Fifth Annual What Works Conference:
Theme: Future-Ready—Fostering Student Success Amid Challenge & Change

Monday, December 15, 2025

As we navigate an era of uncertainty, the imperative to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for their success has never been stronger. How can higher education remain resilient, relevant, and responsive to equip students with readiness skills to be successful? With public trust under threat, approaches to our work evolving, and perspectives on diversity and inclusion shifting, faculty and staff find themselves having to adapt and lead students in new ways. This year's *What Works* theme—*Future-Ready*—invites proposals from partnered institutions **William Paterson University** and **Passaic County Community College** faculty and staff. Proposals should highlight innovative practices in teaching, motivating, advising, student support, student-faculty research, and overall institutional strategies aimed at enhancing student success.

We encourage sessions that showcase approaches to:

- Build inclusive and supportive learning communities that empower students

- Foster resilience, civic engagement, and adaptability that prepares students for academic and professional journeys

- Integrate essential digital literacies, equipping students to navigate misinformation, polarization, and societal change

- Reinforce the value of academic inquiry and research by emphasizing career connections to course content and structure.

- Addressing readiness gaps and creating successful support scaffolds

- Evaluating past approaches to inform the future

- Reinforce the value of higher education for students and by demonstrating value amidst uncertainty

This conference remains practical and solution-oriented, offering faculty and staff a forum to share strategies, research, and initiatives that are shaping a positive, motivating, and fulfilling future for students. **All sessions will be virtual via Zoom.**

Sample Session Prompts
- **Future-Ready Skills**: Success supports helping students bridge the gap between high school and college to scaffold their skills to college-level skills.
  - How do we emphasize and ensure students are truly present in classroom activities with the threat of technology distractions and decreased motivation?
  - What discipline-specific AI, digital tools, and technology skills will prepare students for jobs/careers?
  - What strategies can be used to assess student wellness in online courses compared to in-person courses?
    - How do we ensure online students are adequately supported and surpass readiness gaps?

- **Inclusive Pedagogies for an Unsettled World**: Ways a college or university serve as a space for belonging, dialogue, and resilience when societal divides run deep.
  - How do we equip students with the necessary tools to stay successful in school and their future workspaces in an unsettled world?
  - Is there a universal design for teaching and learning in an unsettled world?
  - How do faculty uphold classroom management while facilitating real-world discussions and societal divides?

- **Navigating the Information Crisis**: What works in teaching students to critically evaluate sources, identify misinformation, and engage responsibly with emerging technologies.
  - How do we continue to hone our teaching skills in response to rapidly changing AI technologies?
  - How are faculty leveraging accessible AI-powered tools to foster active learning and student engagement through dynamic course content and interactive learning activities?
  - How do we incorporate AI competency and literacy into coursework?

- **Rebuilding Trust in Higher Education:** What strategies reaffirm the value of research, scholarship, and academic expertise at a time when universities and academic institutions face heightened skepticism.
  - How do can we reassure students that their academic goals will remain achievable and supported despite differing outside societal efforts towards institutions?
  - Are there innovative ways to help students make connections to careers, highlighting the purpose of academic content and connection to future skills?
  - How can we reassure students that their degrees are valuable? How can we keep students motivated, excited, and inspired in their majors in the face of scary uncertainty?

- **Future-Ready Student & Curriculum Initiatives**: What new student populations can we attract, building on our current strengths and priorities? For example, can we develop or improve upon an early college program or a college in prison program?

- **Faculty as Mentor:** How can we build trusting relationships with students that empower them and build their academic skills? How can we support their well-being and encourage their intellectual growth?

- **Faculty & Staff Resilience**: How can we sustain ourselves as educators and practitioners, balancing institutional demands with personal well-being?

Proposals due by October 27, 2025 via THIS LINK

Decisions by mid-November

We request proposals from faculty and staff for individual sessions and panel sessions. Faculty and staff may also propose panels of students as presenters, or mixed panels of students, faculty, and/or staff. Session proposals should showcase innovative programs, evidence-based practices or initiatives, research and scholarship, and/or assessment. Proposals should highlight your best practice, your strategy in implementing it, evidence of its effectiveness, and how others may adapt it in their own work. Design your proposal to demonstrate how you are preparing students, colleagues, or institutions to thrive in an age of challenge and change, keeping the conference outcomes in mind.

For example, if your presentation is about rebuilding trust in higher education, you might consider: What practices affirm the value of academic research and expertise? How can we strengthen communication with students, families, and the public to restore confidence in higher education? If your focus is on inclusion, you might ask: How do we create learning spaces that sustain belonging and dialogue across differences, especially in polarized contexts to ensure student success? Or if your session is about future-readiness: What advising, curricular, or co-curricular practices equip students with the skills to adapt to shifting career landscapes and societal challenges?

Your presentation doesn't have to be about these specific areas—these are merely examples of the kinds of questions we invite you to consider in terms of preparing students and institutions for the future. You may also present research on best practices in higher education more broadly. We are open to session topics that align with the 2025 theme, *Future Ready*, as well as those that showcase your current findings on student success—even if they extend beyond the theme.

Submissions should include:
- **Session Title**
- **Name(s), title(s), and email(s) for each presenter**
- **Presentation style: Lecture, panel, student voice (panel with students), roundtable, or case study analysis**
- **Session Description (including session goals, 300 words max.)**
- **Plan for engaging attendees in light of the virtual format**
- **Panel session length: 25 minutes (mostly for single speakers, case study analysis and round table discussions) or 50 minutes (mostly for multiple speakers).**

Criteria for selection include (a) clarity of proposal, (b) likely interest to session attendees, (c) evidence of impact, or prospective impact, on students, (d) potential for attendee application of learning, (e) how well the proposal applies to the conference theme.

Proposals are peer-reviewed. All presenters should be available to present between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. on the conference day.