



Community College  
Association of Texas Trustees

## West Texas Trustee Leadership Seminar

March 22, 2024 | Speaker Biographies

### Elizabeth Chivers

Elizabeth Chivers serves as the Senior Director of Strategy & Policy Analysis at TACC. Ms. Chivers works to help advance the mission of our colleges and association through data insight and analyses. As a key member of TACC's policy team, she supports data-informed policy advocacy and strategy for our public community colleges.

Before joining TACC, Elizabeth spent almost four years with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, where she served in several roles, including program director as part of the data team and most recently as the Senior Director of Strategy & Major Projects. She was involved in helping execute strategic priority planning and engaged in several key agency projects, including the 60x30TX Regional Advisory Groups, SB 25 Recommend Course Sequences, New Texas Transfer Framework, and metric development for the newly adopted Building a Talent Strong Texas strategic plan. She also served as District Director of Institutional Research and a member of the college leadership team at Navarro College.

Elizabeth holds a Bachelor of Arts from Central College, a Master's in Sociology, with a focus on criminology and quantitative and qualitative methodologies from the University of Northern Iowa, and additional doctoral-level coursework related to furthering her expertise in qualitative methods, work & organizations, and social psychology from North Carolina State University.

### Dr. Tara Deaver

Dr. Tara Deaver, a podiatric physician and surgeon, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center of the Permian Basin. She is on staff at Medical Center Health System and Odessa Regional Medical Center. She treats patients in an outpatient clinic, wound care clinic, and inpatient hospital settings. She conducts lectures on lower extremity pathology to the community, Texas Tech Residents and Fellows. She currently serves on the Odessa College Board of Trustees as



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vice-chair and the Board of Directors of the American College of Podiatric Medicine.

Dr. Deaver received degrees in Biology from Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama, and Bioengineering from Texas A&M University in College Station. She received her Doctor of Podiatric Medicine from the New York College of Podiatric Medicine and completed her residency at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio where she served as Chief Resident. She is a Diplomate of the American Board of Podiatric Medicine, Fellow of the American College of Podiatric Medicine, Certified Wound Specialist Physician through the American Board of Wound Management, and Fellow of Faculty Podiatric Medicine the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. Dr. Deaver is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

### **Dr. Linda Garcia**

Linda García is the Executive Director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) at The University of Texas at Austin (UT). Prior to this role, she served as the Assistant Director of College Relations at CCCSE. Previously, Linda was Vice President of Community College Relations at the Roueche Graduate Center at National American University, and she has worked at Lone Star College, Maricopa Community Colleges, and The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College.

Linda's experience includes student development, instructional support, grant writing, and teaching. She served as a coach for the American Association of Community Colleges Pathways 2.0 and continues in this same role for the Texas Pathways Project. Linda earned a Bachelor of Journalism with a concentration in broadcast and a doctorate in higher education administration with a specialization in community college leadership from The University of Texas at Austin. Her Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies degree is from The University of Texas at Brownsville.

### **Brandy Ham**

Brandy's academic journey is a testament to her unwavering commitment to finance and accounting. She earned her bachelor's degree in Accounting and Master of Business Administration from the University of Texas Permian Basin. Currently, she is furthering her knowledge and expertise by pursuing a doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Abilene Christian University.



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Brandy spent nearly seven years as the Executive Director of Finance at Odessa College, a role that prepared her for her current position as the Chief Financial Officer, which she has held for the past four and a half years.

Prior to transitioning to the realm of higher education, Brandy conducted audits for educational institutions and school districts while working with a local accounting firm.

### **Gary Johnson**

Gary Johnson serves as the current Chair of the Odessa College Board of Trustees and has served on the board for 34 years. Gary attended Odessa College from 1969-1970 and graduated from Texas Tech in 1973 with a BBA in Management. He is part-owner of the family business, Johnson Bros Oil Co., which was a wholesale fuel and lubricants business for 42 years. The business was sold in 2017 and Gary retired in 2021. He currently serves as President of the Ector County Appraisal District Board and is involved with many organizations in Odessa. Mr. Johnson has been married for 43 years to Laurie Johnson, the Executive Director of the Non-Profit Management Center in Odessa and Midland. He is an active member of First Baptist Church in Odessa.

### **Connie May**

Ms. Connie May is a product of community college and has worked in higher education for 23 years both on the financial and institutional effectiveness sides of the institution. She currently serves as the Executive Director for Institutional Effectiveness and is the SACSCOC Liaison for Odessa College. In addition, she teaches as an adjunct for the institution and has served on numerous local non-profit boards. Her educational background includes AS, BBA, and MBA degrees.

### **Bonnie Soria Najera**

Bonnie Soria Najera was elected to serve a six-year term in May 2017 on the El Paso Community College (EPCC) Board of Trustees. In addition to her local commitment to service in higher education, she also has leadership at the State and National level. In 2019 she became involved in the Community College Association of Texas Trustees (CCATT) serving on the Education Committee and was later elected to the CCATT Board of Directors in 2020 and 2022. Ms. Najera was appointed to serve a one-year term on the ACCT Board of Directors in



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December 2022 and served on the Public Policy and Advocacy in 2023. She currently serves as the CCATT Education Committee Chair and is also on the American Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) Governance and Bylaws Committee

As a Board Member of El Paso Community College, she actively contributes to shaping policies and strategies that ensure the college continues to meet the evolving needs of students and the community. Her dedication to fostering innovation, inclusivity, and student success is evident in her collaborative approach and commitment to excellence. Ms. Najera's commitment to education extends beyond her role as a trustee. She is actively involved in the local community, particularly in supporting K-12 education throughout the Socorro Independent School District. Her previous role as a Parent Liaison in the district has given her a unique perspective on the importance of early education. She firmly believes that the path to a better future begins in elementary school. To this end, she works tirelessly with groups and organizations to increase awareness of educational opportunities and higher education, demonstrating her integrated approach to education and her firm belief in its transformative power. Ms. Najera is honored to serve on the Board of Trustees as well as in her regional and national leadership roles. She remains dedicated to furthering the mission and vision of the community college, striving to create a positive impact on the lives of students and our nation.

## **Brian Jones**

Brian Jones is an educational leader and doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University, specializing in Organizational Leadership. A first-generation college student from New Orleans, Brian earned his Master of Education Degree from Texas Tech University and continued his coursework in Lamar University's Principal Leadership program. His professional journey in education spans roles as a choir director, middle school principal, and executive director of professional learning, culminating in his current position at Odessa College.

Brian Jones has dedicated himself to understanding the distinct challenges faced by students who experience academic and economic disadvantages. His research focuses primarily on the involvement of school administrators in supporting homeless students, particularly in understanding the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act within the context of educational leadership.



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Brian's commitment to educational equity is evident in his appointment by Texas Governor Greg Abbott to the Texas Commission on Community College Finance and his involvement in the historic signing of HB8.

Brian's educational philosophy is deeply rooted in the belief that education is the great equalizer, driving his lifelong commitment to enhancing student support systems. He believes education is a transformative process that can mold students' lives, cultivate personal development, and enable individuals to positively improve society.

Brian resides in Odessa, Texas, alongside his spouse, Marie, and their two offspring. He persistently champions the cause of student support and institutional efficacy, utilizing his personal experiences to build favorable conditions that promote the success of all learners.

### **Dr. William Serrata**

Dr. William Serrata has been the President of the El Paso County Community College District since August 2012. Dr. Serrata holds a Bachelor's Degree from Texas A&M University – College Station, a Master's Degree from the University of Texas at Brownsville, and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Educational Human Resource Development from Texas A&M University – College Station.

During his career, Dr. Serrata has provided enrollment management leadership in fostering enrollment growth as well as increases in student retention, dual credit enrollment, and graduation rates with an emphasis on first-generation and Hispanic populations and establishing a college-going culture. As President of EPCC, he has become recognized for his leadership in higher education at the local, regional, and national levels.

Dr. Serrata is an active member of the El Paso community and currently serves as a Board Member for Workforce Solutions Borderplex, Board of Directors for the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce, Board of Directors for the El Paso Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas and Chair of the Board for the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence. At the state level Dr. Serrata serves as the Chair for the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC), Co-Chair of the TACC Business Advisory Council, Chair of the TACC Texas Success Center Advisory Committee, Past Chair of the Texas Student Success Council convened by Educate Texas, and on the Board of Directors for Humanities Texas.



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On the national level, Dr. Serrata serves on the Board of Directors for the Lumina Foundation, has previously served as Chair of the Board of Directors for the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Immediate Past-Chair of the Board of Directors of Excelencia in Education and serves as an Advisory Board Member of the Higher Education Research and Development Institute (HERDI). Dr. Serrata previously served on the National Student Clearing House Advisory Council and was a member of the 2015 class of the Aspen Institute Ascend Fellows. In 2019 Dr. Serrata was selected as the Western Region Chief Executive of the Year by the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) and subsequently received the Marie Y. Martin Chief Executive Officer Award during the national conference.

Under Dr. Serrata's leadership, the Aspen Institute announced that El Paso Community College (EPCC) was named one of 10 nationwide finalists for the 2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence which recognizes a college's impact on student success. EPCC was selected from a pool of nearly 1,200 community colleges. Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education and Community College Week magazines continue to recognize EPCC as a national leader in awarding associate degrees to Hispanic students. The College earned the Seal of Excelencia from Excelencia in Education for EPCC's outcomes in accelerating Latino student success. EPCC received the 2016 AACC's Student Success Award and is the recipient of the ACCT Western Regional Equity Award in 2016 and 2022.

## **Dr. Gregory Williams**

Dr. Gregory D. Williams serves as president of Odessa College, a position he has held since January 2007. Accepting that post was a true homecoming for Dr. Williams, who began his journey in higher education as a student at Odessa College in 1983.

Before earning his doctorate in higher education administration from Baylor University, Dr. Williams' educational journey also included the completion of three degrees from the University of Texas Permian Basin: first, a bachelor's degree in psychology, with a certification to teach psychology, history, and learning-disabled students, followed by two master's degrees, in education mid-management and in psychology, respectively.

Dr. Williams has led the OC team in breaking every major enrollment record, student retention record, student success record, and fund-raising record



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previously held by the college. His leadership has set OC on the path to becoming the best community college in the nation. In 2018, Odessa College was awarded the Achieving the Dream's Leah Meyer Austin Award. In 2017, 2019, and again in 2021, Odessa College was named an Aspen Institute Top 10 Community College. OC went on to win the Rising Star Award for Community College Excellence from the Aspen Institute in 2017 and 2019, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's 2017- and 2021-Star Award.

On the state level, he serves or has recently served as Chair of the Texas Association of Community Colleges, the TACC Executive Committee, the TACC Rural College Committee, the TACC Legislative Committee, the Texas Student Success Council, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Business & Community Advisory Council.

On the national level, Dr. Williams was appointed to the Chair of Achieving the Dream Board of Directors in 2022, he has served the board since January 2018. He recently served on the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Board of Directors and Executive Board. He has also served on the Belk Center for Community College Leadership & Research Advisory Board since December 2019. Dr. Williams and his wife, Karen, have two sons, Kieran and Gregory, and one daughter, Kara, who also is a graduate of Odessa College – notably as one of the first Dual Credit students to earn an Associate Degree from OC *before* graduating from high school.