2026 Annual Training Conference

Orange Beach Event Center · 4671 Wharf Parkway W, Orange Beach, AL 36561

Sunday, October 18th, 2026	
3:00 PM	Early Bird Registration Opens! SWAG Pick-Up Party & Welcome Reception (Hors d'oeuvres)
6:00 PM	Registration Closes - Dinner on Your Own
Monday, October 19th, 2026 Alumni Day (Come dressed to represent your amla mater!)	
7:30 AM	Registration Opens - AVAA Office Open
8:00 AM	Full Breakfast/Networking
9:00 AM	Opening Ceremony: Presentation of Colors by Gulf Shores High School Navy JROTC
	National Anthem by The Coastal Sound - Coastal Alabama Community College
	President's Welcome / Business Meeting / Open Board of Directors Position
9:30 AM	Brigadier General (Ret.) Jeffrey Newton - Commissioner - Alabama Dept. of Veterans Affairs
10:30 AM	Coffee & Snack Break – 15 minutes
10:45 AM	**VA Kahoots!!! (Fun! Shenanigans! PRIZES!!!!!)**
11:00 AM	Keynote: Kelli Campbell-Goodnow – Scholarships Senior Coordinator - Gary Sinise Foundation
12:00 PM	Lunch Provided
1:00 PM	**SCO Training Requirements – Heather Cates**
2:00 PM	Snack Break - 15 minutes
2:15 PM	**Breakout Session/Round Table Discussions**
Main Hall	Tuition Assistance – James Shamlee, University of Alabama
Saturn Room	Catalog, Credits, and Compliance Rose Marie Cobb – VMA Coordinator – Jefferson State Community College
Vulcan Room	Wearing Two Leis: When SCO is Only One of Your Jobs Stephanie Miller – Financial Aid Director – Central Alabama Community College
Cypress Room	Still Serving Veterans
3:30 PM	**Breakout Session/Round Table Discussions**
Main Hall	Tuition Assistance - James Shamlee, University of Alabama
Saturn Room	Catalog, Credits, and Compliance Rose Marie Cobb – VMA Coordinator – Jefferson State Community College
Vulcan Room	Wearing Two Leis: When SCO is Only One of Your Jobs Stephanie Miller – Financial Aid Director – Central Alabama Community College
Cypress Room	Still Serving Veterans
5:00 PM	**Dinner on Your Own**

Alabama Veterans Affairs Association

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Tuesday, October 20th, 2026 Luau Day (Dress for the luau!)	
7:00 AM	Morning Meditation - Yoga/Exercise Rosario Thomas - Veterans Specialist - Southern Union Community College
8:00 AM	Full Breakfast/Networking & AVAA Office Opens – Orange Beach Event Center
8:30 AM	Welcome, Announcements, Nominations for Board of Directors/Voting opens. (Main Hall)
9:00 AM	**Keynote: Genivieve Kruger – Founder – Hidden Chapters**
9:45 AM	Coffee & Snack Break - 15 minutes
10:00 AM	**DVA Debt Management – Tamara Dole**
11:00 AM	**National Training Team – VA Work Study – Kevin White**
12:00 PM	**Lunch Provided - VA Kahoots!!! (Fun! Shenanigans! MORE PRIZES!!!!!)**
1:00 PM	**State Approving Agency Updates – Kimberly Minnifield & Laura Taylor**
2:00 PM	Snack Break - 15 minutes
2:15 PM	**Breakout Session/Round Table Discussions**
Main Hall	ANGEAP - Sara Jo Gilmore – Education Technician – Army National Guard
Saturn Room	VA, Banner, Argos, and You Stephanie Miller – Financial Aid Director – Central Alabama Community College
Vulcan Room	What to Expect When You're Expecting a Compliance Survey Rose Marie Cobb – VMA Coordinator – Jefferson State Community College
Cypress Room	Building Bridges: Common Problems and How to Utilize Your School's Resources Demetrius Pearson – Director of Veteran Services – UAB
3:30 PM	**Breakout Session/Round Table Discussions**
Main Hall	ANGEAP - Sara Jo Gilmore – Army National Guard
Saturn Room	VA, Banner, Argos, and You Stephanie Miller – Financial Aid Director – Central Alabama Community College
Vulcan Room	What to Expect When You're Expecting a Compliance Survey Rose Marie Cobb – VMA Coordinator – Jefferson State Community College
Cypress Room	Building Bridges: Common Problems and How to Utilize Your School's Resources Demetrius Pearson – Director of Veteran Services – UAB
5:00 PM	**Make Your Auction Bids!**
6:00 PM	**2026 AVAA Luau Dinner – Magnolia Hall**

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Wednesday, October 21st, 2026 AVAA T-Shirt Day (Wear your AVAA gear with pride!)	
7:00 AM	Morning Meditation - Yoga/Exercise Rosario Thomas - Veterans Specialist - Southern Union Community College
8:00 AM	Full Breakfast/Networking & AVAA Office Opens – Orange Beach Event Center
8:30 AM	Welcome, Daily Announcements
8:45 AM	**VR&E Updates – Jaime Wilder**
9:45 AM	**National Training Team – 85/15 – Kate Caruso**
10:45 AM	Coffee & Snack Break - 15 minutes
11:00 AM	TAP – Transition Assistance Program – Daniel Schwind
12:00 PM	**Lunch Provided, Veterans Panel - VA Kahoots!!! (Fun! Shenanigans! MORE PRIZES!!!!!)**
1:00 PM	**Legislative Updates w/ Deputy Director Ruhlman**
2:00 PM	**Breakout Session/Round Table Discussions**
Main Hall	Alabama GI Dependent Scholarship Kayla Kyle – Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs
Saturn Room	Dynamic Ways to Use Ellucian Banner for Your Military Connected Students Rose Marie Cobb – VMA Coordinator – Jefferson State Community College
Vulcan Room	Financial Aid Updates Stephanie Miller – Financial Aid Director – Central Alabama Community College
Cypress Room	Beyond "Thank You for Your Service" Nick Anderson – Director of Military & Veterans Programs – UAH
2:45 PM	Snack Break - 15 minutes
3:00 PM	**Breakout Session/Round Table Discussions**
Main Hall	Alabama GI Dependent Scholarship Kayla Kyle – Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs
Saturn Room	Dynamic Ways to Use Ellucian Banner for Your Military Connected Students Rose Marie Cobb – VMA Coordinator – Jefferson State Community College
Vulcan Room	Financial Aid Updates Stephanie Miller – Financial Aid Director – Central Alabama Community College
Cypress Room	Beyond "Thank You for Your Service" Nick Anderson – Director of Military & Veterans Programs – UAH
4:00 PM	AVAA Announcements
	AVAA Board Election Results / Scholarship Winners / Awards & Recognitions / Auction Results
5:00 PM	**Dismissal - Dinner on Your Own - VOTING CLOSES AND AUCTION ENDS!!!!**

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Thursday, October 22nd, 2026	
8:00 AM	Welcome, Daily Announcements
8:30 AM	**National Training Team – Enrollment Manager – Shay Norton Leonard**
9:30 AM	Hotel Check-Out & Auction Pick Up/Payment
10:30 AM	Surviving and Thriving: Bridging the Gaps Between Student Services and the SCO Rose Marie Cobb - Rose Marie Cobb – VMA Coordinator – Jefferson State CC
11:30 AM	President's Remarks, 2026-2027 Board Introduction, and Conference Wrap-Up
12:00 PM-5:00 PM	AVAA 2026-2027 First Board Meeting (2026-2027 Board Members)
Thank You for Attending the 2026 AVAA Conference. See You Next Year!	

2025 – 2026 Board of Directors

President

Rose Marie Cobb – Veterans & Military Affairs Coordinator, Jefferson State Community College

Vice President of Membership

Tammy Hussey – Financial Aid Counselor & SCO, Troy University

Vice President of Training

Nick Anderson – Director, Military & Veterans Programs, University of Alabama in Huntsville

Treasurer

Delana Anderson – VA Associate Director, Troy University

Secretary

Betsy Pumphrey – Enrollment Supervisor, Columbia Southern University

Historian

Gladys Richerzhagen – Military Benefits Specialist, Jacksonville State University

Public 4-Year Representative

Demetrius Pearson – Director, Veterans Services, University of Alabama at Birmingham

Public 2-Year Representative

Rosario Thomas – Veteran Affairs Specialist, Southern Union State Community College

Private Institution Representative

Taylor Petelinski – Training Coordinator, Columbia Southern University

Member at Large – I

Kevin Couch – School Certifying Official, Auburn University

Member at Large – II

J. Drew Malinowski – Billing Coordinator II, Auburn University

Member at Large – III

Michelle Webb – Senior Specialist – VA Certifying Official, Coastal Alabama Community College

Member at Large – IV

Christy Snyder – Assistant Director of Student Accounts, Columbia Southern University