



Welcome from Dr. Soraya M. Coley, Our Network's Presidential Sponsor

As another academic year winds down, I want to recognize you for your involvement in the network and for all your efforts to positively impact higher education — especially at a time of unprecedented change. Your perseverance, commitment and collegiality do not go unnoticed and your continued leadership at each of your institutions is essential.

Members of the ACE Women's Network of Southern California have had a nurturing, thought-provoking and inspirational year. The annual conference held in the fall at Cal Poly Pomona was a great success, and I especially want to thank the Events Planning and Programming Committee, whose efforts were so consequential in making it so. Keynote speaker, Karen Catlin, inspired attendees to reflect on the concept of allyship — the reasonable expectations of allies, as well as approaches to support and uplift others. Allyship will continue to be a principal theme of the network and I look forward to seeing what we accomplish together.

In February, ACE Women's Networks of Southern and Northern California jointly hosted a half-day workshop that offered meaningful collaboration and camaraderie. In April, The Power of Purpose, Passion, and Perseverance lunch and learn also inspired our members to reach for all those elements in their lives and communities.

I look forward to continuing to build this important work together. Thank you again for all you do. I wish you a healthy and vibrant summer.

“Your perseverance, commitment and collegiality do not go unnoticed and your continued leadership at each of your institutions is essential.”

- Dr. Soraya M. Coley

“A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader, a great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves.” ~ Eleanor Roosevelt



Welcome from State Chair, Olukemi Sawyerr

Welcome to [ACE Women's Network of Southern California](#) (ACE WNSC) spring 2023 newsletter. My name is Olukemi Sawyerr. I am the state chair of the ACE WNSC. I am also a professor of strategy and entrepreneurship in the College of Business Administration, and I currently serve as the associate vice president for Academic Innovation at Cal Poly Pomona. ACE WNSC is part of a [national system of networks](#) with the goal of advancing and supporting women in higher education.

This has been an extremely exciting year for the Network:

- We provided high quality programming that was informed by our spring 2022 member needs assessment.
- Over 140 participants learned about allyship during our fall conference: *Women Empowering Women Through Allyship: Connect, Contribute and Collaborate* on October 21, 2022.
- Our February 2023 virtual event, funded by the inaugural ACE Women's Network mini grant, gathered 167 men and women from across California to uplift voices and build supportive relationships.
- Our first in-person Lunch and Learn event on April 21, 2023, allowed 140 participants to gain insights, develop connections, and listen to an inspirational panel of Cal State Long Beach women leaders: President, Jane Close Conoley, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, Karyn Scissum Gunn, and Vice President of Student Affairs, Beth Lesen.

This was the first year of a formalized structure for the Network. We approved our bylaws and strategic plan in summer 2022. The board was also actively engaged to ensure they were consistently serving our members' needs. We look forward to rolling out the strategic plan in the service of our members. We are also pleased to be on the verge of our institutional membership drive – where we will invite university presidents within the 10-county Southern California area to join and support our efforts to advance women in higher education.

We thank our Presidential Sponsor, Dr. Soraya M. Coley, for being a stalwart supporter of our Network. We could not accomplish all that we have without her consistent financial and moral support. We also acknowledge the commitment, dedication, and leadership of the Advisory Council of Institutional Representatives (IRs) and the Network Board of Directors, and the continued support of the national ACE Women's Network.

We especially thank all of you for participating and engaging with the Network. We [invite](#) you to serve as an IR or on one of the four standing committees as we continue to identify, develop, encourage, advance, link, and support (IDEALS) women in higher education careers within the state of California.

Events

Fall & Spring 2022-23 | Professional Development Events

Fall Conference at Cal Poly Pomona

Contributed by Bharti Sharma

The ACE WNSC annual conference was held in person on October 21, 2022, at Kellogg West Conference Center and Hotel. Hosted by Cal Poly Pomona, the invited speaker was acclaimed author and leadership coach, Karen Catlin and the event focused on *Women Empowering Women Through Allyship: Connect, Contribute, and Collaborate*. Attendees had an opportunity to network during the breakfast and Catlin presented on everyday actions to create inclusive workplaces. The lunch also featured a discussion and activity on identifying privileges. Post-lunch, there were curated breakouts on topics such as diversifying your network, advocacy, the use of inclusive language, and sponsoring. A great success, the conference was attended by more than 140 women in higher education.

Path to Success Webinar

Contributed by Bharti Sharma and ODessa-Elise Downing

ACE Women's Network of Southern and Northern California jointly hosted the online *Path to Success* webinar on February 3, 2023. The event gathered 167 attendees from both Southern and Northern California Networks in an intra-state, cross-network collaboration. The webinar emphasized paths for success in mentoring, support networks, and allyship, and was partially funded by the ACE micro-grant (PI: Dr. ODessa-Elise Downing and Co-PIs: Dr. Bharti Sharma, Dr. Shokoufeh Mirzaei, Sarah Calderon, Lucinda Schell, and Dr. Camille Johnson). Additionally, the event featured six sessions on the leadership journey of women, strength-based leadership styles, active listening, male allyship, and networking. Our esteemed panelists included:

- **Hollie Allbaugh**, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, Human Resources, California State University, San Bernardino
- **Dr. Raquel M. Rall**, Associate Professor & Faculty Chair, School of Education, University of California, Riverside
- **Sheila Owens**, Senior Director of Systemwide Learning & Development, California State University System
- **Dr. Natacha Cesar-Davis**, Assistant Dean for the Office of Justice Equity Diversity & Inclusion, University of California, Los Angeles
- **Dr. Tracy Pascua Dea**, Certified Gallup Strengths Coach
- **Ms. Shanell Tyus**, SKD Creative, Inc.
- **Mr. John Gungon**, California State University, San Bernardino
- **Dr. Dale Stephenson**, Past Dean, College of Health & Human Services, Northern Kentucky University
- **Dr. Brandon W. Jones**, Director for Student Learning, Development, & Engagement, University of Texas at Austin
- **Dr. Scott W. Thayer**, Vice President of Student Services, San Bernardino Valley College

Lunch and Learn at Long Beach

Contributed by Miranda Bates



The ACE Women's Network of Southern California Lunch and Learn event was held at California State University, Long Beach on April 21, 2023. The sold-out event gathered over 140 students, leaders, and staff from a variety of campuses and industries. Attendees were given the opportunity to network and build relationships with institutional leaders and colleagues. Additionally, the event featured an inspirational panel of CSULB leaders who discussed their own journeys to success as women in higher education. CSULB panelists included:

- **Dr. Jane Close Conoley**, President of California State University, Long Beach
- **Dr. Karyn Scissum Gunn**, Provost & Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs
- **Dr. Beth Lesen**, Vice President of Student Affairs

“What a fantastic event! Met phenomenal women at our table, inspiring speakers, beautiful venue, and delicious lunch.

Thank you, ACE Women's Network!”

– Lunch and Learn Attendee

The luncheon's theme was [*The Power of Purpose, Passion, and Perseverance*](#). Our panelists shared their stories, discussed how they try to combat gender norms, and detailed their success in attaining institutional achievement. Other topics of discussion included their experiences and struggles as professionals.

Following an impactful panel, our speakers then opened the floor for questions and offered words of advice and encouragement to all attendees. CSULB was a proud host campus, exhibiting their plethora of women leaders and the possibility to excel in higher education.

Featured

Embracing Challenges: Becoming a Department Chair Amidst New Beginnings

Contributed by Shokoufeh Mirzaei

Life has a way of surprising us when we least expect it, presenting us with remarkable opportunities that test our courage and determination. Picture this: I was newly married, contemplating starting a family, when an extraordinary chance to become a department chair unfolded before me. Doubt gripped my heart as I weighed the responsibilities of the role against my family plans. It was in these moments of uncertainty that my mentors stepped in. Their encouragement helped me to seize the opportunity and embark on a new personal journey.

Embrace Ambition and Possibility: Sheryl Sandberg once said, "We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in." When the department chair opportunity presented itself, I could have easily succumbed to self-doubt and hesitated to take on such a significant role. However, I chose to embrace ambition and possibility – recognizing that with determination and the right mindset, I could rise to the challenge.



Navigate the Balancing Act: Stepping into my new role, I soon realized that navigating my department chair responsibilities alongside the demands of a new marriage and impending motherhood would require a delicate balance. It was essential to set clear priorities, communicate effectively, and delegate tasks when necessary. Sandberg's words echoed in my mind: "Careers are a jungle gym, not a ladder." I embraced this concept, allowing myself to explore different paths and take calculated risks while staying true to my goals.

Build a Supportive Network: Sandberg emphasizes the importance of a supportive network, and I couldn't agree more. Throughout my journey, I leaned on my husband, family, friends, and colleagues for support and guidance. Their unwavering belief in me provided the necessary strength and encouragement to navigate the challenges ahead. As Sandberg writes, "We are more effective and happier when surrounded by those who believe in us."

Embrace Vulnerability and Growth: Pregnancy brought with it physical and emotional changes that tested my resilience. There were times when I felt overwhelmed and doubted my ability to manage it all. In those moments, I reminded myself that vulnerability is not a weakness, but a sign of strength. I embraced the chance for personal growth, understanding that the challenges I faced were shaping me into a stronger, more resilient leader.

Now, three semesters into my department chair role and with a joyful one-year-old by my side, I can confidently say that this opportunity has allowed me to grow both personally and professionally. Balancing the demands of leadership with the joys of motherhood has been an incredible journey of self-discovery and resilience. I have learned to navigate challenges with grace, leverage my mentors' wisdom to overcome obstacles, and push the boundaries of what I thought was possible. The journey is far from over, however, armed with the lessons learned from this incredible journey, I am confident that I can make positive personal and professional changes. So, to all those at the crossroads of family obligations and leadership, I urge you to trust in your abilities and seek your mentors' guidance. Embrace the beautiful complexities of life, find strength in your unique journey, and know that with passion, perseverance, and a little bit of magic, we can create positive changes in the world.



President Coley to Receive Donna Shavlik ACE Award

Cal Poly Pomona President, Soraya M. Coley, was selected to receive the 2023 American Council on Education (ACE) [Donna Shavlik Award](#). This award honors an individual who demonstrates a sustained commitment to advancing women in higher education. Coley has spent her decades-long career in the California State University system and has served in various roles including lecturer, tenured faculty member, department chair, dean, provost, and president. As the presidential sponsor of the ACE Women's Network – Southern California, Coley champions leadership pathways

for women throughout their academic careers. Currently, her leadership team is 75 percent women. "I have benefitted greatly from my mentors and supporters, and I pay that forward however way possible. I owe gratitude to them all, especially those who saw potential in me that I never imagined," said Coley.

"I have benefitted greatly from my mentors and supporters, and I pay that forward however way possible." – Dr. Soraya M. Coley

Male Leaders as Allies: Bridging Gender Gaps in Higher Education Leadership

Contributed by Bharti Sharma, ODessa-Elise Downing, and Shokoufeh Mirzaei

We are pleased to share a sneak peek into the research conducted by the ACE Women Networks of Northern and Southern California. Made possible through the ACE mini grant, the *Male Leaders as Allies in Women's Leadership* research report highlights the pivotal role of male allies to close higher education gender gaps.

As we strive to achieve our goal of gender equity in higher education, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of male allies in women's leadership. While women are instrumental in supporting one another, it is equally as important to involve male leaders to help mentor and sponsor women for leadership, considering their greater representation in these roles.

A phenomenological qualitative exploration, this research delves into the role of male leaders as allies, mentors, and sponsors of women. It also examines strategies to strengthen relationships with male allies and explores institutional plans, programs, and initiatives to support the advancement of women into leadership positions.

The research findings will offer valuable insights into the perspectives of male leaders regarding the obstacles to women's success and barriers to their representation. Additionally, the study will provide techniques for men to better support women in their pursuit of leadership opportunities, and present strategies and solutions to address gender gaps through the power of male allyship.

We invite you to review the full research report when it is soon published. The insights promise to enrich our understanding and create more inclusive and supportive environments for women aspiring to leadership roles in higher education.

Network Updates & Upcoming Opportunities



Upcoming Membership Drive

ACE WNSC will conduct our first membership drive this summer. We will send an email message to the presidents of private and public institutions, two-year and four-year, within the ten-county area in Southern California. We will petition for university presidents to join the Network and provide opportunities for the women at their institutions to join our efforts and support the leadership journeys of women in higher education. IRs, please lookout for these emails so you can follow-up with your president to respond.

Connect With Us

Follow the ACE Women's Network of Southern California on [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

Save the Date

The ACE Women's Network of Southern California Annual Conference will be held on Friday, October 6, 2023.

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of Southern California***

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