15TH ANNUAL

Advising Matters Conference

Everyone Plays a Role in Student Success

FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2025

THE INN AT VIRGINIA TECH AND SKELTON CONFERENCE CENTER

VT
VIRGINIA TECH.

AM
Advising Matters

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Registration and Continental Breakfast   8:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.

Welcome with Lauren Thomas   8:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

Opening Session with Kevin P. Thomas   9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Break   11:00 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

Concurrent Session I   11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Lunch   12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.

Table Discussions   1:15 a.m. - 1:45 p.m.

Break   1:45 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Concurrent Session II   2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Break   3:00 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.

Concurrent Session III   3:15 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.

If you have any questions, please email advising@vt.edu. Thank you!

Kevin P. Thomas, Ed.D.

Vice President for Enrollment Services and Student Success at the University of Central Arkansas

In today's dynamic academic environment, the success of students hinges on a comprehensive and unified approach to advising. This keynote will explore the concept of "seeing the whole picture," which emphasizes the importance of collaboration among academic advisors, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders to create a cohesive and supportive environment for students. By breaking down silos and integrating efforts across departments, we can ensure that every aspect of a student's experience is addressed—from academic needs to personal development and career readiness.

The session will highlight how a unified approach to student success requires academic advising but also the support of a campus community. By adopting a holistic perspective, advisors can better support students in navigating these complexities, ultimately leading to improved outcomes and a more enriching university experience. Join us as we explore how, together, we can see the whole picture and create a thriving community for all students.

About Dr. Thomas

Dr. Kevin Thomas is the Vice President for Enrollment Services and Student Success at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA). Kevin previously served as the Director of Retention and Student Success at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) from 2012 through 2019 where he led efforts that resulted in an increased retention rate over that time of 10%. During his recent career, Kevin was promoted to the Director of the Academic Advising and Retention Center after serving as the Assistant Director of Undergraduate Advising Practices at Western Kentucky University (WKU). Before joining the academic advising profession in 2007, Kevin worked in Housing and Residence Life in various roles at Murray State, Ball State, and WKU.

At UCA, Kevin establishes the collective vision and direction of the offices within Enrollment Services & Student Success, which includes Academic Advising, Admissions, Financial Aid, the Registrar's Office, Online, Transfer, and Returning Student Services, Strategic Enrollment Communication, Student-Athlete Advising, Student Success, and the Veterans Resource Center. Over the past five years, Kevin has been a key leader in the creation of UCA Commitment, a tuition and fee-free program for Arkansas students whose families earn $100,000 or less, a successful transition to a primary role advising on campus, and a scholarship remodel that focuses on high school GPA – not standardized testing requirements. Each of these efforts has strengthened the opportunity to access, the opportunity to succeed, and the opportunity to graduate from UCA. Most recently, UCA experienced an over 22% growth in freshmen through the work of admissions, advising, strategic communication, and providing access and opportunity to college-going students.

Within NACADA, Kevin has served as chair of the Advising Administration Community, the chair of the 2017 Annual Conference in St. Louis, twice a mentor within the Emerging Leaders Program, and served on the Board of Directors from 2019-20. In 2018, Kevin was selected as an Outstanding Advising Administrator within NACADA. Kevin is the current chair of the Administrator's Institute and has served as a faculty member for the Institute since 2020. In addition, he has presented at numerous campus, state, regional, and annual conferences on topics surrounding retention and student success, advising administration, and the culture of care in your leadership and campus approach.

Dr. Thomas earned his doctorate in Educational Leadership from WKU and his master's and bachelor's degrees from Murray State University.

Cultivating Connection: Envisioning a Collaborative Path to Student Success

Kevin Thomas, University of Central Arkansas

Location: Latham DEF

Building on the keynote's call to "see the whole picture," this session invites participants to reflect on the potential of collaborative efforts in shaping a supportive environment for students. Through guided discussions and thought-provoking examples, attendees will explore how fostering connections across campus can enhance student experiences and outcomes. This session encourages participants to think beyond traditional boundaries, envisioning new possibilities for cooperation and integration that address the diverse needs of students. Together, we will consider how a shared commitment to student success can inspire meaningful change and strengthen the fabric of the campus community.

First Gen in STEM Student Voices: Panel on Supporting First Generation College Students

Melissa Cumbia - Deanna Flora - Julie Burger - Lauren Varboncoeur, Virginia Tech

Location: Assembly Hall

Advisors must be well equipped to support the holistic success of first generation college students. In this panel, attendees will hear directly from first generation students in STEM fields across three Virginia Tech colleges. Student panelists will share their personal experiences and challenges as well as make recommendations for how advisors can provide support. Join us to explore best practices for supporting first generation students throughout their undergraduate career. Attendees will gain insights to inform their work with first generation students. Key topics will include retention, belonging, and academic support. The session will also feature a Q&A to engage with panelists.

Connection Counts: Building Relationship-Rich Advising for Student Success

Haley Tucker - Rebekah DeToma, Virginia Tech

Location: Drillfield

What if the key to unlocking student success lies not in technology or resources, but in the power of meaningful relationships? We'll explore how connections drive student success and provide actionable insights for integrating these principles into academic advising. While highlighting the impact of relationship-centered advising, we'll share strategies for building rapport & discuss practical ways to offer tailored, inclusive support. Attendees will gain understanding of creating a connection-driven approach that enhances engagement, fosters belonging, & empowers students to thrive. Whether you're a seasoned advisor, new to the job, or teach a First-Year Experience course, this session offers new ideas for relationship-building!

Everyone and Everything Plays a Role in Student Success: Partnering with Generative AI

Suzanne Shelburne - Anya Work - Krystal Johnson, Virginia Tech

Location: Solitude

Looking to add generative AI to your advising toolkit? This session explores the possibilities of generative AI in academic and career advising. We will discuss how advisors can ethically partner with generative AI to help students set goals, explore careers, prepare for interviews, and craft strong resumes and cover letters. Practical insights for leveraging AI tools in professional communication, administrative tasks, and instructional design will also be shared. Participants will have the opportunity to develop effective prompts and experiment with various platforms. Join us to discover how using generative AI responsibly can empower both advisors and students.

Firebreak: How Students and Academic Advisors Can Use the Circle of Control Theory for Stress Management When the World Is on Fire

Barbara Parker, Virginia Tech

Location: Smithfield

In this interactive workshop, participants will discuss stress and anxiety as experienced by both students and academic advisors. They will learn the Circle of Control theory introduced by Stephen R. Covey and use it to identify which stressors are within their control, which they can influence, and which are out of their control. Through hands-on activities, participants will identify their personal stressors and place them in their respective circles to manage stress and prevent burn out.

The Resilient Advisor: How to Last Over Time and Be Successful Through Resiliency Strategies and Collaborative Relationships

Lisa Racek, Virginia Tech

Location: Latham DEF

Advisors are often the front line to student success and thriving, and help students navigate burdens that can extend beyond academics including mental health challenges, relationship difficulties, food insecurity, and even crisis management. What factors influence your resilience and longevity? Are there ways to build this up over time so you can last in the role, remain inspired, and be successful? After interviewing advisors and mental health practitioners across the country, I've discovered some data that can help. This interactive session will equip you to define your own version of resiliency and empower you to thrive in a challenging role.

Collaborating to Develop and Embed Career and Professional Development Content in Your Curriculum

Priscilla Baker - Heidi Gilbert, Virginia Tech

Location: Assembly Hall

We're seeing an increased disconnect between employer expectations and student preparedness, leading to a national conversation about the need for professional development early and often to ensure students are better prepared to enter the workforce as young professionals. This session will illustrate how one academic advisor collaborated with Career and Professional Development's resources and expertise to design, embed, and teach career readiness in key required courses, exposing students to content at timely intervals, and increasing their understanding that becoming a professional is a process of developing a skill set and knowledge base rather than something that just happens at graduation.

Coordinated Care in Action: Leveraging Advising Tools for Student Success

Heather Whedbee, Virginia Tech

Location: Drillfield

Advisors are vital contributors to student success, especially through their work in submitting referrals and documenting interactions. This interactive workshop will examine how collaborative efforts, effective documentation, and well-placed referrals can lead to successful interventions and improved student outcomes. Through real-world case studies, participants will explore practical strategies for connecting students to resources and fostering persistence. Whether you use Navigate 360, Starfish, Maxient or another platform, this session will offer insights into how advisors' contributions shape a comprehensive support system for students.

Building a Community of Practice in Liberal Arts Advising

Meira Kensky - Abigail Holeman - David Walsh - Roberto Armengol - Sean Reid, University of Virginia

Location: Solitude

This academic year, the University of Virginia has embarked on an ambitious mission to create a community of practice around advising in and for the liberal arts. We are combining the expertise of newly hired advising fellows, faculty advisors, and a wider advising infrastructure to improve advisee-mentor connections, student intellectual flourishing, and pre-major wayfinding outcomes. In fall 2025, we will scale this model so that virtually all incoming students in UVA's College of Arts and Sciences will be advised by their instructors in a required first-semester seminar. In this roundtable discussion, our director of advising and several colleagues showcase these efforts and their promising initial results, welcoming feedback, critique, and comparative collaboration from attendees.

Unlocking Graduate Opportunities: Advising for Accelerated Programs and Beyond

Jenn Million, Virginia Tech

Location: Smithfield

This session equips advisors with strategies to guide students in exploring graduate school options and assessing if it aligns with their goals. We'll discuss selecting a graduate program and introduce Virginia Tech's Accelerated Masters program, which allows students to take graduate-level courses that count toward both a Bachelors and Masters at the undergraduate rate. The session highlights advising tools that enhance support and promote retention through efficient academic pathways.

Innovative V-TOP Initiatives to Advance Student Career Success

Sam Ratcliffe - Carolyn Sutphin, State Council of Higher Education of Virginia

Location: Latham DEF

The session includes three key initiatives by the Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership to scale work-based opportunities statewide. It will focus on free online resources to help students complete internship opportunities and develop critical career readiness competencies. Other information includes modules developed for educators to develop skills and practices to become champions for students' career success through more effective advising to foster a culture of career readiness in higher education. The content is appropriate for anyone whose work can influence the career development of students. Participants will gain key information about resources to support student career advising and development, and how they can expand the impact of available career advising resources.

Increasing Collective Knowledge and Support Through Community

Christina Fabrey - Alyssa Henderson - Amber Smith - Lauren Thomas - Matt Ebert, Virginia Tech

Location: Assembly Hall

Can your work in advising feel isolating? Do you find it difficult to stay informed about all of the resources available to students? Creating a Community of Practice (CoP) can empower a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in a topic and can provide you with a network of practitioners supporting the common work in advising or student success. CoPs can also foster meaningful professional development, improve knowledge and resources, and stimulate creativity! Come learn about CoP models, their benefits, and how they can be used to support advising communities. In this session, you will learn from cross-campus partners who built a peer education-focused CoP to address a campus need and leveraged their community to share resources and knowledge.

The Pressure of Straight A's: ADHD, Anxiety, and Added Stressors

Nicole Ebreo - Caroline Begley, Virginia Tech

Location: Drillfield

ADHD and anxiety are increasingly prevalent among our student population. According to research, there is an established connection between the two, which leads us to our overarching question: How can we utilize our understanding of the connection between ADHD and anxiety to effectively support first-year students? In this presentation, we will explore strategies to enhance our practices in helping students manage both racing thoughts and anxiety-inducing emotions. We will examine this through the lens of educational psychology, focusing on Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory. The presentation aims to highlight current research on the connection between ADHD and anxiety, with an emphasis on applying this knowledge to advise first-year students.

Developing Strong Advisors from the Start: Tips for Onboarding and Integrating New Advisors to Your Team

Justin Grady - Caitlin Fanning, Virginia Tech

Location: Solitude

Looking to improve the training procedures for new academic advisors for your office, or maybe develop a new or initial training protocol? The advising team in the Pamplin College of Business have continued to develop, improve, and fine-tune our onboarding processes to support the rapid growth of our advising team since 2020. This presentation will provide insights and tools we have accumulated over the years to assist with developing effective new hire onboarding and training materials. Combined with foundational discussions in student learning and instructional design theories, this session will provide attendees with a toolbox of practical and theoretical takeaways to create and improve their onboarding and team building processes.

Laying the Foundation for First-Year Success: Enhancing Engagement Through Pre-Enrollment Summer Advising

Donna Faltin - Deanna Flora, Virginia Tech

Location: Smithfield

This session targets academic advisors working with first-year students, focusing on strategies to foster early engagement. We will present research highlighting the importance of early cognitive and behavioral engagement in promoting retention, graduation rates, and positive college experiences. Attendees will gain insights into advising practices that enhance student preparedness before the semester starts, along with specific activities to support academic, emotional, and social readiness. Participants will be equipped with new strategies to improve student outcomes from day one.

SCAN OR CLICK

SESSION
EVALUATION FORM

Academic Advisor Mentor Program

The Academic Advisor Mentor Program (AAMP) has been created to enhance the professional development of Virginia Tech's academic advisors. This program strives to create an engaged community of professional academic advisors at Virginia Tech and provide participants with information and resources that can be incorporated into their advising curriculum to meet the needs of their unique student populations. Mentors guide mentees in developing professional goals and provide tailored support to each of their mentees.

Advisor of the Month

The goal of the Advisor of the Month program is to recognize outstanding academic advisors. Recognition is based on evidence of qualities and practices that distinguish the nominee as an outstanding academic advisor to include:

- Quality of information and advice
- Strong interpersonal communication skills
- Implementation of a "support and challenge" environment
- Accessibility

College of Architecture, Arts, and Design
- Michelle Flinchum, March 2024

College of Engineering
- Kimberly Johnston, June 2024
- James Newcomer, August 2024
- Jacob Kerstiens, November 2024
- Maia Greene-Havas, January 2025

College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
- Dawn Knight, October 2024

College of Science
- April Newcomer, April 2024
- Vivek Shastry, July 2024
- Jessica Hurdus, September 2024
- Taylor Swan, December 2024
- Christina Minford, February 2025

Student-Athlete Academic Support Services
- Emily Patton, May 2024

MEET OUR FALL 2024 MENTORS

Matt Cheatham

College of Engineering, Engineering Education

Melissa Cumbia

College of Natural Resources and Environment Advising Center

Vern Ferguson

College of Architecture, Arts, and Design, School of Architecture

Kayla Goodwin

College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

Rob Jacks

College of Architecture, Arts, and Design

Christina Minford

College of Science, Psychology Department

2024-2025 Professional Development Grant

April Newcomer
College of Science

Jessica Hurdus
College of Science

Kayla Goodwin
College of Liberal Arts and
Human Sciences

Virginia Tech makes intentional efforts to aid in the professional development of its advisors by providing funds to support the development of faculty, professional, and staff advisors who serve undergraduate students in an advising capacity. Each recipient above has been awarded a $500 professional development grant to assist with expenses related to advising conferences and events.

Spring 2025 Academic Advising Academy

Academic Advising Initiatives is excited to announce the Spring 2025 cohort of the Academic Advising Academy (AAA)! The AAA is a comprehensive, semester-long training and development program designed for academic advisors at Virginia Tech. Tailored to advisors at all levels of experience, the program enhances advising skills through a series of progressive learning opportunities. Each cohort is equipped with the data, tools, and resources necessary to deliver impactful and relevant academic advising, supporting students in their academic success and a seamless transition to university life.

Student Opportunities & Achievement Resources
- Ashley Offutt
- Brandon Stokes
- Mikaela David-John
- Iyaira Williams
- Seth Sterlin

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- Courtney Collins

College of Engineering
- Mayar Madboly
- Hannah Rodriguez
- Mark Flynn

Student Athlete Academic Support Services
- Sarah Wattenberg
- Kaitlyn Barrett
- Hope Thomas

College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
- Shauna Webb

College of Architecture, Arts & Design
- Charlotte Parks

Career and Professional Development
- Kassee Sosa

Student Success Initiatives
- Cassidy Wood

Student Affairs Advancement
- Heather Conklin

College of Natural Resources and Environment
- Mahealani Kaloi

Thank you to our Conference Sponsors!

- College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- Pamplin College of Business
- College of Engineering
- College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
- College of Architecture, Arts, and Design

- College of Natural Resources and Environment
- College of Science
- Division of Enrollment Management
- Office of the University Registrar
- Office for Inclusive Strategy and Excellence

2025 University Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Academic Advising
Melissa Cumbia

College of Natural Resources and Environment
"As an advisor, I strive to provide students with information so they can make knowledgeable decisions about their personal higher education journey. Advising should be a highly supportive and moderately challenging experience. I aim to be a helpful resource, committed partner, and advocate for my students as they pursue their individual educational and professional goals."

2025 University Award for Excellence in Graduate Academic Advising
Daniel Hoek

College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
"In my advising, a key part of this is to teach students the 'hidden syllabus': the network of specific conventions and shibboleths that academics in philosophy are expected to know but which students from these groups are often unfamiliar with."

2025 Outstanding New Advisor Award
Michelle Flinchum

College of Architecture, Arts, and Design
"Not many people are fortunate enough to love the work they do; I consider myself lucky in my position as an academic advisor to have a small role in the lives of tomorrow's changemakers. I find immense fulfillment in fostering a sense of belonging among my students while guiding and celebrating them on their journey towards academic achievement and self-discovery."

2025 Outstanding Administrator Award
Karen Watson

College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
"Academic advising is a shared relationship between the student, advisor, faculty, staff, and administrators, all of whom have distinct responsibilities. Academic advising is more than a process by which a student selects classes to enroll in each semester. It is a decision-making process for the student where they choose many aspects of their academic careers."

2025 Award for Excellence in Career Advising
Priscilla Baker

College of Engineering
"At the end of the day, my job is all about relationships. It's about the relationships I have built within my department and across campus with other advisors and resource offices to further aid my students. Most importantly, it's about the relationship I establish with each individual student. I am wholly invested in their academic success, their future career endeavors, their overall happiness and well-being, and I think they genuinely know that."