



Speakers: Dr. Sarah Whitley

Title: Advancing Efforts Through Implementation Science and Continuous Improvement

Audience: Faculty, Advisors, and Administrators

Project track: Meauxmentum Strategies

Session Description

This presentation will examine the relationship between implementation science and continuous improvement methodologies in higher education. Beginning with the "know-do gap," we will discuss how continuous improvement provides a structured approach to addressing implementation challenges through iterative cycles of planning, execution, assessment, and adjustment. Central to this approach is the development of driver diagrams that align strategic priorities with measurable goals, identify barriers to success, and outline targeted improvement projects.

This session will provide space for participants to examine their own complex challenges and provide insight into using 30-60-90 day implementation cycles with clear accountability mechanisms. The session will address the critical role of change management in supporting continuous improvement efforts. This session is applicable to all attendees but is particularly useful for teams engaging with Meauxmentum Framework projects.

Speaker Bio

Sarah E. Whitley is a first-generation college graduate and advocate for equity in higher education. From 2017 - 2024, Sarah served as inaugural leader and executive vice president of NASPA's Center for First-generation Student Success where she scaled the First Scholars Network to serve 400+ institutions, established the National First-generation Student Success Conference, and created the National First-Generation College Celebration.

A frequent speaker and researcher, Sarah authored numerous publications on first-generation student success and established the Journal for First-generation Student Success. With 20+ years of experience as faculty, administrator, researcher, and association executive, her expertise spans continuous improvement and implementation science, systemic change, strategic planning, student transitions, and university governance.

Sarah holds a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia, an M.Ed. from James Madison University, a B.S. from Longwood College, and an A.S. from Richard Bland College. She lives in Harrisonburg, VA with her partner, three children, and rescue dog.