

DRAFT PROGRAM AGENDA - Aug 26

# NYSFAAA 2026 Conference

*"Empire State of Mindfulness"*

October 27 – 29, 2026



Welcome to the NYSFAAA 2026 draft program agenda! Designed with clarity and intention, this attendee-facing agenda guides you through daily sessions, keynote presentations, networking opportunities, and concurrent learning tracks.

Note: Minor changes to this agenda will be made. The final agenda will be available to attendees in Whova.

## Monday, October 26, 2026 (Pre-Conference)

### 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM Registration Open

**Room:** Foyer

### 12:00 PM - 4:00 PM NASFAA Credential: Direct Loan Programs

**Room:** Salon D

### 12:00 PM - 5:00 PM Executive Council Meeting w/ Lunch

**Room:** Albany/Colonie

### 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM Vendor Setup

**Room:** Foyer

### 4:30 PM - 7:30 PM Brewery Hangout

**Room:** Lionheart on the Green - 952 Broadway, Albany, NY

Mindfulness is also about being fully present with the people around us. Join us for a casual evening to unwind, recharge, and connect! Whether you're catching up with long-time colleagues or making new friends across the association, this gathering is all about camaraderie, laughter, and building meaningful connections. Grab a drink—alcoholic or non-alcoholic—and enjoy great conversation in a relaxed environment. Come as you are, pull up a chair, and celebrate our wonderful community!

### 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM Dinner on Your Own

**Room:** Off Site

### 7:45 PM - 8:45 PM The Great Conference Mystery

**Room:** State Room • **Speaker:** Ashley Ruscysk

Unplug, tap into your presence, and put your collective problem-solving to the test! A conference mystery has everyone searching for answers, offering a unique, immersive opportunity to connect deeply and collaborate with your peers. Work with your team to mindfully examine the evidence, separate fact from fiction, and uncover the truth—but beware, not every clue is what it seems.

### 8:30 PM - 9:30 PM Nightcap & Networking

**Room:** Chats Lounge • **Speaker:** Keri Edsall

Grab a drink and pull up a seat. No agenda, no presentations, just good company

## Tuesday, October 27, 2026

### 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM Morning Wellness: Zumba

**Room:** Empire • **Speaker:** Erin Pfister

Start your day with energy, joy, and intention! Self-care isn't just quiet reflection—sometimes it's letting go, moving your body, and having fun. Join us for a fun, high-energy Zumba session where dance and play become a powerful form of active mindfulness. Taking time to care for our physical well-being helps us show up energized, focused, and present for ourselves and the students we serve every day. All fitness levels welcome—no dance experience required!

### 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM Registration Open

**Room:** Foyer

### 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM Vendor Area Open

**Room:** Foyer

### 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM Coffee Chat (coffee with vendors)

**Room:** Foyer

Start your day grounded, fueled, and connected! Before the morning sessions kick off, head down to the partner hall to enjoy a warm cup of coffee and fresh breakfast pastries. Take this quiet, low-pressure time to wake up your senses, mingle with colleagues, and drop by our partner booths for easy, casual conversations. It's the perfect way to pour into your day, build meaningful relationships, and jumpstart your morning with good energy!

### 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM HESC Training - TAP 101: From Application to Payment

**Room:** Salon A/B • **Speaker:** Michael Turner and Alex Baird

New to TAP or need a quick refresher? This session walks you through the full processing journey, from application and required documentation to certification and payment. You'll leave with a clear, practical understanding of how each step connects.

### 11:10 AM - 11:40 AM First-Time NYSFAAA Conference Attendee session

**Room:** Salon C • **Speaker:** Keri Edsall

### 11:00 AM - 11:45 AM Wellness Break & Visit Vendors

**Room:** Foyer

### 11:45 AM - 1:00 PM Conference Kick-Off & Welcome Lunch

**Room:** Salon E - H

**1:00 PM - 2:00 PM**    **Keynote Speaker**

**Room:** Salon E - H    • **Speaker:** Colin Ryan

Colin is a Certified Professional Financial Counselor, a nationally-recognized speaker and storyteller, and an author who helps colleges and financial institutions uncover the human side of money. He shows us how courage, self-compassion, and the psychology of money can transform even the toughest financial conversations.

**1:30 PM - 4:00 PM**    **Vendor Area Open**

**Room:** Foyer

**Concurrent Session #1**

**Time: 2:10 PM - 3:20 PM**

**OPTION 1    Mind the Gap: Psychological Impacts of OB3 on Financial Aid Professionals**

**Room:** Salon A    • **Speaker:** Ashley Rusczyk and Dr. Wendy Braje

The implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OB3) represents one of the most significant regulatory shifts in recent years. While institutions are focused on compliance and operational readiness, the human impact on financial aid professionals is often overlooked. This session explores the psychological and emotional responses that can arise when implementing complex and sometimes conflicting policies. Through a unique collaboration between a financial aid administrator and a psychology professor, participants will gain insight into concepts such as cognitive dissonance, moral distress, change fatigue, and burnout, framed specifically within the context of financial aid administration. Attendees will leave with practical, actionable strategies to manage stress, support colleagues, and build resilience during times of ongoing change.

**OPTION 2    Default Prevention & Loan Management**

**Room:** Salon B    • **Speaker:** Melissa Vargas

Explore data-driven default prevention frameworks, early-intervention outreach, and proactive repayment management strategies designed to safeguard your institution's cohort default rate (CDR) while driving long-term student success.

**OPTION 3    The Washington Update: Reading the Tea Leaves**

**Room:** Salon C    • **Speaker:** Jonathan Helwink

Federal policy developments are not just abstract; they are already shaping institutional risk profiles. Changes in enforcement focus, evolving expectations around outcomes, and increased scrutiny of accreditors are creating new pressure points for institutions across the sector.

**OPTION 4    Veterans Affairs Session**

**Room:** Salon D

**3:20 PM - 3:30 PM**    **Visit Vendors**

**Room:** Foyer

## Concurrent Session #2

Time: 3:30 PM - 4:40 PM

### OPTION 1 Financial Aid LifeHacks!

**Room:** Salon A

During this session, we'll go over some fun hacks that SUNY Binghamton is using to help make processes more efficient, even on a limited budget! We'll also talk about the power of AI in financial aid, and we encourage attendees to bring their own lifehacks to share with the group!

### OPTION 2 Financial Aid Jeopardy!

**Room:** Salon B • **Speaker:** Renee Swift

A classic game show with a financial aid twist. Join me for this fun and highly interactive game show and test your knowledge of all things financial aid.

### OPTION 3 AHEAD, FTV and Accountability

**Room:** Salon C • **Speaker:** Christopher Barto and Dan Sharon

Description Coming! Check back soon!

### OPTION 4 FA DNA: The Core Competencies that Define Financial Aid Leaders

**Room:** Salon D • **Speaker:** Karyn Wright-Moore

The Financial Aid profession is evolving—so what does it take to lead? The answer lies in the “FA DNA”—the unique blend of competencies that drive ethical practice, strategic thinking and student-centered service. NASFAA’s Competency Model defines the “FA DNA” that connects every outstanding aid administrator: knowledge, empathy, communication, data fluency, leadership and a deep commitment to college access and student success.

### 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM President's Reception

**Room:** Empire

### 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM Dinner on Your Own

### 8:00 PM - 11:00 PM Music BINGO, Karaoke & Photo Booth

**Room:** Chats Lounge

Mindfulness isn't always quiet—sometimes it's singing your heart out and laughing until your cheeks hurt! Unwinding through play, music, and shared laughter is one of the healthiest ways to release stress, boost well-being, and nurture our mental health. Join us for an evening of friendly competition, music, and silly photo moments as we celebrate our community. Come play, let loose, and give your mind and body the joyful break they deserve!

## Wednesday, October 28, 2026

### 7:00 AM - 8:00 AM George Chin Scholarship 5K Walk/Run

**Room:** Hotel Lobby

Lace up your sneakers and start your morning with purpose! Mindfulness isn't just about turning inward—it's also about intentionally connecting with others and giving back. Join us as we move together to support the George Chin Scholarship Fund. Whether you walk, jog, or run, every step you take and every dollar raised directly supports future financial aid professionals and students. Take a moment to breathe in the fresh air, care for your body, and experience the simple joy of coming together for a great cause!

### 8:00 AM - 9:30 AM Breakfast

**Room:** Salon E - H

### 9:00 AM - 9:30 AM NYSFAAA Institutional Membership Discussion

**Room:** Salon E - H • **Speaker:** Rob Zasso

As our financial aid landscape evolves, so does our association! Join our NYSFAAA President for an open, collaborative discussion on a potential shift in how our membership is structured: transitioning from individual memberships to an institutional model.

### 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM Registration Open

**Room:** Foyer

### 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM Vendor Area Open

**Room:** Foyer

### 9:30 AM - 9:50 AM Mindful Connections: Meet our Partners

**Room:** Salon E - H

Building strong support networks is an essential part of a healthy, sustainable career. In this fast-paced, high-energy session, our valued conference partners will take the stage for a series of quick, one-minute introductions! Discover who they are, the innovative solutions they offer, and how their services support both financial aid administrators and the students we serve every day. It's a fun, efficient way to broaden your resource toolkit, discover new opportunities for collaboration, and make meaningful connections across our community.

## Concurrent Session #3

**Time:** 10:00 AM - 11:10 AM

### **OPTION 1 From PLUS to Private: Navigating Loan Qualification & Credit**

**Room:** Salon A • **Speaker:** Jennifer Sommerman

The One Big Beautiful Bill (OB3) is reshaping how students and families pay for college — and for many, it means increased reliance on private education loans. As federal options shift, credit readiness is becoming a critical part of financial aid advising, not an afterthought. In this session, we'll break down how OB3 elevates the importance of credit and why more students will encounter credit-based borrowing earlier and more often. Financial aid administrators will learn how to explain credit reports and scores in plain language, set realistic expectations around eligibility, and — most importantly — give students actionable steps they can take now to improve their credit before applying. Attendees will leave with a clear, repeatable framework they can confidently share with students and families, including simple timelines, real-world examples, and protective strategies like credit freezes. The goal is not just understanding credit, but empowering students to actively improve it in a post-OB3 borrowing landscape.

### **OPTION 2 Breaking Barriers: Supporting Every Student's Path to Higher Education**

**Room:** Salon B • **Speaker:** Natasha Torres

Every student deserves a path to college, and NYS offers more than one way to access state financial aid. We'll explore the NYS DREAM Act, the Alternate Eligibility Path, and the TAP for Incarcerated Students Program, along with common application errors to watch for. Walk away with best practices to better support underserved populations.

### **OPTION 3 “FORE!” – Simple Strategies for Avoiding the Financial Aid Rough**

**Room:** Salon C • **Speaker:** Rich Neilsen

This team-based session uses golf as a playful metaphor, challenging teams to decide which “clubs” are best suited for the real-world situations they face. Designed for those newer to the financial aid profession, this interactive experience encourages collaborative thinking, a touch of golf humor, and practical problem-solving. Participants will leave with actionable strategies and greater confidence they can apply immediately in their day-to-day work.

### **OPTION 4 On-boarding an AI Agent for Financial Aid**

**Room:** Salon D • **Speaker:** Martin Daniels

Review and discuss the decision process toward moving in an AI direction and the first year on-boarding and agent development work for the RPI Office of Financial Aid

### **11:10 AM - 11:20 AM Visit Vendors**

**Room:** Foyer

## **Concurrent Session #4**

**Time: 11:20 AM - 12:30 PM**

### **OPTION 1 Scholarships for Every Student: How HESC Supports Veterans, Career Fields, and More**

**Room:** Salon A • **Speaker:** Maureen Seaman and Renee Swift

TAP is just the start of what NYS offers students. In this session, we'll spotlight scholarship programs supporting veterans, specific career fields, and more, plus practical tips for processing each application. Discover new ways to help students ease the cost of college.

### **OPTION 2 Ghostbusters: We ain't afraid of no fraud!**

**Room:** Salon B • **Speaker:** Ryan Dulude and Tanner Matchus

There's something strange in your enrollment data. Who you gonna call? Financial aid fraud is a very real specter haunting higher education, with ghost students and straw applicants vanishing with Title IV funds. In this session, we strap on our proton packs to tackle the invisible threats lurking in your distance education programs. We will move beyond the jump scares to actionable tactics, teaching you how to calibrate your PKE meters to detect the 'slime' of synthetic identities, falsified HS diplomas, and IP address anomalies before disbursement occurs. We will also discuss why 'crossing the streams' - deep collaboration between Admissions, IT, and Financial Aid - is actually the only way to save the day. Don't let the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man of non-compliance crush your institution. Join us to learn how to trap these entities, secure your containment unit, and bust fraud for good - because we ain't afraid of no audit!

### **OPTION 3 Beyond Federal Loans: Innovative Institutional Loan Programs for post-PLUS Era**

**Room:** Salon C • **Speaker:** Sean Steinmarc, TFC Tuition

The July 2026 federal loan changes have left schools searching for responsible ways to help students and families bridge funding gaps. This session explores how institutions are using their own resources to offer innovative institutional loan programs, and how flexible tiers, interest options, positive credit bureau reporting, and professional servicing can expand access, support persistence, protect both students and the school, and can generate operational revenue. Drawing on TFC Tuition's experience administering programs like TFC Installment Advantage and TFC Semester Flex, we'll share a practical framework for what a well-designed institutional loan program looks like, what questions to ask before launching one, how to remain compliant with federal and state regulations (without stress!), and how third-party guidance and administration make these programs manageable for financial aid offices of any size. We'll also touch briefly on risk-share funding models for schools interested in going further.

### **OPTION 4 Credits Count: Mastering the Schedule of Reductions (SOR)**

**Room:** Salon D • **Speaker:** Ronald Michael Campbell

### **12:30 PM - 1:45 PM Lunch & Regional Awards**

**Room:** Salon E - H

### **1:45 PM - 2:30 PM HESC Update**

**Room:** Salon E - H

Join HESC Acting President Doris B. González and Grants and Scholarships staff as they share program and policy updates, what's coming next, and key processing changes. You'll learn how these shifts affect your day-to-day work.

### **1:30 PM - 2:45 PM Vendor Area Open**

**Room:** Foyer

### **2:30 PM - 2:45 PM Wellness Break & Visit Vendors**

**Room:** Foyer

## **Concurrent Session #5**

**Time: 2:45 PM - 3:55 PM**

#### **OPTION 1 Graduate Concerns Roundtable**

**Room:** Salon A • **Speaker:** BJ Revill • **Moderator:** Patrick Ziegler

This panel discussion will include representatives of various graduate and professional institutions who will discuss the evolving impact of OBBBA on their offices and students.

#### **OPTION 2 Tools, Tips and Answers from HESC Priority Services and College Resources**

**Room:** Salon B • **Speaker:** Lisa Simpson and Erika Terwilliger

HESC Priority Services is your go-to contact for all things NYS grants and scholarships. This session covers your most frequently asked questions and provides tips on making processing faster and easier. College Resources offers guidance, tools, and policy materials to support your everyday tasks.

#### **OPTION 3 The New World of Professional Judgement**

**Room:** Salon C • **Speaker:** Robert Weinerman

The New World of Professional Judgment looks at changes to professional judgment introduced in the FAFSA Simplification Act and the Inspector General's (IG's) University of Southern California's Use of Professional Judgment report of 2023. It focusses on the scope of examples listed in the FAFSA Simplification Act, the Act's encoding the professional judgment for unemployed contributors during a national emergency, and the IG's narrow definition of case-by-case and strict expectations about professional judgment documentation. It is a somewhat advanced program designed to ensure PJs are done properly with the correct and adequate documentation.

#### **OPTION 4 Mindful Leadership in Times of Crisis: Leading Others Without Burning Out**

**Room:** Salon D • **Speaker:** Nick Prewitt

Between constant federal updates, administrative shifts, and dwindling campus resources, financial aid leaders are being asked to do more with less while maintaining poise for their staff and senior administration. As the exodus of seasoned professionals leaves critical leadership gaps, how do we step into these roles without sacrificing our own well-being? This interactive session bridges the realities of financial aid leadership with mindful, sustainable management practices. We'll discuss actionable tools for setting boundaries, prioritizing amidst chaos, and supporting a team through fatigue. Designed for both current directors and emerging leaders, this session provides realistic encouragement and proven strategies to help you lead with purpose, protect your team, and thrive in the face of continuous industry evolution.

#### **2:45 PM - 5:30 PM Vendor Breakdown**

**Room:** Foyer

#### **4:00 PM - 5:15 PM NASFAA: OBBBA Updates**

**Room:** Salon E - H • **Speaker:** Karen McCarthy

#### **5:30 PM - 6:30 PM Cocktail Hour**

**Room:** Foyer

Unwind, raise a glass, and toast to another great day at NYSFAAAA!

**6:30 PM - 8:30 PM**

### **Banquet Dinner, State Awards & Passing of the Gavel**

**Room:** Salon E - H

Gather together to nourish the body and celebrate our community as we honor outstanding achievements with the NYSFAAA State Awards! Enjoy a delicious banquet dinner and toast to our collective future during the symbolic Passing of the Gavel from Rob Zasso to Lucila "Lucy" Villaquiran.

**8:30 PM - 9:30 PM**

### **Comedy (PG)**

**Room:** Empire Room • **Speaker:** Colin Ryan

Laughter is one of the quickest, most effective ways to reset our minds and release the tension of a busy year. Join us as our keynote speaker, award-winning comedic storyteller and author Colin Ryan, takes the stage for a lighthearted, PG stand-up comedy set! Blending sharp observational humor with warm, relatable storytelling, Colin reminds us that taking our work seriously doesn't mean taking ourselves too seriously. Grab a seat, relax, and let your body and mind enjoy a healthy dose of laughter!

**9:30 PM - 10:00 PM**

### **Comedy (rated R)**

**Room:** Empire Room • **Speaker:** Ethan Filler

For those looking to end the night with a dose of bold, edgy humor, stick around for a quick, unfiltered comedy set from comedian Ethan Filler! A staple of the NYC comedy scene known for his sharp wit and hilarious roast-style comedy, Ethan brings a fast-paced, late-night set designed to let you completely let loose. Unwind, leave the professional decorum at the door, and close out the evening with pure, uninhibited laughter.

## **Thursday, October 29, 2026**

**7:00 AM - 8:00 AM**

### **Morning Wellness Activity**

**Room:** Troy or Schenectady

**8:00 AM - 9:30 AM**

### **Breakfast**

**Room:** Salon E - H

**8:30 AM - 9:00 AM**

### **NYSFAAA Business Meeting**

**Room:** Salon E - H • **Speaker:** Lucy Villaquiran and Executive Council

Join Incoming President Lucila "Lucy" Villaquiran as she leads the NYSFAAA Business Meeting to share strategic updates, align our collective vision, and reflect on the path forward for our organization.

**9:00 AM - 9:30 AM**

### **EASFAA Update**

**Room:** Salon E - H • **Speaker:** Nick Prewitt

Expand your perspective and stay connected with our broader regional community as leadership presents key updates, legislative insights, and collaborative opportunities from the Eastern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (EASFAA).

**9:00 AM - 10:15 AM**    **NASFAA: Inside the Beltway**

**Room:** Salon E - H    • **Speaker:** Karen McCarthy

This NASFAA Federal Update will provide an overview of the latest developments in Washington, including a high-level look at the current political climate in D.C., and will focus on federal financial aid policy and how it has impacted students and institutions in recent years. Topics include recent legislative and regulatory activity and predictions for how student aid funding will fare in upcoming budget negotiations. Movement within the Department of Education concerning negotiated rulemaking and updates from Federal Student Aid (FSA) will also be discussed. The session will also provide an overview of NASFAA-led projects, services, and advocacy efforts.

**10:20 AM - 11:30 AM**    **What's New in Verification and Eligibility in 2027-2028**

**Room:** Salon E - H    • **Speaker:** Robert Weinerman

Changes to the FAFSA and in the 2025 tax code may create new work for financial aid administrators (FAAs), and for some students, may create difficult to explain changes in their Title IV aid eligibility. In this session, we will look at the new "Combined AGI" and "Combined Income Tax Paid" fields on the FAFSA, which will require contributors to combine data from territory and federal tax returns. These are almost certainly going to be V1 verification items and will require FAAs to become more familiar with the Puerto Rico tax return. We will also look at how the new deductions for tips, overtime, car loan interest payments, and taxpayers 65 and older may change students' eligibilities compared to prior years. And If these new tax rules encourage reporting of previously unreported tip income, some students may see other changes and the possibility that we will have to address conflicting information from past years (2026-2027 and earlier) based on what we learn from the 2025 tax return.