

**Teaching Fellows Junior Conference**

**POP: Proactive, Optimistic, and Present**

**Dr. Amanda Darden and Ms. Maggie Darden**

**Session Descriptor:** The student experience is often that key component of how a student enjoys their education experiences. This session will focus on the POP effect: Students being proactive, optimistic, and present throughout their journeys. As the student experience and quality assurance administrator at my current institution, I spend much time looking at predictive analytics, but then I take the data and use it to host focus groups with students. These focus groups are centered around best practices of what factors have the biggest impact on both the student experience and how students enjoy learning. The first-year experience course has been a space in which the focus group ideas have been embedded into the curriculum and center around 2 crucial elements:

1. Academic preparedness and

2. Promoting engagement on campus. Leaders assist with facilitating topical discussions within the classroom and facilitate engagement on campus through our newly implemented Affirmation Station as well as promoting student attendance at on campus events.

Participants will leave this session with the tools to implement these same practices in their own classroom settings as well as empower and encourage students to be POP throughout their journeys. Participants will also learn how to prepare students to be global citizens who are change agents in their communities as well as their professional careers.

1. To improve the student experience at all levels through allowing students to be seen, heard and validated.

2. Learn how to implement POP with all students.

3. Prepare students to be academically prepared while also promoting engagement inside and outside the classroom.

**Presenter Bio:** Dr. Amanda J. Darden is the Vice President for Student Experience and Quality Assurance at Lander University located in Greenwood, SC. Darden began her role as the 1st Vice President in the new cabinet-level position June 2022. Darden has a comprehensive background in higher education leadership with a proven record of management in teaching, research, and administration. Her student-focused experiences are relevant to the needs of students as she spends much time in conversations and listening to students' perspectives. Darden's education includes a bachelor's degree in health and physical education and an M.Ed. in educational curriculum and instruction, both from Radford University. She completed her Ph.D. in higher education administration at Coastal Carolina University in 2022. Darden has reviewed a number of professional scholarly journals focused on health, physical education and recreation, which serve current practitioners. Darden has also presented her research nationally on the subjects of educational leadership, curriculum, best teaching practices, and improving teacher knowledge, instruction and retention. Her current research has focused on the student experience and how students perceive the impact their journey will have on them in their career paths upon graduation. Although she has received many awards related to advising and retention efforts over the years, Darden's most proud moment was being named the 2022 Ph.D. candidate of the year for the inaugural doctoral class at Coastal Carolina University. Darden served as the CERRA Board Chair from 2020-2023 and has served on CERRA's Board since 2017. Ms. Magdayln Darden (Maggie) is a senior Dance Education major and South Carolina Teaching Fellow at the University of South Carolina. Maggie has served in many leadership roles during her time at USC including cohort representative for her Teaching Fellows Cohort, Secretary of the student chapter of National Dance Education Organization, Resident Assistant for University Housing, Senior Resident Assistant, lead roles in the USC Dance Company, as well as submitted, accepted, and presented her proposal on The History of Dance at the National Dance Education Conference in October 2023. Maggie is currently doing her student teaching at Dreher High School and plans to attend graduate school upon graduation.