

Professional Staff Leadership Academy Class of 2025

Urbana-Champaign



Julia Abel is the Director of Strategy, Planning, and Implementation at the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In this role, Julia provides executive leadership in the Office of the Dean, collaborating closely with the Dean and senior leadership to develop, implement, and monitor strategic initiatives that drive the College's mission. She is responsible for overseeing the Dean's office operations, managing a team, and representing the Dean in administrative matters with internal and external stakeholders.

Julia has extensive experience in higher education administration, having held key roles at the University of Illinois since 2012. Prior to her current position, she served as Director of Men's and Women's Gymnastics Operations in the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics. Her previous work in the Board of Trustees Office and University of Illinois Foundation honed her skills in committee logistics, operations, and donor relations.

Julia holds a Doctor of Education degree in Interdisciplinary Leadership from Governors State University, with a focus on Higher Education Administration, as well as a Master's degree from Duke University, and Bachelor's degree from Bethel University. She is an active community member, serving as treasurer and board member for Feeding Our Hungry Kids and as a mentor for CU 1 to 1 Mentoring.

In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her husband and children, reading, crafting, and adult gymnastics classes.



Charisse Coleman is the Associate Director of Human Resources in the Carle Illinois College of Medicine at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In this role, she collaborates on the development of the College's workforce strategy—including recruitment, hiring initiatives, and position development—and oversees day-to-day HR operations. She also provides leadership for special projects and strategic initiatives.

Charisse has devoted 17 years to serving the campus community in various human resources and administrative capacities within the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences and the Gies College of Business. Her extensive experience includes managing recruitment and hiring strategies, supporting faculty appointment structures, and implementing organizational systems and processes to enhance overall efficiency.

She holds a Master's degree in Management Information Systems, is certified as a Professional in Human Resources (PHR), and is a SHRM Certified Professional (SHRM-CP). In addition, she earned a graduate certificate in Strategic Leadership and Management from the Gies College of Business and has participated in the Emerging Women Leaders program.

Outside of her professional commitments, Charisse enjoys reading, traveling, and spending quality time with her family.



Jeffrey Fox is the Chief Information Officer and Process Improvement Coordinator for the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. There he manages IT strategic direction and operations for the diverse technology needs of researchers, teachers, veterinary professional students and many staff in a fast-paced environment that also houses a fully operational teaching hospital and the state's diagnostic lab.

Prior to the University, and before pivoting into IT management, he worked in various roles as a manufacturing engineer, project manager, and new product developer working in cross functional teams to support a diverse consumer products portfolio and global operations within 3M. He brings a unique perspective to improving operations at Vet Med, and more recently has been applying those insights by volunteering some time with the Operational Excellence initiative, several IT campus initiatives and in his current role as vice-chair of the IT Council.

Jeff has a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from Michigan State University and completed his MBA at the University of Illinois. Outside the office, Jeff is Cubmaster for a cub scout pack, a Scouts BSA volunteer, a runner, biker, hiker, avid reader, general tinkerer and most importantly, a full-time dad and husband.



Maria Jaromin's experience spans computational engineering, technology transfer, research compliance, and facilitation of research collaborations. She currently serves as the Assistant Director for Healthcare Research at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). In this role, she fosters and leads cross-disciplinary research collaborations both within the university and with external institutions. She is dedicated to advancing the use of high-performance computing in health and social sciences research and offers consultation in various areas of research compliance.

Before her current position, Maria was a technology manager at the Office of Technology Management at the University of Illinois System, where she managed an intellectual property portfolio in engineering and physical sciences. She assessed the patentability and commercialization potential of university inventions, prepared and negotiated legal agreements, and educated researchers on the technology transfer process and policies. Maria started at UIUC as a research engineer at the Illinois Applied Research Institute where she specialized in performing modeling and simulation to optimize the efficiency, safety, and overall performance of engineering processes and systems.

She holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Power Engineering from the Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice, Poland; a licentiate of engineering in Energy Technology from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden; and an MBA from the University of Illinois.



Marcia Mathis is the Assistant Director of Budget and Finance at the Roy J. Carver Biotechnology Center (CBC) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In this role, she oversees the operational, financial, regulatory, and business functions of the center. Marcia is responsible for managing external service contracts, coordinating with key partners, and ensuring alignment between the center's goals and both internal and external stakeholders.

With over nine years of experience at the University of Illinois, Marcia has held previous business roles at the Beckman Institute and in Mechanical Science and Engineering. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Biology from Illinois State University

and an MBA from Eastern Illinois University. Marcia is also a certified business administrator and research administrator.

Outside of her professional work, Marcia enjoys spending time with her family and attending her children's sporting events.



Michelle Rome is an Associate Director in the information technology (IT) unit known as ATLAS in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS). ATLAS stands for Applied Technology for Learning in the Arts and Sciences and can be thought of as the first point of contact for computer and technology needs in LAS. While the mission of ATLAS is very broad supporting teaching, research, and administration, Michelle's primary areas of responsibility are leading custom Application Development and Data Services teams for the College and establishing and overseeing a technology-based internship program for LAS undergrads.

In her role in LAS, Michelle has been fortunate enough to work on a wide variety of projects giving her experience with many aspects of our institution including teaching, research, and administration. She finds great satisfaction in helping others leverage technology with what they need to do, whether it is to find insights into data, streamline complicated and tedious tasks, or something else on the computer. Prior to joining the University as a staff member, she worked as a consultant and served in roles in a number of Illinois's system level offices.

Michelle holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Computer Science. She serves on a variety of campus and system committees representing LAS including Operational Excellence and Boldly Illinois efforts and is helping lead the establishment of formal Data Governance efforts on the Urbana campus. In her free time, Michelle enjoys gardening, playing bassoon, and spending time with her dog Poppy.



Trinity Allison, Senior Program Lead for SNAP-Education at University of Illinois Extension, oversees day-to-day program operations and leads key statewide SNAP-Ed projects related to increasing food access, improving diet quality, and enhancing community collaborations. In this role, Trinity provides programmatic direction and leadership, grant coordination, capacity building supports, and fiscal planning for over 150 SNAP-Ed staff conducting nutrition education and policy, systems, and environmental change supports in 300+ communities throughout the state.

Trinity's strengths are strategic thinking, breaking down big-picture ideas into easy-to-understand concepts, and getting people excited to move thoughts into action. These are skills she leverages when providing training to states across the country on community nutrition program implementation strategies and as Illinois State Nutrition Action Council co-chair and member of the Association of SNAP-Ed Administrators National Advocacy Committee.

Trinity started her work with Illinois SNAP-Ed as a peer educator in 2010. After completing her Master of Science in Community Nutrition and dietetic internship at Southern Illinois University, Trinity began working as a Regional Educator in 2011, providing training, technical assistance and mentoring for SNAP-Ed team members in the southern 29 counties. Since then, she has held multiple positions within the Family & Consumer Science team where she uses her passion for collective impact to support community-led, equity-focused interventions that improve nutrition security and health for families across Illinois.

Springfield



Daniel Aguilar is the Program Coordinator of Hispanic/Latinx Outreach and is designated as the Undocumented Liaison for the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) Diversity Center. He has earned both his B.A. and M.A. in Political Science from UIS and is currently a doctoral student in the Educational Policy and Organizational Leadership program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

He has a strong commitment to serving traditionally marginalized and historically underrepresented groups. Daniel's goal is to pursue a career in higher education and ultimately become an upper-level administrator, while his passion lies with his family.



Jessie Burrell is an accomplished communications and marketing professional with nearly 20 years of experience driving impactful strategies across a range of industries. Currently, she serves as the Director of Marketing and Brand Strategy at the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS), where she leads the development and execution of integrated marketing strategies supporting university goals.

In addition to her work at UIS, Jessie is deeply involved in her community and professional networks. She is vice president of the Sangamon County Fair Board; is a member of the American Marketing Association, Illinois Women in Leadership, the Mid-Illinois Communications Association, Order of the Eastern Star, and the Underground Railroad Committee of the Morgan County Historic Society; and was

recognized in the Springfield Business Journal's "Forty Under 40."

Before joining UIS, Jessie held key roles in communication at the Illinois Department of Transportation, Memorial Health System, and The Hope Institute for Children and Families, where she developed content strategies and managed media relations efforts. She has also owned businesses in the restaurant/bar, online retail, and home repair industries.

Jessie is a graduate of UIS with a master's degree in communication and bachelor's in journalism from the University of Missouri Columbia. Jessie lives on a seventh-generation family farm in rural Sangamon County with her 2-year-old son Briggs and husband Zac, and enjoys gardening, finding treasures at auctions, home DIY projects and watching rugby.



Kathryn Kleeman serves as the Director of Admission at the University of Illinois Springfield. In that role, she oversees all recruitment strategy and activities for undergraduate and graduate recruitment. She has a Master of Public Administration degree from UIS and a Bachelor of Science in Management from Indiana State University.

Kathryn started as an admission counselor for UIS in 2000 and was promoted to Assistant Director of Admission, a position she held for several years. During that time, she saw the implementation of Banner, championed and owned several CRM implementations, the first electronic reading process in Admission Processing, and served as Slate Captain. Additionally, she has supervised student and professional

staff, traveled extensively to high schools and community colleges in Illinois, and coordinated marketing materials and campus events for the office.

Outside of work, Kathryn is a Sustaining Member of the Junior League of Springfield, having served several positions on their executive board. She is an advisor to the Illinois Wesleyan chapter of Sigma Kappa Sorority, serves on the parent committee for her son's boy scout troop, and is a proud hockey and show choir mom.

Chicago



Jacqueline Berger is the Director of Facility and Space Planning in the Executive Dean's Office in the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago. In her current capacity, Jacqueline oversees 1 million square feet of educational, clinical and research space in 22 buildings on campus including all capital projects which help support the \$190 million research portfolio and a very active curricular program for one of the country's largest and most diverse medical schools.

Jacqueline has worked at the University of Illinois at Chicago for 31 years in a variety of roles including Student Affairs, Human Resources, Administrative Services and the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research. Jacqueline was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Canada and moved to the USA for college. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and a Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Ohio State University. She is currently ABD in the Policy Studies PhD program at UIC. During her tenure she took a year off to backpack through SE Asia, the Middle East, India and Europe and was also able to take a six-week sabbatical to participate in the Rotary International Group Study Exchange where she was able to shadow professionals at institutions of higher education in Andhra Pradesh, India.



Jonathan Fair is a licensed architect and the Director of Planning and Design at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC). Jonathan is a Chicago native who received his Bachelor of Science in Architecture from Florida A&M University before returning to Chicago and completing his Master's in Architecture degree at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Working in higher education and an advocate for affecting change through design, Jonathan is committed to fostering academic and research excellence through the development of a vibrant and energized urban campus at UIC. Through his planning and design work, Jonathan has helped to shape the university's approach to space utilization, near and long-term capital planning and the design of campus grounds and facilities alike. Moreover, as a WELL accredited professional, Jonathan is a champion for the creation of a campus environment that promotes wellness and healthfulness for students, faculty, and staff.

In his free time, Jonathan volunteers with several social-impact focused organizations, including Open Architecture Chicago and the National Organization of Minority Architects. A lifetime Chicagoan and committed public-servant, Jonathan is also a commissioner on the city's Commission for Chicago Landmarks where he leverages his experience to thoughtfully preserve the city's rich architectural legacy.



Dr. Jamie Haney is the Associate Dean for Academic Services in the UIC Graduate College. Dr. Haney joined the UIC community in August 2019, after 14 years in graduate academic and student services at several other Chicagoland institutions. She oversees the Academic Services team, which manages graduate student academic administrative processes from admissions through graduation, and she represents the Graduate College on a variety of campus committees and taskforces. She currently serves as the chair of the Committee of Associate and Assistant Deans and the UIC Senate Student Affairs Committee, and she was recognized as a 2024 UIC Rising Star award recipient.

Dr. Haney is passionate about continuously improving the student experience by ensuring all students receive the needed administrative support for their education and seeking ways to increase efficiency of processes and accuracy of records. She spearheaded several significant projects at UIC, including the Graduate College's conversion to electronic record keeping, creation of a new policy to award degrees in cases of terminal illness or death, and co-chairing a project team that created recommendations to optimize campus email communication to graduate and professional students.

As a lifelong learner, Dr. Haney completed a Bachelor of Arts in American Studies at Albion College (2004), Master of Arts in Liberal Studies with a Concentration in History at Valparaiso University (2006), and a Master of Science in Student Affairs and Higher Education (2014) and PhD in Higher Education Administration at Indiana State University (2022). In her post-graduation free time, she enjoys reading for fun, spending time with her husband, cheering on their three children in sports and activities, and traveling to Disney World several times a year.



Girmachew Mekonnen is an accomplished respiratory care professional with more than a decade of experience in critical care and healthcare management. He currently serves as the Manager of the Respiratory Department at the University of Illinois Medical Center, a role he has held since 2013, and briefly served as the Interim Administrative Director in 2022.

He holds a Master of Science in Respiratory Care from Rush University, Chicago, and a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from Alemaya University in Ethiopia. Girmachew's expertise spans adult and pediatric critical care, mechanical ventilation, medical gas therapy, and pulmonary rehabilitation. He is also an adjunct

clinical instructor at St. Augustine College, where he has been mentoring future respiratory therapists since 2018.

With extensive clinical experience at renowned institutions like Rush University, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, and Loyola University Medical Center, Girmachew has excelled in patient care, staff education, and departmental leadership. He is also a published researcher with a focus on high-flow oxygen delivery systems. Known for his commitment to professionalism, quality care, and team development, Girmachew continues to advance respiratory care practices and improve patient outcomes.



Marty Semrau is a Senior Training and Development Specialist on the IS Education team for the Information Services Department at the University of Illinois Hospital and Clinics (UI Health). In this role, he oversees IS education project planning for ongoing and new projects and partners with stakeholders to provide educational tools tailored to each project and end-user need. He recently led projects to implement an organization-wide learning repository and an EMR onboarding project for more than 275 incoming residents.

Marty has served in various roles at UI Health over the last 11 years. Before serving in his current role, he worked in Hospital Human Resources as a LMS Administrator and an Organizational Development Consultant. These opportunities have allowed him to create lasting relationships with Nursing and Provider leadership across the organization.

Marty graduated from the University of Indianapolis with a BA in Human Resources Management. He is a 2017 UIC Award of Merit winner. Outside of work, you can find him hiking at the Indiana Dunes, spending time with his husband and dog, Lincoln, searching out new coffee shops, or running outside in all seasons.



Hugo Trevino is the Assistant Director of Health Science Disability Resources at the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC). Hugo began working in the DRC in 2019 as a Disability Services Specialist. He mentions being grateful for the opportunities that he has been presented with and is proud to say he is a product of the University of Illinois System. During his undergraduate career at UIUC, Hugo helped establish the Enabled Abroad Scholarship, which is specifically designated for UIUC students with physical and/or sensory disabilities to study abroad, becoming the first and second recipient of this scholarship.

Hugo is a first generation Mexican American, who earned his degree in Spanish and Translation Studies at University of Illinois at Champaign Urbana (UIUC) in August 2014. During his undergraduate career, he studied abroad 3 times in Costa Rica, China, and Taiwan. His passion for education, student affairs, and travel, inspired him to obtain his Master of Education in International Higher Education in December 2018, from Loyola University Chicago where he was able to study abroad in Vietnam and Italy. Before joining the UIC team, he was very fortunate to work for non-profit organizations where he was able to help Latinx, LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities in multi-faceted of ways including education, healthcare, and self-advocacy to name a few.

Hugo also serves on the board for UIC Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities as a Co-Chair. Hugo is also a member of UIC Chancellor's Committee on the Status of LGBTQ People (CCSLGBTQ+), ADA 25 Advancing Leadership Fellow, UIC Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Latinos (CCSL), UIC Academic Professional Advisory Committee (APAC), and University of Illinois Latina/Latino Alumni Association (IllinoisLLAA) – Lifetime Member. While working at UIC, Hugo has seen the DRC office grow from serving 1,170 students to surpassing their wildest goals with over 3,100 students registered by the end of the Spring 2024. The DRC has also grown in terms of staffing needs, from 5 to 16 full-time members. Hugo has witnessed the importance of good leadership and being able to easily bring up issues as they arise, guaranteeing all students are being supported. As part of CCSPD, he has worked to create institutional change with a Campus Wide ADA Accessibility Audit, helped create the employee Centralized Accommodation Fund (CAF), and increase transportation on campus through UIC Paratransit Services.

One of Hugo's career goals is to make UIC and the entire University of Illinois System a recognized system for its accessibility and its ability to help students with all kinds of disabilities. UIC has a Disability Cultural Center, a Disability and Human Development program and the Disability Resource Center all of which are

serving more students than ever before. Daily advocacy is not easy, but it is important to be able to show quantitative data and have support from university stake holders to grow with our students, staff, faculty, and community. Creating positive change is something that requires persistence, providing quality service, and creating a network of campus supporters who unite to champion your cause, to take UIC and the University of Illinois System into the future of innovation.

During his free time Hugo, is a public speaker on ableism, intersectionality, and equity. Hugo also loves to destress with a good book, game night, catching up with friends over food, going to the movies, or seeing a Broadway show. Hugo is also involved with local politics where he has championed for environmental justice, infrastructure, and the voices of marginalized communities to be heard.



Susan Young has been a dedicated University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) community member since 2005. She joined the UIC Human Resources team in 2009 and currently serves as the Director of Budget, Finance, and Administration. She is a results-driven administrator, combining extensive experience in human resources, budget operations, policy development, and project management. In her current role, Susan is responsible for budget oversight, business and administrative operations, facilities management, and compliance. She oversees the UIC Human Resources Welcome Center and serves as Chief of Staff to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Human Resources.

Susan is a valued UIC HR Management Team member, providing strategic advice to senior leadership on a wide range of issues. With her extensive experience and long tenure at UIC, she plays a key role in enhancing the department's initiatives and overall effectiveness. In addition to her leadership role within UIC Human Resources, Susan actively contributes to the broader university community by serving on several committees, further supporting the university's goals and objectives.

With nearly two decades of experience at UIC, Susan has developed a deep understanding of the complexities of the university's HR and departmental financial operations. Her expertise is further enhanced by a Master's in Organization Management from Dominican University, which provides her with a broad perspective on key areas such as governance, change management and strategic leadership – essential elements that influence the daily decisions and long-term success of UIC Human Resources and the university.

System Offices



Michelle Chitambar is Assistant Director of Licensing and a Senior Technology Manager at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Office of Technology Management (U of I OTM), where she works to develop OTM licensing strategies, support U of I entrepreneurs, and protect and license technologies in the engineering and physical sciences.

From 2015 to 2018, she worked as a Technology Futurist, Research Enterprise Director and Senior Technology Transfer Specialist at Southern Illinois University. Her previous experience includes four years spanning the technical and business teams at an energy storage controls start-up, an MS in Electrical Engineering from the University of Michigan, and a PhD in Applied Physics from the same institution, where her research focused on charge transfer at semiconductor heterojunctions. Dr.

Chitambar is a registered patent agent.



Nikki Melander is the Director for Controller Operations for the University of Illinois System Offices. In this role, Nikki serves as the budget development process lead for System Offices, prepares the System's Fiduciary Financial Statements, guides the annual FCIAA process, oversees ICR distribution, reviews Internal Control Exception Requests and Deficit Reduction Plans, prepares ad hoc reports for special projects and committees, and manages a small but mighty staff.

Nikki has been with System Offices for over 11 years working in several different roles within University Accounting and Financial Reporting and the Controller Organization, the latter of which she has been with for the past five years. Nikki's previous employment includes public accounting at CliftonLarsonAllen and accounting instruction at Parkland College. Nikki is currently a member of the Executive Club of Champaign County and the Junior League of Champaign-Urbana; she has held multi-year board positions as treasurer in both organizations. She received bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting from Illinois State University and is a registered Certified Public Accountant.

Lastly, Nikki was selected for the 2024 NACUBO Emerging Leaders Program and is excited to continue leadership training in 2025 with the Professional Staff Leadership Academy. When not working, Nikki enjoys spending time with her husband and three sons, whether it be cheering them on in sports or just relaxing together.



Daniel Pelayo, MBA, serves as the Senior Associate Director of Accounts Receivable Operations and Student Loans and Collections for University Bursar. In this capacity, he leads the administration of receivables operations, which includes the annual disbursement of over \$300 million in student refunds and the management of more than 10,000 campus-based borrowers. Additionally, Daniel is instrumental in directing a rigorous and effective 4.5-year collection process for the university system's receivables portfolio, valued at \$2.5 billion annually, with less than 1% ultimately written off.

With 19 years of professional experience in higher education, including 17 years with University Bursar, Daniel is known for his strong leadership and technical expertise. He has led numerous initiatives and fosters a collaborative team culture focused on accountability and achieving shared goals.

Daniel earned his Bachelor of Science in Finance from the University of Illinois Chicago in 2004 and completed his Master of Business Administration with concentrations in Finance and Management in May 2023.

An active contributor to ACA International, Daniel has served on its Creditors Advisor Council for five years and holds certifications as a Professional Collection Specialist (PCS), Collection Industry Professional (CIP), and Professional Collection Manager (PCM). He participates in higher education conferences to stay current with industry trends and has presented on various topics within his field, demonstrating his dedication to continuous learning and professional growth.