

SPEAKER BIOS



Mignonne Ater, RN, MSN, CNE - Dean of Nursing/Allied Health, Campus Dean Ferriday - Central Louisiana Technical Community College

Mignonne Ater is the Dean of Nursing and Allied Health for Central Louisiana Technical Community College and Campus Dean of the Ferriday Campus. She obtained a Master's of Science in Nursing with a functional role in Nursing Education from Northwestern State University in 1999. She earned the designation National League for Nursing Certified Nurse Educator (CNE) in 2017.

Ater is a member of the American Nurses Association, Louisiana State Nurses Association, and serves as a Board Member for the Alexandria District Nurses Association. She presides as Co-Chair of the Louisiana Community Technical College System (LCTCS) Dean and Directors of Nursing and Allied Health functional group.



Valerie Aymond, CRIS, SPHR - Chief Resource Officer Gilchrist Construction Company

Valerie Aymond is the Chief Resource Officer for Gilchrist Construction Company, a Louisiana-based, heavy highway contractor. Her oversight includes the company's resource divisions, including Human Resources, Organizational Development, Safety, and Enterprise Risk Management. She is a 1995 graduate of Louisiana State University at Alexandria, where she majored in Business Administration, and a graduate of the ABA National & Graduate School of Human Resources at the University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado. Aymond also attended Louisiana Tech University where she earned a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership with a concentration in Project Team Management.

She holds several Human Resource designations. She is a Certified Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR), a SHRM Senior Certified Professional (SCP), and is a Certified DDI (Development Dimensions International) Instructor. She is also a Certified Risk Insurance Specialist (CRIS).



Donna Bailey, MS, SPHR, SHRM-SCP - Vice President of Human Resources RoyOMartin

Donna Bailey, a native of Central Louisiana, holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education from McNeese State University, a Master of Science in Human Resources from Louisiana State University, and is currently seeking her doctoral degree at Baylor University in Organizational Change and Leadership. She was previously an educator in Allen Parish for 12 years. For the past 18 years, Bailey has worked at RoyOMartin, where she has served as human resources manager, director of human resources, and corporate director of employee engagement. In 2018, she was named RoyOMartin's first female vice president.

During her time at RoyOMartin, Bailey developed and led many workforce-development programs, including: WoodWorks, RoyOMartin Believes in Women in Manufacturing, Pay for Knowledge and Skills, I Believe, and Intentional Leadership Development.

She has earned several awards, including Allen Parish Teacher of the Year and the STEP Ahead Award from The Manufacturing Institute. She holds several professional human resources certifications.



**Chriss Cazayoux - Director, Workforce Solutions
ACT®**

Chriss Cazayoux works with stakeholders in education, policy makers, researchers, curriculum developers, and classroom instructors to achieve the universal goal of transforming the lives of learners across the K20 spectrum.

His experience positions him to be a champion for ACT® clients in the Adult Education, Workforce, and Career & Technical Education markets.



**Jim Clinton - President & CEO
Louisiana Central**

Jim Clinton serves as President and CEO of Louisiana Central, an organization dedicated to creating economic opportunities in the 10 parishes of Central Louisiana. In this role, he has led efforts to enable more education and training opportunities for our residents, the upgrading of a technical school to a technical community college, the construction and opening of a new technical community college campus in downtown Alexandria and an associated manufacturing training center, enhanced collaboration among the region's higher education partners, and the certification of all 10 parishes as ACT® Work Ready Communities. He has also provided oversight for the organization's award-winning entrepreneurial acceleration system, business recruitment and expansion, and food system and farmers market development.

Clinton served as Executive Director of Southern Growth Policies Board, a thirteen-state alliance based in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. At Southern Growth, he was a lead author on publications such as *Invented Here*, *The Mercedes and the Magnolia*, *The New Architecture of Rural Prosperity*, *Innovation with a Southern Accent*, and *Brave New South*. He was President of the Louisiana Partnership for Technology & Innovation and President of Gulf South Research Institute.



**Ed Conard - Workforce Account Executive, Client Relations
ACT®**

Ed Conard has been with ACT®, Inc since 2001. For the last 20 years he has worked on the WorkKeys® product, holding positions such as Product Manager, Partner Manager, Sr. Manager of Customer Care and now Account Executive for Workforce Products. Conard has a bachelor's degree from the University of Iowa (Go Hawks) where he majored in Political Science and History. Prior to coming to ACT®, Conard worked at an appliance manufacturer in international sales and forecasting, specializing in commercial and industrial cooking equipment.



Stacy Gunderman - Director of Administration
Future Fuel Chemical Company, Batesville, Arkansas

Stacy Gunderman is Director of Administration for Future Fuel Chemical Company. She received her B.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Arkansas and has been with the Batesville, Arkansas site through its transitions from Eastman Kodak to Eastman Chemical Company to Future Fuel Chemical Company, serving many roles within the plant. As Director of Administration, she oversees Human Resources, Training, and Communications and Public Affairs. She completed her Masters in Operational Management from the University of Arkansas in 2022.



Montgomery Hinton - College and Career Prep Specialist
Rankin County School District, Mississippi

Montgomery Hinton is a 30-year veteran of teaching who brings a diverse background, starting with his distinguished college education, spanning into various teaching experiences and teaching multiple genres at the high school level. Hinton has been in charge of creating a culture of college and career success for students across a range of avenues, including but not limited to the ACT® test, ACT® WorkKeys®, ASVAB, SAT, and PSAT.

Having coached a wide variety of sports, as well as teaching across a multitude of genres at the high school level, Hinton creates a unique approach to student engagement and enrichment that has seen consistent results at the student level, teacher level, schoolwide level, and district level. His diverse teaching background allows avenues for high achievement for all learners to be formed and sustained. This success model largely factors into the continued A rating in Rankin County, Mississippi's second-largest school district.



Lafe Jones, APR - Vice President
Louisiana Central

Lafe Jones is the Vice President of Louisiana Central. He oversees all industry relations including business recruitment, and business expansion and retention activities. He also oversees all workforce development initiatives. He brings more than 35 years of business planning, marketing and management experience to the organization. As a marketing and strategic planning consultant for more than 15 years, Jones served clients throughout the United States. He spent 15 years as CEO of a large medical practice with 12 doctors and offices in 13 locations throughout the state. In addition, he has served in leadership and management roles within both healthcare and higher education in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Jones has served on numerous local, regional, and state boards of professional organizations. He also speaks regularly at regional and national conferences.



Sharon Neal - Executive Director

Office of Economic Workforce Development/Workforce Operations Department Area 61

Sharon Neal was born and raised in Central Louisiana. She graduated from Bolton High School and received her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Louisiana College. She graduated with her master's degree in educational leadership from the University of Louisiana at Monroe. Neal is a retired teacher of 21 years with the Rapides Parish School Board and a former principal in the private school sector. After retiring, she began working as a youth case manager at the Rapides American Job Center helping at-risk youth. Six months later, she stepped into her new role as Director of the Office of Economic Workforce Development with Rapides Parish.



**Gino Perkins, CMRP, CAMA - Manager, Workforce Development
*Nissan North America***

Gino Perkins is an expert in Workforce Development and Leadership. He is a dynamic and influential leader with a passion for empowering individuals and organizations through workforce development. With a proven track record in guiding teams toward success, Perkins is recognized as a thought leader in the field. As the Workforce Development Manager at Nissan Motor Manufacturing, he has spearheaded innovative workforce initiatives, fostering growth and adaptability in today's ever-changing professional landscape. Drawing from his extensive experience in the automotive manufacturing industry in special roles such as maintenance shop floor management, global maintenance reinforcement, physical asset management and new department startups, Perkins brings a unique blend of strategic vision and hands-on expertise to the realm of workforce development. He strives to encourage management teams to rethink traditional approaches to leadership, talent acquisition, and professional growth. With a commitment to fostering inclusive and diverse workplaces, Perkins is dedicated to unlocking the full potential of individuals and teams.

A native of Mississippi, he holds an AAS in Electronics Engineering Technology as well as industry-recognized certifications including Global TMC Sr. Expert, Certified Asset Management Assessor, and Certified Maintenance and Reliability Professional.

Perkins' vision for his Learning Pathways team is to develop lifelong partnerships both internal and external that serve as the foundation for individual learner success and overall learning excellence.

Bronwyn Robertson - Assistant Director for WIOA Compliance

Mississippi Community College Board Office of Adult Education

Bronwyn Robertson serves as the Office of Adult Education's Assistant Director for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Compliance at the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) and oversees Mississippi's employability course, Smart Start, including ACT® WorkKeys®.



Prior to joining the MCCB in 2018, Robertson served as the Transition Specialist and Smart Start State Lead for Holmes Community College's Adult Education program. With over 18 years of community college experience, specifically in the workforce space, Robertson served seven as a WIA Coordinator (currently WIOA) and in 2016, transitioned full-time to adult education assisting students with career pathways while continuing to enhance community partnerships through workforce development efforts. Robertson's current position allows her to monitor as well as provide guidance and technical assistance to local programs as they work together identifying promising practices and comprehensive solutions for overall program effectiveness.

Robertson earned a B.S. in Social Work from Mississippi State University and a M.Ed. in Higher Education Leadership from Capella University.

Andrew Schwarz, Ph.D. - Professor, Stephenson Department of Entrepreneurship & Information Systems

Louisiana State University

Dr. Andrew Schwarz is a Professor of Information Systems and holds the E.J. Ourso Professorship in ISDS #2 in the E. J. Ourso College of Business at Louisiana State University. In his 20 years at LSU, Dr. Schwarz has published over 30 articles in top tier journals and was recognized locally, as one of the top 40 business leaders under the age of 40. He was honored internationally with a legacy award (termed ATLAS Award) by the Association for Information Systems. Recently, Dr. Schwarz was named as an AIS Distinguished Member-Cum Laude and is one of less than 200 professors globally to hold this designation.



At LSU, Dr. Schwarz's teaching focuses on the MBA program in the area of IT strategy. He teaches across all three programs, including daytime, evening, and online. In 2017, Dr. Schwarz received the Tiger Athletic Foundation Excellence in Teaching Award in the College of Business. This award recognizes tenured faculty who strive for high levels of teaching and recognizes professors who receive consistently high teaching evaluations.

Dr. Schwarz was one of the lead architects of the online MBA program at LSU and has delivered multiple courses. As one of the chief architects of the program, he was responsible for helping to design the curriculum and is one of the three professors to deliver the first set of courses. This placement recognizes his innovation and forward-thinking approach to the future of the classroom by the administrators in the college. Dr. Schwarz is the doctoral coordinator for the Stephenson Department of Entrepreneurship and Information Systems, where he oversees the Entrepreneurship and Information Systems Ph.D. program.



Susana Schowen - Secretary
Louisiana Workforce Commission

Susana Schowen is the newly appointed Secretary for the Louisiana Workforce Commission in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is committed to advancing workforce development initiatives that empower individuals, drive economic growth, and foster a thriving business environment. Schowen made significant contributions to Louisiana's economic and educational landscape during her tenure as Vice President of Education for Louisiana Community Technical College System (LCTCS) and showcased her innovative approaches to aligning education with workforce demands, ensuring the needs were met for business and industry and graduates were equipped with the skills needed for today's job market. She spearheaded strategic initiatives to bridge the gap between industry needs and workforce development during her time at LCTCS. Her contributions were instrumental in fostering partnerships between academia and industry, resulting in a more robust and adaptable workforce.

Schowen is a 1990 graduate of Wellesley College and a 1995 graduate of Columbia University, where she received her master's in physical chemistry. Schowen previously served as the Director of Workforce Initiatives for LED FastStart.



Kathy Smith - Principal
Grant High School

Kathy Smith has been a part of Louisiana's education system for 20 years. She has worked for the Grant Parish school system for 16 of those years serving as an English teacher, Assistant Principal, Secondary Supervisor, and Principal. As Secondary Supervisor, she worked with students, school administrators, and counselors in all areas of College and Career Readiness. She has supervised JumpStart Summer programs and scholarships for Grant Parish students helping them to achieve credentials and opportunities after graduation. Through the JumpStart 2.0 enhancement process, Smith has worked with the Louisiana FFA to add 2 credentialing opportunities for students within the Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources Pathway.

Smith lives in Grant Parish with her family. She has recently been named Principal of Grant High School where she hopes to continue to provide opportunities for students to ensure success after graduation.



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