



FDLA / FAMTE 2026 · Virtual Conference

FDLA / FAMTE 2026

Reimagining Learning, Empowerment, and Innovation in Distance Education

February 4–6, 2026 · Virtual Conference

Join: <https://nova.zoom.us/j/84962876103>

Session Icon Legend



Keynote



Panel



Roundtable / Interactive



AI & Emerging Technology



Instructional Design /
Faculty Development



Teaching & Learning
(Pedagogy)



Global / Sustainability /
Culture



Law / Policy / Compliance



Awards

*A big thank you to our Sponsors: McGraw Hill and Choose Support, LLC

Wednesday – February 4, 2026: Morning Sessions

Moderator for AM Sessions: *Melinda Coleman, Ed.D.*

9:00 AM

Keynote: Dr. Craig Sommer, Chief of Schools, St. Lucie Public Schools

Dr. Sommer will share insights on leadership, innovation, and systemic improvement in K–12 education, drawing on district-level transformation and student-centered reform efforts.

10:00 AM

Igniting Faculty Engagement: Leadership Strategies for EdTech Adoption in a Fast-Paced World

Presenters: Melinda Coleman, EdD, Professor, Nova Southeastern University

In a fast-paced edtech landscape shaped by AI and blended learning, this session equips K–12 leaders with research-backed strategies to move beyond mandates toward meaningful faculty engagement. Using an Engage–Empower–Excite framework, participants will learn how to foster teacher ownership, reduce resistance, and sustain technology adoption that improves student learning.

10:30 AM

Mentorship by Design: Reimagining Support Networks for Instructional Designers

Presenters: Nafije Prishtina, Florence W. Williams, Efren De La Mora Velasco, University of Central Florida

As Florida continues to advance higher education on innovation, the professionals who make online learning possible play a vital role. Instructional Designers (IDs) in particular benefit from strong, intentional mentorship to thrive in this evolving landscape. This roundtable presents early insights from an ongoing mixed-methods study of 33 IDs and ID-adjacent professionals across higher education. Discussion will highlight emerging patterns such as uneven access to mentoring, the significance of informal “webs” of support, and the ways mentorship needs shift from onboarding through leadership. These findings inform a practical, adaptable framework that institutions and ID teams can tailor to their own contexts. This session is designed for instructional designers, technologists, faculty developers, program leaders, and K–12 collaborators, and bridges research, theory, and everyday practice. Together, we will explore how mentorship can become more intentional, inclusive, and sustainable across distributed teams and institutional boundaries.

Wednesday – February 4, 2026: Mid-Day Sessions

 11:00 AM

Mathematical Thinking to Spark Young Learners

Presenter: Dr. Ruth Jacoby, Executive Director of Curriculum and Early Childhood, Academica Schools

This session will equip educators and administrators with developmentally appropriate strategies to foster mathematical thinking in young learners. By integrating animated storytelling and interactive games, participants will learn to create a dynamic, engaging learning environment. Attendees will leave with practical tools to spark curiosity, reduce math anxiety, and promote foundational numeracy skills in primary educational settings.

 11:30 AM

Creating a Crisis Management Plan/Playbook in Higher Education

Presenters: Dr. David Ross, Professor, Nova Southeastern University

All higher education personnel and stakeholders must assess the importance of having a pre-crisis and crisis plan for their institution. Please note that many crises will require the administration to be both proactive and responsive. The best proactive option is to have a pre-crisis plan in place for any situation within your institution and its satellite campuses. A leader/leadership team with input from all levels must be proactive in developing a crisis plan for incidents that could impact an institution of higher education. Many crises could be based on natural disasters, crime, safety, protests, student suicides and other mental health issues, low enrollment, rising tuition costs, etcetera.

 12:00 PM

Lunch and Learn: Compliance Strategies and Resources for New and Aspiring E-Learning Administrators

Presenter: Josh Strigle, Ph.D., Dean of eLearning, College of Central Florida

One way E-Learning professionals serve students is by keeping their institution in good standing with its various authorizing authorities. From the ADA to ZTC designations, E-Learning plays a role in most institutional compliance scenarios. If you are new to this arena, don't panic; there are a variety of resources and professional organizations available to you. This session will provide an overview of many statutes, rules, and policies that impact how we do our jobs and connect you with my go-to resources to build awareness and understanding of the ever-changing policy landscape.

Wednesday – February 4, 2026: Afternoon Sessions

Moderator for PM Sessions: *Josh Strigle, Ph.D.*

 1:00 PM

eLearning Panel

Presenters: Josh Strigle, Dean of E-Learning and Academic Services at the College of Central Florida in Ocala, Joshua Strate, Ph.D., Florida Virtual Schools

As E-Learning transitions from a post-COVID era to the age of artificial intelligence, we are at a crossroads of perception, policy, and practice. A group of E-Learning professionals will discuss their observations from decades in the field and aim to illuminate the pitfalls and opportunities presented to E-Learning today.

 2:00 PM

Designing Engagement: From Boring Browsers to Active Players Through Visual Storytelling

Presenters: Martha Hubertz, Alisha Janowsky, Joe Fauvel, University of Central Florida

Transform online courses from mundane to magical using research-backed gamification strategies. This presentation shows how themed visual narratives and strategic AI integration significantly increase student engagement in distance learning environments. Drawing from comprehensive research across multiple gamified courses, including a Clue-themed forensic psychology and a Pokémon statistics class, discover why 96% of students found themed elements engaging. Learn practical implementation strategies that achieved 84% enhanced learning experiences, exceeding traditional gamification benchmarks by over 57%.

 2:30 PM

Making G.R.I.T. Work: Empowering K-20 Mathematics Learners Through Growth Mindset, Resilience, and Digital Innovation.

Presenter: Dr. India White, Board Member, FCTM

This session explores how Dr. India White's G.R.I.T. Framework—Growth Mindset, Resilience, Self-Efficacy, and Time Management—empowers K-20 mathematics learners in virtual and hybrid settings. Participants will learn practical strategies and innovative digital tools to strengthen perseverance, engagement, and mathematical identity. The session highlights concrete ways educators can embed G.R.I.T. routines, digital G.R.I.T. Games, and culturally responsive practices to improve learner outcomes and create more empowered, equitable experiences in online mathematics classrooms.

Wednesday – February 4, 2026: Late Afternoon Sessions

 3:00 PM

A Five-Year Review: Virtual Cultural Experiences

Presenters: Crystal H. Marul, Lecturer in Spanish and Portuguese Studies; Coordinator of the Online Spanish Program at the University of Florida

This review synthesizes five years of virtual cultural exchanges that have transformed online language education through the Three Pillar Model. Surveys from 2,000+ students show enhanced proficiency, intercultural competence, and confidence. It highlights technology's role in global connectivity and advocates expanded online pedagogies.

 3:30 PM

Pivoting to Digital/Online Learning in the ELA Classroom

Presenter: Stephanie L. Nelson, Doctoral Candidate, Nova Southeastern University

This session will explore digital tools educators can use to reach students in the online English/Language Arts classroom. The session will focus on tools for reaching struggling readers and English Language Learners. Digital citizenship and literacy, as well as AI, will also be discussed. Participants will have the opportunity to share their suggestions and perspectives and to ask questions.

 4:00 PM

End of Day 1 Conference

Thursday – February 5, 2026: Morning Sessions

Moderator for AM Sessions: *Victoria Brenes*

 9:00 AM

Technology Panel: GenAI-Powered Inclusive Education

Presenters: Victoria Brenes Chair, Victoria Brown, Ed.D., Michael Simonson, Ph.D., and Anymir Orellana, Ed.D.*

This technology panel will focus on how generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) can be leveraged for accessibility. Panelists will discuss how they collaborate with GenAI tools to create inclusive learning experiences aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, meeting student needs and promoting student agency and engagement. Panelists will also share how they navigate the challenges they face when designing these experiences, such as bias and inaccurate information. Attendees will leave with actionable insights on applying GenAI tools to enhance accessibility.

 10:00 AM

From Coursework to Competency: Are AI-Reliant Graduates Truly Prepared?

Presenters: Rebecca Armstrong, Green Canyon University; David Hart Jr., faculty, Capella University

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming how people learn and how businesses operate, raising urgent questions about whether educational institutions can keep pace. As employers demand new skills and adaptability, many graduates feel unprepared for today's workforce. This growing gap highlights the need for higher education, especially online learning, to evolve. This presentation examines how institutions can redesign learning to ensure students gain the confidence, competence, and career-ready skills required to succeed in an AI-driven world.

 10:30 AM

"I Can Tell It's Fake": What Gen Alpha Already Knows About AI

Presenter: Charlotte Jones-Roberts, University of Central Florida

As generative AI becomes increasingly visible in education, younger learners are developing their own criteria for identifying and dismissing AI-generated content as inauthentic or "fake". This presentation explores how Gen Alpha students already recognize and evaluate AI outputs and what their skepticism means for higher education. The session challenges assumptions about AI naïveté and reframes AI integration as an issue of trust, authenticity, and meaningful learning design rather than detection or prohibition.

Thursday – February 5, 2026: Mid-Day Sessions

 11:00 AM

The Human Arc: Story-Driven Design for Online Learning

Presenters: Cate Dowman, Ph.D., Maité Saco, a senior instructional designer at the University of Miami, is involved in digital and online learning initiatives.

This poster invites educators to reimagine online learning through the power of storytelling. It draws on research to show how narrative techniques ignite motivation, celebrate cultural diversity, and deepen cognitive engagement. By showcasing prototypes and adaptable frameworks, the session demonstrates how storytelling transforms digital spaces into human-centered experiences. Aligned with the conference theme, it challenges us to innovate boldly and design learning that inspires connection, meaning, and empowerment.

 11:30 AM

MISTTIC: Transforming STEM Learning Through Applications of AI-Driven Mechatronics

Presenter: Alfredo Rodriguez-Vera, MS, Ph.D. candidate in Instructional Technology at USF, and Stephanie Arthur, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Instruction in Science and STEM Education at the University of South Florida (USF) College of Education

This presentation covers the Mechatronics Integrated into STEM Teaching for Transformative Innovative Communities (MISTTIC) project. Funded by the NSF, this initiative supports STEM teacher leaders in adding mechatronics to STEM learning. The session explores the link between AI and mechatronics. Their combination shifts learning from automation to intelligent systems. We also discuss changes to educational practices when considering digital citizenship, data privacy, and sustainability in innovative technology. Attendees will see how this approach fosters communities of practice that prepare students for future STEM careers and degree pathways.

 12:00 PM

Sponsor Presentation: McGraw Hill

Presenter: Heidi Allwood

Title: Responsible AI for Student Success

Description: Explore new ways to build strong personal connections with distance learning students that improve course outcomes and maintain academic integrity.

 12:30 PM

Prompt Engineering 101: Collaborating with GenAI for Lesson Creation

Presenter: Victoria Brenes, Doctoral Candidate, Nova Southeastern University

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has the potential to help educators create and enhance instructional materials. However, to obtain the most accurate output that best meets student needs, educators should learn prompt engineering. This session will present a framework for structuring prompts effectively to generate a lesson plan. This session will also discuss how educators can revise AI-generated materials to better meet learners' needs. Attendees will walk away with practical strategies for leveraging GenAI to design prompts that produce expertly crafted lesson plans.

Thursday – February 5, 2026: Afternoon Sessions

Moderator for PM Sessions: *Susan Spraker, Instructional Designer, UCF, Treasurer, FDLA*

 1:00 PM

Designing with Purpose: Turning Accessibility Barriers into Inclusive Teaching Practices

Presenter: Emily Franklin, AT Still University

This session reframes digital accessibility in distance learning from compliance requirements to pedagogical best practice. Using the Representation principle of Universal Design for Learning and Canvas course examples, participants will learn to identify common accessibility barriers and implement high-impact improvements. Designed for both online faculty and instructional designers, the session demonstrates how accessible course design creates welcoming distance-learning environments for all students and provides instructional designers with practical strategies to coach faculty on accessibility improvements.

 1:30 PM

From Seed to Forest: Student Co-Creation Spreading Sustainability Through Digital Roots

Presenters: Martha Hubertz, Associate Lecturer, Psychology, UCF; Devon Cadwell Bazata, Associate Lecturer, Interdisciplinary Studies, UCF; Richard Plate, Associate Lecturer, Sustainability & Environmental Science, UCF

Like trees spreading through roots that become new trunks, our sustainability OER project demonstrates organic growth. We created a Pressbooks, spawned two UN SDG Fellows, evolved a student Yellowdig sketch into professional graphics, and transformed a video when a senior Knight made it student-centric. With 700+ diverse learners achieving an 80% improvement in understanding, discover how digital learning spreads naturally—each root becoming a trunk that supports new branches of creative commons content, Materia widgets, and community knowledge.

 2:00 PM

Formatively Evaluating Instructor-Created AI Tutors

Presenter: Anymir Orellana, Ed.D., Professor, Nova Southeastern University

Many online instructors are experimenting with creating AI tutors, acting as instructional designers and content creators, yet may lack clear guidance on how to evaluate these tools as instructional materials before classroom use. This session introduces a practical framework for formative evaluation of instructor-created AI tutors. Participants will learn how small-scale, one-to-one testing with learners can enable instructors to refine AI tutors before broader adoption in their courses.

Thursday – February 5, 2026: Late Afternoon Sessions

 2:30 PM

Awards Ceremony: Jia Borrer* Chair

Presenters: Award Recipients (2026)

Distinguished Leadership in Distance Learning – Dr. Jill Buban, University of Miami

Innovator in Distance Learning – Vernon Czelusniak, Ph.D., St. Thomas University

Distinguished Service in Distance Learning – Emily Franklin (UCF), Roslyn Miller, Ph.D. (UCF), Jia Borrer, Ed.D. (NSU), and Amy Sugar, M.A. (UCF)

Recognition of the BEST Conference Paper Award 2025

PAVING PATHWAYS: *Navigating the Intersection of AI and Student Support in Higher Education* by Tracy M. Balduzzi, Ed.D., Lori Driscoll, Ed.D., Dr. Sean Nufer, and Amanda Major, Ed.D.

 3:30 PM

Taking AI to the Next Level: Empowering Students with Personal Tutoring Assistance

Presenter: Dr. Victoria Brown, Florida Atlantic University

AI is constantly evolving, and with each new tool, educators can create opportunities for designing better instruction. With Microsoft Copilot, instructors can add a personal tutor to their classes to help students achieve their academic goals through an agent. Learn what an agent is and how an agent works. In a post-class survey, students shared how they used the AI agent to support them in their coursework. Finally, learn what it takes to create your own personalized tutor using an AI Agent for your class.

 4:00 PM

Every Drop Counts: Clean Water Challenges Worldwide

Presenters: Hui Fang, Angie Su, Ed.D., Professor of Mathematics Education, Fischler College of Education & School of Criminal Justice, Nova Southeastern University, Olivia Boggs (STEM student), Bella Hoener (STEM student), Samantha Mattia (STEM student), Charlize Rust (STEM student), Nova Southeastern University

This session examines global clean water challenges through interdisciplinary inquiry and student-driven research. Presenters highlight how learners investigate water access, quality, and sustainability across diverse regions, demonstrating how distance learning can foster global awareness, critical thinking, and real-world problem solving around one of the world's most urgent issues.

 4:30 PM

End of Day 2 Conference

Friday – February 6, 2026: Morning Sessions

Moderator for AM Sessions: *Melinda Coleman, Ed.D., David Ross, Ph.D., & Angie Su, Ed.D.*

 9:00 AM

K–12 Panel: Math Unleashed: Igniting Innovation & Empowerment

Presenters: Melinda Coleman, Professor, NSU, Chair, Craig Sommer, Chief of Schools, St. Lucie Public Schools*

Math Unleashed: Igniting Innovation & Empowerment explores transformative pedagogical practices that turn mathematics into a catalyst for curiosity, confidence, and creativity. Highlighting St. Lucie Public Schools' historic 2024–2025 "A" rating and the #1 statewide ranking in math year-over-year growth, this dynamic Discussion unites educators and innovators to share proven, practical strategies that empower all learners. Attendees will discover how bold teaching methods, supported by a culture of continuous improvement, data-driven systems, and high-quality instruction, drive unprecedented gains and foster resilient mathematical thinkers.

 10:00 AM

Higher Education Panel: Pros and Cons of AI Use in Secondary and Post-Secondary Education

Presenters: Dr. David Ross, Nova Southeastern University, and Dr. Joshua Strate, Florida Virtual

Across secondary and post-secondary education, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) has become the norm for some individuals, but to what extent is it truly regulated? The core learning concepts and content guidelines are established, but the processes governing program use vary across institutions and among faculty. Teacher/faculty training and student reviews of ethical expectations have led to more streamlined expectations, but to what extent do they address achievement gaps and build the critical thinking skills needed in education and in one's future career/profession? Foundational skills are essential across all subjects, and secondary skills support their application in post-secondary settings. Thus, AI-generated content must be addressed; however, how that is addressed is not yet universal across either level of education.

Friday – February 6, 2026: Mid-Day Sessions

 11:00 AM

Keynote: The scope of Copyright law

Presenter: Stephan Carlisle, J.D., Copyright Officer, Nova Southeastern University

The internet age has presented educators with a thorny dilemma: educational materials are voluminous and readily available. The problem is that while materials are "readily" available, they are not always "freely" available. The scope of Copyright law, both domestically and abroad, ensures that virtually any form of human expression is protected by copyright, and the rules for using it, even in an educational setting, are complex and ever-changing. This presentation will present a primer of what is and is not protected by copyright law, the duration of that protection, how to know when a work is in the public domain, the concepts of fair use and the "TEACH" Act, and how educators can protect themselves and their institutions.

 12:00 PM

Law Panel: The Legalities of Artificial Intelligence

Presenters: Stephen Carlisle & William Smith, J.D., IRB Director, Institutional Review Board, Division of Research and Economic Development, Nova Southeastern University

Like many things in the Tech World, the development of Artificial Intelligence has barreled forward without resolving the many legal issues that inevitably arise: Does AI output have a Copyright? If so, who owns it? Who is responsible if your AI output is factually inaccurate? Do the AI companies owe compensation to the thousands of authors they copied from? All will be discussed.

Friday – February 6, 2026: Afternoon Sessions

Moderator for PM Sessions: *Jia Borrer, Ed.D. Professor Fischler College of Education & School of Criminal Justice, Nova Southeastern University*

 1:00 PM

The Use of Mursion in Undergraduate Teacher Preparation Programs

Presenters: Jia Borrer, EdD; Elizabeth Aguila, PhD, Nova Southeastern University

This session explores how undergraduate education courses at Nova Southeastern University integrate Mursion. This mixed-reality simulation platform blends AI and human-driven avatars to create safe, authentic practice environments to prepare future educators. Presenters will demonstrate how students rehearse classroom management, parent-teacher communication, and other interpersonal skills. Attendees will gain insight into designing meaningful virtual practice experiences that strengthen emotional intelligence, leadership, and communication within online and hybrid teacher-preparation programs.

 1:30 PM

AI-Assisted Assignments with a Spiral Design

Presenter: Aubry Jacques, Instructional Designer, Florida Atlantic University

This session introduces a framework for designing spiraled assignments that build skills and foster reflection throughout a course. Generative AI is used as a scaffold—not a shortcut—to support learning without increasing instructional burden by creating a spiraling curriculum. Participants will explore assignment sequencing and calibration of complexity. The session aligns with the FDLA theme by offering a practical, research-informed framework for designing innovative, scalable, and student-centered digital learning experiences.

 2:00 PM

Sponsor Presentation: Choose Support, LLC

Presenter: Michael Zelin

Title: Creative Learning of Mathematics and Physics: e-Project-Based Service Learning

A new online platform enables students to learn Math and Physics by creating their online posts, cross-checking each other's work, and collaborating. Users can create their own galleries to showcase their work and share resources. Bring your laptop: create your own gallery and get free resources that you can use in your courses.

 3:00 PM

End of Conference

Thank You for Attending!

Thank you for attending FDLA/FAMTE 2026.

Conference Planning Committee

- Jia Borrer
- Victoria Brenes
- Melinda Coleman
- Emily Franklin
- Roselyn Miller
- Amy Sugar
- George Romagosa
- David Ross
- Joshua Strate
- Josh Strigle
- Hui Fang Angie Su
- Florence Williams

Design Note: Booklet's layout and visual design were created with the assistance of GenAI.