

4th Annual Illinois Higher Education Equity Symposium
Bridging Gaps and Building Futures
October 9–10, 2025
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL

Thursday, Oct 9 – Day 1

8:30–8:45 AM

Welcome & Opening Remarks
Dr. Dan Mahony, SIU System
Dr. Sheila Caldwell, SIU System

8:45–9:15 AM

Keynote Address
Melinda Brock, American Institute for Boys and Men
Topic: At a Crossroads: The Crisis and Opportunity for American Men in Higher Education

9:15–10:00 AM

Panel Discussion: Illinois-Based Strategies to Support Male Achievement & Workforce Access
Moderator: Paul Kendrick, Hope Chicago
Panelists: Pa Geno Wheeler/Savion McGrue (WIU Hope Scholars), John W Blue (EIU Strong MAN), Jim Flavin (LUC Rambler Brotherhood), Duane Davis & Decoteau Irby (UIC Brothers Teaching & Duane Entry, NIU), Miguel Saucedo & Eugene Robinson (CPS Black Student Success)

10:00–10:45 AM

Featured Speaker: Kofi “Kizzle” Forson
Topic: Rooted, Recruited, Retained

10:45–11:00 AM

Audience Reflection Session
Guided Questions on systemic/cultural barriers & local partnerships

11:00–11:15 AM

Morning Break

11:15–12:00 PM

Research Spotlight: Dominique McKoy, University of Chicago
Topic: Navigating the Divide: How Chicago’s Young Men Move from High School through College

Friday, Oct 10 – Day 2

8:30–8:45 AM

Welcome & Reflections

8:45–9:30 AM

Ruben Abarca, Discovery Partners Institute
Topic: Charting the Future of Work and Opportunity

9:30–10:15 AM

Eric Lichtenberger
Topic: Student Hustle – Understanding How Today’s Students Work While Earning Degrees

10:15–10:45 AM

Break & Audience Reflection
Session: Work, School, and Equity: What’s Our Role?
Questions: Student employment trends and partnership solutions

10:45–11:30 AM

Ravan Hawrami, American Institute for Boys and Men
Topic: Pathways to Purpose – Career Trajectories for Men in America

11:30–12:00 PM

Closing Remarks & Acknowledgements

12:00 PM

Lunch & Networking

Thursday, Oct 9 – Day 1

12:00–1:00 PM

Lunch Break

1:00–1:45 PM

National Strategy Presentation: Holly Pflum, NASH

Topic: Metrics That Matter: Using Data to Drive Equity in Student Success

1:45–2:45 PM

Presidential Leadership Panel

Moderator: Dr. Alison Kadlec, SOVA

Panelists: Cherita Ellens, Dr. Lisa Freeman, Dr. Lisa Castillo Richmond, Deborah Santiago

Topic: Leading With Equity: Presidential Perspectives

2:45–3:30 PM

Keynote Address: Deborah Santiago, Excelencia in Education

Topic: Excelencia in Action: Advancing Success for Latino Men in Higher Education

3:30–3:45 PM

Afternoon Break

3:45–4:30 PM

Fireside Chat: Brian Barney & Son

Topic: Building Bridges Across Generations

4:30–4:45 PM

Interactive Guided Questions

- Presidential Panel: Leadership approaches

- Fireside Chat: Supporting diverse student pathways

4:45–5:00 PM

Closing Reflections & Day 2 Preview

6:00 PM

Dinner at Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum

Friday, Oct 10 – Day 2

Please complete the survey and provide us with your feedback on our conference.

Thank you for your attendance!