

# AIRC



**MORE PLAYERS, HIGHER STAKES:  
COMPETING FOR STUDENTS IN A  
GLOBAL EDUCATION MARKET**

## **2026 AIRC SPRING SYMPOSIUM**

**Monday, May 25, 2026**

**8:30 AM - 4:00 PM**

**University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida**

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**UNIVERSITY OF  
CENTRAL FLORIDA**



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## **Event Description:**

Political and policy upheaval since 2024 in the traditional major destinations has upended global student mobility markets and enabled a growing number of countries to compete for international students. Join AIRC: The Association of International Enrollment Management for a one-day deep dive into these market changes. Are we really seeing a shift “from the big 4 to the big 14?” What will our new reality look like once the dust settles? And crucially, how can institutions, agencies, and service providers effectively respond, now and into the future? This practical, solutions-oriented session will help you generate knowledge, insights, and connections to navigate uncertainty and sustain international enrollment in an unstable world.

## **Learning Outcomes:**

- Analyze the key political, economic, and demographic forces shaping global student mobility trends
- Learn how prospective student perceptions of the US as a study destination have shifted, and where the US’ strengths and weaknesses lie
- Evaluate how recruitment agencies are diversifying their portfolios and assess the implications for US international enrollment management
- Identify and compare the major and growing destination countries, institutions, and third party players competing for international students
- Apply insights from global mobility trends to adapt your IEM strategies to the new reality
- Explore trans-national education (TNE), online/hybrid learning, and other approaches as alternatives or supplements to traditional international enrollment
- Glean scenarios from case studies related to international engagement to enhance recruitment strategies

# EVENT SCHEDULE

*DRAFT SCHEDULE, SUBJECT TO CHANGE*

**MONDAY, MAY 25**

**8:30 AM | Registration & Breakfast**

**9:00 AM | Welcome from AIRC and University of Central Florida**

**9:15 AM | Opening Plenary: Global Trends presented by Studyportals**

**10:15 AM | Coffee Break**

**10:30 AM | Concurrent Sessions**

- A1: Lessons Learned for Successful TNE Partnerships
- A2: Beyond the Headlines: What Prospective International Students Actually Think in a Shifting Global Market

**12:00 PM | Lunch & Networking**

**1:00 PM | Concurrent Workshops OR UCF Campus Tour**

- B1: Do Your Credit Policies Encourage Enrollment?
- B2: Beyond Mobility: International Online Enrollment and the Global Workforce

**2:30 PM | Concurrent Sessions**

- C1: From Analog Outreach to Algorithmic Precision: Re-Calibrating Strategy in a High-Stakes Global Market
- C2: Counseling Through Chaos: A Student-Centered Approach to Advising in an Unstable Market

**3:40 PM | Reflection & Closing**

**4:00 PM | Symposium Ends**

# SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

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## **Opening Plenary: Global Trends presented by Studyportals**

While global demand for higher education remains robust, the international landscape is shifting from the "Big 4" toward 14 to 20 emerging destination countries. Policy changes in the US, Canada, and Australia are driving students to explore new markets, making the competitive set harder than ever. This plenary establishes a shared baseline for navigating these shifts using UNESCO Project Atlas data to visualize the "changing pie" of student mobility, and real-time Studyportals data insights. We will focus on execution at every step of the enrollment journey, ensuring students are supported and enrollment goals are achieved. Join us to explore case studies and actionable "truisms" for maintaining excellence in student success and career outcomes.

Presenters: Dr. Amy VanSurksum, Studyportals; Andrew Ness, Studyportals

## **A1: Lessons Learned for Successful TNE Partnerships**

Trans-national education (TNE) is often discussed as a possible solution to international enrollment challenges. But what exactly is TNE, how can institutions find reliable partners, and what makes for a successful TNE partnership? Learn about best practices and common pitfalls from two institutions with longstanding TNE programs ranging from dual degrees to overseas branch campuses.

Presenter: Alana Jones, University of Colorado Denver

# SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

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## **A2: Beyond the Headlines: What Prospective International Students Actually Think in a Shifting Global Market**

Global headlines about visa policies, geopolitical tensions, and shifting government priorities have dominated conversations about international student mobility since 2024. However, these headlines often obscure a critical perspective: how prospective students themselves are interpreting these developments and incorporating them into their decision-making. This session will bring authentic student voices and real-time sentiment into the discussion by drawing on three complementary sources of insight from IDP Education: 1. New global survey findings from the latest Emerging Futures report, capturing thousands of prospective international students' perceptions of major study destinations, geopolitical developments, and career outcomes. 2. Behavioral insights from peer-to-peer conversations between prospective students and current students on the Ambassador Platform, highlighting the questions students are actually asking when evaluating institutions and destinations. 3. Frontline perspectives from in-market counselors, who work directly with students and families navigating uncertainty around visas, safety, cost, and long-term career outcomes. Together, these perspectives provide a uniquely holistic view of how prospective students are processing global uncertainty and evaluating study destinations. The session will highlight emerging shifts in destination perception, the role of peer-to-peer engagement in building trust, and how institutions can align recruitment messaging with the concerns students are expressing in real time. Participants will gain insight into how student sentiment differs from institutional assumptions and how these insights can inform recruitment strategy, communication, and engagement.

Presenter: Kirsten Feddersen, IDP; Stephanie Sieggreen, University of Tennessee Knoxville

# SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

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## **B1: Do Your Credit Policies Encourage Enrollment?**

Universities around the world pride themselves on being equitable, but how equitable are transfer credit and advanced standing policies? Are outdated or biased policies and practices preventing qualified students from enrolling? Are they choosing your competition instead because of their better policies? This interactive session will explore often overlooked secondary credentials that should be awarded credit/ advanced standing, barriers that prevent equitable policies, and how to implement equitable policies that encourage enrollment. The competition for students is fierce, don't hurt your chances with old mindsets and outdated policies!

Presenters: Susan Whipple, The Evaluation Company; Sarah Daknis, The Evaluation Company

## **B2: Beyond Mobility: International Online Enrollment and the Global Workforce Mitigating Credential Fraud from Red Flags to Emerging AI**

Most institutions are competing harder than ever for the same internationally mobile 18–24-year-old students. Increasing spending, expanding agent networks, and facing mounting volatility driven by visa policy shifts, geopolitical tensions, and currency instability. What if the growth opportunity isn't competing harder, but in competing differently? This session challenges traditional international enrollment strategy by spotlighting a rapidly expanding, under-leveraged global marketplace: working professionals who seek U.S. credentials, career advancement, and industry-aligned qualifications, without leaving employment or relocating. Drawing on anonymized case studies (due to NDA agreements), we will demonstrate how institutions have generated new revenue streams by designing and marketing online programs specifically for employed international learners. We will unpack the enrollment, pricing, and positioning strategies that allowed these institutions to access entirely new markets to drive enrollment and revenue growth.

Presenter: John Evans, Catalyst GEM

# SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

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## **C1: From Analog Outreach to Algorithmic Precision: Re-Calibrating Strategy in a High-Stakes Global Market**

In an era of "More Players, Higher Stakes," institutions can no longer afford the "System Lag" of unsegmented, global outreach. To compete, universities must shift from Analog Outreach—broad, low-fidelity recruitment—to Algorithmic Precision. This session explores the transition from "Broad-Signal Noise" to the development of new ways of thinking of the link between marketing and recruitment, including Market and Channel Diversification, Strategic Corridors and Hubs of Influence. We will focus on leveraging data to ensure that institutional storytelling is transmitted at the highest possible fidelity to the right student segments. Referring to specific examples in the presenters' experience, the panel will carefully reflect both on necessary changes, and on fundamentals, identifying principles that remain core to effective enrollment strategy even in volatile times. One institution will share insights into how they grew international enrollments over the past year, even as their comparator institutions saw declines.

Presenters: Teeba Alsafar, ApplyBoard; Glen Besterfield, University of North Florida; Hanen Burkee, Saint Leo University

# SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

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## **C2: Counseling Through Chaos: A Student-Centered Approach to Advising in an Unstable Market**

This session explores what it looks like to counsel students through today's volatile international education landscape. Through real case studies, attendees will examine how students are pivoting away from traditional destinations due to shifting priorities around affordability, ROI, safety, and post-study work opportunities, and what that means for the institutions and agencies competing to enroll them. As macro-level market forces play out in individual advising conversations, the student-advisor relationship becomes the critical link between institutional strategy and enrollment outcomes. Attendees will leave with concrete communication frameworks for rebuilding student and family confidence, a multi-destination advising model for guiding students through plan pivots, and the ability to translate complex global mobility trends into clear, actionable guidance for the students and families navigating an unstable world.

Presenters: Lindsay Fried Augustine, Simply Succeed; Greg Holz, University of Central Missouri

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**WE LOOK FORWARD TO  
SEEING YOU SOON!**

**QUESTIONS? EMAIL [STAFF@AIRC-EDUCATION.ORG](mailto:STAFF@AIRC-EDUCATION.ORG)**

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