

Dr. Kelly Ferris Lester is Associate Provost for Faculty Success and Professor of Dance at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), where she leads institution-wide initiatives that advance faculty excellence, student success, and innovative teaching and learning. A recipient of the Fulbright France International Education Administrators Award (2025) and Project Director for a \$2.1 million U.S. Department of Education Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP) grant, *Improving Student Degree Attainment: A Comprehensive Institutional Approach* (2025–2030), she is recognized for leading faculty-centered, data-informed strategies that improve student outcomes at scale.

She served as the inaugural director of USM’s Center for Faculty Development (2018–2022), where she designed and led initiatives to enhance teaching effectiveness, faculty leadership, and research advancement across disciplines. Under her leadership, the center and institution were recognized as a “Movement Maker” by the National Higher Education Teaching Conference in 2023. She continues to oversee faculty onboarding, promotion and tenure processes, annual evaluation, and initiatives supporting the integration of emerging technologies into teaching and learning.

An Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) credentialed educator and featured faculty expert in the ACUE Effective Teaching Practices Framework, Dr. Lester was selected as a 2022 fellow in the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Emerging Leaders Program and currently serves as a fellow in the AASCU’s Becoming a Provost Academy (2025–2026). Since 2023, Dr. Lester has led the university’s Artificial Intelligence Taskforce, advancing a presidentially charged, cross-functional strategy for AI integration that includes recommendations for curriculum, faculty and staff development, and institutional infrastructure. She presents nationally on artificial intelligence in teaching and learning, faculty development, student belonging and mental well-being, and active learning practices.

Dr. Lester has held extensive national leadership roles, including service on the Board of Directors for the National Dance Education Organization (2011–2024) and as President (2021–2022), where she led strategic planning. She currently serves on the American Council on Education (ACE) Women’s Network Executive Council.

As an artist-scholar, she was a co-founder of Hub Dance Collective (2012-2022), with choreography presented nationally and internationally. Dr. Lester’s scholarly research is published in the *Journal of Dance Education*, *Journal of Faculty Development*, and edited volumes on somatic practice. Her work has been recognized through numerous awards, including the SUNY Brockport Alumni Association Outstanding Service Award (2024), multiple National Dance Education Organization Presidential Awards, the USM Distinguished Friend of the Division of Student Affairs Award (2022), the College of Arts and

Sciences Dean's Award for Exemplary Leadership and Service (2020), and the HEADWAE Award (2018) from the Mississippi legislature.

Dr. Lester holds an Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration from USM, an M.F.A. in Dance from The College at Brockport (SUNY), and a B.F.A. in Theatre with a concentration in dance from University of Memphis.