



Focus on equity & support student success

A review of ACTE's Postsecondary CTE Summit 2023



In September 2023, ACTE hosted its Postsecondary CTE Summit in Denver, Colorado. Educators Earl Frederick and Brian Rick — both of whom participated as fellows in the NextLevel Postsecondary CTE Leadership Program — attended the Summit and feel strongly about its impact on postsecondary career and technical education (CTE).

“The Postsecondary CTE Summit is a great event for those who are in the postsecondary education field or work with the postsecondary sector,” wrote Brian Rick, a CTE Project Team instructor at Northern Illinois University “Many in the postsecondary sector have felt like professional development is primarily geared toward K–12. When ACTE launched this national conference in 2022, it was meant to provide a space to support the wide variety of work in the Postsecondary, Adult and Career Education (PACE) Division.”

Postsecondary CTE leaders are dedicated to student success.

The event began with preconference sessions, including a visit to Emily Griffith Technical College and a workshop about creating engaging instruction for all. “It is always great to see what other programs are doing,” commented Rick. Attendees’ visit to Emily Griffith Technical College started with a warm welcome from Vice President of Education Linda Van Doren, followed by a student-led tour through the Cosmetology and Barbering programs. Both areas featured fully immersive, hands-on learning environments that are also open to the public. “The students seemed very happy to have seasoned industry professionals as their instructors and expressed the importance of this when applying for jobs after graduation,” wrote Earl Frederick, department head of cuisine management at Clark College. “The students in these programs were also learning merchandising, as they had everything from lip balms to shaving gels for sale — all items with the school’s logo on them.



“The Culinary program tour featured a state-of-the-art professional kitchen, which the students used to prepare and stage a three-course meal for our party,” Frederick continued. “The antipasto, with a perfectly poached egg, was very elegant and tasty. A hearty portion of lasagna was flavored with a zesty marinara sauce and a house-made pesto that balanced the richness. Dessert was a chocolate torte that had a deep, rich flavor and was surprisingly light. But the best part of the whole meal was watching how attentive the students were and how much pride they took in what they were doing. It was a very good experience, so much so that I had to give kudos to the entire team in the kitchen after the meal.”

The next day began with a compelling keynote speaker: Joe Garcia, chancellor of the Colorado Community College System. He elaborated on the structure of the system in Colorado as an extension of K–12 education. And he discussed the equity and diversity challenges that face his state, alongside how they are working to solve them. This led into a panel discussion on how to support special populations students; panelists discussed racial and

economic barriers and how they have helped students through these issues. Later, concurrent sessions tackled the achievement gap, data and using technology to support postsecondary CTE leaders. And a workshop-style session conducted in small groups encouraged participants to reflect on what they had learned so far.

ACTE's events are tailor-made to support educators in their institutions.

Another panel discussion featured a group of diverse education leaders who discussed the role of effective data collection in supporting students from special populations. Collecting data such as test scores and graduation rates can expose disparities in access to high-quality career and technical education. “This information is crucial when advocating for equity in education,” said Frederick. “That includes using data to create student affinity groups, develop campus activities for students, and evaluate program and faculty performance.”

A big challenge facing all of CTE today is how to hire and retain qualified faculty and staff.

“For me, coming from a rural area, the panel on how to recruit and retain faculty and staff was a really helpful discussion,” said Rick. “I am learning how to think outside the box to develop a diverse talent pipeline, which in turn helps all students feel represented and accepted. And that can increase student learning.”

Additional roundtable sessions invited conference attendees to pick two areas of interest, such as non-credit programs for adults, student-led organizations, pathways to workforce readiness, and more. Then a presenter at each table discussed these topics in a smaller setting. “There was a sense of closeness that is often lost in larger groups,” said Rick. “It was nice to be able to share resources and network.”

Networking is one of the biggest benefits of attending events like this. A variety of educational settings allowed deeper connections to be formed among attendees. And a PACE Division-sponsored reception fostered stronger understanding of how ACTE can help you, your programs and your students grow.



Topics of interest

- **Creating inclusive pathways for apprenticeships**
- **Implementing culturally responsive teaching**
- **Increasing accessibility to improve success**
- **Supporting new CTE teachers**
- **Empowering nontraditional students in CTE programs**
- **Exploring the future of postsecondary CTE**

Earl Frederick recalled an impactful moment: “‘Meet the students where they are.’ This is especially helpful in gaining trust and creating an environment of togetherness. Positive reinforcement will empower your students to do more in the classroom and can also lead to a successful career pathway.

Conclusion

Equity in education was a major focus of ACTE’s Postsecondary CTE Summit 2023. “Increasing access to postsecondary CTE can lead to economic mobility,” said Frederick. “When there is equity in access and affordability, individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds have a fair chance to improve their economic prospects. This, in turn, can reduce income inequality. I also took away that a more equitable postsecondary education system can contribute to a more diverse and skilled workforce.

“Diversity brings about a variety of perspectives and ideas that can enhance innovation. And equity in postsecondary education can help to reduce achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status,” he continued. “Institutions of higher education, especially community and technical colleges, can serve as anchors for their communities.

When these institutions prioritize equity, they contribute to the overall development and well-being of their region.

This second annual event in Colorado allowed educators and partners to convene and continue the conversations that began in South Carolina the previous year. Now, we would like to personally challenge everyone to keep talking about these issues. Keep working to improve postsecondary CTE. Together we can help our students succeed. ■

Are you a member of ACTE’s PACE Division at the national and state levels? If your state doesn’t already have a PACE Division, please reach out to ACTE for more on how to start one.

Make plans to attend the Postsecondary CTE Summit 2024, Sept. 18–20, in Chicago, Illinois.

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