

WITNESS BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Bridget Burns
Chief Executive Officer
University Innovation Alliance

Bridget Burns is the founding Chief Executive Officer of the University Innovation Alliance (UIA), a national consortium of 19 public research universities that has transformed how institutions collaborate to improve student success and economic mobility. Since its launch in 2014, UIA member institutions have produced more than 180,000 additional graduates above baseline projections, increased the number of graduates from low-income backgrounds by 51 percent, and more than doubled the number of graduates from historically underrepresented backgrounds. She has helped the UIA become a nationally recognized model for helping universities innovate together, scale proven solutions, and openly share what works across higher education.

Working in partnership with the presidents and chancellors who govern the Alliance, Dr. Burns helped build the UIA into higher education's national testbed for innovation, generating early evidence on practices such as predictive analytics, proactive advising, completion grants, AI-enabled student support, and career readiness strategies that later spread across the sector. Today, UIA institutions collectively serve more than 570,000 students and work together to address shared challenges that no single campus can solve alone.

Dr. Burns advises university presidents, system chancellors, policymakers, and national funders on large-scale institutional transformation, workforce preparation, and strategies to improve educational and economic outcomes for students. In 2025, she received the Clark Kerr Award from the Academic Senate of the University of California, Berkeley, one of higher education's most distinguished honors. She has been named one of the "16 Most Innovative People in Higher Education" by Washington Monthly, and her work has been featured in The New York Times, The Washington Post, 60 Minutes, Fast Company, and in the documentary Unlikely.

Before helping launch the University Innovation Alliance, she was an American Council on Education Fellow at Arizona State University and held senior leadership roles within the Oregon University System, including Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor. Originally from rural Montana, she began her higher education journey at a community college with the support of a Pell Grant. She earned a Doctorate in Higher Education Leadership and Policy from Vanderbilt University, as well as a master's degree in Public Policy and a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Oregon State University.

University Innovation Alliance member institutions:

Arizona State University (ASU)

Georgia State University (GSU)

Iowa State University (ISU)

Michigan State University (MSU)

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T)

Oregon State University

Purdue University

Temple University

University at Buffalo (SUNY)

University of Central Florida (UCF)

University of Colorado Denver

University of Illinois Chicago (UIC)

University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)

University of Massachusetts Amherst

University of New Mexico (UNM)

University of South Carolina

University of Utah

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)

University of California, Riverside (UCR)