

SPRING 2025

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

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Pictured: Outgoing Executive Director, Cole Woodcox & New Executive Director, Jeanine Went

# COPLAC

# SPRING REPORT

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# A Welcome from the new Executive Director

Greetings from Asheville,

Thank you for entrusting me with the responsibility of leading COPLAC under the guidance of President Tuajuanda Jordan and members of the Executive Committee: James Birge (President-Elect), Jeff McClurken, Janet Schrunk Ericksen, Melinda Treadwell, and Kimberly van Noort. It has been an honor and privilege to serve in this role—one I have approached with a consultant’s eye and a listening ear.



Photo courtesy of the UNCA Communication & Marketing Dept.

This spring, I held many Zoom meetings, visited several COPLAC campuses, and met with many of you—Chancellors, Presidents, Provosts, and Board Members. Our conversations reaffirmed the value that COPLAC has brought to its members over the years and underscored a growing need for advocacy. In a time of persistent challenges in higher education, COPLAC must champion the value, resilience, and promise of a public liberal arts education. Your students and alumni are thriving, and COPLAC must help to ensure that future generations will also have access to the personalized, high-impact experiences that public liberal arts campuses provide. In that vein, I penned a letter to U.S. Department of Education Secretary, Linda McMahon, requesting continued support for Pell Grants, low-interest, appropriately managed Student Loans, and continued Civil Rights protections for students. This letter received the support of COPLAC signatories: Tuajuanda Jordan (President), and James Birge (President Elect). The letter was also submitted through the Federal eRulemaking Portal at Regulations.gov.

As we near the end of COPLAC’s five-year strategic plan, it’s time to reflect and reimagine. Re-engaging campus leaders—new and longstanding—will be a key priority. With your support, the new year could see a COPLAC advocacy campaign highlighting the value of a public liberal arts education, with a video series and a legislative breakfast planned to kick-off this initiative. A new “Presidents’ Club” may be established. COPLAC’s signature programs, like the Beard Leadership Circle, may be expanded to reach broader audiences. Our student publication, *Metamorphosis*, will be getting a new look. Through COPLAC’s relationship with the Gardner Institute, members will have an opportunity to obtain grant funds to increase student success. The potential for the organization’s future is limited only by your imagination. Think outside of the box – think *big!*

It’s time to work together to shape COPLAC’s next chapter and ensure it continues to serve you—the COPLAC members—with strength and purpose.

“*The potential for the organization’s future is limited only by your imagination. Think outside of the box—think big!*”

Onward,

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

Jeanine B. Went, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

# COPLAC Presentations at AAC&U

12 Individuals | 9 Institutions | 3 Presentations

AAC&U's *Reaffirming Higher Education's Public Purpose Conference*

January 22-24, 2025 in Washington, DC



## ***Cultivating Democratic Citizens: Advancing Democracy through the Public Liberal Arts***

Phillip Bridgmon, *University of South Carolina Aiken*

Jordan Cofer, *University of Minnesota Morris*

Katie Gantz, *St. Mary's College of Maryland*

Kevin Bucholtz, *Georgia College & State University*

## ***Advancing Public Purpose Through Societal Impact – Business Education at Public Liberal Arts Colleges***

Tanya Goette, *Georgia College & State University*

Niti Pandey, *Eastern Connecticut State University*

Rashmi Prasad, *Truman State University*

Lynne Richardson, *University of Montevallo*

Filiz Tabak, *University of Mary Washington*

## ***Preparing Students for Careers and Civic Life: Sustainability in Curriculum, Campus Life, and Community Engagement***

Patricia Szczys, *Eastern Connecticut State University*

Niti Pandey, *Eastern Connecticut State University*

Janet Schrunk Ericksen, *University of Minnesota Morris*

Claudia Luke, *Sonoma State University*

# Federal Agency Grants

## National Science Foundation Grant

### Evidence-based Strategies for Advancing Gender Equity in STEM

Co-PIs: Dr. Wendy Pogozeleski & Dr. Karleen West (SUNY Geneseo), Dr. Chavonda Mills (Georgia Gwinnett College), Dr. Sally Wasileski (UNC Asheville), Dr. Josephine Rodriguez (UVA Wise)

### Faculty Equity Training for Chairs (2022–2023)

- Virtual 2-day training focused on workload, evaluation bias, and resource allocation
- 90% of participants would recommend it; valued cross-institutional collaboration
- Compressed version held at COPLAC Beard Leadership Circle (2022–2024)

### 2024 Focus

- Determining project impact and dissemination
- STEM faculty demographics census showed increases in women faculty: Professors: 33% → 41% Associate Professors: 44% → 49%

### Follow-Up Surveys

- Administrators reported Policy reforms (teaching evals, service recognition, chair training) & an increased awareness and motivation for equity work
- Faculty reported ongoing inequity concern, low confidence in administration, poor communication on equity efforts, student success prioritized over faculty success

### Impact and Dissemination

- Consortium commitment critical to project success
- Two papers submitted, one near submission, one in planning
- Dissemination at multiple national conferences and events



## National Endowment for the Humanities Grant



## Spotlight Grant

Empowering Students to Navigate an AI World

### Developing a Public Liberal Arts Humanities Curriculum: Empowering Students to Navigate an A.I. World

Co-PIs: Dr. Emily Todd (Eastern CT) & Dr. Miriam Wallace (UIS)

### The following grant activities were reported:

- Personnel from five participating COPLAC institutions met monthly to share their progress, plan for shared activities, and design a charrette
- Individual campus groups also met monthly
- Everyone received a copy of *Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning* by José Antonio Bowen and C. Edward Watson
- Zoom and Slack were used to foster collaboration among faculty from the different campuses
- At least 2 faculty from each institution attended the charrette on May 22-23 at Innovate Springfield (UIS campus)
- Electronic repository to be developed in the summer of 2025

University  
of Mary  
Washington

**N**  
NORTHERN

UNIVERSITY OF  
ILLINOIS  
SPRINGFIELD



  
evergreen

# Promoting COPLAC

COPLAC's core values are to build community, strengthen connections, and demonstrate value. One way to do this is to elevate COPLAC's message and amplify the voices of our member institutions. As you know, COPLAC members are active in sharing the value of a public liberal arts education at national conferences. It's important to share our message in other ways, too! Under Dr. Went's leadership, COPLAC's social media outlets have been revitalized, producing an increase in both member and non-member engagement online. All views, interactions, and followers were organic, with no paid promotions.

Help us to increase our reach! Give us a like, share, and follow!



Pictured: Janet Schrunk Ericksen, Patricia Szczys, Claudia Luke, Niti Pandey



## Facebook

Facebook has 3.05 billion monthly active users of which 65% access the site daily and spend an average of 40 minutes per day on the platform. 61.7% of its users worldwide are millennials and Gen Z.

## Facebook



Viewer Activity up 432% since Mar.

**Dates 3/3\*-5/18/2025**

\*First post since 2/23/2023

Followers before March: **605**  
 Followers added since March: **9**  
**614** followers (up 1%)  
**6** posts - **35** interactions  
 Page Performance: **1800** views



## Instagram

Instagram has 2 billion monthly active users of which 500 million access the site daily and spend an average of 24 minutes per day on the platform. 62% of Instagram users are between the ages of 18 to 34.

## Instagram



Profile Activity up 75.8% since Feb.

**Dates 2/18\*-5/17/2025**

\*First post since 12/16/2018

Followers before February: **191**  
 Followers added since February: **4**  
**196** followers (up 2%)  
**12** posts - **3209** post views  
 Page Performance: **3215** views



## LinkedIn

LinkedIn has 1 billion registered users of which 48% are monthly active users and 16% are daily active users. Monthly users spend an average of 17 minutes per month on LinkedIn. 47% of LinkedIn users are millennials, 29% are Gen X, 15% are Gen Z, and 10% are baby boomers.

## LinkedIn



Visitor Activity up 489.7% since Jan.

**Dates 1/27\*-5/18/2025**

\*First post in history

Followers before January: **37**  
 Followers added since January: **73**  
**110** followers (up 69%)  
**17** posts - **327** impressions  
 Page Performance: **3906** views

# Dunn & Prior Award Winners 2025



Dr. Jennifer Goodnough, UMN Morris

In honor of Charles Dunn's significant contributions to the advancement of the consortium and to promoting student success in the public liberal arts sector, the COPLAC Board of Directors established an annual faculty award bearing his name. Charles Dunn understood that members of the faculty play an essential role in advancing this mission. Therefore the COPLAC Award recognizes a faculty member whose commitment to student success goes above and beyond the traditional roles of teacher, academic advisor, and mentor. This year's Dunn Award was presented to Dr. Jennifer Goodnough from the University of Minnesota Morris. You can learn more about Dr. Goodnough on the [COPLAC Awards Webpage](#).

Dr. Taylor Elsey, faculty member from Georgia College & State University, received an Honorable Mention.

## Special Thanks to this year's Award Selection Committee Members

Dr. Forrest Anderson (USC Aiken), Dunn Award  
Dr. Agya Boakye-Boaten (UNC Asheville), Dunn Award  
Dr. Erin Fouberg (Northern State University), Prior Award  
Dr. Susan Hangen (Ramapo College of NJ), Dunn Award  
Dr. Ruth Truss (University of Montevallo), Prior Award

The David J. Prior Award was created in 2012 to recognize senior-level undergraduates whose academic careers and future goals have been shaped by the transformative power of their liberal arts and sciences experience at a COPLAC institution.

This year's Prior Award was awarded to Micaela Reiss, Truman State University, '25. Her biography may be found on the COPLAC Website on the [Awards page](#).

One honorable mention was given to Ava Weber from the University of Minnesota Morris. Both students' essays may be viewed on the [COPLAC Website](#).



Micaela Reiss, Truman State University

# SUMMER PROGRAMS 2025



## Summer Summit

Each year a COPLAC member campus hosts the Summer Summit - a 2-day program which includes the summer COPLAC Board of Director's Meeting. Teams from across the consortium come together, discuss shared initiatives, pursue collaborative approaches to issues, create networks, and explore the local region. The workgroups under this year's topic, **Positioning the public liberal arts for the future: Storytelling, Advocacy and Workforce Innovation**, hosted by **SUNY - Geneseo** on June 8-9, will inevitably help to orchestrate COPLAC's future strategic direction and provide guidance on best practices for COPLAC's member institutions. We appreciate the commitment of our workgroups: **Positioning through Storytelling**, co-led by Jessica Savage (Dixon Schwabl), Kerri Howell (SUNY Geneseo) & Dennis Rebelo (MCLA), **Positioning through Advocacy** co-led by John McAllister (McAllister & Quinn), Julie Buehler (SUNY Geneseo) & Laura Standley (MCLA), and **Positioning through Workforce Innovation** co-led by Leah George VanScott (Greater Rochester Enterprise), Michael Wanous (Northern State University) & Alexander Grabowska (University of Minnesota Morris).



## Summer Institute for Liberal Learning

The annual Summer Institute brings together faculty and/or staff for two days of workshops, discussions, and networking. COPLAC welcomes individuals from COPLAC member institutions to participate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Summer Institute on Liberal Learning from June 19-21. This year's focus is on Health Studies professions, featuring faculty from 4 COPLAC member institutions. As is tradition, discussion topics are selected and facilitated by members of the group. In keeping with tradition, this year's program will be held at COPLAC's home campus: UNC Asheville.



## Beard Leadership Circle

For the first time in COPLAC's history, the Beard Leadership Circle will be hosted at UNC Asheville. This year's cohort is made-up of 27 current and incoming deans, associate deans, and associate provosts from 14 COPLAC member institutions who are looking to advance their leadership skills. We've contracted experienced and talented facilitators from 7 COPLAC member institutions to develop and facilitate this 3-day personalized experience from July 29-31, including: Courtney Bentley (University of Montevallo), Jordan Cofer (University of Minnesota Morris), Angela Criscoe (Georgia College & State University), Eric Freedman (Truman State University), Susan Hangen (Ramapo College of New Jersey), Karen Moranski\* (Sonoma State University), and Niti Pandey\* (Eastern Connecticut State University). \*Co-chairs



# Future Goals & Strategy

## 01. Advocacy Work

Engage with stakeholders and decision-makers to safeguard the rights and interests of our institutions. Advocate to secure critical funding for public liberal arts, and create lasting positive change. Aim to influence public policy, elevate the voices of the COPLAC community, and address systemic challenges that impact students' access to quality education.

## 02. Expand Membership

Amplify the value proposition of membership in COPLAC, with a vision to eventually expand membership to all 50 states and U.S. territories, and all 10 provinces of Canada. Evaluate the viability of adding members from other countries with public liberal arts colleges.

## 03. Add Value

Launch a strategic planning process with member stakeholders. Re-engage current members to lend value and reinvigorate membership. Seek out new partnerships to add more opportunities for our members. Find opportunities to improve what we're already doing well and increase the value for our members.

## 04. Source New Revenue Streams

Engage in entrepreneurial activity, including, but not limited to, grant development, fundraising, and developing alternative funding streams.

## Ideas for Advocacy

Develop a Public Liberal Arts publicity campaign, using self-produced videos and Social Media. Feature all campuses who agree to participate. Repeat. Launch the campaign with a Legislative Breakfast to be held during the AAC&U January convening and invite members of Congress to include all of our campus' Representatives and Senators as well as any COPLAC alumni in federal leadership.

## Ideas for Membership

Identify one new public liberal arts campus per state and province (as applicable). Begin outreach using active members of COPLAC who will take the lead by sharing their testimonials, providing an introduction to COPLAC. The E.D. and members of the Membership Committee can recruit from there.

## Ideas to Add Value

Re-engage seasoned and new COPLAC CEOs by developing a President's Club. Offer a monthly mentorship meeting for new CEOs, led by a different seasoned CEO each session. Work with the Gardner Institute and the Gates Foundation to support student success. Improve upon existing Communities of Practice model.

## Ideas for New Revenue Streams

Create and expand professional development offerings for our members and others who may be interested in our offerings. This could include facilitating educational trips for faculty & staff, offering a Certificate in College Teaching program for new faculty and graduate students, and adding new tracks to existing programs and services.



# SAVE THE DATES

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

- ◆ **Summer Summit 2025**  
SUNY Geneseo  
June 8-9
- ◆ **Summer Institute 2025**  
UNC Asheville  
June 19-21
- ◆ **Beard Leadership Circle 2025**  
UNC Asheville  
July 29-31
- ◆ **Northeast URSCA 2025**  
Keene State College  
October 24-25
- ◆ **Midwest/West URSCA 2025**  
Indiana University - Kokomo  
November 8
- ◆ **Board of Directors Meeting 2026**  
Marriott Marquis - Washington, DC  
January 21  
\*Hold for possible legislative breakfast
- ◆ **AAC&U Annual Meeting 2026**  
Marriott Marquis - Washington, DC  
January 22-24  
\*Hold for possible legislative breakfast
- ◆ **Southeast URSCA 2026**  
Mississippi University for Women or  
UVA - Wise  
Spring Dates TBD
- ◆ **Summer Summit 2026**  
UVA - Wise  
June Dates TBD
- ◆ **Summer Institute 2026**  
UNC Asheville  
Possible "Artificial Intelligence" Focus  
June Dates TBD

# COPLAC Behind the Scenes



**Claire Bailey, M.L.I.S.**  
**Program Manager**

A seasoned Program Manager with 12 years of experience with COPLAC, Claire expertly oversees operational budgeting, grant coordination, event programming, and stakeholder communications. She previously served as an interpreter at the Thomas Wolfe Memorial and The Biltmore Company, and worked as a Park Ranger on the Blue Ridge Parkway, where she developed and led educational tours and programs. In addition to her professional roles, Claire contributes her time as a board member for North Asheville Preschool and No Ordinary Women. She holds a Master's degree in Library and Information Science and is pursuing a Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management from UNC Greensboro.



**Priscilla Alpizar Vargas**  
**Web Developer**

Priscilla began her COPLAC role in April of this year. She brings both technical and interpersonal strengths to every project. She is a dedicated and creative visual artist and student with a strong academic background and hands-on experience in event coordination and arts education. In 2021, she earned an Associates of Fine Arts degree with high honors from Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College. Now named to the Chancellor's List, Priscilla is pursuing a dual major in Drawing and New Media with a 3D Animation concentration from the University of North Carolina Asheville. She plans to graduate in 2026 with her Bachelor of Arts degree.



**Ali Schiewe, B.S.**  
**Bookkeeper**

Ali performs Quickbooks bookkeeping for COPLAC. She is contracted with us through Controller Works. She specializes in assisting small businesses with their bookkeeping and business service needs and understands the complexities of running a business and balancing the many demands faced by small nonprofits like ours. Ali brings excellent bookkeeping and business practice expertise to our team. Ali holds a B.S. in Health Science and Community Education from the University of Florida.



# COPLAC

COUNCIL OF PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

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