



2025 CIC CAO Concurrent Session

The Talent Development Imperative: Developing Faculty & Staff to Fuel Student Success

In an era marked by rapid change and increasing demands on higher education, developing faculty and staff is not a luxury; it is a strategic necessity. In this session, participants explored the critical importance of talent development as a driver of institutional health, student success, and mission alignment. Through practical examples and compelling stories, participants examined how colleges can build intentional, integrated (and affordable) approaches to professional growth, leadership development, and cross-functional collaboration. Participants discussed promising practices, challenges, and how academic and student success leaders can partner to build a culture of continuous learning and shared ownership for institutional outcomes.

Facilitators:

Dr. Joretta Nelson, Vice Chairman and Founder of *Moving the Needle, Credo-Powered by Carnegie*
Dr. Alex Kappus, Senior Director for Client Success, *Credo-Powered by Carnegie*

Panel Guests:

Dr. Suzanne Blum Malley, EVP & Provost, Methodist University- smalley@methodist.edu
Dr. Pete Holbrook, Provost and COO at Tiffin University - holbrookpj@tiffin.edu
Dr. Alvin Sturdivant, Vice President for Student Affairs & Inclusive Excellence at the University of Portland - sturdiva@up.edu

Session Slide Deck:

([PDF linked here](#))

Key Takeaways:

During the session, post-it notes were distributed, and attendees were encouraged to write down a key insight, idea, or what will “stick” with them beyond the session.

1. Talent Development as Strategic Infrastructure

Participants strongly affirmed that professional growth is not optional; it is a strategic necessity. Investing in people fuels institutional vitality and student success. Attendees noted the importance of succession planning, leadership pipelines, and training supervisors to grow talent intentionally and transparently. Colleges must plan for turnover, cultivate rising stars, and view every role as part of a broader learning ecosystem rather than a fixed position.

Representative ideas: “Succession planning is essential,” “Leadership Academy,” “Train all supervisors to grow talent,” “Rising stars visiting cabinet meetings.”

2. Building a Culture of Continuous Learning

Many reflections centered on cultivating a “leaderful campus,” an environment where everyone is empowered to learn, stretch, and lead. Participants resonated with the idea that professional growth should extend beyond occasional workshops to become a sustained, campus-wide practice. Structured initiatives such as Faculty and Staff Leadership Institutes and individual professional development plans tied to institutional values can help embed continuous learning as a shared norm.

Representative ideas: “Leaderful campus,” “Faculty and staff formation rather than development,” “Individual PD Plans anchored to values,” “Effective practices to sustain change.”

“The talent development imperative is a student success strategy. How are you helping your faculty and staff learn how to re-recruit your students every single semester? ”

Alex Kappus
Senior Director, Client Success
Carnegie

3. Intentional Design for Development Opportunities

Participants appreciated the focus on intentional, affordable, and integrated approaches to development. Suggestions included stretch assignments, dual reporting structures, and participation in local or virtual learning networks. The idea of failing quickly and safely through supported experimentation was also emphasized. These creative designs help overcome the resource limitations often experienced by smaller institutions while strengthening cross-functional collaboration.

Representative ideas: “Fail quickly,” “Dual reporting structure for an office of 1,” “Cross-train to remove silos,” “Low-cost opportunities like webinars and local professional groups.”

4. Aligning Growth with Institutional Mission and Data

A recurring insight was the power of aligning development efforts with mission, values, and measurable outcomes. Faculty and staff development should not exist apart from institutional strategy; it should be a primary vehicle for achieving it. Participants referenced framing initiatives as learning questions, using data for reflection and adjustment, and connecting personal development goals to broader institutional goals.

Representative ideas: “Frame everything as learning questions,” “Block time for capacity-building: vision, goals, assessment,” “Grow talent in conjunction with institutional goals and values.”

“We talk a lot about student formation, educating the whole student. We need to talk more about formation in the context of faculty and staff as well.”

Alvin Sturdivant
Vice President for Student Affairs & Inclusive Excellence
University of Portland

5. Recognition, Motivation, and the Human Element

Several post-it notes pointed to the emotional and motivational side of talent development. Acknowledgement as a resource and tapping into people’s “why” stood out as deeply resonant takeaways. Growth is not merely procedural; it is relational. Recognizing effort, offering affirmation, and fostering belonging help individuals stay engaged and see development as part of their purpose rather than a requirement.

Representative ideas: “Acknowledgement as a resource,” “Tapping into people’s ‘Why,’” “Faculty and staff formation,” “Go to grow.”

6. Leading Through Change and Uncertainty

Finally, attendees reflected on the need to prepare faculty and staff to lead through change, not just react to it. Institutions must train people to anticipate and adapt to evolving contexts, equipping them with the data, collaboration, and mindset skills required to thrive. Middle managers, in particular, can benefit from intentional coaching in data literacy, reflection, and adaptive leadership to sustain institutional resilience.

Representative ideas: “Focus on data skills for middle management,” “Be transparent about the higher ed context,” “Help foster people’s ability to anticipate change,” “Model for Complex Change.”

“Data fluency is one of the most important skills you can be fostering among your faculty and staff to drive your student success work.”

Joretta Nelson
Vice Chairman and Founder of Moving the Needle
Carnegie