



W O M E N ' S
L E A D E R S H I P
C O N F E R E N C E

2025

P R O G R A M

March 25 | 8 AM-3 PM | Lewis Alumni Center

Welcome to the Conference

About

The Women's Leadership Conference (WLC) is a day of learning, networking and sharing. A partnership between University of Idaho and Washington State University, this event is open to everyone who seeks to support and empower women in leadership.

2025 Theme

This year, we are collaborating to lift one another up in paving our paths and reaching new heights.

Learning Outcomes

- 1** Gain an understanding of persistent barriers to collaboration, women's leadership, and professional opportunities, with a focus on the impact of intersectionality.
- 2** Foster connections with colleagues and establish diverse, inclusive networking structures to support both personal and professional growth.
- 3** Develop and enhance skills and tools for continuous personal and professional development.
- 4** Learn effective strategies to empower and uplift the voices of all women, including those from marginalized and underrepresented groups, such as Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+ and women of color within the workplace.

Attendee Expectations

- Please wear your name badge – it is your ticket into all sessions, the luncheon, and the closing plenary.
- Please silence your cell phones and digital devices so sounds don't interrupt presenters or distract other attendees.
- Please sure you arrive before your chosen sessions start and be prepared to stay through to the end of each session.
- Introduce yourself to others. What a great opportunity to network and make lasting connections!

Need to Knows

- Wifi is available. Please refer to posted signs around the venue for connection details.
- A lactation room is available for attendees. Visit the check-in table for the key and room location.
- Following the conference, please join Athena for a no-host social at Lumberyard.

Schedule at a Glance

8-8:30 AM	Conference Check-in	Reception Gallery and Fireplace
8:20-8:30 AM	Welcome	
8:30-9:30 AM	Keynote with Mari Williams Be an EPIC Leader: How to Navigate Change and Challenge with Confidence	Great Hall
9:30-9:45 AM	Break	
9:45-10:45 AM	Breakout Session I: details on pg 6-7	
10:45-11 AM	Break	
11 AM-12 PM	Breakout Session II: details on pg 8-9	
12-1:15 PM	Lunch	Ensminger Pavilion
1:15-2:15 PM	Breakout Session III: details on pg 10-11	
2:15-2:30 PM	Break	
2:30-3:15 PM	Keynote with Sam Williams Gracious Space: Fostering Collaboration	Great Hall

Keynote Speakers



Marli Williams

Marli Williams is an interactive keynote speaker, leadership trainer and joy instigator whose journey into transformational leadership began as a camp counselor. With a master's degree in education and two decades of facilitation and leadership experience, Marli partners with extraordinary individuals and organizations ready to elevate their energy, activate their purpose, and amplify their impact. Her mission is to empower change makers and leaders to fully realize their potential.

She hosts the widely acclaimed *Let's Lead Together Podcast*, which skyrocketed into the top 5% of all podcasts globally within its first month. Marli is also the creator of The Connect Deck, a powerful tool fostering shockingly easy and meaningful conversations, now cherished by communities around the world. When she's not inspiring audiences, training leaders or consulting with mission-driven organizations, you can find Marli exploring the trails with her dogs, Summit and Journey. To find out more about Marli, go to marliwilliams.com.

Be an EPIC Leader: How to Navigate Change and Challenge with Confidence

In an ever-changing academic landscape, women leaders face unique challenges that require resilience, adaptability and vision. This empowering keynote will inspire women faculty and staff to embrace their roles as EPIC leaders by learning how to navigate change and challenges with confidence and courage.

Using the EPIC Leadership framework, you will discover practical tools to overcome obstacles, lead with authenticity, and inspire others in your community. Through engaging stories and actionable insights, this session will leave you feeling energized and equipped to tackle the complexities of leadership with clarity and conviction. Step into your power as an EPIC leader and create meaningful impact within your university and beyond!



Sam Williams, MSEd

Native (Salish/Kootenai), first-gen, two-spirit, artist, technologist and multimedia enthusiast.

With over 25 years of experience in IT across nonprofit and higher education sectors, Sam has held key leadership roles, including Director of Administrative Technology at Salish Kootenai College, Director of Academic Technology and Innovation at the University of Portland, and Chief Information Officer at Linfield University. Currently, Sam serves as the Executive Director of Business Architecture at Oregon State University.

As an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community, Sam draws inspiration from the community's dedication to preserving traditions while embracing contemporary life. Sam is also passionate about creating accessible and inclusive technology solutions that remove barriers with a focus on universal design.

Sam is committed to fostering critical conversations using the Gracious Space framework, which he introduced at Oregon State University. This framework emphasizes inviting diverse voices and encouraging collaboration. Sam had the honor of presenting on Gracious Space at the inaugural Elevating Women in Technology - NWACC Workshop in October 2024.

Gracious Space: Fostering Collaboration

Oregon State University Information and Technology has embraced 'gracious space' as a leadership strategy and the cornerstone of their commitment to fostering a diverse, equitable, inclusive and accessible culture. This commitment is crucial in our ongoing efforts to engage and empower women and other underrepresented communities in the field of IT.

Breakout Session I: 9:45-10:45 AM

A New Path to Leadership: Faces and Voices

Aubrey Shaw and Sharon K. Stoll from University of Idaho

 Athletics Conference Room

Able-bodied people are the majority in leadership. This presents a unique problem for them to understand the lived bodily experience of a person with a physical disability. In leadership settings, organizations choose people who are competent to be in leadership roles. However, there are not many people with physical disabilities in those roles. Is this because they are not competent? Or is this because they are seen as not competent because of their physical disability?

The purpose of this presentation is twofold: 1) discussing the lived bodily experience of disability in leadership roles and 2) examining the power of bringing these different voices and faces to leadership.

Impact of Academic Leadership on Women's Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing

Aleksandra Hollingshead, Brooke Blevins, Jingru Lu, Mya Gackstetter and Aubrey Bureau from University of Idaho

 Ensminger Pavilion

This presentation examines the impact of academic leadership on women's physical and mental health and overall wellbeing, with a focus on understanding barriers to collaboration, leadership and professional advancement. Specifically, it will investigate how engagement in leadership positions at higher education institutions influences women's dietary behavior, physical health and mental wellbeing, particularly when intersecting factors such as age and motherhood are considered.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study combines qualitative interviews with five instruments measuring nutrition, physical activity and demographic information. Preliminary findings reveal how systemic and cultural expectations shape women's health experiences in leadership roles, often creating barriers to sustained participation and career advancement.

Our Identity is Our Power

Kolloh Nimley from Washington State University

 Great Hall

In this session, we will wrestle with the question, “Who am I?” Outside of the professional world, apart from my position, who am I? We become empowered and bold when establishing the foundation of who we are. Before the position that I hold today, I lived, and I will continue to live after I have left this position. In the history of the United States and the world, women have had greater impacts on policies, at local, regional, national and global levels, so why are we still fighting to get a seat at the table?

After this session, participants will know how to separate their personal lives from their professional lives. This will discover the source of their power and how to use the power. They will also establish their identity, and create space to boldly discuss issues impacting the effectiveness of women in the workplace

Women’s Labor Force Trends

Lisa Grigg from Idaho Department of Labor

 Regents Conference Room

This presentation will explore recent women’s labor force trends. It will also highlight that despite this incredible growth, women’s labor force participation continues to be limited by external factors and Idaho’s rural/remote landscape.

Encouraging Young Women to Explore New Areas of their Professional Lives

Joy Wanja Muraya from Washington State University

 Past Presidents Conference Room

This presentation will encourage young women to explore new areas of their professional lives. It will motivate young mothers to chase their dreams, such as a graduate education, as their children study, too. It will encourage young women of color to be seen and heard in the professional space.

Breakout Session II: 11 AM-12 PM

I FEEL SO SEEN! Empowering the ‘Lost Generation’ of Neurodivergent Women

Morann Johnson from Washington State University

 Athletics Conference Room

This presentation will be a discussion/reflection-based discussion focusing on neurodivergent brains in our professional, learning and community spaces. Research is unearthing an entire generation of women who present with ADHD and/or executive function challenges whose symptoms were ignored in childhood, adolescence and emerging adulthood. These women are now our supervisors, coworkers, community partners.

We'll explore ways that you can support and collaborate with neurodivergent thinkers who experience life in a unique way. And how those living with executive function challenges can ‘work with their quirks’ and advocate for their strengths.

Barriers to Advancement for Women in Academia: A Gap in Gender Equality

Kimberly McBride from Washington State University

 Regents Conference Room

Scientific data and lived experiences suggest a gap in gender equity across academic disciplines and institutions. The gap is most evident when examining differences in the achievement of career benchmarks such as tenure and promotion, as well as in the distribution of workload. Unseen and unvalued emotional labor, misogynistic views on science, inadequate institutional policies, and lack of a supportive work environment all contribute to the under-representation of women in academia, particularly women of color.

In this interactive, audience-engaged session, a panel of women-identified scholars and leaders representing different academic disciplines will explore barriers to advancement through a review of scientific data and the sharing of lived experiences in a safe space.

Protecting the Pause ... And Other Tips to Let Go of Stress

Karen Richel from University of Idaho

 Ensminger Pavilion

We all have pauses in our lives. Those events in life that slow us down, stop us, redirect us. How we choose to respond to these lulls define every aspect of our lives and affects how we serve others. This workshop will share tools, tips and tricks to get “unstuck” from the pauses in life, redefine stress, reframe your perspective, practice gratitude and joyfulness, and realign your resilience. This session is tailored for every single woman out there!

Reclaim Your Confidence and Rise to New Heights

Neida Vargas Nancy Hernandez from Washington State University

 Great Hall

Do you like solving mysteries? Join us for an interactive workshop where you'll assist in solving the case of Julia Steele who lost her confidence and, through life lessons, she reclaimed it to create a path to new heights. Through hands-on activities, you'll learn practical strategies to boost your leadership skills and build lasting confidence. By the end of the workshop, not only will you have the tools to close the case, but you'll also walk away with actionable steps to strengthen your own confidence and empower your community.

How Podcasts can Increase Networking Structures and Enhance Professional Skills

Samantha Lewis from University of Idaho

 Lighty Library

Winning, results and scores are valuable and do create the game. Humans, however, are complex, multi-dimensional beings who cannot be defined by game stats. Competition can be positive, but balance is needed to find enjoyment and healthy outcomes. The subjective, joyful, lived experience is why we play and compete. Coaching through the subjective experience creates success.

This oral presentation will offer an effective approach to coaching through the subjective, using examples from novel research involving modern technologies like podcasting combined with Socratic maieutic reflective practices.

Breakout Session III: 1:15-2:15 PM

Integrate Wellbeing into Your Workday

Amanda Ferstead and Emily Tuschhoff from University of Idaho

 Great Hall

This interactive program will explore ways to integrate wellbeing into many aspects of your workday. We will start with a bit of Laughter Yoga, then discuss skills and tools for embedding wellbeing practices into your individual workday, team building and team meetings, and workplace settings. Participants will leave the session having identified strategies they already engage with and ideas to enhance wellbeing at various levels. Integrating wellbeing throughout the day helps to empower and lift up all.

Transform, Innovate and Cultivate: Become a Spirited Leader

Heather Van Mullem from Lewis-Clark State College

 Athletics Conference Room

While the number of women in leadership positions continues to grow, room for improvement in equity, workplace treatment and improved wellness remains. Identifying positive and effective ways to help reduce barriers women face to living a healthy and well life must involve exploration of new leadership approaches. Spirited Leadership – grounded in emotional and social intelligence – encourages building supportive and collaborative networks of colleagues, positive workplace environments, and leaders who encourage the personal and professional growth of all employees (Armstrong, 2011).

Session participants who attend this interactive and engaging session will: 1) explore the Spirited Leadership framework, 2) gain understanding of how embracing emotional and social intelligence in leadership can result in creating innovative work environments, and 3) identify strategies leaders can take to create an inspirational, transformative and supportive workplace where employees can thrive.

50 Years of Leadership at WSU: AFW Past Presidents Round Table

Katie Forsythe, Tracy Skaer, Knona Liddell, Erica Austin, LeeAnn Hunter, Chelsea Leachman, Melissa Parkhurst and Blythe Duell from Washington State University

 Past Presidents Conference Room

Founded in 1975, Washington State University's Association for Faculty Women (AFW) is a broadly inclusive group that promotes successful and satisfying careers for women and other marginalized genders by creating opportunities for members to connect in environments that are welcoming, supportive and empowering. For 50 years, AFW has led change at WSU on topics such as mentoring, salary equity, tenure processes, recruitment and retention of faculty, and childcare.

In this session, seven past AFW presidents and the current AFW president will discuss the history of AFW, legacy left for current and future faculty, and issues that persist today. We will discuss navigating university leadership transitions, building mutually supportive relationships with administrators and campus partners, and the challenges and opportunities of leading a system-wide organization. Time will be saved for audience questions and discussions about your own university leadership journey.

Navigating Leadership as Parents: Leveraging Strengths and Identities

Sophia Gaither, Christian Elsberry and Amanda Morgan from University of Idaho

 Regents Conference Room

This panel brings together three accomplished leaders who are also moms, sharing their journeys of navigating careers while balancing the demands of parenting. Rather than a traditional career ladder, their paths resemble a jungle gym—full of lateral moves, pivots and unexpected opportunities.

Panelists will discuss how motherhood shapes leadership skills like adaptability, time management, and resilience, while also addressing the realities of career growth at different starting points. This conversation will provide practical insights on embracing nonlinear career paths, seizing opportunities, and finding balance in both leadership and life.

Thank you

Thank you for attending the 2025 Women's Leadership Conference!

We would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to our sponsors and those who donated their time, knowledge and skills. Without you, the Conference would not be possible.



University of Idaho



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