools can access. We have also worked to streamline the process for current students to transfer credit, while ensuring consistent evaluation of courses. This session will walk advisors through these processes, discuss how they can work to adopt the tools we use, and end with a question-and-answer session.

**Juniper Tiedermann** has been with the University since 2005, when they attended as an undergraduate, graduating with a BA in English and Textual Studies and Religion. After trying life in Philadelphia for a bit and graduating from Saint Joseph's University with Masters in both Elementary and Special Education, they returned to Syracuse and have been working in CAS/MAX advising since 2016. They have been involved on campus with the University Conduct Board, SPIRAL, and regularly attending Cuse WBB games.



### **1D. A Holistic Approach to Supporting Disabled Students: The Role of the Center for Disability Resources**

—*Paula Possenti-Perez, Director, Center for Disability Resources*

—*Judy Kopp, Associate Director, Center for Disability Resources*

What advisors need to know about the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) and its role as a campus resource whose responsibility is to ensure access and equity for disabled students. This session will include a brief overview of CDR resources, service areas, policy/process updates, as well as relevant data points. Key discussion points include CDR's role in implementing accommodations as well as student and faculty responsibilities, the purpose and rationale for testing and classroom accommodations, and, lastly, an open discussion addressing the advisor's role in assisting CDR/faculty with atypical classroom or program accommodations, as well as responding to challenging situations.



**Paula Possenti-Perez** (she, her, hers), M.S. Ed., C.A.S in Disability Studies, PhD candidate (ABD) in Higher Education, began her tenure at Syracuse University as the Director of the Center for Disability Resources. Her major responsibilities include the oversight and administration of all disability-related resources and supports for undergraduate and graduate students attending Syracuse University and SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry. Additionally, Ms. Possenti-Perez is a member of the University's Disability Access & Inclusion Council and the Office of Diversity & Inclusions Partners Group. Committed to a climate of inclusive excellence and incorporating disability as a rich expression of diversity, under her leadership, CDR endeavors to be a national leader in creating a cultural shift in higher education, embracing a critical lens to address social justice and disability, and adopting an equity-minded praxis.

**Judy Kopp**, M.Ed., began at Syracuse University in 2001, and has been with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) since 2013. As Associate Director, Judy supervises the access counseling staff and the academic support area. She is also the support liaison to Falk College. As CDR represents a social justice model in envisioning disability as diversity, Judy is an advocate for equal access to all.



### **2A. Working Smarter, Not Harder:**

#### **Proactive High Impact Advising Tips and Tools for Student Success and Retention**

—*Malissa Monaghan, Academic Counselor, Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics*

In today's world of higher education, advisors are tasked with guiding students toward academic success while juggling an ever-increasing caseload. This session will introduce proactive, high impact advising strategies that streamline workflows, foster student engagement, and improve student success and retention. By maximizing existing technology features, utilizing

organizational strategies, and relationship-based advising techniques, advisors can maximize their effectiveness without increasing their workload. Participants will leave with practical tools and strategies they can implement immediately to enhance student outcomes while maintaining a sustainable work-life balance.



**Malissa Monaghan** joined Syracuse University as an academic counselor in the Falk College Office of Student Services in 2012. She works as a team member, with a strengths-based advising approach, to ensure that all Falk students receive accurate information and guidance in their degree requirements with a high degree of professionalism, personal integrity, and discretion. Malissa counsels, advises, and mentors undergraduate students on complex academic and personal issues, making appropriate referrals when needed. Malissa has also instructed FYS 101 and HSH 101 courses. Prior to her current role, Malissa worked in a variety of K-12 educational settings. She holds a Master of Science degree in Counseling Services from SUNY Oswego and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from St. John Fisher College. Malissa is also a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in NY state and a Certified Play Therapist.

## **2B. Beyond Responsible: Academic Integrity Advising Conversations from a Growth Perspective**

—Kate Marzen, Assistant Director, Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS)

—Ashley Jimenez, Program Support Coordinator, Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS)

The academic advisor's role can be difficult to navigate after a student has been found responsible for an academic integrity violation. Advisors are often tasked with managing student emotions, supporting them beyond the process, and providing additional assistance as students with violations begin the process of applying for jobs, internships, and graduate programs. This session explores supporting responsible students from a growth perspective: helping them process their violation and engage with future opportunities from a place of positive reflection. A responsible finding may be an obstacle students face while studying at Syracuse University, but our aim is to help them overcome and feel better prepared for future academic, professional, and personal challenges. Through interactive activities, participants will learn to understand academic integrity from the student perspective and identify key vocabulary and practices that help them reframe their post-violation thinking. This session will also highlight practical skill application, allowing advisors to work through common application scenarios that students experience. By the end of the session, advisors will be more prepared to help students navigate the emotional process of applying for opportunities after an Academic Integrity violation.

**Kate Marzen** has been with the Center for Learning and Student Success and Syracuse University since 2023. In her role, Kate processes student academic integrity violations, educates others on the importance of integrity at the collegiate level, and collaborates with partners across campus to bring more awareness to her office. Kate earned an M.B.A. from Newman University, an M.Ed. from the University of South Carolina and a B.S.Ed. from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Outside of work, Kate is an outdoorsy introvert, an avid runner and reader. She can always be found on the track, on the trail with her partner and dogs, or in a library.



**Ashley Jimenez** joined the Center for Learning and Student Success as a Program Support Coordinator in late 2023. Prior to this, she worked as an accounting analyst in the University's Comptroller's Office. Ashley earned a B.S. in Accounting and Business Management from the Whitman School of Management in 2020. During her undergraduate career, Ashley was involved in Student Living where she served as a resident advisor. She is currently a student in the Master of Higher Education program here at SU.

## **2C. Practice Makes Improvement! Action-Based Programming to Support 1<sup>st</sup> Year Success**

—Bruce Williams, Jr., HEOP Associate Director, School of Education

—Amy Messersmith, TRIO SSS Associate Director, School of Education

The Arthur O. Eve Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) is a New York State program that provides college access to students deserving of the opportunity. Student Support Services (SSS) is a federally funded TRIO program that supports first generation college students. Both programs support students with lower academic profiles and from lower income-earning families. By virtue of program eligibility, HEOP and TRIO SSS students are considered at-risk. Fall 2023 semester GPA data for first-year students was concerning for both programs: 35% of first-year students had a semester GPA below 2.0. In response, staff implemented two new interventions. During SummerStart 2024, the staff launched "Motivational Mondays," which consisted of a mandatory meeting from 5pm to 6pm every Monday for six weeks. Topics included the history of HEOP and TRIO SSS, examples of successful alumni, financial aid, financial literacy, social justice, student engagement, and much more.

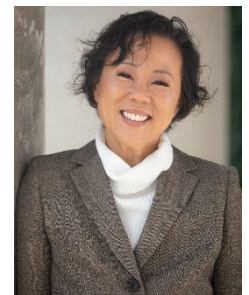
Additionally, both programs laid the foundation for a standardized grade tracking system for all first-year students and students on probation and SAP warning. By the end of fall 2024, the percentage of HEOP and TRIO SSS first-year students with a semester GPA below 2.0 was reduced to 18%. This session will delve into the reason behind these interventions, the challenges faced during implementation, and the impact these interventions had on students.



**Bruce Williams, Jr.** is the Associate Director of the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), bringing over a decade of experience in student support services at both the high school and collegiate levels. A former Division I student-athlete and team captain, Bruce is a dynamic leader passionate about fostering student success through academic advising, mentorship, and program development. Before joining HEOP, Bruce served as an academic advisor at Syracuse University's Whitman School of Management, where he guided students through complex academic challenges, coordinated interdisciplinary programs, and championed student engagement initiatives. His expertise also extends to athletic academic services, having worked with student-athletes to ensure NCAA eligibility and academic excellence. Bruce holds a Master of Science in Instructional Design, Development, and

Evaluation and a Bachelor of Science in Child and Family Studies from Syracuse University. His commitment to student empowerment continues to shape inclusive and transformative educational experiences.

**Amy Messersmith** is an associate director of TRIO Student Support Services (SSS). Amy earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from SUNY Brockport and master's degree in women's studies from The Ohio State University. She has been with TRIO SSS at SU since 2006. In 2020, Amy was inspired by Texas State to start The SENSES Project, which provides the equipment, instruction, and space for HEOP and SSS students and friends to learn podcasting and music creation. In 2023, Amy became an inaugural administrative fellow through Syracuse University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion.



## **2D. Leading with Heart and Mind: Emotional Intelligence (EQ) for Student Success**

—*Savonne Proctor, Student Success Advisor, College of Engineering & Computer Science*

This session will explore strategies for developing emotional intelligence to support student success in higher education. We will explore practical approaches for managing stress, building resilience, and fostering empathy, helping students navigate academic and social challenges. Attendees—whether faculty, advisors, or student support professionals—will gain tools to build trust, promote inclusivity, and enhance communication, all of which contribute to student well-being and achievement. Additionally, the session will introduce methods for assessing emotional intelligence growth, utilizing an EQ student self-awareness assessment and case studies to evaluate student development and the real-world application of these skills.



**Savonne Proctor** joined the University community in July 2024 as a student success advisor in the College of Engineering and Computer Science. In this role, she supports students academically, personally, and professionally, helping them persist and thrive in their college journey. Savonne began her career in higher education as a graduate resident hall director at SUNY Buffalo State, where she earned her master's degree in higher education and student affairs administration. She has spent most of her career in student affairs, focusing on student persistence and success. Her interests include spiritual identity, neurodivergence, and emotional intelligence as key factors in holistic student support. She also enjoys teaching when the opportunity arises. Savonne is excited to continue her professional journey in academic affairs with the College of Engineering and Computer Science and looks forward to fostering student success in STEM fields.

## **3. Watering the Roots, Harvesting Success: Practical Strategies for Supporting Student Mental Health**

—*NACADA webinar viewing and discussion*

This presentation will provide attendees with insights and strategies to better understand the mental health needs of their students, with a particular focus on the impact of anxiety, depression, ADHD, and challenges faced by marginalized student populations. The presenters aim to equip attendees with the necessary skills to support college students in developing mental health challenges and help connect them with appropriate care. Viewing followed by comments and discussion with Cory Wallack, executive director of health and wellness at the Barnes Center at the Arch.