

Robert Jason Cottrell

DrJCottrell.com

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy, Higher Education Policy and Leadership, December 2015

The University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia

Cognates: Research and Social Policy

Dissertation: *The Role of a University College on Student Engagement*

Master of Education, Administration and Supervision, December 2002

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia

Bachelor of Science, Sociology and Anthropology, May 2001

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

The Office of Postsecondary Education works to strengthen the capacity of colleges and universities to promote reform, innovation, and improvement in postsecondary education, promote and expand access to postsecondary education and increase college completion rates for America's students.

Data Coordinator, Office of Postsecondary Education

2024 – 2025

- Serve as a strategic advisor to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Management and Planning, coordinating data initiatives that support planning and performance goals.
- Lead standardization of data collection, reporting, visualization, and analysis procedures.
- Implement data governance policies strengthening a data-driven culture and strategic asset use.
- Cultivate partnerships across OPE and with external federal partners.
- Represent OPE on Department's performance improvement group, influencing enterprise data strategy.
- Define and track key performance indicators aligned with the Department's strategic plan.
- Provide strategic data and performance support for 60+ federal grant programs distributing over \$1B annually to institutions, students, and community organizations.

Lead Research Analyst, Office of Postsecondary Education

2016 – 2024

- Principal research advisor to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Higher Education Programs.
- Led research and evaluation projects to assess and strengthen institutional capacity grants.
- Managed eligibility process for Titles III and V grants serving minority- and low-income institutions.
- Redesigned and modernized performance reporting for Titles III, V, and VII, improving data clarity and program oversight.
- Represented OPE as liaison to the Department's Evidence-Leadership Group, aligning program evaluation with agency-wide goals.
- Authored and submitted Congressional research and eligibility reports on Titles III and V programs, informing legislative oversight and funding decisions.
- Supervised a team of two staff and two interns, mentoring junior analysts and overseeing grant-related data operations.
- Delivered training and technical assistance to grantees on eligibility, reporting, and compliance.
- Created guidance and documentation for federally approved information collections, ensuring OMB compliance and clear data standards.
- Interpreted federal education statutes and regulations in coordination with legal counsel.
- Supported over 40 federal programs that allocate millions in grants annually to postsecondary institutions nationwide.

Selected Achievements (2016–2025)

- Led the modernization of the designation process determining institutional eligibility for Titles III and V grant programs (Minority-Serving Institutions) and the Title IV federal cost-share waiver.
- Collaborated with the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development to establish operational frameworks and methodologies for allocating COVID relief funds.
- Designed program priorities, requirements, and definitions for Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grants, including a \$2 million, three-year Center of Excellence in Spatial Computing (CESC) grant and a \$100 million, five-year Research and Development Infrastructure (RDI) grant supporting HBCUs, TCCUs, and other MSIs.
- Assisted in developing the Department’s Learning Agenda under the Evidence Act, partnering with the Evidence Leadership Group to advance evidence-building in postsecondary education.
- Supported OPE data initiatives in collaboration with the Office of the Chief Data Officer on the Data Backbone, Data.Gov, and the Department’s Data Maturity Assessment.

North Carolina Central University, Durham, North Carolina

North Carolina Central is a public, historically Black master’s university with an undergraduate full-time enrollment of 6,500 students and a graduate enrollment of 1,800 students.

Interim Director & Associate Director, New Student Services

2011 – 2015

- Key member of the Enrollment Management leadership team.
- Led the design and execution of orientation and first-year experience programs impacting 1,000+ incoming students annually.
- Advised the NCCU Parents and Family Association, fostering parent engagement to support student retention and success.
- Oversaw departmental marketing, communications, and assessment strategies, leveraging surveys and digital platforms to improve student engagement.
- Supervised a team of 40+, including full-time staff, graduate and undergraduate student leaders, and national interns, to deliver comprehensive orientation programming.
- Managed a \$200K budget and implemented cost-saving strategies that reduced expenditures by \$85K in FY15 without compromising program quality.

Selected Achievements

- Developed and implemented a strategic plan for New Student Services aligning with national CAS standards for orientation and student transition programming. Assessed and enhanced the transfer orientation process, doubling student enrollment guarantees by the May 1 deadline.
- Established and led a collaborative Week of Welcome featuring creative and inclusive programs from Move-In through Convocation.
- Oversaw enhancements to the summer reading program by incorporating small group discussions aligned with the University’s Quality Enhancement Plan.
- Created a comprehensive communications plan for new students, improving engagement with students, parents, and families through an Orientation Guide, transition planner, weekly e-newsletter, parents and family calendar, semester postcards, and ongoing publication of the NCCU Parent Guide.
- Provided peak-period support to Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid by processing applications, leading regional admitted-student events (Eagle Days) in collaboration with partnering K12 school districts, and assisting students with financial aid navigation during orientation and the first week of classes.
- Increased Parents and Family Weekend attendance from 40 to over 400 participants through targeted marketing strategies and implementation of a registration fee.

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia

Virginia Commonwealth is a public, comprehensive doctoral university with high levels of research activity and community engagement, and an undergraduate full-time enrollment of 24,000 students and graduate full-time enrollment of 8,900 students.

Director, New Student Programs**2008 – 2010**

- Served on the University College leadership team, reporting to the Associate Dean.
- Oversaw new student enrollment coordination across nine colleges and schools, ensuring a seamless transition for diverse academic disciplines.
- Managed a diverse team of 60+, including full-time, graduate, and undergraduate student staff, to deliver university-wide orientation programs.
- Led assessment strategy for University College programs, establishing outcomes and data-informed improvements to new student initiatives.
- Developed and managed a \$700K annual budget, aligning resource allocation with institutional priorities and program outcomes.

Selected Achievements

- Contributed to the establishment of the University Transfer Center by collaborating with local community colleges, editing the online transfer guide, creating the University's transfer equivalency tool, and maintaining a military transfer credit database.
- Redesigned New Student Orientation by expanding the mandatory first-year program from one day to two days and enhancing the transfer orientation program to better address the unique needs of transfer students.
- Developed and implemented strategic programs for new students, including living-learning communities including the summer bridge program, Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs), New Student Convocation, Parents and Family programs, a new core curriculum, and an attendance tracking system for core curriculum courses.

Coordinator of Supplemental Instruction**2004 – 2008**

- Served on the leadership team of the Campus Learning Center, reporting to the Director.
- Founded and directed all aspects of VCU's Supplemental Instruction program, from initial design and staffing to evaluation and outcomes assessment for high-enrollment STEM courses.
- Supervised a team of 50 SI Leaders and 4 Coordinators delivering peer-led academic support across high-enrollment gateway courses.
- Position and program funded by a \$1.8M Title III Grant (Project PRISM) to increase success in science and math through structured academic support programs.

Selected Achievements

- Established the university's first campus-wide Supplemental Instruction (SI) program, which grew to over 50 student leaders, 160+ weekly study sessions, and 250,000+ student contact hours per semester. Improved participants' academic performance and increased persistence rates.
- Contributed to the creation of University College, the Core Curriculum, and the Summer Reading Program by supporting planning, policy design, and program implementation.

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Henrico, Virginia

J. Sargeant Reynolds is a two-year public community college with an enrollment of 13,000 students.

Coordinator for Student Life**2003 – 2004**

- Designed and implemented student life programming across three distinct community college campuses, increasing student engagement and leadership development opportunities.
- Restructured student organization governance and funding models to enhance accountability and sustainability across campuses.
- Organized campuswide Student Life Leadership Retreat to train and engage student government and organization leaders.
- Managed a \$108K budget supporting student engagement initiatives, leadership development, and co-curricular programming.

Selected Achievements

- Established foundational student life policies and procedures for campus programs and organizations, published in the inaugural *Student Life Handbook*.
- Coordinated a student activity fee budget reduction from \$226,000 to \$108,000 while maintaining essential programs and supporting organizational continuity.

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia

Financial Aid Counselor

2001 – 2003

- Advised students and families on federal, state, and institutional financial aid policies, ensuring compliance and promoting access to higher education.
- Co-supervised a team of six federal work-study students supporting front-desk advising, records processing, and financial aid document intake.

Selected Achievement

- Contributed to the administration and disbursement of over \$130 million in financial aid, supporting undergraduate, graduate, and professional students through federal, state, and local programs.

SPECIALIZED TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

- Microsoft 365 (Word, Outlook, Excel, PowerPoint, Power BI, Teams, and OneNote)
- Conducting original qualitative and quantitative research with analytical software (SPSS, NVIVO)
- Federal policy development and analysis
- Authoring Congressional reports
- Student information systems (Banner, SIS+, Simplicity)
- Project and contract management
- Program evaluation and assessment
- Strategic planning
- Certified Coordinator of Supplemental Instruction
- *Federal Security Clearance*: Public Trust

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Association of University Professors

2002 – 2008

Monroe Park Campus Representative

2004 – 2006

ACPA-College Student Educators International

2009 – Present

Vice President-Elect for Membership

2025 – 2028

Presidential Task Force on ACPA Conventions

2022 – 2023

Presidential Task Force on 21st Century Employment in Higher Education

2022

ACPA22 Convention Chair (St. Louis, Missouri)

2020 – 2022

ACPA19 Co-Chair, Sponsored Programs

2018 – 2019

Coordinator for ACPA Chapters

2014 – 2017

Vice Chair for Research, Commission for Student Involvement

2011 – 2012

Candidate for Chair, Standing Committee for LGBT Awareness

2010

Director of Education, Standing Committee for LGBT Awareness

2009 – 2011

Volunteer: Program Reviewer, Cluster Leader, Convention Volunteer, Committee Member

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators

2002 – 2011

National Campus Learning Center Association

2004 – 2008

Editorial Board, The Learning Assistance Review

2005 – 2008

National Orientation Directors Association

2012 – 2016

North Carolina College Personnel Association

2010 – Present

President (Elect, President, Past)

2012 – 2015

Member-At-Large for Diversity and Social Justice

2011 – 2012

Virginia College Personnel Association

2008 – 2010

Volunteer, Job Search Boot Camp

2008

AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2024** ACPA Foundation Diamond Honoree
2024 Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition, Representative Jamie Raskin
2022 Congressional Citation, Senator Chris Van Hollen
2022 ACPA Presidential Citation
2015 ACPA Outstanding Experienced Professional in Admissions, Orientation, and First-Year Experience (11+ Years)
2014 NODA Award for Excellence in Design: Outstanding Novelty Item
2014 ACPA State Division Presidents' Star Award
2013 ACPA Inaugural Institute for Aspiring Senior Student Affairs Officers
2013 ACPA Annuit Coeptis Emerging Professional
2013 University of Virginia Alton L. Taylor Award for Professional Development
2013 HRC North Carolina Nominee for Leader in LGBT Equality Award
2012 ACPA Graduate Student Research & Innovation Award for Commuter Students & Adult Learners
2007 VCU Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute
2005 VCU First Year Student Services Recognition for Extraordinary Contribution
2004 UMKC Supplemental Instruction Supervisor Certification

TEACHING

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

SDV 100: College Success Skills

Virginia Commonwealth University

VCU 101/UNIV 101: Introduction to Virginia Commonwealth University

VCU 102/UNIV 102: Introduction to Student Success/Mindset for Academic Success

HONR 399: Harry Potter and the Matter of Diversity

PUBLICATIONS

Report on 21st Century Employment in Higher Education. (2022). ACPA-College Student Educators International. ACPA Presidential Task Force on 21st Century Employment in Higher Education.

Ali, S., **Cottrell, J.**, Mayfield, M., and Wallace, J. (2023). *What are the needs of today's college students: stakeholder essays.* In N. Y. Gulley (Ed.), *Multiple perspectives on college students: needs, challenges, and opportunities* (1st ed., pp. 89-101.). Routledge.

INVITED SPEAKER

Professional Development

Brown, P. G., Cottrell, R. J., Wright, J. L., Robsham, K., Wall, V. A. Leaving the Academy: Working in Higher Ed Adjacent Careers. American College Personnel Association Convention. Columbus, Ohio. March 2017.

*Cottrell, R. J. Directing Your Professional Development: A Guide for Professional Growth. North Carolina College Personnel Association Conference. Raleigh, North Carolina. October 2014.

Cottrell, R. J. True Life: My Life as a Student Affairs Professional. National Careers in Student Affairs Month. North Carolina Central University. Durham, North Carolina. October 2014.

Todd, D. ACPA Aspiring SSAO Institute: Highlights from the Inaugural Year. American College Personnel Association Conference. Indianapolis, Indiana. March 2014.

Tregoning, M. E. Find Your Way in ACPA: Your Guide to Getting Involved. American College Personnel Association Conference. Indianapolis, Indiana. March 2014.

*Plenary Address

PRESENTATIONS

Research, Evaluation, and Assessment

Cottrell, R. J. Creating a Culture of Evaluation and Assessment through Logic Models. American College Personnel Association Convention. Columbus, Ohio. March 2017.

Cottrell, R. J. Title III APR Data System Technical Assistance. National Association of Historically Black College and University Title III Administrators. Jackson, Mississippi. June 2019.

Cottrell, R. J. 2017 Title III Annual Performance Reports. National Association of Historically Black College and University Title III Administrators. Arlington, Virginia. October 2017.

Cottrell, R. J. 2017 Title III Annual Performance Reports. Hispanic Serving Institutions Project Directors' Annual Meeting. Arlington, Virginia. October 2017.

Lamba-Nieves, N., Cottrell, R. J. Title III Funding. McAllister and Quinn Student Success Workshop. Washington, D.C. October 2016.

Lamba-Nieves, N., Cottrell, R. J. Title III Funding. Conference for Community College Grant Professionals. Washington, D.C. November 2017.

Social Justice

Cottrell, R. J. Did I Say Something Wrong? Propelling Undergraduate Students Higher Symposium. Durham, North Carolina. December 2012.

Cottrell, R. J. Closing the Diversity Gap: Did I Say Something Wrong? North Carolina College Personnel Association LEAD Conference. Greenville, North Carolina. February 2012.

Cottrell, R. J. You Matter. North Carolina Central University Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Durham, North Carolina. February 2012.

Cottrell, R. J. Be More Than Supportive: Developing Allies for Justice and Care I. American College Personnel Association Conference. Baltimore, Maryland. March 2011.

Cottrell, R. J. Be More Than Supportive: Developing Allies for Justice and Care II. American College Personnel Association Conference. Baltimore, Maryland. March 2011.

Cottrell, R. J. Be More Than Supportive: Developing Allies for Justice and Care III. American College Personnel Association Conference. Baltimore, Maryland. March 2011.

Doxey, T. M. & Cottrell, R. J. Ageism and Classism. NCCU Housing and Residential Life In-Service Training. Durham, North Carolina. March 2014

Student Success and Transition

Cottrell, R. J. The Role of a University College on Student Engagement. Poster Presentation. American College Personnel Association Convention. Columbus, Ohio. March 2017.

Cottrell, R. J. How University College at Virginia Commonwealth University Affected First-Year Student Engagement. Maryland College Personnel Association Fall Conference, Lutherville-Timonium, Maryland. November 2015.

Cottrell, R. J. Preliminary Results: A Study of Differential Treatment Effects on First-Time Freshmen Student Engagement at Virginia Commonwealth University. NCCPA Research Symposium, Boone, North Carolina. February 2013.

Cottrell, R. J. Commuter Student Engagement and a Structured First-Year College. American College Personnel Association Conference. Baltimore, Maryland. March 2011.

Cottrell, R. J. A Case Study of Virginia Commonwealth University's Supplemental Instruction Program. International Conference on Supplemental Instruction. Orlando, Florida. May 2008.

Leadership

Breeden, R.L., Domingue, A.D., Cottrell, R.J., Davis, J., Dobbs, A.M., Wright, E.P. You Won't Break Our Soul: Re-Evaluating Employment for Entry-Level Professionals. New Orleans, Louisiana. March 2023.

Cottrell, R. J. Roundtable: Inspiring Communities – ACPA Involvement through State Divisions. American College Personnel Association. Las Vegas, Nevada. March 2013.

Cottrell, R. J. Leadership for a Better U. North Carolina College Personnel Association LEAD Conference. Greenville, North Carolina. February 2012.

Cottrell, R. J. and Morrison, H. A. Professional Development Through State Organizations. North Carolina HBCU Housing Conference. Durham, North Carolina. January 2014.

Media Engagement

Education Cuts

Featured guest, *Student Affairs Now* podcast – “I work(ed) at the Department of Education” (April 2025)

Interviewed, *ABC News* – “Emotional Education Department ‘clap-outs’ celebrate departed federal employees (March 28, 2025)

Interviewed, *FEDSCOOP* – “What the dismantling of the Education Department means for its data” (April 22, 2025)

Interviewed, *MSNBC Town Hall* – “100 Days of Trump: Forced Out Federal Workers” – segment: “An enormous hit to the American public” (May 2025)

Interviewed, *Katy Tur Reports* – Impact of staffing cuts at the Department of Education (July 2025)

Featured, *Time* – “This Education Department Official Lost His Job. Here’s What He Says is at Risk” (July 18, 2025)

Interviewed, *USA Today* – “Fired Education Department workers say the ‘fight isn’t over’” (July 17, 2025)

Interviewed, *USA Today* – “Trump just made it harder to close the Education Department” (July 20, 2025)

Featured, *NPR Education* (August 1, 2025)

Interviewed, *MSNBC with Ana Cabrera* – “Laid off Department of Education worker speaks out on Trump admin’s shakeup” (August 2025)

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Girls on the Run Montgomery County	2025
VCU Rams for PRIDE Executive Council	2025
Partnership for Animal Welfare	2024
VCU Rams for PRIDE Steering Committee	2024
Human Rights Campaign North Carolina Steering Committee	2010
Richmond Jaycees	2006 – 2010
Sigma Alpha Epsilon Virginia Chi Advisor	2004 – 2010
Stop Child Abuse Now	2004 – 2005
Mayor's Committee for Youth in the City	2002 – 2003
Planned Parenthood: Straight Talk	2001
Global Community Service: Honduras (Alma College)	1999
Alpha Phi Omega: Alma College	1998 – 1999