

SUMMER/FALL  
2025

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COUNCIL OF PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES  
**Executive Director's Report**



Outgoing COPLAC President, Tuajuanda Jordan Passing the Gavel to Incoming President James Birge

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# COPLAC SUMMER/FALL REPORT

June - December 2025



# A Message from the Executive Director

This past year has been an active and productive one for COPLAC. As I have continued to deepen my understanding of the organization, I have worked closely with Claire Bailey, committees, and campus leaders to strengthen our foundation and position COPLAC for continued success. Many of these efforts are already visible, with others soon to come.



Photo courtesy of the UNCA Communication & Marketing Dept.

I have spent a fair amount of time focused on membership engagement and growth. I have met regularly with the Membership Committee to recruit new members and to reimagine our membership structure. The committee will soon propose changes that I am excited about and hope will enhance value and access to our consortial programs and services.

With your support, I launched two new initiatives for chief executive officers: the Presidents' Forum and the New Presidents' Club. These one-hour sessions foster connection, shared learning, and peer support. I hope those who have participated have found them valuable. I invite others to join us in the coming year.

In collaboration with the Executive Committee and the Advancement Community of Practice, I have been developing COPLAC's first comprehensive fundraising strategy, which we anticipate launching this spring. The Finance Committee has likewise focused their time and energy on strengthening COPLAC's long-term financial outlook. On behalf of the organization, I have submitted inquiries to 23 foundations, resulting in meetings with program officers from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, the Davis Educational Foundation, ECMC, Gates, and Teagle, and I have shared information with Chief Academic Officers regarding potential shared grant opportunities.

Looking ahead, I have been working with leaders from the Beard Leadership Circle to expand its offerings beginning in July 2026. The program will feature two tracks: one for academic affairs professionals, and one for student affairs professionals, with combined and separate sessions designed to strengthen collaboration in support of the student experience.

This year also brought important changes to COPLAC's Communities of Practice. While maintaining long-standing groups, I now facilitate structured meetings for Advancement, Communications and Marketing, Government Relations and Chiefs of Staff, and Vice Presidents of Student Affairs/Deans of Students.

I'm pleased to share that the COPLAC Video Project involved participation from 17 member campuses. I look forward to sharing a finished product with you in Washington, DC.

Finally, the value of COPLAC extends far beyond what our staff team alone can provide. I am deeply grateful to the many professionals who self-initiated projects and shared their work across the consortium. This includes an NSF GRANTED proposal led by Josephine Rodriguez, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Professor in the Department of Natural Sciences at UVA Wise, with partners from UNC Asheville, Mississippi University for Women, St. Mary's College of Maryland, and UVA Wise, as well as two high school counselor lunches organized by David L. Hautanen, Jr., Vice President for Enrollment Management at St. Mary's College of Maryland, with colleagues from SUNY Geneseo, Georgia College & State University, UMN Morris, and UVA Wise.

I look forward to serving and working with you in the coming year.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "JB Went". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue background.

Jeanine B. Went, Ph.D.  
*Executive Director*

# JUNE # COPLAC SUMMER SUMMIT



## GENESEO

NEW YORK'S  
PUBLIC HONORS COLLEGE

June 8-9, 2025



Summer Summit Participant Photo, courtesy of SUNY Geneseo.

This year's COPLAC Summer Summit, hosted by SUNY Geneseo, was a vibrant gathering focused on community building, education, and networking. The event was held on June 8-9, on the SUNY Geneseo campus immediately following the Annual Board Meeting.

The event welcomed 50 participants from 15 member institutions. Attendees had the option to choose from three separate breakout sessions: *Positioning Through Advocacy*, *Positioning Through Storytelling*, and *Positioning Through Workforce Innovation*. Key takeaways from each session were summarized in three accompanying "Insights and Recommendations" documents that COPLAC members may access [here](#).

# JUNE

## Health Studies

### UNC Asheville Campus

June 19-21, 2025



# SUMMER INSTITUTE ON LIBERAL LEARNING



Health Studies Cohort 2025 pictured with the Planning Team

The Annual Summer Institute occurred at the University of North Carolina Asheville from June 19-21. The event attracted 10 participants from 4 COPLAC member institutions, each representing academic roles in various Health Studies fields. The event culminated in a field-specific SWOT analysis, which has been openly shared with COPLAC board members and Chief Academic Officers. The document may be reviewed by COPLAC members [here](#).

Our Web Developer, Priscilla Alpizar Vargas, UNCA '26, interviewed participants and developed a video about the 2025 Summer Institute on Health Studies. Watch this three and a half minute [video](#) to hear what some of the faculty participants had to say!

# JULY



BLC Cohort 2025 pictured with the Facilitators and Planning Team

The fifth annual Beard Leadership Circle brought together 24 participants from 12 COPLAC member institutions. This year's BLC was designed for mid-level academic administrators such as deans, associate deans, and associate provosts. Participants were selected for their leadership potential and interest in advancing the public liberal arts mission through strategic decision-making and collaboration across disciplines. The event was hosted on the University of North Carolina Asheville campus.

The Beard Leadership Circle was designed to build leadership capacity within COPLAC institutions, recognizing the unique challenges they face—ranging from state funding and enrollment pressures to shifting student demographics and institutional priorities. Sessions addressed a range of administrative and leadership topics, including managing institutional change, evidence-based decision-making, building consensus, securing grants, strategic communication, and academic innovation. The program emphasized peer engagement, problem-based learning, and the development of practical skills for navigating complex institutional issues. A video of participants' experiences may be found [here](#).

In the spring, participants completed case study responses and engaged in virtual discussions, while the July gathering offered intensive workshops and collaborative sessions. The in-person component provided rich professional development and opportunities to build community. Optional virtual meetings and a book club have been offered during the 2025–26 academic year to sustain momentum and connection.



## Planning Commenced for Legislative Breakfast & Public Liberal Arts Video Campaign

This summer, COPLAC began developing a Public Liberal Arts publicity campaign using self-produced videos featuring outstanding alumni from COPLAC member campuses. Communications and marketing staff across COPLAC were engaged, subcommittees were formed, and group meetings were convened.

In total, COPLAC worked with campus communications and marketing professionals to record alumni from 17 participating campuses. An editor compiled the videos to develop a three-minute public liberal arts video that will launch at the **Legislative Breakfast on January 22, 2026, at 8 a.m.** in the **Dirksen Senate Building, Room SD-G11.** Additional video interviews will be released on social media throughout the spring term.

The University of Minnesota Morris Chancellor, Janet Schrunk Ericksen, and her colleague, Sue Dieter, Public Relations & Communications Specialist, arranged an initial meeting with U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar's team on August 12, to discuss a proposal for COPLAC's first ever Legislative Breakfast on January 22, 2026. Senator Klobuchar's team received her support to collaborate with COPLAC on this event. Future meetings were held with the Senator's Washington, DC team to help secure a location for the event on the Capitol premises.

Later meetings with the COPLAC Executive Committee and the Government Relations and Chiefs of Staff Community of Practice helped to form our agenda, which will include a COPLAC video showing, a recent graduate speaker, a current student speaker, and an address by Senator Klobuchar. Our "asks" will be focused on supporting student access and success. Members of Congress will be invited, including every campus's Representatives and Senators as well as any COPLAC alumni in federal leadership.

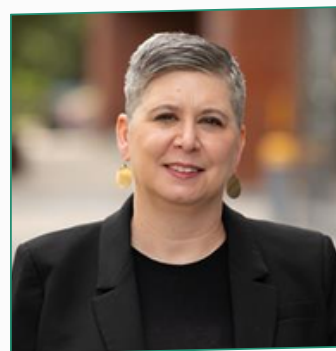


# SEPTEMBER



## Presidents' Forum

As a new initiative this year, COPLAC is offering a Presidents' Forum to bring together campus CEOs for 1-hour topical meetings. The meetings are offered on Zoom to discuss issues of common concern in a shared, safe, collegial space, while enjoying a brown bag lunch or sipping a morning coffee. There is no charge for COPLAC CEOs to attend.



Our inaugural session occurred on Thursday, September 11, 2025, at 12 Noon Eastern, featuring guest speaker, Dr.

Richard A. Detweiler, author of *The Evidence Liberal Arts Needs*, and founder of *Higher Ed Impact*. With about a dozen attendees, Dr. Detweiler spoke about his book and shared his thoughts on the current state of affairs in higher education.

Here are the additional dates and speakers for this academic year:

- **Thursday, November 13, 2025** 12 pm Eastern, featuring **Dr. Sarah Pfatteicher**, Executive Director of Five Colleges, Inc. and author of *Collaborative Thinking: How to Build and Sustain College Consortia* (see page 10 for more details).
- **Thursday, January 8, 2026** 12 pm Eastern, featuring **Sarah Spreitzer**, Vice President and Chief of Staff, Government Relations for ACE, and co-host of the *dotEDU Podcast*.
- **Thursday, March 12, 2026** 12 pm Eastern - **Guest Speaker TBD**
- **Thursday, May 14, 2026** 12 pm Eastern, featuring **H. Art Taylor, JD**, President & CEO, Association of Fundraising Professionals



# OCTOBER

## NORTHEAST URSCA



The Northeast Undergraduate Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity (URSCA) Conference was held on Friday, October 17, and Saturday, October 18, 2025 at Keene State College in New Hampshire, and offered a rich array of interdisciplinary research by 49 undergraduate students from across the Northeastern United States. The projects spanned neuroscience, biology, sociology, psychology, public health, sustainability, history, physics, education, music, and law, highlighting both applied and theoretical work. Students represented six different COPLAC member institutions, including:

- Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania (including Mansfield, Bloomsburg, Lock Haven campuses – merged under one system)
- Eastern Connecticut State University
- Keene State College
- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA)
- Ramapo College of New Jersey
- State University of New York (SUNY) Geneseo

You can see the schedule and abstracts of our students' work [here](#). It was a wonderful event for all in attendance! We are grateful to our student and faculty participants for sharing their research and time with us, and we are especially grateful to Keene State College in New Hampshire for their hospitality!

## New Presidents' Club

To build community this year, another new initiative that COPLAC has taken on is to host a New Presidents' Club for COPLAC Campus CEOs (not just those with the title of "president") who are newer to their roles. This club is ideal for anyone who is new to their role within the past three years, but there are no term restrictions! All COPLAC CEOs are welcome to self-identify to join this community of practice. Club members have the opportunity to discuss issues with one another in a meeting facilitated by a seasoned campus CEO mentor. Below you will find the dates/times of the NPC meetings:



Thursday, October 9, 2025  
12 - 1pm Eastern  
**James Birge, Ph.D.**, President,  
MCLA & COPLAC



Thursday, December 11, 2025  
12 - 1pm Eastern  
**Denise Battles, Ph.D.**,  
Past President, SUNY  
Geneseo



Thursday, February 12, 2026  
12 - 1pm Eastern  
**Donna Price Henry, Ph.D.**,  
Chancellor, University of  
Virginia's College at Wise

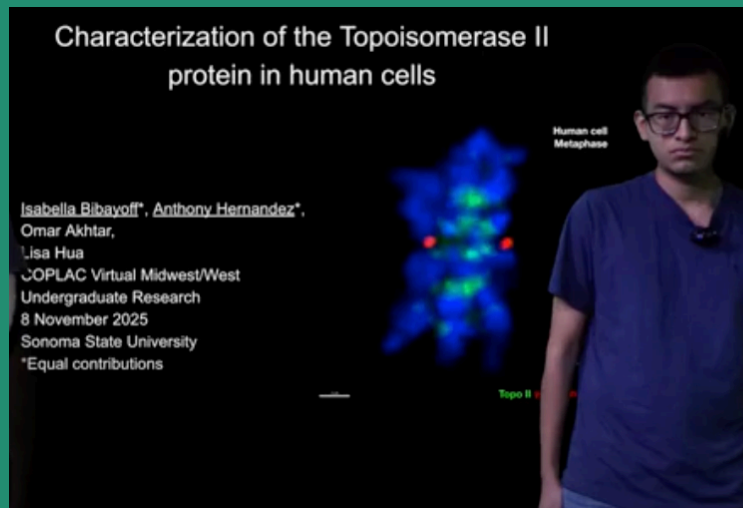


Thursday, April 9, 2026  
12 - 1pm Eastern  
**Sue Thomas, Ph.D.**,  
President, Truman State  
University



Thursday, June 11, 2026  
12 - 1pm Eastern  
**Renee Wachter, Ph.D.**,  
Chancellor, University of  
Wisconsin - Superior

# NOVEMBER



## MIDWEST/WEST URSCA

On November 8, 2025, we were pleased to partner with Indiana University Kokomo to host our Virtual Midwest/West Undergraduate Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activity (URSCA) conference!

The Midwest/West URSCA featured undergraduate research presentations from six COPLAC member institutions: Sonoma State University, the University of Minnesota Morris, the University of South Carolina Aiken, the University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma, the University of Wisconsin-Superior, and The Evergreen State College. Sonoma State University contributed the largest number of presentations, with eight student submissions!

Students conducted their research under the guidance of faculty mentors and presented their work to a full online audience consisting of other students, faculty, staff, and family members. Attendees engaged with presenters through a question-and-answer format, allowing for deeper understanding of the research.

The student presentations were well prepared and highly impressive. You may learn more about our program and view student submissions [here](#).

## PRESIDENT'S FORUM 2<sup>nd</sup> SESSION

Our second session, scheduled for Thursday, November 13, at 12 Noon Eastern, featured guest speaker Dr. Sarah Pfatteicher, Executive Director of Five Colleges, Inc. and author of [Collaborative Thinking: How to Build and Sustain College Consortia](#). With about a dozen COPLAC CEOs in attendance, Sarah spoke to the group about her book and shared her thoughts about how to strengthen our already strong ties with one another during a challenging time for higher education. Her 2025 book on leading consortia (listed above) is available from Johns Hopkins University Press.

# DECEMBER



## Launched Strategic Planning Process

To inform the development of a new strategic plan, COPLAC implemented a streamlined data collection process to clarify consortium priorities and articulate the value of membership. The approach was modeled on planning processes used by peer consortia and grounded in established frameworks, drawing on Jason Saul's methodology for measuring nonprofit impact and informed by Jim Collins's work on organizational excellence. Data are presently being collected through a focused 16-question survey addressing demographics, strategic priorities, and key messaging, enabling COPLAC to gather broad input and define clear, shared strategic directions.



## Finalized First COPLAC Public Liberal Arts Video

This year, COPLAC worked with Communications and Marketing leaders from member institutions to develop a Public Liberal Arts publicity campaign using self-produced videos that were edited by an Asheville, NC - based video editing firm. The campaign featured all 17 member campuses that agreed to participate. The first of 10 videos to be produced was finalized in early December. The campaign will launch with a premier showing of the first 3-minute video at a Legislative Breakfast held in January 2026 in Washington, DC. Additional, shorter videos will be produced early in the spring term and will be launched on various social media platforms. All video content will be shared with COPLAC's member institutions for their use.



## New Presidents' Club 2<sup>nd</sup> Session

The December New Presidents' Club meeting, graciously hosted by Dr. Denise Battles, past president of SUNY Geneseo, provided a uniquely valuable experience for the participating member. With an intentionally small setting, the attendee benefited from individualized, one-on-one coaching from Dr. Battles and left the session with practical ideas for addressing current leadership challenges. Opportunities for confidential, high-level coaching of this caliber—at no cost—are rare. All new presidents are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this exceptional resource by attending and participating in the three remaining Club meetings on February 12, April 9, and June 11, 2026.



## Legislative Breakfast Invitations Sent

An invitation for the January 22, 2026 Legislative Breakfast has been distributed to campus Government Relations personnel, who are encouraged to draft a cover letter on campus letterhead for their state and federal legislative offices, and attach the COPLAC letter as a supporting document. COPLAC has provided a list of legislator contact information for all campuses. COPLAC Board members and CEOs have received email invitations to the event. COPLAC members must register in advance via [Eventbrite](#) and pay the registration fee to offset event costs. Attendance for members of Congress and their staff is complimentary, but they should notify Jeanine Went via [email](#) with attendee names and dietary requirements one week prior to the event.

# SAVE THE DATES

Please mark your calendar with the following dates/times/locations of important upcoming COPLAC Events!

## ◆ Board of Directors Meeting 2026

Marriott Marquis - Washington, DC  
January 21, 9am-11am

## ◆ AAC&U Annual Meeting 2026

Marriott Marquis - Washington, DC  
January 21-23

## ◆ Legislative Breakfast 2026

Dirksen Senate Building, SD-G11 - Washington, DC  
January 22, 8am-10am

## ◆ Southeast URSCA 2026

Mississippi University for Women  
April 17-18

## ◆ Summer Institute 2026

UNC Asheville  
Focus on the Future  
June 11-13

## ◆ Summer Summit 2026

UVA - Wise  
June 21-23

## ◆ Beard Leadership Circle 2026

Georgia College & State University  
July 21-23\*

\*ATL/GCSU transportation available on 7/20 & 7/24

## ◆ Northeast URSCA 2026

Commonwealth University of  
Pennsylvania - Bloomsburg Campus  
October Dates TBD

## ◆ Midwest/West URSCA 2026

Virtual Campus Host TBD  
November Date TBD

## ◆ Board of Directors Meeting 2027

Sheraton Grand - Seattle, Washington  
January 20

## ◆ AAC&U Annual Meeting 2027

Sheraton Grand - Seattle, Washington  
January 20-22

