
2021 CONFERENCE THEME: LEADING WITH CLARITY, DETERMINATION, AND PURPOSE

Long-time beacons of hope in our communities, our colleges stand on the threshold between what has been and what is yet to be. This space—known as liminality—is experienced during periods of change, and the last year has been the most transformative that many of us will experience in our lifetimes. A deadly pandemic, unemployment, illness, political violence, massive protests, and heightened awareness of racial injustice have forced us to change quickly. Many of our students are bearing the weight of the losses our communities and our country have endured. Our colleges have responded to these challenges in varying ways and with variable success, and learned that we are more nimble than we ever thought possible.

This year's theme, ***Leading with Clarity, Determination, and Purpose***, calls us to action as our colleges, communities, and country begin to map out "getting back to normal." What if instead of getting back to normal we let go of the idea of our colleges as we knew them before and rethink what they can become? Let us ask ourselves: What does a new normal look like after spending more than a year in this liminal space? Will we keep some of the changes we have made? Create new processes and approaches? Rethink our purpose? Return to some traditional approaches while adopting some new?

Leading with Clarity, Determination, and Purpose requires us to renew our commitment to fostering inclusive institutions that champion anti-racist teaching and learning, increased equity mindedness, and more flexibility. So let us simplify processes and support for our students to help them meet their financial, housing, food, mental health, and other essential needs. Let us streamline pathways for job training, degree completion, and transfer. And let us provide high-touch support to help students succeed. In the words of Amanda Gorman from her poem, *The Hill We Climb*:

We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be, a country that is bruised but whole, benevolent but bold, fierce and free. We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation.