

*Salve Regina University
Sixth Annual Mercy Summit
Friday, April 17, 2026*



**SALVE REGINA
UNIVERSITY**

*Structures that Serve:
Accessibility in Action*

A large graphic consisting of three overlapping circles on a teal background. The circles are dark blue, orange, and black. The text '6TH ANNUAL MERCY SUMMIT' is centered within the black circle. '6TH ANNUAL' is in yellow, 'MERCY' is in white, and 'SUMMIT' is in white.

**6TH ANNUAL
MERCY
SUMMIT**

Structures that Serve: Accessibility in Action

The year's summit focuses on ways that institutions can serve people and communities with accessibility needs. What does it look like to structure our spaces with accessibility as an intention? What are the experiences of individuals with unseen challenges? We invite participants to join us in an examination of historical barriers, contemporary disparities, and innovative strategies that promote belonging, equity, and inclusion.

Summit Learning Goals

As a result of attending today's summit, participants will be able to:

- 1. Develop a deeper understanding of structural barriers that exclude people with accessibility needs.*
- 2. Gain confidence in fostering inclusive practices across academic, professional, and community settings.*
- 3. Learn strategies to promote accessibility, equity, and advocacy in their personal and professional lives.*
- 4. Join a collaborative community committed to advancing disability awareness and inclusion.*

SUMMIT SCHEDULE

8:30 - 9 a.m.	Optional Continental Breakfast	O'Hare 160
9 - 9:10 a.m.	Invocation Dr. Theresa Ladrigan-Whelpley Vice President for Mission Integration	O'Hare 160
9:10 - 9:20 a.m.	Welcome Dr. Kelli J. Armstrong, President	O'Hare 160
9:20 - 10:20 a.m.	Keynote Speakers: Carrie W. Miranda and Lilly Marino	O'Hare 160
10:30 - 11:20 a.m.	Mercy Session 1	
11:30 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.	Mercy Session 2	O'Hare 160
12:30 - 1:20 p.m.	Lunch/ICDP Presentation and Award Ceremony	O'Hare 160
1:30 - 2:20 p.m.	Mercy Session 3	
2:30 - 3 p.m.	Reflection and Debrief	O'Hare 260

Educational Concurrent Sessions

Session #	Name of the Presenter	Title of the Presentation	Room #
1 10:30 – 11:20 a.m.	Dr. Katie Brennan	Accessibility vs. Cure: Exploring Cultural Attitudes to (Dis)ability	O'Hare 205
1 10:30 – 11:20 a.m.	Dr. Matthew Taylor	Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	O'Hare 265
1 10:30 – 11:20 a.m.	Mahealani Dunn and Carolyn I. Morey	Panel on Accessibility Tools and Strategies	O'Hare 210
1 10:30 – 11:20 a.m.	Dr. Kimberly Behan and students	Accessibility Designs from Future Teachers	O'Hare 206
1 10:30 – 11:20 a.m.	Dr. Tara Brooke Watkins	Story Circle 1	O'Hare 117
1 10:30 – 11:20 a.m.	Jim Mournighan	Story Circle 2	O'Hare 121
2 11:30 a.m.– 12:20 p.m.	Isaac Davis	A Phenomenological Approach to Autism and Empathy	O'Hare 210
2 11:30 a.m.– 12:20 p.m.	Michael L. Dotolo	What Accessibility and UDL Means in the Canvas LMS	O'Hare 205
2 11:30 a.m.– 12:20 p.m.	Laura Kcira and Leah Palazzo	From Documentation to Implementation: How SAS Supports Equitable Learning	O'Hare 265

Session #	Name of the Presenter	Title of the Presentation	Room #
2 11:30 a.m.– 12:20 p.m.	Dr. Emma Grauerholz-Fisher Dr. Stephanie Jones	What You Need to Know About Neurodiversity	O'Hare 263
2 11:30 a.m.– 12:20 p.m.	Dr. Tara Brooke Watkins	Story Circle 1 (continued)	O'Hare 109
2 11:30 a.m.– 12:20 p.m.	Jim Mournighan	Story Circle 2 (continued)	O'Hare 120
3 1:30 – 2:20 p.m.	Mia Rafanelli	Invisible: You See Me, but Don't Know Me	O'Hare 263
3 1:30 – 2:20 p.m.	Dr. Craig Condella and student panel	Growing Access: Building an Inclusive Community Garden at Thompson Middle School	O'Hare 106
3 1:30 – 2:20 p.m.	Dr. Madeleine Esch	Accessing Creativity/Creating Accessibility	O'Hare 141
3 1:30 – 2:20 p.m.	Jim Mournighan	Campus Accessibility Walk	O'Hare 209
3 1:30 – 2:20 p.m.	Casey Weibust, Katherine Thompson, Lilly Marino, and Melissa Seitz	Looking Upwards – Art for All: Weaving Together	O'Hare 218

Mercy Sessions Details

Session 1, Room 117

Title: Accessibility vs. Cure: Exploring Cultural Attitudes to (Dis)ability

Presenter: Dr. Katie Brennan

Presentation Overview:

This interactive workshop examines the assumption that body-minds labeled as “broken” must be fixed. Drawing on Eli Clare’s concept of “cure” from *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*, participants will question whether cure should be the primary response to disability. The session shifts the focus toward accessibility—designing institutions, spaces, and technologies to include people with disabilities—and invites discussion about how accessible features benefit everyone. Together, participants will explore how to move from a culture of cure toward a more accessible world.

Session 1, Room 121

Title: Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Presenter: Dr. Matthew Taylor

Presentation Overview:

This presentation introduces Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a framework for creating inclusive, flexible, and rigorous learning environments in higher education. As faculty increasingly support students with diverse learning needs, UDL offers practical strategies to reduce barriers to access and engagement. Participants will be introduced to the three core principles of UDL—multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression—and explore how these can be applied to common course components such as lectures, readings, discussions, and assessments. Through examples and guided reflection, the session highlights small, actionable changes that can significantly improve student learning outcomes. Attendees will leave with a foundational understanding of UDL and practical strategies they can implement immediately in their own courses.

Session 1, Room 210

Title: Accessibility Tools and Strategies

First Presenter: Mahealani Dunn

Presentation Overview:

Speaking from a student's experience with faculty, Mahea shares some strategies she has found helpful when navigating neurodivergence with assignments, class work, and conversation.

Second Presenter: Carolyn I. Morey

Presentation Overview:

This 12–15 minute presentation introduces the importance of accessible PDFs for students, faculty, and professionals. It highlights common barriers—such as scanned documents without selectable text and visual clutter—and explains how these issues affect users who rely on text-to-speech tools. Participants will see accessibility tools in action, including Natural Reader, and learn simple strategies for locating and converting PDFs into more accessible formats. The session aims to equip attendees with practical steps to create and use documents that support more inclusive learning and professional environments.

Session 1, Room 206

Title: Accessibility Designs from Future Teachers

Presenters: Dr. Behan, Ed.D., Education Dept. Chair,
Tamsin Nicholson, Elementary & Special Education (Junior) and
Delia Bailey, Elementary Education Major (Senior)

Presentation Overview:

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), accessible pedagogy, curriculum design, student support structures, and equitable pathways through education. This 45-minute session will provide the participants with an overview of UDL and hear from Education students on how they design lessons that provide a range of supports in a variety of inclusive settings. Participants will have time to learn through the work of future teachers on the UDL principles, representation, expression, and engagement. In addition, participants will deepen their understanding of how using UDL fosters an environment of equity and belonging.

Session 2, Room 210

Title: A Phenomenological Approach to Autism and Empathy

Presenter: Issac Davis

Presentation Overview:

“A Phenomenological Approach to Autism and Empathy” examines the common claim that Autistic people lack empathy. Drawing on phenomenology and the work of scholars such as Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Michel Foucault, the presentation critiques earlier theories from figures like Eugen Bleuler, Hans Asperger, and Simon Baron-Cohen. It argues that these frameworks can dehumanize Autistic people and shape persistent social, political, and legal biases. Using phenomenological methods, the talk seeks to bracket these assumptions and offer a more nuanced understanding of autism and empathy.

Session 2, Room 109

Title: What Accessibility and UDL Means in the Canvas LMS

Presenter: Michael Dotolo, Academic Technologist

Presentation Overview:

In this session, we will be reviewing the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, and how it relates to Universal Learning Design (UDL) within the Canvas Learning Management System (CMS). Participants will be provided with suggestions for developing course content which promotes the principles of UDL while complying with accessibility guidelines.

Session 2, Room 120

Title: From Documentation to Implementation: How SAS Supports Equitable Learning

Presenters: Laura Kcira and Leah Palazzo

Presentation Overview:

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) serves to ensure Salve's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA). In doing so, the goal is to ensure that accommodation provides an equitable experience for students with documented disabilities in a way that is fair and reasonable for both students and faculty alike. We will review the process for student registration with SAS, including review and approval of accommodations and how they are often translated into the academic setting. This will include discussions about specific accommodations, faculty and student rights, and collaborative responsibilities.

Session 2, Room 263

Title: What You Need to Know About Neurodiversity

Presenters: Emma Grauerholz-Fisher, Assistant Professor of Psychology and
Stephanie Jones, Assistant Professor of Psychology

Presentation Overview:

This session provides an overview of neurodiversity, including common diagnoses such as autism spectrum disorder and ADHD. Designed for students, staff, and faculty with limited prior knowledge, the session introduces the neurodiversity movement, the social and medical models of disability, and current language and terminology. Participants will also explore how neurodiversity may present in college students and discuss strategies for supporting neurodiverse learners. The talk will be semi-structured, with opportunities for questions and discussion.

Session 3, Room 263

Title: Invisible: You See Me, but Don't Know Me

Presenter: Mia Rafanelli

Presentation Overview:

This presentation will share a powerful multimedia narrative of living with an “invisible” chronic illness and disability. It will trace the presenter’s journey from diagnosis and intensive treatment to the social and emotional realities of being a student at Salve, highlighting experiences of isolation, stigma, and misunderstanding. It will conclude with a personal reflection calling for greater awareness, empathy, and a more inclusive campus culture.

Session 3, Room 106

Title: Growing Access: Building an Inclusive Community Garden at Thompson Middle School

Moderator: Dr. Craig Condella

Presenters: Maria Barragan, Olivia Costa, Kate Markowski and Sophiabelle Nebroski

Presentation Overview:

Students from Dr. Condella’s Environmental Justice course will present their work with Aquidneck Community Table to develop a community garden at Thompson Middle School. The project explores how gardens can be designed as spaces of accessibility, education, and community connection. Students will discuss plans for physically accessible garden structures, strategies for connecting middle school students to food systems, ways to engage families and community members, and efforts to create a culturally inclusive garden through plant choices and multilingual signage. The session will highlight the role of community-engaged learning and environmental justice in creating spaces that are accessible, educational, and responsive to diverse communities.

Session 3, Room 141

Title: Accessing Creativity/Creating Accessibility

Presenter: Dr. Madeleine Esch

Presentation Overview:

This session explores the connection between creativity and accessibility through student journalism and creative work. Students from COM271 will conduct person-on-the-street interviews on campus accessibility, while creative challenge submissions—ranging from writing and art to video and audio—will reflect the theme “accessing creativity/creating accessibility.” Selected works will be showcased, with student creators invited to share their projects. Attendees will gain insight into how students understand and express accessibility and be inspired to see themselves as creators of accessible, inclusive narratives.

Session 3, Room 209

Title: Campus Accessibility Walk

Presenter: Jim Mournighan

Presentation Overview:

Join us for a walking tour around campus as we take a fresh look at spaces we pass every day. Even if you know the buildings well, do you know where the accessible entrances are? Come along as we explore and see how accessible our campus really is.

Session 3, Room 218

Title: Art for All: Weaving Together

Presenters: Carrie W. Miranda and Lilly Marino

Presentation Overview:

In this workshop, we'll explore how art can be a bridge to inclusion, offering everyone a place to belong. Through shared creative weaving/looming, we'll discover how accessible art forms can spark collaboration, expand our perspectives, and remind us of the power of shared creativity.

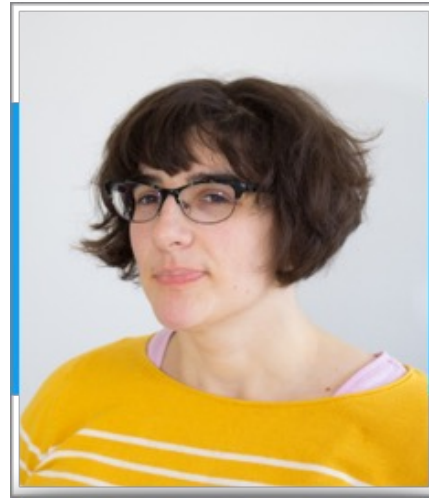


Keynote Speakers



Carrie W. Miranda

Carrie W. Miranda has served as executive director of Looking Upwards since 2004. A bold, forward-thinking leader, known for facing challenges head-on and opening new possibilities, she brings more than 30 years of experience in the field of developmental disabilities and a reputation for engaging people's talents to create focused momentum toward goals. Honored Salve Regina University's Distinguished Graduate Alumni in 2021 and recognized by Providence Business News as one of Rhode Island's Forty Under Forty, she has consistently demonstrated her commitment to strengthening communities. Carrie has held numerous leadership roles, including current vice president and past president and secretary of the Community Provider Network of Rhode Island, and she has represented the state in both the American Network of Community Options and Resources and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. She holds a Master of Science in health services administration from Salve Regina University and is an alumna of Leadership Rhode Island.



Lilly Marino

Lilly is a multidisciplinary artist from Warren, RI. In addition to being an established artist and a small business owner, Lilly is also a year-round raspberry mocha iced coffee enthusiast. Much like her coffee order, Lilly is an energetic force whose bold personality is mirrored in her colorful creations. Her work is immediately recognizable for its sense of drama. It is evident upon meeting Lilly that her natural disposition and personal style inform her artistic expression. While Lilly's background is originally in jewelry design, her creativity blossomed anew as she began experimenting with fiber arts. She first learned to weave using a lap loom and has since expanded her practice to using rigid heddle looms and tabletop looms. From Plain Weave to Soumak stitch, Lilly employs a range of techniques that fill her work with as much character and zest as she possesses.

Ground Rules for the Day

- **Speak Your Truth:**
Share from your own experiences. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
- **Seek to Understand:**
Actively listen, before responding. Another participant's experience may not look like yours at Salve.
- **Respect Others' Experience:**
We may have different OR similar stories to share, and contexts to draw from. All are legitimate.
- **Disagree Without Discord:**
Disagreement is expected. HOWEVER, approach unexpected ideas with curiosity, not argument.
- **Share the Air:**
Make room for all voices to be heard, and don't dominate the conversation. Participate to the fullest of your ability — community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
- **Power and Privilege:**
Acknowledgement of power and privilege differences among members in the roles they hold outside of group. Although members may hold different positions of power and privilege on campus, all are equal members within the group.

Sources: *Brene Brown Discussion Guides and Guide for Setting Ground Rules*



