

Equity Panelists, Biographical Sketches

Dr. Patricia Trujillo

Dr. Patricia Trujillo joined the New Mexico Higher Education Department as Deputy Secretary in November of 2020. She formerly served as founding director of the Office of Equity and Diversity at Northern New Mexico College since 2013, where she oversaw programming to address access and inclusion for historically underrepresented populations in higher education. Key initiatives included leading development of co-curricular assessment and student learning outcomes for cultural sustainability, creation of student support groups such as the Hermanas Juntas and Black and African American Student Organization, and oversight of the ¡Sostengal farm.

Born and raised in the Española Valley, Trujillo has dedicated her career to improving social engagement via critical education, social justice, and community-building. She has served on multiple commissions and boards, including the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, Tewa Women United, NewMexicoWomen.Org, and the Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation. Trujillo also has more than 15 years of experience in higher education and is a tenured professor at Northern New Mexico College. She has taught in the areas of Chicana/Chicano studies, Southwest literature, Indigenous history, and New Mexico history, and has published work in multiple academic books and journals.

She has a Ph.D. in U.S. Latina/Latino Literature from the University of Texas San Antonio, an M.A. in English from the University of Nebraska, and a B.A. in English with a supplemental major in Law and Society from New Mexico State University.

Dr. Dhanfu Elston

Dr. Dhanfu E. Elston (pronounced: dah-NEE-foo) serves as Complete College America's Chief of Staff and Senior Vice President for Strategy where he leads internal operations and strategic efforts to advance the organization's vision of creating a more effective, equitable, and student-centered higher education system. In addition to managing CCA's national external partnerships, he has led CCA's guided pathways initiatives, Purpose First career alignment strategy, 15 To Finish national campaign, and scaling standards to close institutional performance and equity gaps. Elston has also coordinated relationships with Governor's Offices, higher education state-wide systems, and national partners in their college completion efforts. He launched a national initiative with the Thurgood Marshall College Fund to amplify completion efforts at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and minority-serving institutions. Across his higher education career in academic and student affairs, Elston has created, implemented, and been a proponent of comprehensive success and retention programs that have garnered national attention. He has been recognized as a champion of college completion policy initiatives at institutions that educate highly diverse and underrepresented student populations.

Prior to his current role with CCA, Dr. Elston held the position of Executive Director of Student Success and Transition at Purdue University Calumet. Under Elston's leadership, Purdue Calumet (now Purdue Northwest) experienced exponential gains in first-year retention, graduation rates, and enrolled credit hours. In addition, enhancements made to campus-wide academic advisement processes led to the receipt of the EAB's inaugural Data-Driven Impact Award for utilization of predictive analytics.

Elston has also served Georgia State University, which is nationally recognized as a model for collegiate academic success, as the Faculty Assistant Director for Undergraduate Studies.

Earlier in his career, he held positions in Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at Georgia State and Clark Atlanta University where he led Greek Life, student activities, and leadership development functional areas. During his tenure at each institution, Dr. Elston held faculty appointments and was responsible for teaching and the development of first-year experience course curricula.

Dr. Elston earned a Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies from Georgia State University where he conducted research in student retention, intercultural relations, learning communities, leadership development, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. He earned both an M.A. in Educational Leadership and B.S. in Biology from Clark Atlanta University.

Elston is a member of and has held leadership roles in numerous professional associations, including Association of Fraternal & Leadership Values (Board Member), Southern Center for Broadening Participation in STEM, NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (former Chairperson of the African American Knowledge Community), NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, LeaderShape, Inc., Golden Key International Honour Society, and Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Honor Society. He is a Life Member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Kristin D. Hulquist, Partner and Co-founder, HCM Strategists

Kristin D. Hultquist is a nationally renowned expert in higher education policy and strategy development at the state and federal levels. She founded HCM because she believes in the power of policy solutions that integrate effective storytelling, rigorous analysis, sharp insights and politically sensitive strategy.

Kristin has built and continues to lead HCM's postsecondary practice, which enjoys a deep record of partnering with clients to advance and sustain evidence-based policy changes. This record includes helping create and manage Lumina Foundation's Strategy Labs, supporting attainment goal setting in 44 states, advising strategic finance change in fifteen states, and guiding strategic plan development in every region of the country. Kristin is routinely sought out by state, higher education and nonprofit leaders when they want to examine and refine their student-centered policies and practices. She has testified as an invited witness to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives during the 114th, 115th and 116th Congresses on federal financial aid reforms recommended by two initiatives she directed—the [American Dream 2.0](#) coalition and the [Doing Better for More Students technical report](#).

Kristin's belief in the transformative power of higher education opportunity is a direct result of her own educational experience. A Pell Grant recipient and the first college graduate in her family, Kristin earned her bachelor's degree in political science from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo and a master's degree in public policy from Georgetown University.

Ever conscious of the doors that good public policy opened for her, she previously served at the U.S. Department of Education as senior advisor to the Under Secretary of Education. In that role, Kristin helped implement Secretary Margaret Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education. This work led to a reframing of the national postsecondary education agenda around outcomes and the largest single-year increase in Pell Grants in more than thirty years. Kristin brought to her federal service a belief that innovative federal solutions come from state innovation – a perspective she gained while serving as the program director in the education division of the National Governors Association. She also directed the Washington, D.C. office of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, where she helped develop the first comparative 50-state report card on higher education performance, Measuring Up. Through

these roles, she cultivated a record of networking states for broad national attention and action, while bringing to light a new way of looking at high school and college graduation rates and affordability.

Kristin splits her time between Parker, Colorado and Alexandria, Virginia. Appointed by Governor Jared Polis to serve on the board of Colorado's largest Hispanic serving institution, the Metropolitan State University of Denver, she serves as vice chair and chair of the governance committee. She also serves on the board of Generation Hope, which provides policy advocacy and direct support to parenting students and their children.

Dr. Wil Del Pilar

Wil Del Pilar, Ph.D., serves as Ed Trust's vice president of higher education policy and practice. In this role, Wil spearheads Ed Trust's mission to highlight inequities and outline solutions in order to improve access, success, affordability, and completion in higher education for low-income students and students of color.

Prior to joining Ed Trust, Wil served in Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf's administration as deputy secretary of postsecondary and higher education, where he developed and implemented the state's strategic vision for higher education. Before joining Governor Wolf's team, Wil had experience in the Pennsylvania Department of Education, working as an executive assistant in the state's higher education office. In this role, he managed an array of services for the state, including the College Access Challenge Grant and the Pennsylvania Information Management System.

Aside from working for Pennsylvania's Department of Education in higher education policy roles, Wil has held senior development positions, as the director of development at Pennsylvania State University and at the University of Florida's MACHEN Florida Opportunity Scholars Program. In both positions, he fought to secure funding to support access and success initiatives for historically underrepresented students.

In addition to his policy and development experience, Wil has a wealth of institutional experience, working in admissions at Chapman University in Orange, California, and the University of California Santa Cruz, as a financial aid counselor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, and as a research assistant at Penn State.

Wil holds a doctorate in higher education/higher education administration from The Pennsylvania State University, a master's degree from California State University-Dominguez Hills, and a bachelor's degree from Chapman University.