

Advancing Campus Pluralism: Courageous Leadership in Contentious Times



March 11, 2025

The Westin Chicago River North, Chicago, IL



Diversity work on college campuses is undergoing rapid changes amid heightened tension and polarization. The Advancing Campus Pluralism Conference provides space for presidents, senior administrators, and higher education thought leaders to discuss openly their commitments to diversity and cooperation across difference and to think through creative ways of pursuing a pluralistic approach to diversity in a time of polarization.

The conference will feature keynotes and plenary panels addressing polarization and highlighting models of cooperation accompanied by two tracks of workshops for participants: one for presidents, and another for senior administrators. Participants will gain valuable insights and build the capacity to develop comprehensive strategies for modeling pluralism on their campuses. We look forward to working together to foster positive change on our campuses and to realizing higher education's potential for creating an inclusive and cooperative academic environment.

Schedule at a Glance

Monday, March 10

Optional Pre-Conference Antisemitism & Islamophobia Workshop (Lincoln Park)

12:00 p.m.–1:00 p.m. **Lunch (Lincoln Park)**

1:00 p.m.–5:30 p.m. **Workshop (Lincoln Park):**
The Promise of Pluralism in an Age of Prejudice: Addressing Antisemitism and Islamophobia on College Campuses

Tuesday, March 11

8:00 a.m. **Registration Opens (Grand Court)**

8:00 a.m.–9:00 a.m. **Continental Breakfast (Grand Court)**

9:00 a.m.–10:30 a.m. **Welcome and Opening Remarks (Grand Ballroom)**
Plenary 1: How Can Universities Model Courage and Collaboration in the Current Political and Cultural Environment?

10:30 a.m.–11:00 a.m. **Break (Grand Court)**

11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. **Concurrent Session 1**
Session 1A - Senior Administrator (Lincoln Park):
Advancing Diversity: A Pluralism Approach to Strengthening Inclusion Efforts

Session 1B - Senior Administrator (Jackson Park):
Civic Pluralism on Campus: Best Practices and Strategies

Session 1C - President (Promenade B):
The Promise of Pluralism for Addressing Antisemitism and Islamophobia on Campus

12:00 p.m.–1:30 p.m. **Lunch (Grand Ballroom)**

1:30 p.m.–2:30 p.m. **Concurrent Session 2**
Session 2A - Senior Administrator (Lincoln Park):
Engaging Diversity Amid Challenging Legislation: Navigating State and National Shifts

Session 2B - Senior Administrator (Jackson Park):
Advancing Campus Pluralism at Your Institution: Moving from Conversation to Action

Session 2C - President (Promenade B):
The Role of University Presidents in Generating and Sustaining Difficult Dialogue

2:30 p.m.–3:00 p.m. **Break (Grand Court)**

3:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m. **Plenary 2 and Closing Remarks (Grand Ballroom)**
Plenary 2: How Can Diversity Work Be Reenvisioned to Generate a Truly Inclusive University and Nation?



Extended Schedule

Monday, March 10

Optional Pre-Conference Antisemitism & Islamophobia Workshop

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Location: Lincoln Park

Lunch

1:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Location: Lincoln Park

Workshop:

The Promise of Pluralism in an Age of Prejudice:
Addressing Antisemitism and Islamophobia on College Campuses

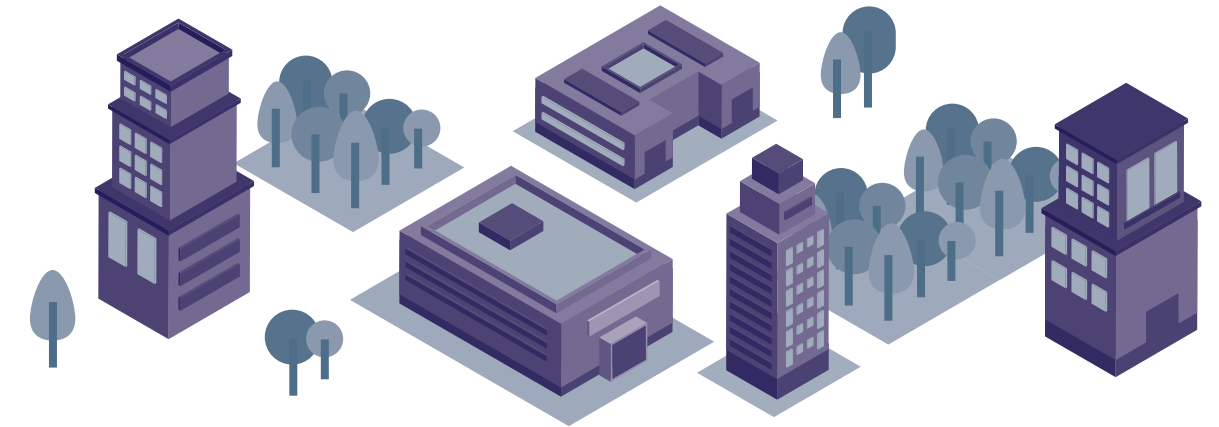
Facilitators:

Homayra Ziad, *Director of Campus Partnerships, Interfaith America*

Rabbi Or Rose, *Senior Consultant, Interfaith America*

Description:

How do college and university professionals attend responsibly to harmful prejudicial behaviors while promoting dialogue, learning, and healing? This 2-part workshop (4 hours total) helps **university presidents** and **senior administrators** think through the complex realities of **antisemitism** and **Islamophobia** in their campus communities and beyond. The first workshop offers foundational knowledge of antisemitism and Islamophobia, including definitions, histories, and intersections. The second workshop examines one or more case studies on religious prejudice (and other related biases) in a campus context that helps participants consider what a holistic response might look like in their own institutional context. While this training focuses specifically on understanding and countering antisemitism and Islamophobia, there will also be robust discussion of how to envision such interventions as part of a larger vision of **civic pluralism**.



Tuesday, March 11

8:00 a.m.

Location: Grand Court

Registration Opens

8:00 a.m.–9:00 a.m.

Location: Grand Court

Continental Breakfast

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Location:
Grand Ballroom

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Welcome from Interfaith America:

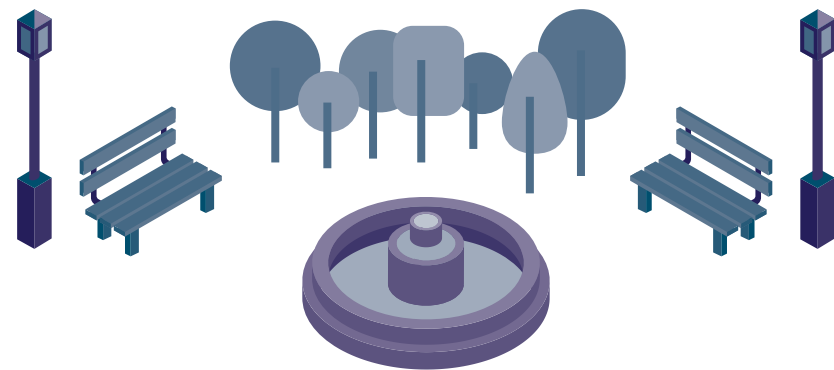
Todd Green, *Senior Director of Campus Partnerships, Interfaith America*

Welcome from AAC&U:

Dawn Michele Whitehead, *Vice President, Office of Global Citizenship for Campus, Community, and Careers, AAC&U*

Opening Remarks:

Eboo Patel, *President, Interfaith America*



9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Location:
Grand Ballroom

Plenary 1: How Can Universities Model Courage and Collaboration in the Current Political and Cultural Environment?

Moderator:
Lynn Pasquerella, *President, AAC&U*

Panelists:
Mary Dana Hinton, *President, Hollins University*
Jane Conoley, *President, Cal State Long Beach*
Fr. John Jenkins, *C.S.C, President Emeritus, Notre Dame University*

Description:

From proposals to eliminate the Department of Education to efforts to dismantle diversity programs, higher education finds itself in the middle of a contentious political climate while also struggling in the court of public opinion. This plenary session invites panelists and conference participants to reflect on why pluralism is essential to navigating the political and cultural tensions that campuses will face in the next several years, as well as how pluralism can create space and opportunity for university presidents to lead with courage and vulnerability in such contentious times.

10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Location: Grand Court

Break (Refreshments)

Concurrent Session 1

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location:
Lincoln Park

Session 1A (Senior Administrator): Advancing Diversity: A Pluralism Approach to Strengthening Inclusion Efforts

Facilitator:
Melissa Carter, *Senior Director and Head of Mindfulness Education and Programs, Global Spiritual Life, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Public Service, Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service Adjunct Faculty, Silver School of Social Work New York University*

Description:

Universities are frequently portrayed as sites of unhealthy and unproductive conflict in media and political discourse. Yet few institutions are better positioned to model what it looks like to bring people with diverse identities and ideologies into a common community to pursue common goals. In this session, participants will discuss pluralism as a promising framework for engaging with diversity and will explore ways that this framework is complementary of existing diversity work.



11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location:
Jackson Park

***Session 1B (Senior Administrator):
Civic Pluralism on Campus:
Best Practices and Strategies***

Facilitator:
Cassie Meyer, *Director of Campus Partnerships,
Interfaith America*

Description:

This session will introduce Interfaith America’s “Civic Pluralism Practices” as a best practices framework for promoting civic pluralism on campus. Building from examples of pluralism in action on diverse campuses around the country, participants will workshop strategies for pursuing these practices on their campus in four concrete areas: Institutional Leadership, Curriculum and Scholarship, Capacity Building, and Cocurricular Engagement. Participants will leave the session with concrete next steps, new connections with colleagues on other campuses, and a model for continuing to champion pluralism on their campuses.

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location:
Promenade B

***Session 1C (President):
The Promise of Pluralism for
Addressing Antisemitism and
Islamophobia on Campus***

Facilitator:
Homayra Ziad, *Director of Campus Partnerships,
Interfaith America*
Rabbi Or Rose, *Interfaith America*

Description:

A documented rise in incidents of antisemitism and Islamophobia on college campuses dominated media headlines and occupied the attention of university presidents and senior leaders in the months after October 7, 2023. In this session, we will discuss the benefits of a pluralistic approach for addressing these prejudices in the current polarized political environment. We will pay special attention to how presidents can deploy pluralistic messaging and strategies in response to these prejudices in lieu of punitive measures that may inadvertently pit those impacted by antisemitism and Islamophobia against one another.

12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Location:
Grand Ballroom

Lunch

Concurrent Session 2

1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

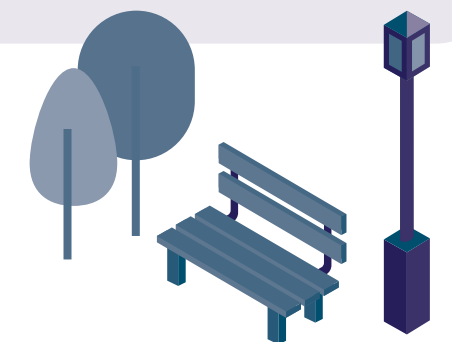
Location:
Lincoln Park

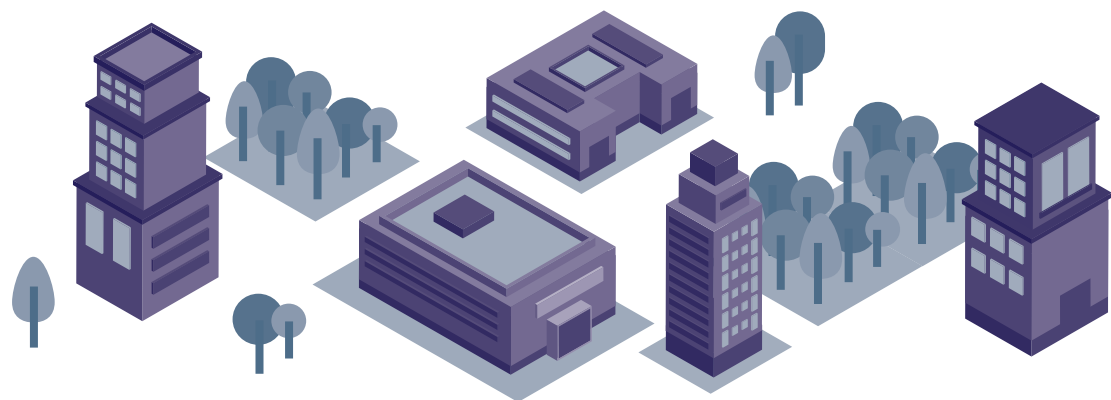
***Session 2A (Senior Administrator):
Engaging Diversity Amid Challenging
Legislation: Navigating State and
National Shifts***

Facilitator:
Mary Ann Villarreal, *Vice President for Diversity,
Equity, and Student Success, AAC&U*
Maria Dixon Hall, *Chief Cultural Intelligence
Officer and Senior Advisor to the President,
Southern Methodist University*

Description:

In the wake of state and federal efforts to restrict or eliminate DEI programs and policies in higher education, university leaders are wrestling with what it means to “do diversity” under such challenging and complex circumstances. This session guides participants through the larger implications of legal challenges to DEI efforts at universities and offers insights into how universities can continue to cultivate and invest in diversity initiatives while taking current legislation into account.





1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Location:
Jackson Park

***Session 2B (Senior Administrator):
Advancing Campus Pluralism at Your
Institution: Moving from Conversation
to Action***

Facilitator:
Dawn Michele Whitehead, *Vice President, Office of Global Citizenship for Campus, Community, and Careers, AAC&U*
Todd Green, *Senior Director of Campus Partnerships, Interfaith America*

Description:

At a moment in history and on campus where headlines point to entrenched division and polarization, new ideas and initiatives that focus on purposeful learning and engagement across differences matter more than ever. Grounded in the current collaboration between AAC&U and Interfaith America, participants in this session will explore strategies to move from conversations about pluralism to integrating pluralism across their institutions and learn about current practices on campuses that have centered pluralistic ideals and been effective at building a campus culture of civic engagement and respectful dialogue across difference. Session participants will consider how pluralism relates to existing campus initiatives; how to identify potential stakeholders who can contribute to this work; how to assess for current synergies for pluralism that may already exist at your home institution; how pluralism connects with other philosophies that guide current practices for student learning in and outside of the classroom; and how to identify next steps for advancing pluralism as an integrated part of campus culture?

1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Location:
Promenade B

***Session 2C (President): The Role of
University Presidents in Generating
and Sustaining Difficult Dialogue***

Facilitator:
Rajiv Vinnakota, *President, Institute for Citizens and Scholars*
Jon Alger, *President, American University*

Description:

Any effort to infuse pluralism comprehensively into a university's ethos depends on the willingness of its president to take the lead and set the tone for generating and sustaining difficult dialogues across deep difference. This session guides university presidents through the larger considerations involved in creating opportunities for sustained dialogue and engaged learning across difference at their institutions, with attention to the importance for why these endeavors matter now more than ever in the current and political environment.

2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Location: Grand Court

Break (Refreshments)



3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Location:
Grand Ballroom

***Plenary 2: How Can Diversity Work
Be Reenvisioned to Generate a Truly
Inclusive University and Nation?***

Moderator:
Eboo Patel, *Founder and President,
Interfaith America*

Panelist:
Van Jones, *CNN Host and Founder of
DreamMachine.org*

Closing Remarks:
Lynn Pasquerella, *President, AAC&U*

Description:

In public and political discourse, universities are often viewed as sites of intractable conflict as opposed to laboratories for cooperation. Much of the blame for the former, fairly or not, has been directed at existing diversity programs on college campuses. This plenary conversation offers reflections on how universities can rethink and recalibrate their approaches to diversity, disagreement, and conflict on the way to becoming centers of pluralism and models for what it means to live in an inclusive, diverse democracy.

Speaker Bios



Jonathan R. Alger

Jonathan R. Alger is the 16th president of American University (AU).

President Alger is an experienced and visionary higher education leader. Known as a national leader in civic engagement, civic education, and civil discourse, he is also a nationally recognized scholar and speaker on higher education policy and law.

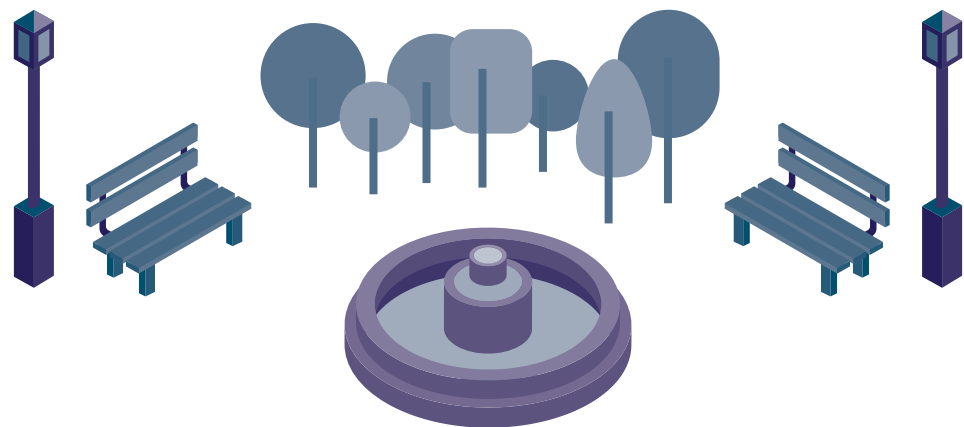
President Alger came to AU from James Madison University (JMU) in Virginia, where he served as president for 12 years. Under his leadership, JMU created and implemented a bold and visionary strategic plan focused on engaged learning, community engagement, and civic engagement.

President Alger currently serves as chair of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Colleges and Universities.

President Alger previously served as a vice president at Rutgers University and has also held positions at the University of Michigan, American Association of University Professors, U.S. Department of Education, and a major international law firm.

Since he arrived at AU in the summer of 2024, he has been an engaged and involved leader. He kicked off a months-long listening tour with constituencies across campus and beyond, and launched The Civic Life, a university-wide initiative focused on civic engagement, civic education, and civil discourse.

President Alger was born and raised outside Rochester, New York. His wife, Mary Ann Alger, has a business background, and their daughter, Eleanor, is a screenwriter in Los Angeles.



Melissa Carter

Melissa Carter is the senior director of Global Spiritual Life and the head of Mindfulness Education and Programming for the Office of Global Inclusion within the University Life at NYU. She also serves as an adjunct assistant professor at the Wagner School of Public Service and an adjunct faculty member at the Silver School of Social Work. Since transitioning from a career in the music industry, Melissa has spent over a decade educating on the intersection of spirituality, pluralism, contemplative practices, care ethics, and well-being as paths to bridge-building. As a published scholar-practitioner, she holds a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies from the University of South Florida and an MBA in Media Management from the Metropolitan College of New York. She is currently a doctoral candidate in the NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development program in Higher Education Administration with a focus on Chaplaincy and Campus Religious Life.



Jane Close Conoley

Jane Close Conoley serves as the seventh President of California State University, Long Beach. Prior to assuming this role, she was the interim Chancellor of the University of California Riverside. She has also held leadership positions at the University of California Santa Barbara, Texas A&M University, and at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. Dr. Conoley is the author, co-author or editor of over one hundred thirty books, articles, and book chapters. Her latest book, *Positive Psychology and Family Therapy*, was co-authored with her husband, Dr. Collie W. Conoley.

She serves on numerous community service boards and has received research, teaching and service honors during her career. Both the American Psychological Association and the Association of Psychological Science honored Dr. Conoley with fellow status. Her research and development efforts in school safety, teacher quality, and student achievement have been supported by over \$50 million dollars in external federal, state, and private funds.

Her primary professional focus is to create pathways of success for California students seeking higher education.



Maria Dixon Hall

Dr. Maria A. Dixon Hall is the Chief Cultural Intelligence Officer and Senior Advisor to the President at Southern Methodist University, a role she has held since August 2020. In this capacity, she leads the strategic direction of campus-wide cultural intelligence initiatives, working closely with the President and Senior Administration. Dr. Dixon Hall holds a BS in Marketing from the University of Alabama, a Master of Divinity, a Master of Theology from Emory University, and a PhD in Organizational Communication and Religion from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Her research specializes in organizational communication in religious organizations and explores the intersection of identity, power, and organizational culture. Before returning to the university setting, Dr. Dixon Hall spent a decade working in marketing management and sales for IBM, Dow Chemical USA, and Diamond Exteriors, Inc.

Dr. Dixon Hall has been widely recognized throughout her tenure at SMU for her unwavering passion for teaching and research. Her accolades include the prestigious 2005-2006 Willis M. Tate Award for service to the Student Body, the 2009 Golden Mustang for outstanding teaching and research by junior faculty, and the 2010 Rotunda Award for Outstanding Teaching. In 2011, she received the “M” Award, SMU’s highest honor for exceptional service to the University. Further solidifying her dedication, Dr. Hall was named an Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Fellow in 2016, and in 2017, she earned the Thomas W. Tunks Distinguished University Citizen Award. In 2023, Dr. Dixon Hall’s dedication to her students and scholarship was recognized by the 118th United States Congress, receiving the Congressional Foundation’s Education Champion Award.

In an extension of her academic research in organizational culture, Dixon Hall began developing SMU’s Cultural Intelligence Initiative in 2016 as a practical, effective alternative to the traditional diversity paradigm. Utilizing an interdisciplinary framework, she extended the existing theory to create practical training that gives members of the SMU community the communication and behavioral tools to effectively learn, teach, collaborate, and lead in the complex cultural contexts in the 21st Century.

Dr. Dixon Hall’s work with CIQ@SMU has been featured in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *DMagazine*, the *Dallas Morning News*, and trade magazines such as *Restaurant News*. Her consulting clients have included Southwest Airlines, The AKOLA Project, The Dance Theatre of Harlem, and the Multi-cultural Food and Hospitality Association. In consecutive years from 2021–2024, Dr. Dixon Hall has been recognized by *D CEO* as one of Dallas’ Top 500 Business Leaders.

Dr. Dixon Hall is an ordained deacon and conference leader in the Horizon Conference of the United Methodist Church.



Todd Green

Todd Green, Senior Director of Campus Partnerships, oversees Interfaith America’s cross-campus efforts to embed interfaith cooperation across all aspects of university life, both curricular and co-curricular. Todd’s first career was as a Presbyterian minister in Texas. He later served fourteen years as a religious studies professor at Luther College in Iowa, followed by a stint as the Executive Director of America Indivisible in Washington, DC. He has conducted research and published books on the topics of Islamophobia, Muslim-Christian relations, and secularization. His perspectives have been featured in a variety of media outlets, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, and NPR. He holds a BA from Birmingham-Southern College, an MDiv from Columbia Theological Seminary, and an MA and PhD from Vanderbilt University. In his free time, Todd has taken up swing dancing and can be found on many Saturday nights dancing the Lindy Hop and the Charleston at social dances.



Mary Dana Hinton

Mary Dana Hinton, Ph.D. is the 13th president of Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia, and President Emerita of the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota. An active and respected proponent of the liberal arts, her leadership reflects a deep and abiding commitment to educational equity and the education of women.

Hinton earned a Ph.D. in religion and religious education with high honors from Fordham University, a Master of Arts degree in clinical child psychology from the University of Kansas, Lawrence, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Williams College. She is the recipient of the Bicentennial Medal from Williams College and honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degrees from Misericordia University, the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and Mount Saint Mary’s University. In 2021, Hinton was elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, an organization established more than 240 years ago by the nation’s founders to honor exceptionally accomplished individuals and engage them in advancing the public good.

Hinton’s scholarship focuses on higher education leadership, strategic planning, and inclusion in higher education. Her new book, *Leading from the Margins: College Leadership from Unexpected Places*, was published by Johns Hopkins University Press in February 2024. Her next book, *Where Love Leads*, is forthcoming. She is also the author of *The Commercial Church: Black Churches and the New Religious Marketplace in America* and a frequent op-ed contributor across higher education publications.

Hinton is a member of the board of directors for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities where she serves as chair, Interfaith America, American Association of Colleges and Universities, The Teagle Foundation, and the board of trustees at Mount Saint Mary’s University Los Angeles.



Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.

President Emeritus, University of Notre Dame

Elected in 2005 as the University of Notre Dame's 17th president, Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., served four terms on behalf of the Board of Trustees, stepping down in 2024 after 19 years of exemplary leadership and growth. As president, he devoted himself to fostering the University's unique place in academia, the Church, the United States, and the world.

A philosopher trained in theology and a member of Notre Dame's Department of Philosophy since 1990, Fr. Jenkins earned undergraduate and advanced degrees from Notre Dame, a doctorate of philosophy from Oxford University, and a master of divinity and licentiate in sacred theology from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley.



Van Jones

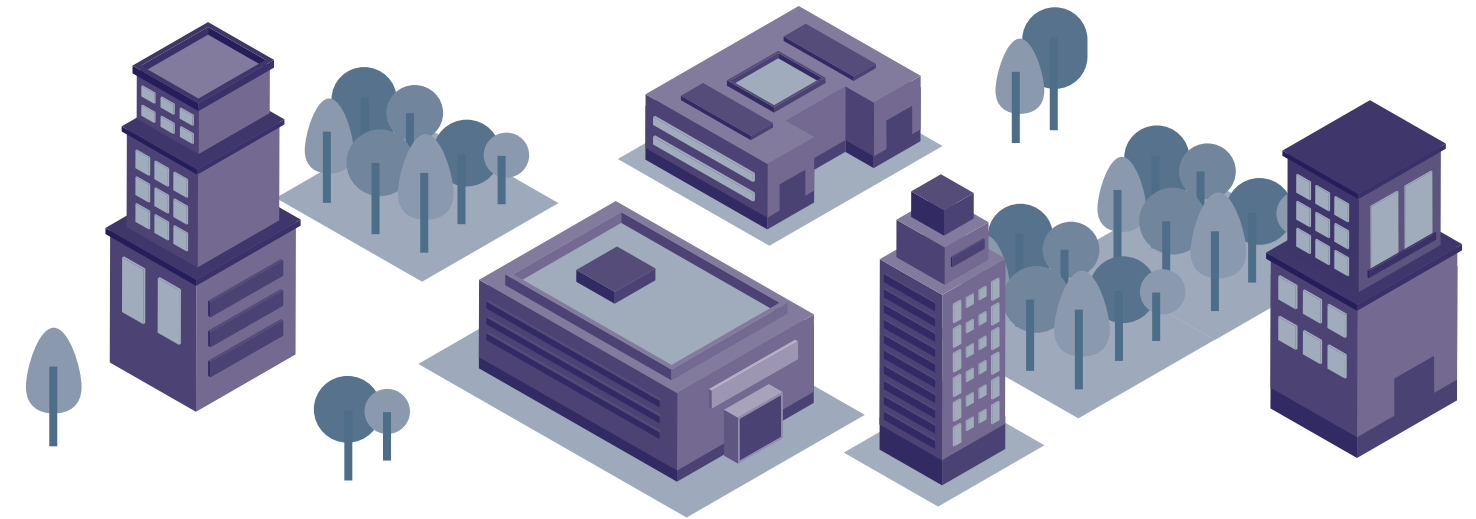
CNN Host, Bestselling Author, and Founder of Dream Machine

Van Jones is a U.S. media personality, entrepreneur and world-class change maker. Jones has a rare track record of bringing people together to do hard things—in areas as diverse as clean energy solutions, criminal justice reform and racial inclusion in the tech sector. In 2007, Van was the primary champion of the Green Jobs Act, signed into law by George W. Bush. In 2009, he worked in the Obama White House as the Special Advisor for Green Jobs. In 2018, he helped pass the FIRST STEP Act – which the New York Times calls the most substantial breakthrough in criminal justice in a generation. In 2021, Jones was the first recipient of Jeff Bezos' Courage & Civility Award. Van is a CNN host, an Emmy Award-winning producer and a 3x New York Times best-selling author.



Cassie Meyer

Cassie Meyer, Director of Campus Partnerships, collaborates with senior administrators and other university leaders on how to promote and deepen pluralism on campuses. Prior to joining IA, Cassie served for six years at the University of the South where she served first as Director of Dialogue Across Difference Programs and then as Assistant Dean of Student Equity and Career Readiness; in both roles she was responsible for building and sustaining new programs and systems with a campus-wide reach. Cassie also served on staff at IA for 13 years earlier in her career, where she designed and oversaw numerous programs, with a particular focus on academic and curricular initiatives, higher education convenings, and scholarship.



Lynn Pasquarella

Lynn Pasquarella was appointed president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities in 2016, after serving as the eighteenth president of Mount Holyoke College. She has held positions as Provost at the University of Hartford and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Rhode Island, where she taught for more than two decades. A philosopher whose work has combined teaching and scholarship with local and global engagement, Pasquarella has written extensively on medical ethics, metaphysics, public policy, and the philosophy of law. Her most recent book, *What We Value: Public Health, Social Justice, and Educating for Democracy*, examines the role of higher education in addressing some of the most pressing contemporary issues at the intersection of ethics, law, and public policy. Pasquarella is immediate past president of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and the host of Northeast Public Radio's *The Academic Minute*.

She is a graduate of Quinebaug Valley Community College, Mount Holyoke College, and Brown University. Her awards and honors include receiving the President's Award and Judith Krug Medal from Phi Beta Kappa; the William Rogers Award and the Horace Mann Medal from Brown University; the STAR Scholars Network North Star Lifetime Achievement Award; Mary Baldwin University's Algernon Sydney Sullivan Service to Humanity Award; the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences Advocacy Award; Quinebaug Valley Community College Champions Award; and the Mount Holyoke Alumni Association's Elizabeth Topham Kennan Award. Pasquarella holds honorary degrees from Elizabethtown College, Bishop's University, the University of South Florida, the University of Hartford, the University of Rhode Island, Concordia College, Mount Holyoke College, Bay Path University, and St. Mary's College and was named by *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* as one of America's top 35 women leaders. She serves on the boards of the Lingnan Foundation, the National Trust for the Humanities, the Coalition for the Common Good, and Handshake.



Eboo Patel

Eboo Patel is a civic leader who believes that religious diversity is an essential and inspiring dimension of American democracy. Named “one of America’s best leaders” by U.S. News and World Report, Eboo is Founder and President of Interfaith America, the leading interfaith organization in the United States. Under his leadership, Interfaith America has worked with governments, universities, private companies, and civic organizations to make faith a bridge of cooperation rather than a barrier of division.

Eboo served on President Obama’s Inaugural Faith Council, has given hundreds of keynote addresses, and has written five books, including *We Need to Build: Field Notes for Diverse Democracy*. He is an Ashoka Fellow and holds a doctorate in the sociology of religion from Oxford University, where he studied on a Rhodes scholarship. Eboo lives in Chicago with his wife, Shehnaz, and their two sons.



Rabbi Or Rose

Rabbi Or Rose is the founding Director of the Betty Ann Greenbaum Miller Center for Interreligious Learning & Leadership of Hebrew College and a senior consultant to Interfaith America. He previously served as the Associate Dean for Informal Education at the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College and as co-founder and co-director of CIRCLE, a center for interreligious education co-sponsored by Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College. Rabbi Rose is publisher of *The Journal of Interreligious Studies* and the co-editor of the award-winning anthologies, *My Neighbor’s Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation* (Orbis, 2012) and *With the Best of Intentions: Interreligious Missteps & Mistakes* (Orbis, 2023). Rabbi Rose is currently completing a contemporary multifaith commentary on the Book of Psalms (Paraclete Press, 2025) and a biography of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel for teen readers (ages 12-15, Monkfish, 2025). His writings have also appeared in *The Huffington Post*; *Forward*; *MyJewishLearning*; *Patheos*; *Religion News Service*; *Tikkun*; and *The Washington Post*.



Mary Ann Villarreal

Mary Ann Villarreal, Vice President for Diversity, Equity, & Student Success, is a dynamic leader and historian whose work is deeply rooted in understanding and amplifying the stories of marginalized communities. As a historian, Villarreal’s research has centered on cultural narratives, with a particular focus on the intersections of race, gender, and class in U.S. history. She has explored the ways in which historical narratives can be used to challenge power structures, while also illuminating the resilience and agency of historically disenfranchised communities. Her scholarly background informs her leadership in profound ways, allowing her to approach equity and inclusion not only as leadership goals but as critical parts of the historical and social fabric of the institution. Villarreal has spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at creating equitable access to resources and opportunities for all students, faculty, and staff. She builds pathways for future generations through education, strategic bridge building, and community engagement.

Villarreal most recently served as the inaugural Vice President, for the division of Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion at the University of Utah. She earned a Ph.D. in History at Arizona State University and an AB in Women’s Studies at Mount Holyoke College.





Raj Vinnakota

A pioneering social entrepreneur, Rajiv Vinnakota serves as President of the Institute for Citizens & Scholars, leading its mission to cultivate the talent, ideas, and networks that develop lifelong, effective citizens. To that end, he works tirelessly to build relationships with the partners and sponsors without whom Citizens & Scholars could not succeed, while at the same time fostering a strong organizational culture focused on American civic values.

Raj has dedicated his life to initiatives that help American citizens from all walks of life to become productive and engaged members of society. Early in his career, Raj co-founded the SEED Foundation, the nation's first network of public, college-preparatory boarding schools for underserved children. The SEED schools were featured in both television and film, and Raj won multiple awards for his work with SEED, including Harvard University's Innovation in American Government Award, Fast Company/Monitor Group's Social Capitalist Award, and Oprah Winfrey's Use Your Life Award. Raj continues to serve on the Board of Directors for SEED.

Before joining the Institute for Citizens and Scholars, Raj served as Executive Vice-President of the Aspen Institute. In this role, he launched and led the new Youth & Engagement Programs division devoted to youth leadership development, civic engagement, and opportunity.

Raj currently co-chairs the Civics and Civic Engagement Taskforce for the United States Congress Semiquincentennial Commission celebrating the 250th anniversary of the country's founding. Raj also co-chairs the Civic Learning Pillar of the Partnership for American Democracy, a coalition of American leaders directing resources and attention toward efforts to save U.S. democracy, and serves on the advisory committee for Citizen Data.

Raj has been at the forefront of innovative scholarship and research that has played a pivotal role in shaping the civic field. His publication credits include *From Civic Education to a Civic Learning Ecosystem*, *Mapping Civic Measurement*, and *The Civic Outlook of Young Adults in America*. He appears regularly on media outlets such as *Associated Press*, *NPR*, *The Hill*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Philanthropy News Digest*, and *Nonprofit Quarterly*. As an expert on civic learning and Gen Z, he has spoken at Fordham Institute, Results for America, Civic Learning Week, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, and as commencement speaker for the University of Chicago Charter School and the University of Pittsburgh.

Raj grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the child of Indian immigrants who instilled in him the faith that a good education could open doors to great things. He graduated from Princeton University and is a recipient of Princeton's Woodrow Wilson Award, the university's highest honor for undergraduate alumni.



Dawn Michele Whitehead

Dawn Michele Whitehead is the vice president of the office of global citizenship for campus, community, and careers at the American Association of Colleges and Universities. Her work focuses on advancing practices and strategies to integrate global, civic, and experiential learning across curricular and co-curricular initiatives and practices that advance equitable participation in global and community-based learning for all. She has also served as the co-director for the joint AAC&U-Interfaith America Institute on Interfaith Teaching Excellence. Dr. Whitehead has presented and published nationally and internationally. She led community-based global learning programs in Ghana, Kenya, and Costa Rica and taught global and international studies at Indiana University Indianapolis (formerly Indiana University Purdue University-Indianapolis). Whitehead was named an inaugural member of the Institute for International Education's National Academy for International Education and serves as vice chair on the board of The Forum on Education Abroad. Whitehead earned her Ph.D. at Indiana University Bloomington.



Hodayra Ziad

Hodayra Ziad believes in a world where we can hold irreconcilable differences and yet create beauty together. After graduating from Bryn Mawr College and Yale University, Hodayra served as Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at Trinity College in Hartford and then Scholar of Islam at the Institute for Islamic, Christian and Jewish Studies, a Baltimore interfaith organization. Most recently, she was Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies and a community-engaged teaching fellow at Johns Hopkins University, receiving JHU's teaching award and supporting religious and other diversity efforts on campus. Hodayra also served as Board President of the ACLU of Maryland. For two decades, she has co-created projects that connect religion with the arts, public health, and mental health and supported educators, activists, artists, and religious leaders in navigating pluralism and fostering networks of social change. She was founding co-chair of the American Academy of Religion's Interreligious and Interfaith Studies Group and is co-editor of *Words to Live By: Sacred Sources for Interreligious Engagement* (Orbis Press, 2018). Hodayra grew up in Pakistan, Uganda, and the suburbs of DC, and has spent time in the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe. She lives on the Baltimore harbor with her two kiddos, and loves to write, meditate, be active, and just chill out with her beloved.

