

2026 PASFAA Conference Agenda

We Are... Student Access! | October 26-28, 2026 | The Penn Stater Hotel & Conference Center, State College, PA

Monday, October 26

TIME	LOCATION	SESSION / EVENT	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER(S)
7:30 AM - 8:30 AM		Breakfast for Conference Committee		
8:00 AM - 9:30 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	Exhibitor Setup		
9:00 AM - 4:30 PM	Conference Registration Desk II	Conference Registration Open		
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM		Beverages available	Beverages available	
9:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	Exhibitor Area Open		
11:00 AM - 11:30 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	Conference Kickoff: PASFAA President's Welcome/Business Meeting		
11:30 AM - 12:30 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	PASFAA Committee-ment: Becoming a Rock Star Committee Chair	Great committees don't happen by accident—they happen because of strong leadership. Whether you're a new chair or looking to take your committee to the next level, this session will explore practical strategies for setting a vision, facilitating productive meetings, engaging volunteers, delegating effectively, and keeping projects on track. Through real-world examples, interactive discussion, and a few lessons borrowed from the world of rock and roll, you'll leave with tools and ideas to help your committee perform at its best. Inspired by the belief that great committees don't just perform—they perform together.	Julie Lawton - Monogram
12:30 PM - 1:30 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	Monday Lunch Buffet/EASFAA Update/Charity Introduction		Nick Prewett - Stonybrook University & EASFAA President
1:30 PM - 4:15 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	Exhibitor Area Open		
1:45 PM - 2:35 PM				
1:45 PM - 2:35 PM	Room 207	PA State Grant/RTSS Academic Progress Reviews		Jana Madar - PHEAA; Brandyn Whitmyer - Millersville University
1:45 PM - 2:35 PM	Room 105	Mindful Leadership in Times of Crisis: Leading Others Without Burning Out	Between constant federal updates, administrative shifts, and dwindling campus resources, financial aid leaders are being asked to do more with less while maintaining poise for their staff and senior administration. As the exodus of seasoned professionals leaves critical leadership gaps, how do we step into these roles without sacrificing our own well-being? This interactive session bridges the realities of financial aid leadership with mindful, sustainable management practices. We'll discuss actionable tools for setting boundaries, prioritizing amidst chaos, and supporting a team through fatigue. Designed for both current directors and emerging leaders, this session provides realistic encouragement and proven strategies to help you lead with purpose, protect your team, and thrive in the face of continuous industry evolution.	Nick Prewett - Stonybrook University & EASFAA President
1:45 PM - 2:35 PM	Room 106	AI in Financial Aid - What Works, What Doesn't, and What Comes Next	Artificial intelligence is rapidly making its way into financial aid offices, but not all AI tools are created equal. In this session, we'll explore how financial aid professionals are using AI today, where generic AI tools fall short, and why purpose-built, regulation-informed AI is critical for navigating complex student scenarios. We'll discuss the importance of data security, FERPA considerations, and regulatory grounding, and invite participants to share their own experiences, questions, and concerns about adopting AI responsibly in financial aid operations.	Eddie Salazar - Peach

TIME	LOCATION	SESSION / EVENT	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER(S)
1:45 PM - 2:35 PM	Room 208	Beyond the Content: Lessons Learned from Five Years of College Student Financial Wellness	The University of Pittsburgh Financial Wellness Center was launched during the 2020–2021 academic year in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past five years, our team has learned that traditional financial literacy topics alone are often insufficient to address the real financial challenges students face.	Joel Philistin - University of Pittsburgh; Janet McLaughlin - University of Pittsburgh
1:45 PM - 2:35 PM	Room 104	Montessori Pedagogy in Higher Ed: Communications with students	Finding yourself repeating things over and over? Dealing with students and families with big feelings? Congratulations! You're halfway to early childhood education! I'm a former Montessori Toddler guide who has found Montessori pedagogy immensely helpful. Let's talk.	Stacy Finnigan - Northampton Community College
2:35 PM - 3:00 PM		Snack and Beverage Break/Visit the Business Partners/Check out the charity baskets at the Business Partner tables!	The Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center has a great refreshment break area with fountain sodas, coffee, hot tea, and fun snacks! We are pleased to offer these throughout the days of the conference!	
3:00 PM - 3:50 PM				
3:00 PM - 3:50 PM	Room 105	Clock Hour Programs (Packaging, R2T4s, attendance, etc)		Kim Cravotta - McClintock and Associates
3:00 PM - 3:50 PM	Room 208	The Red Flag Game (Verification)	Conflicting information is a serious red flag! Join this interactive, game-style session where participants work in teams to review real-world inspired financial aid files and identify potential red flags across verification, professional judgment, and conflicting information scenarios. Attendees will decide whether each file is clean, needs follow-up, or presents a compliance concern, then we will break down the regulatory guidance and best practices behind each decision. This session focuses on building consistency in file review, strengthening documentation, and increasing confidence in spotting issues early while keeping it engaging, practical, and a little competitive.	Tara Verrico - Geneva College
3:00 PM - 3:50 PM	Room 106	On the Bridge: Steering Social Media with Intention	Financial aid offices sit at the center of some of the most urgent, emotional, and misunderstood conversations on campus. On the Bridge: Steering Social Media with Intent helps administrators shift from reactive posting to purposeful communication that clarifies processes, reduces misinformation, and supports students at scale. Rather than treating social media as an extra task, this session shows how to use it as a high-impact service tool—one that improves outreach, reduces call volume, and reinforces compliance-friendly messaging.	Janee Knippenberg - Earnest
3:00 PM - 3:50 PM	Room 207	Cohort Default Rates in a Post-COVID Era: What's Changed and What's Next	The return of federal student loan repayment has created a new reality for Cohort Default Rates (CDRs). Years of COVID-era payment pauses, flexibilities, and temporary relief measures significantly changed borrower repayment behavior and resulted in artificially low default rates. This session will examine what has changed in the post-pandemic environment, what institutions should expect as the 2024 cohort and beyond begin to emerge, and proactive strategies schools can implement now to reduce default risk and support student borrowers.	Justin Welliver - Edamerica
3:00 PM - 3:50 PM	Room 104	Beyond Burnout: Reclaiming Energy in Financial Aid	Financial aid offices are fast-paced, high-pressure environments. Between constant regulation changes, busy seasons, and supporting students through stressful situations, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and burned out. This interactive session will take a real look at what burnout actually looks like in financial aid and why it happens. We'll talk through practical, realistic ways to manage stress, recognize the warning signs early, and build habits that help you stay grounded during peak times. We'll also explore simple ways teams and leaders can create a more supportive and sustainable work environment. Participants will walk away with strategies they can actually use right away to feel more balanced and supported in their day-to-day work.	Jamille Medina-Baashit - Saint Joseph's University
3:50 PM - 4:00 PM		Snack and Beverage Break/Visit the Business Partners/Check out the charity baskets at the Business Partner tables!	The Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center has a great refreshment break area with fountain sodas, coffee, hot tea, and fun snacks! We are pleased to offer these throughout the days of the conference!	

TIME	LOCATION	SESSION / EVENT	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER(S)
4:00 PM - 5:00 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	OB3: Adjusted Loan Amounts for Less Than Full Time Annual Enrollment	Don't call it loan proration. That still exists. But there is a new wrinkle being introduced as part of OB3 that arrived this Fall -- adjustments to Direct loan amounts for annualized less than full time enrollment. This is a new paradigm, and there is complexity here. Come join us as we take a look at some examples, and review the rules (as best we know them now).	Daniel Barkowitz - Penn State University
5:00 PM - 6:30 PM		President's Reception	Come one, come all! We would like to celebrate the long year we've had!	
6:30 PM - 6:45 PM		If you signed up for a dinner group hosted by Business Partners, meet your group at the designated meeting spot to take your pre-planned transportation.		
7:00 PM - 9:00 PM		Business Partners Hosting Dinner Outings	Sign up for a restaurant and Business Partner host so you don't have to eat alone! It is a fun way to meet people without any stress! Each person pays on their own and transportation will be provided via Uber/Lyft.	
8:30 PM - 10:00 PM	Courtyard outside Conference Center	Firepits open and s'mores available	Join other PASFAA members outside at the firepits and make your own s'mores! Ingredients provided!	

Tuesday, October 27

TIME	LOCATION	SESSION / EVENT	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER(S)
7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	Breakfast and Financial Aid Management System Roundtables	Grab your breakfast and sit with your other colleagues who use the same financial aid management systems as you! We will have tables for schools that use Banner, Colleague, PowerFAIDS, Peoplesoft, and Workday. Join others to talk through the most recent financial aid changes with OB3 to compare notes.	Banner table: Shelby Maguire Colleague table: Barbie Schmitt PowerFAIDS table: Pam Wolfe & Daniel Barkowitz Peoplesoft table: Amanda Symanski Workday table: - Barbie Schmitt, King's College Pam Wolfe, Susquehanna University Daniel Barkowitz, Penn State University Amanda Symanski, Penn State University
8:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Conference Registration Desk II	Conference Registration Open		
8:00 AM - 8:30 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	Exhibitor Area Open		
8:30 AM - 9:30 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	The Trust Gap: What Cost Confusion Means for Financial Aid Leaders		Stephen Payne - Strada Education
9:30 AM - 10:00 AM		Snack and Beverage Break/Visit the Business Partners/Check out the charity baskets at the Business Partner tables!	The Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center has a great refreshment break area with fountain sodas, coffee, hot tea, and fun snacks! We are pleased to offer these throughout the days of the conference!	
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	State Higher Education Policy Updates	Join PDE colleagues us for a review and discussion of recent higher education policy changes and implementation across Pennsylvania in 2025-26 and 2026-27. New policy topics will include the PA FAFSA Completion Requirement; an overview of the State Board of Higher Education's newly passed Strategic Plan; an overview of PA Workforce Pell 2026-27 program determination process and next steps. Implementation and recurring updates for existing policies will include Transparency in Costs and Financial Aid related to Act 69, with a focus on learnings from the 2025/26 academic year. Relevant updates on federal financial aid policy including new student loan provisions may be included with ample time for sharing and Question and Answer with department colleagues.	Ali Caccavella - Pennsylvania Department of Education
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM		Beverage Break/Visit the Business Partners/Check out the charity baskets at the Business Partner tables!	The Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center has a great refreshment break area with fountain sodas, coffee, hot tea, and fun snacks! We are pleased to offer these throughout the days of the conference!	
11:15 AM - 12:05 PM				
11:15 AM - 12:05 PM	Room 208	Judgment Day: Tackling Professional Judgment with Confidence	This presentation will provide financial aid professionals with practical guidance on exercising Professional Judgment authority in compliance with federal regulations and discuss different institutional policies that can be considered. Attendees will review common PJ scenarios, documentation best practices, and recent regulatory updates if applicable. Participants will leave with strategies and tools to support consistent, student-centered decision-making.	Nichole Thon - University of Pittsburgh; Todd Summers - Penn State University
11:15 AM - 12:05 PM	Room 105	Transactional vs. Transformational Customer Service	Exploring how to elevate the customer service we provide to our students	Paige Lewis - Thomas Jefferson University
11:15 AM - 12:05 PM	Room 207	Navigating Federal Loan Changes: Evolving Borrower Needs	Federal loan reform has reshaped borrowing options for parents and graduate students, creating new challenges for institutions across the academic cycle. This session brings schools and lenders together to focus on forward-looking preparation as campuses transition from fall billing into spring enrollment and financing periods. School panelists will share strategies for implementing loan reform and communicating changes in federal loan limits, private loan readiness, and implications for admissions yield. Lender representatives will offer insights into how the industry is adapting to increased reliance on private student loans and evolving borrower demand. Attendees will leave with practical tools and communication strategies to support borrowers, strengthen enrollment outcomes, and navigate the changing loan landscape in the terms ahead.	Daniel Barkowitz Robin Walker Keri Neidig Kat Delgrosso Eddie Hill Janee Knippenberg Amanda Snyder - Penn State University Wilkes University Sallie Mae College Ave Citizens Earnest PHEAA

TIME	LOCATION	SESSION / EVENT	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER(S)
11:15 AM - 12:05 PM	Room 106	Why Personality and Leadership Styles Matter for Communication, Difficult Conversations, and your Mental Health	This session briefly reviews some of the popular personality and leadership assessments (DiSC, Myers-Briggs, Enneagram) and provides discussion to help you understand yourself and your team and why you work together the way you do. We will discuss practical scenarios and give you tips you can implement to enhance communication and improve your workplace culture.	Kim McCurdy - PHEAA; Patty Peterson - SoFi
11:15 AM - 12:05 PM	Room 104	Supporting Student Veterans: Benefits, Insights, and Best Practices	Veterans bring unique strengths—and unique challenges—when transitioning from military service to higher education. This session equips financial aid professionals with the tools to support veterans effectively. Learn the key things veterans want you to know, explore strategies for building trust and collaboration, and gain a clear understanding of the education benefits available to veterans. Walk away with practical insights and actionable steps to help those who served succeed in the classroom and beyond.	Brandyn Whitmyer - Millersville University; Carrie Wilson - Pennsylvania Gunsmith School
12:05 PM - 12:15 PM		Transition to the President's Hall for our program and lunch!		
12:15 PM - 12:35 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	PHEAA CEO Update		Jim Steele - PHEAA
12:35 PM - 2:00 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	Membership Luncheon, Welcome Past PASFAA Presidents, and Awards		
2:00 PM - 2:15 PM	Outside Presidents Hall 1234	Photos for Past Presidents and Award Winners	For Past Presidents and award winners, please plan to have your pictures taken!	
2:00 PM - 2:15 PM		Snack and Beverage Break/Visit the Business Partners/Check out the charity baskets at the Business Partner tables!	The Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center has a great refreshment break area with fountain sodas, coffee, hot tea, and fun snacks! We are pleased to offer these throughout the days of the conference!	
2:15 PM - 3:15 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	PA Grant and Special Programs Update		Elizabeth McCloud - PHEAA
3:15 PM - 5:00 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	Exhibitor Area Open		
3:15 PM - 3:30 PM		Snack and Beverage Break/Visit the Business Partners/Check out the charity baskets at the Business Partner tables!	The Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center has a great refreshment break area with fountain sodas, coffee, hot tea, and fun snacks! We are pleased to offer these throughout the days of the conference!	
3:30 PM - 4:20 PM				
3:30 PM - 4:20 PM	Room 108	Pennsylvania National Guard EAP/MFEP Benefits for Servicemembers	Discussion about the Pennsylvania National Guard Educational Assistance Program and Military Family Education Program changes and updates.	Dana Black - Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA); Office of Administration (OA); State Education, Incentives, and Support Programs Division
3:30 PM - 4:20 PM	Room 207	Audit findings related to 7/1/26 changes: Issues from One Big Beautiful Bill and Issues from the new R2T4 rules		Kim Cravotta - McClintock and Associates
3:30 PM - 4:20 PM	Room 104	Importance of Updating Policies and Procedures		Kate Brabandt - College Aid Services; Tracey Richards - Lehigh Carbon Community College

TIME	LOCATION	SESSION / EVENT	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER(S)
3:30 PM - 4:20 PM	Room 105	The Case for Creativity: Why Financial Aid Administrators Need it More than Ever	Financial aid has never been more demanding. Burnout, regulatory complexity, and workforce attrition continue to challenge professionals across the field. This presentation explores creativity not as an artistic talent or leisure activity, but as an essential form of self-care and a powerful tool for emotional regulation, stress reduction, and overall well-being. Participants will learn how to reframe creativity from a "nice-to-have" hobby into a practical strategy for improving mental health, quieting overthinking, and building resilience. In a profession dedicated to supporting others, attendees will discover how incorporating creativity into their daily lives can help them navigate the increasing demands of financial aid.	Amanda Abreu - Ascent
3:30 PM - 4:20 PM	Room 106	More Than a Paycheck: Transforming Student Employment into Real Office Impact	More Than a Paycheck: Transforming Student Employment into Real Office Impact shares how the Financial Aid Office at the University of Pittsburgh transformed student employment from a simple check-in role into a meaningful part of daily office operations. Through mentorship, clear expectations, and intentional training, work study students became active contributors supporting projects, office workflows, and student services. This presentation will highlight lessons learned, challenges faced, and practical strategies for building a student employment program that benefits both the office and the students themselves.	Morgan Clark - University of Pittsburgh
4:25 PM - 5:15 PM				
4:25 PM - 5:15 PM	Room 208	Reuniting the PASSHE Sector Family!	Birds of a feather session with others from your sector within PASFAA!	Alyssa Dobson - Slippery Rock University
4:25 PM - 5:15 PM	Room 105	Reuniting the State Related Sector Family!	Birds of a feather session with others from your sector within PASFAA!	Amanda Szymanski - Penn State University
4:25 PM - 5:15 PM	Room 106	Reuniting the Institutional Support Services Sector Family!	Birds of a feather session with others from your sector within PASFAA!	Eddie Hill - Citizens
4:25 PM - 5:15 PM	Room 108	Reuniting the Graduate/Professional Sector Family!	Birds of a feather session with others from your sector within PASFAA!	Anthony Naro - Wilkes University
4:25 PM - 5:15 PM	Room 207	Reuniting the Health Sciences and Career Technology Sector Family!	Birds of a feather session with others from your sector within PASFAA!	Carrie Wilson - Pennsylvania Gunsmith School
4:25 PM - 5:15 PM	Room 205	Reuniting the Private Sector Family!	Birds of a feather session with others from your sector within PASFAA!	Barbie Schmitt - King's College
4:25 PM - 5:15 PM	Room 104	Reuniting the Public Two-Year Sector Family!	Birds of a feather session with others from your sector within PASFAA!	Tracey Richards - Lehigh Carbon Community College
6:30 PM - 7:30 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	Dinner Buffet		
7:30 PM - 10:00 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	Game Night and Dessert! Including "Escape from Default Island: An Interactive Adventure for Financial Aid Professionals" Charity Basket raffle winners announced!	In addition to corn hole and other games available for you to play with friends after dinner, we will have "Escape from Default Island" for all of us to work together and play! We need some fun--we've all been working so hard and need a minute for play! Stranded on Default Island, your mission is clear: work together, solve puzzles and escape before time runs out! This immersive escape room experience blends fun and friendly competition with practical learning about federal student loan default. Are you ready to escape?	Preston Dodson - Citizens; Eddie Hill - Citizens
8:30 PM - 10:00 PM	Courtyard outside Conference Center	Firepits open and s'mores available	Join other PASFAA members outside at the firepits and make your own s'mores! Ingredients provided!	

Wednesday, October 28

TIME	LOCATION	SESSION / EVENT	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER(S)
7:00 AM - 8:00 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	Breakfast		
8:00 AM - 9:00 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	Fraud in Financial Aid	Fraud has been a growing issue in higher education, we will discuss trends, tools, and changes from ED to help you protect your institution from fraudsters.	Alyssa Dobson - Slippery Rock University; Tracey Richards - Lehigh Carbon Community College
9:00 AM - 10:00 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	Exhibitor Area Open		
9:00 AM - 9:15 AM		Snack and Beverage Break/Visit the Business Partners		
9:15 AM - 10:05 AM				
9:15 AM - 10:05 AM	Room 207	Loan Repayment Counseling	Loan Repayment Changes and Strategies	Grace Taylor - Moore College of Art & Design
9:15 AM - 10:05 AM	Room 105	Change Management		Sherrie Borden - Penn State University
9:15 AM - 10:05 AM	Room 208	Understanding the Grow PA & PA-TIP CIP Code Changes	Join the PHEAA team for a concise, informative overview of recent Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code updates impacting the Grow PA Program and the PA Targeted Industry Program beginning in the 2026–27 academic year. This session will highlight what changed, why it matters, and how institutions can support their students applying for these programs.	Christina Aul - PHEAA; Erica LeBlanc - PHEAA
9:15 AM - 10:05 AM	Room 106	Designing an Aid Strategy, Not Just Packaging Students	This is where directors can really differentiate: a. Aligning aid awarding with enrollment, retention, and equity goals b. Tradeoffs between leveraging aid vs. access c. When to deviate from traditional packaging models d. Using data to justify strategy shifts to leadership ■ Bonus: show before/after outcomes from a strategy change.	Barbara Schmitt - King's College; Hannah Brown - Marywood University
9:15 AM - 10:05 AM	Room 104	Building Trust Through Financial Aid Counseling	Financial aid counseling is often one of the most important conversations students and families have during the college decision process. With changing FAFSA regulations, increasing college costs, and growing concerns about student debt, families are looking for more than just a breakdown of numbers, they want guidance and reassurance. Many families do not know what questions to ask or even where to begin. Being able to identify concerns, guide the conversation, and explain information in a clear and approachable way is critical to helping families feel informed and supported. This session will focus on practical strategies for leading effective financial aid conversations while helping students and families better understand affordability, financing options, and the long-term impact of borrowing. Through real-life examples and common counseling scenarios, attendees will explore ways to simplify complex aid information, navigate difficult conversations with empathy, and build trust during high-stress situations.	Christy Snedeker - Wilkes University; Brian Beighley - University of Pittsburgh - Greensburg
10:05 AM - 10:30 AM		Snack and Beverage Break/Visit the Business Partners/Check out the charity baskets at the Business Partner tables!		
10:30 AM - 11:30 AM	Presidents Hall 1234	Inside the Beltway/Federal Update		Will Lindsey - PHEAA
11:30 AM - 12:30 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	PASFAA Closing Business Meeting/Passing of the Gavel		
12:30 PM - 1:00 PM	Presidents Hall 1234	Exhibitor Area Breakdown		
12:30 PM - 2:00 PM		PASFAA Executive Council Meeting		