

LEVELUP

INVESTING IN YOURSELF
AND YOUR CAREER

WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2-3, 2022

1-5 ET / 12-4 CT / 11-3 MT / 10-2 PT ↓ VIA ZOOM

\$50 ACE MEMBER ↓ \$80 NON-MEMBER ↓ \$30 ACE STUDENT MEMBER



CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

JESSICA CHEN



Jessica Chen is an Emmy-Award winner, top virtual keynote speaker, and CEO of the global business communications agency, Soulcast Media. The company trains Fortune 500 companies, global teams, and individuals on presentation, executive presence and communications messaging. Her client list includes Google, LinkedIn, the CDC, Medtronic, HP, DraftKings, and many more. Prior to starting Soulcast Media, Jessica was a broadcast television journalist. She has been awarded an Emmy-Award for her work at ABC 10News and multiple Associated Press Awards. Jessica is also a top LinkedIn Learning Instructor where her communications courses have been watched by over 1 million learners and featured in Forbes, Fortune, and Entrepreneur Magazine. Her course, “Developing Executive Presence on Video Calls” was ranked #1 among leaders worldwide in 2021 by LinkedIn Corp.

LYNDALL STOUT



Lyndall Stout is Oklahoma State University’s director of agricultural communications services, which includes a team of more than 20 professionals focused on integrated communications and marketing. Over the past four years, she’s led the effort to modernize and evolve the department further into the digital era by adding a management layer in the reporting structure. Together, they’ve accomplished a great deal in a short amount of time by developing specialty teams, streamlining workflows and processes, increasing accountability, project tracking and customer service, and boosting morale. During this time, they adopted the mantra People before Projects. Ultimately, they are increasing output and helping usher in a new era of visibility for OSU Agriculture.

An ACE member since 2011, she and the team have been recognized a number of times in the organization’s Critique & Awards program over the years for video production, marketing campaigns, social media, promotions and more. Lyndall has had a 20+ year career in television broadcasting. She is also host and executive producer of SUNUP, which airs statewide each week on PBS. Stout has a master’s degree in mass communication from Louisiana State University and a bachelor’s degree from Arkansas Tech University in journalism and speech communication.

DR. LESLIE BLANCHARD



Leslie Blanchard, Ph.D. has worked in the field of education for more than 25 years. She currently serves as the Executive Director of the Leadership Development Institute at Louisiana State University.

From 1996 to 2008, Dr. Blanchard worked exclusively in the K-12 world. As a classroom English and Secondary Science teacher, she was both a school and district level teacher of the year, as well as the Louisiana recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching given by President George W. Bush in 2003.

Dr. Blanchard moved to LSU in 2009 where she served as the Operations Manager for the Masters of Natural Sciences degree in the Cain Center for STEM Literacy. She supported middle and high school STEM teachers to pursue advanced degrees including leadership development components taught by Dr. Blanchard. In 2013, Dr. Blanchard assumed the role of Assistant Dean of the College of Agriculture where she served for five years. She supervised the recruitment/retention, student services, employee engagement/ internships, and study abroad units for 1400 students.

Dr. Blanchard accepted the position as Executive Director of the LDI in August of 2018. She has directed her efforts toward improved outcomes in K-12 schools and districts through customized, strategic, and deliberate leadership development. Dr. Blanchard's research focus is in the areas of leadership development and evaluation, particularly in K-20 education. Her dissertation researched the method of using self-assessment of efficacy and student feedback as a component of K-12 teacher evaluation, and she continues her research as it relates to leadership development and evaluation across all workforce areas in the human services sector. Dr. Blanchard has developed and taught leadership courses at the undergraduate and graduate level for the past ten years, and has consulted and coached with individuals, teams, and large groups to facilitate organizational effectiveness and improved culture and climate. Her passion is to "develop the people that develop people," and she hopes that her efforts to cultivate great leaders in the human services field will have a positive lasting impact on the communities that LSU serves.

AUDREY M. GAINNEY



Audrey M. Gainney, a Society for Human Resource Management Senior Certified Professional (SPHR-SCP) is the director of Talent Acquisition and Onboarding with the University of Florida Human Resources. She holds a master's degree in organizational management from the University of Phoenix and a bachelor's degree in marketing from Alabama A&M University. Gainney has 30+ years of experience as an HR professional in recruiting, selection and inclusive hiring and currently provides leadership and direction for a team of 12 in the design and implementation of talent acquisition and onboarding strategies for faculty and staff.

MERCEDES D. SWAN



Mercedes D. Swan, a Society for Human Resource Management Certified Professional (SHRM-CP) is the HR Manager for the Strategic Talent Group, the internal executive search team for the University of Florida. She holds a master's degree in management and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Florida. Swan has 7 years of experience as an HR professional in talent acquisition, inclusive hiring, employee engagement, and professional development and currently provides oversight and direction for a team of 5 Talent Acquisition Consultants and Specialists.

DR. LACEY ROBERTS-HILL



Dr. Lacey Roberts-Hill is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at New Mexico State University. She graduated with her bachelor's degree in Agricultural and Media Communications from West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Tx. She received her master's degree in International Agriculture from Oklahoma State University, and her Ph.D. in Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications from Texas A&M University. Her doctoral work focused on the visual communication efforts of international agricultural development programs. During her academic studies, Lacey also worked as a freelance photographer and designer, with photos being featured in a global news story with Reuters and National Public Radio online publication The Salt. Her research interests focus on visual communication, storytelling, and message creation. Lacey's work focuses on the field of agriculture communications. Within this area, she aims to apply the idea of storytelling to an international agriculture setting to see how messages are being formed and shared within development. Ultimately, she hopes to aid in program development, dissemination, and evaluations that focus on building up future leaders of developing countries. Other research avenues include messaging for on-campus food pantries to ensure food security among college students, impact of undergraduate research on underserved populations and visual literacy and use of visual in college classrooms.

DR. ANNIE SPECHT



Dr. Annie Specht is an associate professor of agricultural communication at Ohio State University. She teaches graphic design, data visualization, and publication layout classes and researches the effects of popular media portrayals of agriculture on public perceptions of the industry. She dabbles in freelance design and spends her free time downloading too many fonts.

LORI GREINER



Lori Greiner currently serves as the Publications Manager for Virginia Cooperative Extension at Virginia Tech. She is responsible for overseeing the production and promotion of VCE's publications and educational materials. She serves as the managing editor of VCE publications and works with faculty members to identify publication topics and creative ways to disseminate information. Lori also serves as the content manager for Virginia Cooperative Extension's Publications and Educational Resources website.

During her 24 years at Virginia Tech, Lori has also served as communications manager for Virginia Cooperative Extension, the communications manager for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and the public relations coordinator and customer advocate for Virginia Tech's Office of Student Programs. Prior to coming to Virginia Tech, she held positions with the Iowa Soybean and with the Michigan Farm Bureau.

Lori has been a member of ACE since 2004 and is ACE's representative to the Journal of Extension Board. She has been involved with several of the learning communities and is a former ACE board member. Lori also serves as a director at-large for her local PRSA chapter.

Lori has a bachelor's degree in food systems economics and management with a second major in agriculture and natural resources communications from Michigan State University.

DR. RUTH HOHL BORGER



Dr. Ruth Hohl Borger, Ed.D, APR currently serves as a Communications Specialist with the University of Florida IFAS Citrus Research and Education Center where she tells the world about all things citrus and UF. Prior to that she served as Assistant Vice President for Communications for the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida. In that role she oversaw the strategic public relations and communications programs for the UF/ IFAS College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, UF/ IFAS Extension and the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station. In addition to Florida, Dr. Borger has served in leadership communications and marketing roles over the past 40 years at higher education and nonprofit organizations in Michigan, New York, Arizona and Virginia. She holds degrees from Arizona State University, George Washington University and the University of Notre Dame and is accredited by the Public Relations Society of America.

MAGGIE LAWRENCE



Maggie Lawrence joined USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture as a science writer-editor in early 2022. Before she joined the NIFA Communications Team, she worked in communications for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System at Auburn University. Maggie began as a producer-director with Extension and retired as the assistant director of the Communications Department. Certified in 2021 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, she is one of less than 150 Master Public Information Officers in the nation. Issues management and crisis communications are among her strengths, and she has presented on these topics at the state, regional and national levels. Maggie is a long-time ACE member who has served in a number of capacities including current Leadership and Management Learning Community Chair, past chair of Electronic Media LC and co-chair of the 2019 ACE National Conference Committee.

LISA STEARNS



Lisa Stearns leads the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture's marketing and communications team as Vice Chancellor. The team serves four units—UT Extension, UT AgResearch, the Herbert College of Agriculture, and the College of Veterinary Medicine—along with numerous programs across the state of Tennessee.

Prior to joining the Institute, Stearns was a healthcare executive with more than 20 years of experience overseeing the marketing and communications efforts for a large, multi-hospital system in East Tennessee. She began her career in broadcast television in Knoxville serving as a reporter, news anchor, and producer at what is now WVLT-TV.

A native of California's San Joaquin Valley, she received her undergraduate degree from Fresno State and obtained her Master's degree in broadcast journalism from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She is currently pursuing her doctorate at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga.

JOHN HAWLEY



John Hawley is the Director of Communications for Montana State University Extension, located in Bozeman. Previously, he worked as an Extension Educator and Farm to School specialist for Purdue University Extension. His expertise includes media relations, event planning, editorial and news writing, and program development. A finalist for the 2021 Indiana Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ag Professionals Award, he thrives at developing external partnerships that benefit Extension and land grant university initiatives and has extensive experience working with multigenerational teams. He holds a master's degree in Agricultural and Extension Education from Utah State University and a bachelor's in Agricultural Communications from Texas Tech University. When out of the office, he enjoys time outdoors, watching sports, attending concerts, and spending time with his daughter.

JUSTIN MILLER



Justin Miller serves as a communications and marketing specialist for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, working in the areas of website development, news and media relations, and social media. Justin is an active leader in the ACE community. He presented professional development workshops at the 2020 and 2022 ACE conferences and has served as vice chair, chair, and past chair of the social media learning committee. Justin is also known for his highly competitive, client-centered projects. During his four years in ACE, he has earned three Outstanding Professional Skill awards, nine gold awards, seven silver awards, and four bronze awards through the C&A program. In 2022, he was presented with the ACE Rising Star Award. Justin holds an Associate in Arts degree from Northeast Alabama Community College and a Bachelor of Science degree from the Auburn University College of Agriculture.

CHANAÈ BRADLEY



Chanaè Bradley is the senior communications specialist for Fort Valley State University's College of Agriculture, Family Sciences and Technology. As a creative communications professional, she strategically plans and manages the production of annual publications focusing on Extension, research and education. She provides content for social media sites and serves as the media relations liaison by pitching news story ideas, conducting media trainings and working with print, online and broadcast media affiliates. In 2019, Bradley was inducted as director of member services for the Association of Communication Excellence (ACE) in Agriculture, Life and Human Sciences and in 2022 she was nominated and inducted as vice president elect. She is the recipient of the several ACE awards, including the Pioneer Award. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication, a Master of Public Administration and is currently pursuing a doctorate at the University of Georgia. In her spare time, Bradley enjoys reading, listening to praise and worship music, and spending time with family and friends.

TERRENCE WOLFORK



Terrence Wolfork is the Assistant Administrator for Communications, Conferencing and Technology at Fort Valley State University. In this position, he coordinates the College of Agriculture's Technology, Communications, Print Shop, Conference Center, and Vehicles Motor Pool to fulfill the University's Land Grant mission.

He has served as President of the National Association of Extension Program and Staff Development Professionals, Chair of the JCEP Special Projects Committee, Chair of the Southern Region Program Leadership Development Information Technology Team Member of the National Digital Extension Education Team and co-chair of the JCEP PILD Conference. He is a Georgia Education Policy Fellowship Program Fellow and a LEAD-21 Scholar.

He received his Bachelor of Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing from Fort Valley State University. He received a Master of Education with a concentration in Educational Technology from Georgia College and State University, a Master of Education with a concentration in Adult Education from Valdosta State University and is currently completing his dissertation at Valdosta State University for a Doctor in Public Administration with a concentration in Public Policy.