

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education
Belk Center for Community College
Leadership and Research

BELK CENTER 2026 ANNUAL REPORT: CONNECT. GROW. APPLY.



The 2025-2026 Annual Report is now live! The Belk Center is dedicated to equipping leaders, advancing evidence-based research, and driving social and economic mobility for learners across North Carolina and beyond.

Grounded in our core mission to Connect, Grow and Apply, our 2025-2026 Annual Report highlights how we are translating research into practice alongside educators, policymakers and strategic partners. From expanding leadership pipelines and scaling high-impact teaching practices to delivering actionable insights for adult learner success, discover how we are working together to strengthen all 58 of our state's community colleges and the communities they serve.

ON THE GROUND

Western Piedmont Community College Fall Convocation Workshop



Pictured here: Members of the Western Piedmont Community College team writing down and sharing their personal commitment to adult learners.

Belk Center team members Dr. Sarah Deal and Jared King recently facilitated an interactive workshop focused on expanding support for adult learners at Western Piedmont Community College's (WPCC) fall convocation.

The session highlighted how WPCC's participation in NC Reconnect directly advances both local college and statewide educational attainment goals. Introducing the Five P Adult Learner Framework, the team led hands-on activities to help attendees refine student messaging, strengthen partnerships and streamline pathways to degree completion.

Throughout the day, WPCC faculty, staff and leadership shared inspiring examples of how they champion adult students every day. The workshop concluded with each attendee making a personal commitment to driving adult learner success in the upcoming academic year.

Empowering Global Journeys: College of Education Belk Center Launches New Study Abroad Program in Croatia

The Belk Center and NC State's College of Education are excited to launch a new Study Abroad program in Croatia designed for doctoral students in the Community College Leadership Ed.D. and Community College and Career Education Ph.D. programs. This immersive experience offers emerging community college leaders and scholars transformative global perspectives on higher education.



Why Your Support Matters:

Global experiences foster innovative leadership and cross-cultural insights that directly benefit North Carolina's community colleges and students. Donor support helps lower financial barriers, ensuring our leaders can participate in these immersive learning opportunities regardless of resource constraints.

Give the Gift of Learning: Donate Today!

SUPPORT STUDY ABROAD

IN THE CONVERSATION



Join Us TODAY: Advancing Adult Learner Success Webinar

This afternoon, the Belk Center's AJ Jaeger and Emily VanZoest will join the Council for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) for a session in their 2026 Fall Sponsored Webinar Series, titled "Advancing Adult Learner Success: The Vision and Work for the Adult Learner Lab."

The webinar will explore how community colleges can better recognize, support and scale evidence-based success strategies for adult students.

ADVANCING ADULT LEARNER SUCCESS:
THE VISION AND WORK FOR THE ADULT LEARNER LAB

REGISTER AT: [HTTPS://WWW.CSCC.PITT.EDU](https://www.cscC.pitt.edu)

JOIN US TODAY

Translating Student Input Into Strategic Action

Across North Carolina, rural-serving community colleges are demonstrating that student voices are key to driving retention and credential completion. When institutional strategic plans reflect what students say they need, colleges can make more impactful, student-centered decisions.

The Belk Center's newest research brief highlights how student perspectives – collected through a strategic planning stakeholder survey – were translated into actionable goals and strategies within new



institutional strategic plans.

[READ NOW](#)



Now Streaming: Adult Learner Strategies on Spotlight on Community Colleges

In the latest episode of the “Spotlight on Community Colleges” podcast, the Belk Center’s Dr. Emily VanZoest joins Ms. Ellen Flowers-Fields from the College of Southern Maryland to explore critical strategies for supporting adult learners. Together, they share actionable insights, institutional approaches and a look at the new Adult Learner Lab.

“Spotlight on Community Colleges” is a Council for the Study of Community Colleges project hosted by Drs. Brett Ranon Nachman, Carrie Kisker and Erin Doran.

[LISTEN NOW](#)

New Funding Available Through the Community College Data Hub



Funding opportunities are now available for scholars, practitioners and policymakers using the freely accessible Community College Data Hub (CCDH) to advance student success. Opportunities include \$5,000 Research Grants for projects utilizing CCDH datasets as a central focus and \$15,000 Research-to-Practice Stipends for community college professionals using data to drive institutional change or policy development.

Submissions are open through October 1, 2026, with awards announced on November 1, 2026.

LEARN MORE & APPLY

From Research to Reality: Action-Focused Community College Partnerships for Adult Learner Success



How can community colleges turn research into measurable institutional change for adult learners?

Join Belk Center Director of Research Sarah Deal, Ph.D., and Visiting Research Scholar Emily VanZoest, Ph.D., on Monday, October 6 at 1 p.m. ET as featured speakers in the ExpandedED: Distinguished Research Series, hosted by the Texas Tech University College of Education.

Texas Tech's ExpandedED Webinar

HOW TO TURN ADULT LEARNER RESEARCH INTO PRACTICAL REENTRY STRATEGIES AND CAMPUS CHANGE

[HTTPS://TEXASTECH.ZOOM.US/JOIN/REGISTER/JCEQJ6R1TJUM1G_NBNP02W4/#REGISTRATION](https://texastech.zoom.us/join/register/jceqj6r1tjum1g_nbnp02w4/#registration)

In this interactive brown bag session, Dr. Deal and Dr. VanZoest will share key insights from recent adult reentry research and introduce a collaborative framework designed to help institutions bridge the gap between data collection and practical student outcomes.

REGISTER

Register Today — 2026 Dallas Herring Lecture

**DALLAS
HERRING
LECTURE**  **2026**
NOV. 17 • 10 A.M. ET



DR. VICKI KAROLEWICS

PRESIDENT OF WALLACE STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
TOP 10 FINALIST, 2027 ASPEN PRIZE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE

**"THE VALUE AGENDA: A SYSTEMS
APPROACH TO STUDENT SUCCESS"**

Calling all community college leaders and partners – #DHL2026 registration is now open!

This year's Dallas Herring Lecture features Dr. Vicki Karolewics, president of Wallace State Community College. Her lecture, titled "The Value Agenda: A Systems Approach to Student Success," explores institutional strategies and systems-based frameworks to align programs with high-value workforce pathways and advance student economic mobility.

Don't wait, register for your virtual seat now!

[LEARN MORE](#)[REGISTER TO ATTEND VIRTUALLY](#)

PLAN YOUR 2026-2027 PACE CLIMATE SURVEY

You track engagement, retention and performance — but if you aren't measuring your campus climate, you're missing the invisible forces driving all three.

PACE CLIMATE SURVEY



PLAN YOUR 2026-27
CLIMATE SURVEY NOW!

The PACE Climate Survey is a diagnostic tool built specifically for community college leaders who need to shift from a reactive to a proactive strategy. It tells you how your employees are experiencing reality right now, measuring the friction points, the unwritten rules and the actual enablers of daily productivity.

To learn more about administering a PACE Survey at your community college, email PACE_Survey@ncsu.edu

[LEARN MORE](#)

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