



2026 Educator/Practitioner Conference Summary Report

Attendees

Chelsea Abella
Inaki Alday
Pedro Alfaro
Mike Alvarado
Craig Aquart
Gorham Bird
Jah Blackman
Riley Calderon
Jassen Callender
Elizabeth Camargo
Jason Chandler
John Cothran
Greg Durrell
Chris Elberson
John Folan
Jeremy Fretts
Christina Guterrez
Eric Harris
Naomi Harrison
Rick Thompson

Justin Hiles
David Hill
Darren James
Katherine Kennon
Lorena Knezevic
Olga Kusche-Iglesias
Mark Marine
Kristen Mauch
Zalmy Meyer
Richard McNeel
Cathe M. Monte Carlo
Cathy Morrison
Marilys Nepomechie
Peter Nguyen
Kaylan Phillips
Ralph Raymond
William Riehm
Henry Rueda
Jakiel Sanders

Vanessa Smith-Torres
Marika Snider
Enrique Socarras
Jim Stevens
Walt Teague
Frank Wagster



The 2026 Southern Conference of NCARB held its 2026 Educator/Practitioner Conference on February 7, 2026, at Florida International University's Paul Cejas School of Architecture in Miami, Florida. Former Department Chair, Henry Rueda and incoming Department Chair Jason Chandler were the hosts of the event.

[Click here for slides.](#)

We appreciate their assistance and guidance while planning the conference. There were fifteen schools of architecture from the Southern Region represented.

The Chair of the Conference Planning Committee, Pedro Alfaro RA, AIA, CAAPPR, SAP, Vice Chair of the Region, was assisted by the following committee members:

Darren James, FAIA, NOMA - Secretary/Treasurer of NCARB Southern Conference

Chris Elbersen, AIA, NCARB

Jackiel Sanders, RA, NOMA, NCARB

Ralph Raymond, RA AIA, NOMA, NCARB

Walt Teague, FAIA, NCARB, LEED AP, SEED AP

Cathe M. Monte Carlo, Executive Director of NCARB Southern Conference and Executive Director of the North Carolina Board of Architecture and Registered Interior Designers.



The theme of the 2026 conference was “Bridging the Gap Between Practice and Academia:

Integrating the Current State and Future of Architecture”. The keynote speaker was Peter Nguyen, a policy researcher at RAND and a professor of policy analysis at the RAND School of Public Policy, [Rand Report Committee Member](#). His

research is focused on



strengthening pathways in education and the workforce.

The morning sessions included a presentation of the RAND report on “Building Impact-Perspectives and Recommendations on the Current State and Future of Architecture”. The report was commissioned by NCARB and the AIA.

[Click here for the presentation slides.](#)



Jeremy Fretts, NCARB Assistant Vice President discussed the Pathways to Practice initiative focusing on education’s role in licensure. This sparked a lively discussion on the role of the educator and the role of the practitioner. This continued into the afternoon panel discussions.

An inspiring presentation on “Building the Pipeline” highlighting K–12 architecture pipeline programs such as



Architects in the Making (AIM), Black Architects in the Making (BAM), and Project Pipeline, highlighting community engagement and diversity efforts led by Craig Aquart, Vanessa Smith-Torres, Naomi Harrison, and Chelsea Abella.

[Click here for slides.](#)

After lunch, a panel discussion featured the perspective of newly licensed architects, recent graduates and students on the Rand Report, Pathways to Practice and the overall state of the profession. They offered clear, honest relevant opinions of architecture school experiences as well as the need to create a work/life balance while finishing school, taking exams and beginning a career in the field of architecture. The panel included Kaylan Phillips, Newly Licensed Architect Enrique Socarrás, Alpha Rho Chi President and Peter Nguyen.





The second panel discussion focused on the Practitioner/Educator perspective and included Chris Elberson, AIA, NCARB, Jeremy Fretts, AIA, NCARB, David Hill, NCSU, Jason Chandler, FIU Professional Office Practice Professor.

The conference concluded with remarks by Jason Chandler and Greg Durrell, the Regional Chair. Pedro Alfaro presented the speakers and panelists with certificates of appreciation.



Southern Conference of NCARB 2026 Educators and Practitioners Conference

Organizing Committee



Pedro Alfaro, RA, AIA, CAAPPR, SAP - Committee Chair and Vice Chair of NCARB Southern Conference

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