



ICCFA UNIVERSITY

2026 College Program



JULY 17 – 22, 2026
EMORY CONFERENCE CENTER HOTEL | ATLANTA, GA

iccfa.com/university



Emory Conference Center Hotel at Emory University

**1615 Clifton Road NE
Atlanta, GA 30329
Phone: 404.712.6000
Toll Free: 1.800.933.6679
Fax: 404.712.6025**

Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, ample meeting space, conference dining facilities, and well-appointed guestrooms, the Emory Conference Center Hotel is an all-inclusive venue that will provide the perfect backdrop for learning from the best in deathcare, connecting with colleagues from every area of the cemetery, cremation, and funeral service profession, and making the lifetime friendships that are the hallmark of the ICCFA University experience.

Room rate: \$189/night

**Secure your spot and
reserve your hotel
room at the 2026 ICCFA
University today at
iccfa.com/university**



Chancellor's Letter

I have had the pleasure of seeing the University from all sides, first attending and graduating, then becoming a professor in several colleges, serving as dean of the College of Land Management & Grounds Operations for five years, and today I am honored to return as your ICCFA University Chancellor.

Why is the ICCFA University so life-changing and one of the most revered educational programs in our profession? The program is more than just a training seminar or conference—it is an EXPERIENCE. The experience starts from the moment you arrive and actually continues for the rest of your career. The professors and fellow students you share the week with will become lasting friends. The memorable conversations with fellow students during meals are enlightening. Everything you learn will alter the lens through which you view the profession from that point forward. This is a situation where the whole is much more than the sum of its parts.

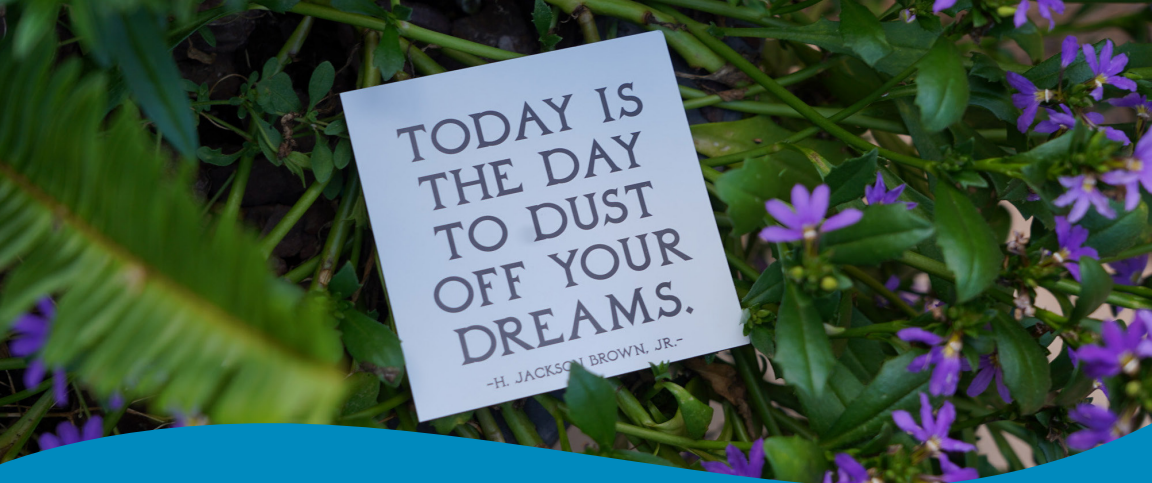
ICCFA University boasts nine colleges in tune with our profession today:

- ▶ College of 21st Century Services – Dean Glenda Stansbury
- ▶ College of Cremation Services – Dean Clift Dempsey, CCrE, CCFE
- ▶ College of Hospitality & Customer Experience – Dean Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE
- ▶ College of Land Management & Grounds Operations – Dean Gino Merendino
- ▶ College of Leadership, Management & Administration – Dean Gary Freytag, CCFE
- ▶ College of Technology - Dean Nick Timpe, CSE
- ▶ J. Asher Neel College of Sales & Marketing – Dean Patrick Downey, CCE
- ▶ Todd Van Beck College of Funeral Home Management – Dean Mike Watkins
- ▶ School of Graduate Studies - Dean Robbie Pape, CCFE

The ICCFA University returns to the Emory Conference Center Hotel at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. With state-of-the-art meeting rooms, excellent audio/visual technology, and fantastic dining spaces, the Emory Conference Center is a perfect location for the ICCFA University.

The ICCFA University is the ultimate educational opportunity in our profession. Everyone involved in the University is proud to continue this one-of-a-kind experience by which thousands have already enriched themselves, their firms, and ultimately their customers through superior, relevant and contemporary service. I encourage you to enroll in the 2026 session of the “U” to begin, or continue, your journey of professional development.

Jeff Kidwiler, CCE, CSE
ICCFA University Chancellor



TODAY IS
THE DAY
TO DUST
OFF YOUR
DREAMS.
-H. JACKSON BROWN, JR.-

All about the U

ICCFA University is a one-of-a-kind program designed by top experts in the cemetery, cremation, and funeral service profession. It offers a unique blend of intensive, practical classroom training and continual informal idea-sharing.

Quality Education

With on-campus housing and dining, ICCFAU offers a unique learning environment. Its nine colleges cover every area of management and operations, and classes are continually updated to include the latest innovations and techniques. Courses combine proven business theory with practical operational instruction, and the staff encourage ongoing participation and interaction.

Experienced Faculty

ICCFAU classes are taught by top cemetery, cremation, and funeral service professionals—along with industry experts from beyond deathcare. You'll receive practical, proven instruction from colleagues selected for their firsthand experience and knowledge of the daily challenges you face in your job. For a complete listing of faculty, see page 45.

Recreation & Networking

Students say one of the most valuable parts of ICCFAU is the opportunity to share ideas and fellowship with colleagues from every area of the cemetery, cremation, and funeral service profession.

Students from all nine colleges come together several times each day for breaks and to share. In the evenings, you can relax with fellow students in the lounge areas. Saturday is

Student Night with an evening of fun and trivia. At the Sports Night on Monday, you'll find a good-natured rivalry among the students from all nine of the colleges.

Registration Procedures & Fees

Class sizes are limited and are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Registrations must be received by July 8. After this date, registration will be on-site only. Students whose registrations are received by June 21 will have their names included in the student directory.

Fees include all classroom training, materials and three meals a day starting with dinner on Friday and ending with the Graduate Reception on Tuesday, as well as refreshments during breaks and at the Sports Night on Monday.

To register, go online to www.iccfa.com/university.

Accommodations

The ICCFA discounted room rate is just \$189 per night at the Emory Conference Center Hotel at Emory University. Students should make their own reservations. See page 2 for details.

Transportation

The closest airport to the Emory Conference Center Hotel at Emory University is Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport (ATL).

ICCFA University

FAQs

Who is eligible to attend ICCFAU?

ICCFA University is open to employees of all cemeteries, funeral homes, crematories, supplier companies, and related businesses. Prior college attendance is not required. In general, it is designed for students who are:

- Company owners and chief executive officers
- Managers seeking to develop additional skills and knowledge in order to improve their techniques and operations
- Managers who are interested in moving into new areas of responsibility
- Managers new to the cemetery and funeral service profession
- Staff interested in advancing into management positions
- Staff interested in improving their skills to better serve their employers and their client families
- Suppliers who want to network and gain a better understanding of their clients' challenges

How does the four-year undergraduate curriculum work?

The ICCFA University is held for five days each July. Undergraduate students enroll in one of the University's eight colleges and spend the entire five days learning about that area of the profession. Students who complete four colleges become ICCFAU graduates.

Do I have to attend for four years?

No. Some students enroll for one or two years, attending just those colleges that are most relevant to their career. However, many students do choose to go on to study for four years or more to broaden the scope of their knowledge.

Can I earn CE credits and certification points at ICCFAU?

Yes. Funeral directors can earn up to 23.5 CE credits, pending individual state approval. Please note that due to onerous and/or expensive filing requirements, the ICCFA no longer applies for continuing education credits in Pennsylvania or Virginia. ICCFA members applying for the Certified Cemetery Executive, Certified Funeral Executive, Certified Cemetery Funeral Executive, Certified Cremation Executive and/or Certified Supplier Executive designations through the association's certification program will earn a total of 18 points toward certification upon completion of each college.

What is the School of Graduate Studies?

The School of Graduate Studies allows ICCFAU graduates to return to the University and attend a specially curated course designed for C-Suite leaders and senior executives who are ready to drive collaboration, innovation, and growth while reaching the highest levels of leadership. This course is limited to 12 participants and will require an application to attend. Please visit iccfa.com/university to apply.



ICCFA Educational Foundation Scholarships

106 scholarships were awarded to the 2025 ICCFA University! The ICCFA thanks the following individuals and companies who contributed to the ICCFA Educational Foundation scholarship funds from 2025:

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Allen Dave Funeral Homes & Crematorium | Homesteaders Life Company | Regions Bank |
| Argent Trust Company | Leaf Cremation | SCI/Dignity Memorial Fund |
| ASD | Matthews International | The Gardens Cemetery - Gethsemane |
| Carriage Services | McComb Family Foundation | |
| Coldspring | Memorial Classic, Inc. | |
| Corient | Merendino Cemetery | |
| Gaffney Group | Care | |
| Hillside Memorial Park & Mortuary | Park Lawn Corporation | |



College of 21st Century Services

Dean Glenda Stansbury

How do you respond to a family who says, “We don’t want a traditional funeral”? You’ll learn how to go beyond tradition with innovative offerings and become certified as a funeral celebrant trained to provide meaningful alternatives to clergy-led services.

Friday, July 17

2:00 PM–5:30 PM

Registration & Check-in

4:30 PM–5:00 PM

Student Orientation

5:00 PM–6:00 PM

Welcome Reception

6:00 PM–7:00 PM

Dinner

Saturday, July 18

8:00 AM–8:45 AM

Breakfast

8:45 AM–9:00 AM

Introductions

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Celebrant Training

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

Celebrants offer an alternative to services provided by clergy for those families who are not affiliated with a church or who do not wish to have a traditional religious funeral service. They design services that are completely personal by incorporating those unique stories, songs, and experiences that defined the deceased. Celebrants schedule a special ‘family time’

meeting where the family can share memories, anecdotes and defining moments in the loved one’s life. They then base the essence of the service on the remembrances of the family and encourage family and friends to participate. Celebrants develop a library of resources available for readings, music, ceremonies, and personal touches. They consult with the family to help them choose elements of the service that reflect their loved one. They are bound by a Code of Ethics for complete confidentiality in all dealings with the family.

Becoming a Certified Celebrant

After completing this college, students will be certified as celebrants. The training for celebrants as established by the InSight Institute seeks to provide the most comprehensive and sensitive training available for people who wish to develop this as a profession or to add to their current job description. It is important that a family knows they are being served by someone who understands the process and is prepared to offer the very best funeral possible.

What Does This Service Cost Families?

The celebrant fee is usually higher than the fees charged by clergy. They can range widely across the country from \$200 to more than \$800, depending on type of service, location, travel and other expenses. A celebrant spends approximately 10 hours preparing for each service, as well as the expenses of training and maintaining a resource library.

What is The InSight Institute?

The InSight Institute has one mission: helping people help people. This has evolved over

the years, expanding from grief care books and seminars to include celebrant training and certification. Founder Doug Manning is a best-selling author, sought after speaker and a grief expert relied on by the media. His first book, *A Minister Speaks About Funerals*, was self-published in 1978, and in 1979, he wrote his best-selling book, *Don't Take My Grief Away From Me*. In 1983, Manning wrote *When Love Gets Tough: The Nursing Home Decision*. With the success of that book, he made the commitment to change careers and founded InSight Books as his publishing and seminar company. InSight Books now publishes more than 40 products by Manning and select authors. The InSight Institute is the training arm of the company.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Student Night - Trivia

College vs. college! Join your classmates to see which College walks away with bragging rights as the 2026 Trivia Champions!

Sunday, July 19

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

Monday, July 20

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Celebrant Training (continued)

Glenda Stansbury; Kathy Burns

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Sports Night

Join your ICCFAU colleagues for a friendly game of bowling or cornhole! Appetizers, salad, pizza, wings, and dessert will be served.

Tuesday, July 21

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Essentials of Public Speaking Basics (Pt I)

Carol Little

- › What is a presentation?
- › Principles of liking

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Essentials of Public Speaking Basics (Pt II)

Carol Little

- › Principles of authenticity
- › Body talk

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Essentials of Public Speaking Basics (Pt III)

Carol Little

- › Vocal techniques
- › Group presentations and feedback

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–4:30 PM

Essentials of Public Speaking Basics (Pt IV)

Carol Little

- › Practice makes permanent

4:30 PM–5:15 PM

University Graduation

5:15 PM–6:00 PM

Classroom Wrap-up | Presentation of Certificate

Required to attend to receive certificate (certificates will not be mailed).

6:15 PM–7:30 PM

Graduate Reception

Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served.

Wednesday, July 22

Travel Day



Save *the* Date



ICCFA
Leadership
Summit

OCTOBER 20 - 22, 2026

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

ICCFA.COM/FALL



College of Cremation Services

Dean Clift Dempsey, CCRE, CCFE

Cremation doesn't have to mean "no service" or "no memorialization." Attendees will discover how to better serve families, improve cremation operations, and increase their company's cremation-related revenues. Attendees will also earn three types of certifications: operator, administrator, and arranger.

Friday, July 17

2:00 PM–5:30 PM

Registration & Check-in

4:30 PM–5:00 PM

Student Orientation

5:00 PM–6:00 PM

Welcome Reception

6:00 PM–7:00 PM

Dinner

Saturday, July 18

8:00 AM–8:45 AM

Breakfast

8:45 AM–9:00 AM

Introductions

Clift Dempsey, CCRE, CCFE

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Operator Certification- All-Day

Larry Stuart, Jr.

In this training session, you'll learn how to operate a crematory retort properly and effectively and limit the liability for you and your company. This extensive training curriculum includes: · Explanation of professional & incinerator terminology · Discussion on the

principles of combustion and incinerator criteria & design · In-depth look at the basics of operating cremation equipment and their general maintenance and how to troubleshoot common problems · Overview of cremation and its impact on the environment · Examples of standard crematory forms and the importance of record keeping · Proper steps for identification · Exposure control, and liability concerns and risk management.

10:30 AM–11:00 PM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Operator Curriculum (continued)

Larry Stuart, Jr.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Operator Curriculum (continued)

Larry Stuart, Jr.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Operator Curriculum (continued)

Poul Lemasters, Esq.; Larry Stuart, Jr.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Student Night - Trivia

College vs. college! Join your classmates to see which College walks away with bragging rights as the 2026 Trivia Champions!

Sunday, July 19

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Cremation Gardens Around the Country

Clift Dempsey, CCRÉ, CCFE

During the past year, Clift traveled to cemeteries around the country to find the most interesting and amazing cremation gardens. This session will show you the biggest to the smallest cremation gardens for any budget. You will take away great ideas for designs and products to offer your families.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:00 PM

Hospice Relationships

Pierce Dempsey, CCRÉ

You are missing out on your funeral home's biggest referral network! By the end of this session, you will be able to create and maintain a successful hospice program using your company's current resources. Pierce will teach you the ins and outs of hospice and how to create a program from scratch.

12:00 PM–12:30 PM

Lunch

12:30 PM–5:00 PM

Bus Tour

Clift Dempsey, CCRÉ, CCFE; Morgan Eubanks

Real world look at all aspects of cremation providers cemetery - crematory – funeral home. The tour will be at Leaf Cremation to see their crematory & cemetery, and Arlington Memorial Park to view their impressive cremation memorialization they have installed the cemetery.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

Monday, July 20

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Cremation Myths Debunked

Néctar Ramírez

So many families who choose cremation are selecting no services. There is a misunderstanding of the cremation consume, which is leading to an abundance of direct cremation policies. In this module we will take a deep dive into the psychology of the cremation consumer and gain a better understanding of their needs and wants. With that understanding we will tailor our presentation of products and services to maximize the probability of a service, higher policy value and family satisfaction.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Cremation Mastermind

Néctar Ramírez

During this session, Néctar is going to give a Mastermind Class on giving the BEST cremation presentation. Topics will include warm up, relationship building, overcoming objections and closing the sale.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Reducing Your Liability to Add to Your Bottom Line

Poul Lemasters, Esq.

This seminar will focus on the Cremation Authorization Form and educate the arranger on why each section is critical. Participants will not only learn the importance of each section and learn how to explain the sections to the family. There will also be examples of lawsuits that have cost providers millions.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Multiple Sources of Cremation Marketing

Pierce Dempsey, CCRÉ

In this session, we will discuss the many different ways to market cremation for your funeral home, cremation center and cemetery. Using new technology and innovative ways

to market your cremation services in today's environment.

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Sports Night

Join your ICCFAU colleagues for a friendly game of bowling or cornhole! Appetizers, salad, pizza, wings, and dessert will be served.

Tuesday, July 21

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

The End of Direct Cremation... Why it Matters

Angelique Simpson

In this provocative session we will look at what could be the end of how we see direct cremation. We will discuss “the how and why” we got to this place where we are now with cremation. What are the trust costs of cremation, and does it really matter to our bottom line? This discussion is about how we present option to families so that they can make an informed decision. It is also about how we, the funeral services professionals, think about families that choose cremation and how we can best help them during this difficult time.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Cremation: It's NOT About the Price Online

Angelique Simpson

This session takes a deep dive into the cremation trends and will focus in on why all funeral service professionals must adjust the revenue gap with direct cremation in order to survive. The session discussion will tackle ways to empower staff to share ALL of the cremation options with EVERY family, EVERY time. This session provides tangible tips and skills to help you navigate the shift of the increasing preference for cremation.

Oh, and spoiler alert! It's NOT about the price

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Every Life is Worth Remembering- Ceremonies for Cremation Families

Glenda Stansbury

Why do we have funerals? What does a funeral offer to a family? Isn't it just easier to not do anything? Why are our cremation families walking out our doors with the urn in their hands with no service or ceremony? How do we articulate the value of the funeral? How do we serve as consultants for our families to create healing and meaningful experiences?

The discussion focuses on the need for a personalized ceremony, options that are available and how everyone in a funeral home or cemetery staff can make the service a memorable and meaningful event. It will provide statistics about the changing demographics, provide sample ceremonies and give practical actions for funeral professionals serving their families in new and unique ways.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–4:30 PM

Out of the Box Opportunities

Clift Dempsey, CCRE, CCFE

We are all trying to find additional ways to serve families. This session will cover some non-traditional services that will provide outstanding value for your families. All kinds of surprises will be taught in this session.

4:30 PM–5:15 PM

University Graduation

5:15 PM–6:00 PM

Classroom Wrap-up | Presentation of Certificate

Required to attend to receive certificate (certificates will not be mailed).

6:15 PM–7:30 PM

Graduate Reception

Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served.

Wednesday, July 22

Travel Day



**SAVE
THE DATE
DEAD Talks**

SALES CONFERENCE

JANUARY 26 - 28, 2027

**PARK MGM LAS VEGAS
LAS VEGAS, NV**

ICCFA.COM/SALES



College of Hospitality & Customer Experience

Dean Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE

This college is designed to give students a foundation in funeral home/cemetery hospitality and catering management. Topics range from basic event planning to interpreting financial budgets, leadership, and catering team management.

Friday, July 17

2:00 PM–5:30 PM

Registration & Check-in

4:30 PM–5:00 PM

Orientation

5:00 PM–6:00 PM

Welcome Reception

6:00 PM–7:00 PM

Dinner

Saturday, July 18

8:00 AM–8:45 AM

Breakfast

8:45 AM–9:00 AM

Introductions

Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE; John Bolton, CCE, CCrE, CSE, CXE

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

How CX Strategy Helps Scale Company Growth

Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE; John Bolton, CCE, CCrE, CSE, CXE

This ICCFAU college builds on the concept of hospitality—a tradition with deep roots both within and beyond funeral service. Historic names like Marriott, Hilton, and Ritz have made hospitality and customer service the foundation

of their empires. In this kick-off class, John and Lori Bolton will walk students through the foundations of hospitality in the funeral industry and define the importance of creating an experience for the families you serve.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

A Beginner's Guide to Building World Class Hospitality

Darin Drabing

So you want to entertain? Seems like everyone's doing it! You've read the articles about post-service receptions, buffet lines, hors d'oeuvres during visitations, and guests drinking beer, wine, and cocktails in the lobby? You're concerned your business is falling behind. You don't have any extra space and you can't afford to build a new building, but how do you catch up, where do you start, and is it even something you should do? Relax. You can do this and we can help. Join us for a look at the basics required to join the 'party'. In this interactive session, we will probe the important issues, challenge long held beliefs, and find creative answers to the questions that are required to move your business to the next level.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Who Are You Serving: Building the Personas and Understanding Touchpoints

Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE

Customers are now driving the business bus and we as an industry are lagging behind. Everything about the traditional business model is changing due to the demand of customers. Customers have more information at their fingertips and have a true sense of how they want to celebrate a life. Who are the consumers that want a different kind of funeral service? In this session, Lori Bolton will outline the key strategies for developing a successful customer experience model, developing customer personas, relating those personas to growing your hospitality business, and how these strategies should drive your hospitality model moving forward.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

CX Journey Workshop

Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE; John Bolton, CCE, CCrE, CSE, CXE

Since the Customer Journey is so important in driving revenue through Customer Experience, Lori and John will lead a hands-on workshop so students can actually create a customer journey specific to their location and their customers. By the end of the workshop, students will be able to take the information back to their operations and lead a journey workshop for their staff.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Student Night - Trivia

College vs. college! Join your classmates to see which College walks away with bragging rights as the 2026 Trivia Champions!

Sunday, July 19

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Why Hospitality and How to Prepare Your Facility for Success

Lee Longino

In this course, we will begin to understand why there is a push toward hospitality in our profession and what got us to this point with our

customers. We will learn how to look at your facilities in a differing way better understanding the use of space and how to make your facilities help you increase your revenues.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Crafting a Successful Celebration of Life: Enhancing Comfort, Personalization, and Value

Kimberly Weis

This session will guide you through creating thoughtful catering menus, designing comforting spaces, and incorporating personalized services to support families during their time of need, all while adding value to your business.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

The Celebration Journey from The Funeral Director's Perspective

Brooke Heldman

It's a funeral director's role to create a safe place by welcoming a newly grieving family into a collaborative journey of celebrating their Loved One uniquely. How do you help a family feel seen and heard from the very beginning, the first call, through their arrival into the funeral home, and into the creation of a meaningful event. This session will model how to create trust with a new family, develop vision together on a venue tour, and work with your team to detail an event that feels personal & healing.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Developing a Hospitality Program Workshop

Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE; John Bolton, CCE, CCrE, CSE, CXE

Now that you understand the fundamental elements of a hospitality program, you will write a plan for your business. What will you do with your facilities? What type of catering will you offer and how will you price it? Evaluate your staff. What staffing changes or additions will be made? How will you train your staff to be sure your new offerings are being presented to every family? What materials and resources do you need to be successful? In this workshop, students will explore these questions. Students will also explore ways to measure and assess

what might get in the way of their success.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

Monday, July 20

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Risk Management

Poul Lemasters, Esq.

Consumers demand more and more from businesses and it is no different in deathcare. Providing a funeral is just the first step. As providers today, we are offering more from catering and receptions, to travel, and even lodging. However, offering all these services comes with an entirely new set of risks. Do you need a license to serve food? If alcohol is available, then who is responsible? Does your insurance cover events outside of the funeral? Not knowing or understanding these as well as many more issues could cost you more than a bad review on Yelp!

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Technology's Role in CX

Nick Timpe, CSE

It's no secret that in today's world, technology plays a defining role in the customer's experience. How does this translate to our profession? Can we transform our processes and adapt our people to serve families in a digital way? Will we miss out on those critical moments of service that have been the hallmark of what we do? The data—and the world around us—show that the modern consumer has adapted to digital. In this session we will review examples and principles from leading firms to see how technology can be applied into funeral service to transform the experience of the families in our care.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Successful Cemetery Events 101

Phil Zehms

Location events can go far beyond our traditional Memorial Day or Christmas Candlelight services. Phil Zehms will walk you through the basics of putting together a successful community event, from creative idea generation, setting a budget, creating timelines,

event promotion, staffing, event follow up and ROI.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Cemetery Event Workshop

Phil Zehms

In this hands-on workshop, students will actually come up with a creative event idea, set a budget, plan the event, and generate an ROI statement to justify the event. When they return to their location, they will have a specific program ready to go!

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Sports Night

Join your ICCFAU colleagues for a friendly game of bowling or cornhole! Appetizers, salad, pizza, wings, and dessert will be served.

Tuesday, July 21

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Customer Experience and Employee Engagement

Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE

You can change your buildings, offerings, marketing brand, and pricing, but the #1 influencer on your Customer Experience is delivery from your employees. How do you build and sustain a culture driven by passion for service, compassion for families, and committed to delivering exceptional experiences? Employee engagement can be defined as the extent to which employees feel committed and connected to their employer and to the work that they do. It is critical that your business has a dedicated strategy for creating an employee experience that leads to engagement to increase performance and retention, saving on the heavy costs of re-hiring and training. In this course we will explore a strategic plan for developing and maintaining employee engagement and how to measure how the Customers' felt about their experiences with your staff.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Customer Service Bill of Rights & Employee GAME Plan Workshop

Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE; John Bolton, CCE, CCE, CSE, CXE

There are minimum standards every customer should expect from our businesses. What are yours? In the first half of this workshop, students will develop always and never statements for touchpoints along their customers' journey. Just as customers should have minimum expectations for their experience with your business, employees should too. In the second half of this workshop session, students will begin to develop a plan for engaging employees, which will include addressing employee growth, appreciation, and metrics for success.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Creating Exceptional Experiences for Cremation Customers

Pierce Dempsey, CCE

Providing excellent customer service is one thing, but what about exceptional customer experiences? During this session, we will explore different types of experiences for the cremation customer and follow a step-by-step process on how to properly explain those options. Learn how to improve cremation offerings, increase your revenue, and be the #1 cremation expert in your area.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–4:30 PM

Let's Do CX!

John Bolton, CCE, CCE, CSE, CXE;

This session is intended to be an open group discussion. If you were starting over with a blank sheet of paper, a big pile of money, and no preconceptions, what kind of business would you design to serve 21st century funeral customers? How would it compare to the funeral home/cemetery of today? John Bolton will challenge student to look at all the elements that would make up the new funeral and cemetery business, including facilities, staffing, products, and services to put it all in place. Students will examine what we can learn from the funeral home or cemetery of tomorrow and how we can put it to work in our businesses today.

4:30 PM–5:15 PM

University Graduation

5:15 PM–6:00 PM

Classroom Wrap-up | Presentation of Certificate

Required to attend to receive certificate (certificates will not be mailed).

6:15 PM–7:30 PM

Graduate Reception

Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served.

Wednesday, July 22

Travel Day





College of Land Management & Grounds Operations

Dean Gino Merendino

Exceptional cemetery service starts with grounds and operations department. Without effective land management and a commitment to an attractive, well-maintained property, there will be no sales or service. Attendees will learn how their grounds management team can succeed and continuously improve internments, landscaping, buildings, grounds maintenance, and exceptional client experience and satisfaction.

Friday, July 17

2:00 PM–5:30 PM

Registration & Check-in

4:30 PM–5:00 PM

Orientation

5:00 PM–6:00 PM

Welcome Reception

6:00 PM–7:00 PM

Dinner

Saturday, July 18

8:00 AM–8:45 AM

Breakfast

8:45 AM–9:00 AM

Introductions

Gino Merendino

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Exceptional Cemetery Maintenance-A Focus Group without Limitations!

Tim Kolasa

A cemetery's maintenance operations, procedures, and resulting outcomes are the defining experiences for families that enter

our gates. What is exceptional cemetery maintenance and why does it matter? We'll kick off our week together with high energy and a dynamic look at what we are doing to enable meaningful experiences at our cemeteries and share collective ideas on how to improve our efforts.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Creating a Committal Service that Everybody Talks About

John Gouch, Jr.

Successful cemeteries create great community events that bring visitors into the cemetery and have them leaving in awe. John Gouch Jr.'s cemetery has that experience designed into every committal service performed. He will share his step-by-step process so you can exceed customer expectations and create a buzz in your community for every funeral you service.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Smarter Grounds: How AI Can Help You Work Smarter and Serve Better

Pierce Dempsey, CCrE

Pierce will show you how even the techno-

illiterate can use AI in practical, hands-on ways. Through live demonstrations tailored to grounds and land management, you'll gain a clear understanding of how AI tools can help streamline operations, improve communication, and make your property more presentable and family-ready. This isn't pie-in-the-sky tech—these are tools you can use right away to save time, reduce stress, and serve families better through excellence in grounds care.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Applying Technology to Cemetery Operations

Nick Timpe, CSE

Smooth cemetery grounds operations are critical to providing a high level of service and care to families. In this session we will explore the intersection of operations and technology. Equipping and empowering team members with the right technology can streamline work orders, automate communication across teams, make records and maps accessible from the field, enable staff to serve families on the fly, provide accountability for work quality, ensure follow-up to the families in our care, and more. We will review practical steps that you can take to leverage technology for your firm.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Student Night - Trivia

College vs. college! Join your classmates to see which College walks away with bragging rights as the 2026 Trivia Champions!

Sunday, July 19

6:30 AM–7:15 AM

Breakfast

7:15 AM–11:15 AM

Train the Trainer

Tim Kolasa

Learn how to share your knowledge and experience so your staff can be as proficient as you are in operating equipment. Utilizing a backhoe, this class will use the same master of motion principle used by Michelangelo and Leonard da Vinci to minimize training time for your employees.

11:15 AM–12:00 PM

Cemetery Tour

Morgan Eubanks

Students will take a tour of the beautiful Arlington Memorial Park Cemetery which has evolved to meet the changing needs of the community, while maintaining its small-town charm. The picturesque grounds cover 122 acres of rolling hills, mature trees, and two sparkling lakes. It is truly breathtaking.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Cremation: Changing the Face of Traditional Memorialization

Erin Schwanitz-Vogt

This course equips cemetery professionals to confidently promote permanent memorialization in an era of rapidly increasing cremation rates—projected to reach nearly 80% of Americans by 2035. Participants learn how to lead respectful, neutral, and informative conversations with families, emphasizing the healing, legacy-building, and community value that permanent memorials provide.

The course explores key aspects of granite and marble, including how these materials are sourced and manufactured, proper maintenance practices, common causes of deterioration, and environmental factors that affect long-term durability. Attendees also receive guidance on essential questions families should ask when choosing memorial materials and designs, along with practical tools to support meaningful and lasting memorial decisions.

Additional topics include creative space utilization, maintaining visually appealing and welcoming cemetery environments, strengthening community engagement, and building successful partnerships with funeral directors.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Green Burial 101 for Cemeteries - Understanding Eco-Friendly Funerals as a Business Opportunity

Rachel Essig

Consumer polls show a growing interest in Growing consumer demand for environmentally friendly funerals is reshaping the profession, with surveys showing strong interest in sustainable options across generations. In this session, Rachel Essig explores the

environmental impact, demographic trends, and market forces driving the rise of natural burial. Attendees will learn how hybrid green burial options can be integrated into existing cemeteries, review real-world case studies, and gain practical strategies to serve this growing market while promoting ecological stewardship.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

Monday, July 20

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Healing Grief

Phil Zehms

Lack of compassion is usually caused by a lack of understanding. Learning more about grief and bereavement allows us to be more empathetic. In this session, we will explore the journey of grief. Discover the ways in which our mourning traditions emerged, how our profession has evolved, and the ways in which we can assist our families in moving toward healing.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Sustainable Practices for Cemeteries: From Land Stewardship to Community Engagement

Nancy Goldenberg

Cemeteries play a unique and increasingly important role in environmental stewardship, community well-being, and long-term land management. This session explores the many ways cemeteries can practice sustainability while honoring their mission and traditions.

Participants will learn about practical and scalable strategies across key areas, including land conservation and habitat protection, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and responsible water management. The course will also examine how sustainability extends beyond internal operations to include meaningful civic engagement, communication, and programming that connect staff, families, and the broader community to environmental values. Sharing real world strategies currently used at historic Laurel Hill in Philadelphia, this session will equip cemetery professionals with ideas and tools to strengthen resilience, reduce environmental impact, and position their cemetery as a leader in sustainable practices.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Cemeteries as Meaningful Places of Trees: How to Become an ArbNet accredited Arboretum

Josh Gevertz

This workshop explores how cemetery trees can serve as powerful historical, ecological, and community assets. Participants will learn how becoming an accredited arboretum through ArbNet can elevate a cemetery's tree collection, enhance visitor engagement, and strengthen connections with the families and communities they serve.

The session provides an overview of ArbNet, the arboretum accreditation process, and available resources, with a focus on the unique opportunities and considerations for cemetery arboreta. A dedicated section covers tree history and identification, tree health, common diseases, and best practices for long-term maintenance, emphasizing stewardship and preservation of historic landscapes.

To illustrate the process in action, the workshop highlights the journey of Cypress Lawn Arboretum and Memorial Park in Colma, CA, showcasing its path to Level 2 ArbNet accreditation and key lessons learned during the first five years of leadership under its first Arboretum Director.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Modern Cemetery Development

Gary Freytag, CCFE

Customer needs continue to evolve and cemeteries must adapt their product offerings to meet these preferences. Cemeteries must also balance aesthetics with density and revenue generation. Gary Freytag has traveled extensively through North America to see the most effective design concepts in a variety of markets. He will share Spring Grove's long-term approach to cemetery development and how its approach has evolved to embrace several common principles that appeal to the needs of the cremation customer.

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Sports Night

Join your ICCFAU colleagues for a friendly game of bowling or cornhole! Appetizers, salad, pizza, wings, and dessert will be served.

Tuesday, July 21

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

OSHA General Duty Clause

Mark Harrison

General Duty Clause: Led by Certified Safety Training, this course provides cemetery workers and supervisors with a clear understanding of the OSHA General Duty Clause and its application in cemetery operations. Participants will learn how this overarching safety standard requires employers to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards that could cause serious harm or death. The class will explore how the clause applies to common cemetery tasks, including grave excavation, equipment use, and grounds maintenance. Practical strategies for hazard identification, risk mitigation, and fostering a culture of workplace safety will be emphasized, ensuring compliance and protecting employees from harm.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Graveside Safety

Mark Harrison

Graveside Safety: Led by Certified Safety Training, students will review OSHA regulations for excavating graves, cemetery hazards, and accident prevention. Students will receive checklists and documents on gravesite safety, which you can take back to train your entire maintenance staff to help fulfill your OSHA training requirements.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Cemetery Liability Issues

Poul Lemasters, Esq.

This session will address a broad range of potential liability issues related to cemeteries and land management. We'll examine risk and liability in a number of different contexts and from the perspective of various parties. The session will stress disclosures and procedures designed to prevent or mitigate liability.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–4:30 PM

Are your Grounds Staff your Greatest Salespeople?

Tim Kolasa

Families often form their first—and most lasting—impression of a cemetery long before they ever speak with a counselor. In many cases, that impression is shaped by the grounds staff: the people maintaining the property, preparing burial spaces, and interacting with families during their most emotional moments. This session explores whether cemetery grounds staff should be viewed as the organization's first line of sales influence, and what that means in practice. Attendees will examine how appearance, behavior, knowledge, and simple courtesies quietly impact trust, confidence, and long-term decisions—without turning grounds staff into traditional salespeople.

4:30 PM–5:15 PM

University Graduation

5:15 PM–6:00 PM

Classroom Wrap-up | Presentation of Certificate

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6:15 PM–7:30 PM

Graduate Reception

Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served

Wednesday, July 22

Travel Day





College of Leadership, Management & Administration

Dean Gary Freytag, CCFE

The cemetery, cremation and funeral service profession is changing, and so are the skills needed to manage and lead effectively. Attendees will receive solid, relevant, results-focused training targeted at today's required core competencies.

Friday, July 17

2:00 PM–5:30 PM

Registration & Check-in

4:30 PM–5:00 PM

Orientation

5:00 PM–6:00 PM

Welcome Reception

6:00 PM–7:00 PM

Dinner

Saturday, July 18

8:00 AM–8:45 AM

Breakfast

8:45 AM–9:00 AM

Introductions

Gary Freytag, CCFE

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Become a Leader Worth Following!

Darin Drabing

In this introductory session, we'll explore the many facets of leadership including the journey of an individual contributor to supervision, the skills necessary for the effective practice of management, and the artistry displayed in becoming a leader worth following. We will discover the motivations that drive us toward

success and those that may stand in our way. We will learn to embrace the responsibilities of followership and to harness our energies and emotions into productive behaviors that can transform your employees and your organization.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Funeral Home and Cemetery Accounting: Keys to Affecting Your Bottom Line

Bill Williams, Jr.

Profit is all about increasing revenue and decreasing expenses. But what are the standards against which you can benchmark yourself? How often does your company truly analyze its expenses? Do you sometimes wonder whether there are line items you should be taking a keen look at but are missing? In this session, we'll examine critical expense items, including how to manage them, ideal ways to reduce them and industry norms to benchmark against them.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

A Case Study in Leadership

Gary Freytag, CCFE

This course will challenge the class to take on a leadership crisis taken from real life events. Students will team up to recommend viable solutions to the CEO while dealing with human resource, legal, and operational repercussions.

This course will help evaluate and benchmark your leadership effectiveness and help you develop your leadership ability.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Beyond the Numbers

Bob Gordon, Jr., CCE

There is a lot more to managing and leading a successful team than just a title, it's what you do. In this face-paced interactive program participants will review top tactics to increase their effectiveness and success. Both seasoned and new managers will gain strategies they can put into action right away.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Student Night - Trivia

College vs. college! Join your classmates to see which College walks away with bragging rights as the 2026 Trivia Champions!

Sunday, July 19

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Communication and the Art of Effective Feedback

Carol Little

We all know that powerful communication is essential to strong leadership. But what is powerful communication and how can you effectively deliver feedback so your team will actually receive and benefit from it? As president and CEO of The Little Training Company LLC (LTC), Carol Little brings 15+ years of experience as a Certified Master Trainer and Public Speaker to these questions to help you improve the way you communicate with your team. In this workshop, she will discuss:

- ▶ The essential elements of feedback
- ▶ How, when, and where to deliver feedback
- ▶ How to address problems and get your team to buy into the solutions
- ▶ The “Feedback Sandwich”—What it is and how to serve it up

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Corporate Culture: How Strong Is Your Foundation?

Gary Freytag, CCFE

Corporate culture is difficult to define but critical to an organization pursuing excellence. How do organizations define and build a positive culture? Are you a “Me” or a “We” company? How does culture help guide every employee in their day-to-day decision making? This class will delve into the key elements of building a positive, self-sustaining culture that supports the business and improves employee engagement. We will examine how leaders, through their decisions and actions can nurture or undermine culture. .

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Trust as a Manager

Ashley Freeman, MBA

New managers are typically promoted for their individual contributor skills, but six out of ten of them receive no formal training on how to manage people. In this session, we cover the most important and foundational interpersonal skill for a cohesive and productive team – building trust – with practical application tips you can apply to your team to enhance engagement and productivity.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Navigating Difficult Conversations

Ashley Freeman, MBA

We all have that one conversation we know we need to have but have been avoiding. This session is a call to action that provides practical tools for that conversation so that you can move forward successfully through it while diffusing defensiveness, resulting in enhanced relationships and improved communication in both your personal and professional life.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

Monday, July 20

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Leadership & Communication – Own it!

Robbie Pape, CCFE

Are you deliberate in how and what you communicate? During this session, Robbie Pape will help us become aware of our ‘communication comfort zones’ using the DISC Assessment. This session will provide you with communication basics, an understanding of the habits that hold us back, and the immense power that choice has in our lives both professionally and personally.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Our Greatest Assets

Beverly Manning

We’ve all heard and believe the statement that “employees are a company’s greatest asset”. As managers and employers, are we doing the things to retain and develop those assets? Are we embracing our competitive advantage and providing the encouragement, incentives and opportunity for our employees to be an integral part of the company’s mission?

This course will introduce you to the latest trends, best practices and tools to assist with developing a work culture that is conducive to achievement and engagement. Topics will include performance management, hiring practices, retention, morale and the importance of consistent policies and procedures.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Using Your Strengths to Prevent Burnout

Ashley Freeman, MBA

When was the last time you felt truly alive after work? In this session, you will define what your strengths are, learn how to apply them in your life and work, and understand research-based methods for using them to feel fulfilled and fueled even after the busiest and most draining days.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Crafting Your Career Purpose Statement

Ashley Freeman, MBA

Most of us have a loose understanding of our ideal career path, but what if you could clarify your career purpose into a single statement? This interactive and reflective session walks you through the components that make up a career purpose statement and leaves you with a draft statement to share and refine with colleagues and loved ones so that you can find more joy, fulfillment, and energy in your everyday career journey.

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Sports Night

Join your ICCFAU colleagues for a friendly game of bowling or cornhole! Appetizers, salad, pizza, wings, and dessert will be served.

Tuesday, July 21

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Community Outreach: Setting Your Company Apart

Christina DiBari

Are you doing everything you can to build your company’s ties into the community? Is your organization the first one families think of in a time of need? Spring Grove Cemetery gets between 20,000 and 30,000 visitors per year – for reasons other than funerals and burials. This course will explore the variety of ways Spring Grove builds its presence and positive awareness, including everything from grief programs, events and tours, to car shows, Segway’s and Facebook.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

“Business Law” - A Funeral Home and Cemetery Legal Outlook

Poul Lemasters, Esq.

As a manager, you are called upon to make many decisions but do you know if your decisions are legally sound? Are you aware of common hiring and firing legal issues and how to avoid them? Do you know how to handle HR issues so that you are paving the way for a good legal foundation versus creating a lawsuit? When it comes to recordkeeping, do you know what to document and what to avoid? Gain the knowledge, the legal knowledge,

to understanding the legal risks, and, more importantly, the steps to avoid legal pitfalls that run with the day-to-day job of management. From customer complaints to demand letters, this will not only help cover the basics but it will also help CYA.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Your Marketing & Branding Mantra: Building Customer Loyalty

Doug Gober

When people hear your company's name, what thoughts or emotions are evoked? In this class, we will learn about how our actions and interactions can positively impact the development process of lasting customer loyalty. Doug Gober will pull together a variety of key branding considerations and apply them directly to cemeteries, crematories, and funeral homes. We will examine each potential point of customer contact within your business and delve into how each of these impact our existing and potential customers. Discover how this integrated branding concept can help you differentiate yourself in your marketplace.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–4:30 PM

First Let's Kill All the Lawyers!

Gary Freytag, CCFE

How often do you wish you could take Shakespeare's advice before dealing with difficult employee situations? As an employer/manager are you at wits end with HR matters disrupting day-to-day operations? Do you have an employee handbook? Are its policies and procedures helping or hindering you from dealing appropriately with bad behavior? Are you unknowingly undermining your company culture? As an employer/manager it's important to have a basic understanding of how to react when you are confronted with different HR situations. This interactive session will present HR scenarios that will help you to think on your feet and exercise prudent judgment while keeping you out of court.

4:30 PM–5:15 PM

University Graduation

5:15 PM–6:00 PM

Classroom Wrap-up | Presentation of Certificate

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6:15 PM–7:30 PM

Graduate Reception

Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served

Wednesday, July 22

Travel Day





College of Technology

Dean Nick Timpe, CSE

The College of Technology will provide practical strategies for attendees to apply technology at their firms for improving operations and better serving their families.

Friday, July 17

2:00 PM–5:30 PM

Registration & Check-in

4:30 PM–5:00 PM

Orientation

5:00 PM–6:00 PM

Welcome Reception

6:00 PM–7:00 PM

Dinner

Saturday, July 18

8:00 AM–8:45 AM

Breakfast

8:45 AM–9:00 AM

Introductions

Nick Timpe, CSE

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

New Technology in an Old Profession

Nick Timpe, CSE

Our profession is perhaps the oldest that exists – how can modern technology help better serve families, and what can I expect out of this school? This session will provide a roadmap for the coming week and provide real life examples of technology making the difference in the level of service provided to families. Students will

share their learning goals for the week.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

People, Process, Technology: Solving the Right Problem

Jason Cavett

We have all heard it before - “Do you want to grow your organization? Increase your revenue? Drive new sales? Well, use XYZ Software and you will see results!” A piece of software, by itself, is just another get rich quick scheme and often results in organizational frustration, split fiefdoms of technology, and failure to achieve the desired goals. This session will cover an approach to organizational growth that creates a bed of solid rock on which to advance, grow, and expand. Rather than throwing technology at the problem or goal, you will walk away with a plan for developing an organizational environment where your tools support and enable your growth.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Embracing Change: Strategies for Helping Staff Continually Improve and Adapt to New Technology

Olga Piehler

As the rate of change and technological innovation continues to exponentially increase

in all aspects of our lives, it is imperative for leaders to become fluent navigators and facilitators of change. This course will cover a neuroscience perspective to change facilitation, and the top reasons change gets stuck. Attendees will be provided with tools to help identify the most common types of resistance to change (external and internal) and techniques to overcome resistance for the adoption of change in a sustainable way. The course will also address the concept of unlearning and its role in change acquisition. Participants will learn how to incorporate unlearning goals into their change-design process to achieve desired outcomes.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Strategic Planning for IT Resources

Christina DiBari; Greg Kent

How does a business, regardless of size or available resources, decide how to allocate their technology dollars? Every business has different initiatives and goals. In this class, we will talk about Strategic Planning, how to prioritize those IT projects and discuss a framework for your IT investments. We will also focus on 2 key challenges that most businesses are currently facing: Security and the modern workforce.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Student Night - Trivia

College vs. college! Join your classmates to see which College walks away with bragging rights as the 2026 Trivia Champions!

Sunday, July 19

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Implementing and Managing Technological Innovation

Gary Freytag, CCFE

Competing in today's business environment requires constant innovation, but what does this look like from a management perspective, and how can you "manage up" to effect that change with your company's leadership? What kind of stats do your decision makers look at, and what influences their decisions? This class will examine justifying new investment, common implementation challenges, balancing the needs of people with systems, and the unintended consequences of technological innovation from a

management perspective.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Customer Experience and Client Follow-up: Surveying for Results

Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE

As our interactions with consumers change through the adoption of technology it is critical to maintain the high level of service and customer experience that marks our profession. In this class we will evaluate approaches and strategies for maintaining a high level of customer experience, survey for consumer feedback, and how to use that feedback to continue improving your organization.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

21st Century Recordkeeping

Tim Kolasa; Nick Timpe, CSE

What can realistically be expected from technology when it comes to running your cemetery or funeral home? What should be pursued first? What can be done in-house and what should be purchased? This session will review off the shelf industry options for records systems, mapping solutions, report builders, as well as DIY tools for the same.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Virtual Tours, Customer Surveys, and Reports Lab

Nick Timpe, CSE; Tim Kolasa; Greg Kent; Christina DiBari

This lab is a hands-on session where you'll build your own virtual tours and learn how to use data analytics to evaluate your business and support smarter planning decisions. Students will divide into small groups and rotate through two practical exercises to experience both parts of the lab. In the first portion, we'll explore and try a range of 3D capture and filming technologies and use them to create virtual tours of properties and facilities. In the second portion, we'll review core data analytics strategies and apply them to real business questions, focusing on how to turn data into insights that support more confident, informed decision-making. By the end of the lab, you'll have practical experience with the tools and a clear framework for using analytics to see your organization in a new light.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

Monday, July 20

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Applying Artificial Intelligence to Funeral Service

Pierce Dempsey, CCRE

AI is disrupting our world and evolving at a rapid pace. How does it apply to funeral homes and cemeteries? What are the benefits, the concerns, and the ethical implications? This class offers a comprehensive introduction to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its application to our profession. Participants will learn about the fundamentals of AI, including how it can transform operations, enhance family service, and drive sales. Through real-world examples, students will understand the potential of AI to streamline business processes and offer personalized services.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

AI Lab

Pierce Dempsey, CCRE

In this lab we will apply what you have learned about AI, trying and testing a number of AI applications that you'll be able to translate back to your operation. You will get hands-on experience as we work through real world issues and experience the myriad of outcomes associated with varying degrees of Human input.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

From Clicks to Clients: Mastering Facebook, Google, SEO & Video for Growth

Haley Laurence

Getting more business from digital marketing isn't about doing one thing right—it's about getting everything to work together. In this session, we'll break down how to connect the dots between Facebook, Google, SEO, video, and more to actually drive calls and grow your funeral home or cemetery. You'll learn simple, effective ways to optimize your Google Business

Profile, get more positive reviews, and make sure your website turns visitors into families who pick up the phone. We'll also cover Facebook and Google Ads strategies that actually work, plus how custom video can help build trust and set you apart. If you've ever wondered how to make digital marketing feel less overwhelming and more like a well-oiled machine, this session is for you.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Hands-On Digital Workshop: Turning Digital Marketing into Measurable Results

Haley Laurence

This isn't just another marketing talk—it's a hands-on session where we roll up our sleeves and get to work. We'll walk through real examples of Google Business Profile optimizations, fine-tune Facebook strategies, and show you quick SEO fixes that make a difference. You'll also get practical tips for improving your website's conversion rate and making sure your ads bring in the right families. Plus, we'll cover easy ways to use video to strengthen your brand and connect with your community. Bring your laptop, your questions, and any challenges you're facing—we're here to help you leave with a clear plan and real solutions you can start using right away.

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Sports Night

Join your ICCFAU colleagues for a friendly game of bowling or cornhole! Appetizers, salad, pizza, wings, and dessert will be served.

Tuesday, July 21

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

“Technology Makes It All Easier – Including the Risks of Liability” A Legal Look at Deathcare Technology

Poul Lemasters, Esq.

It's so simple. In today's technology world, with a click of a button you can do anything. Buy a casket – click. Schedule a funeral – click. Write a bad review of a funeral business – click. But with all that technology brings us, it also brings new risks. While every business will have some risks, what about new risks with new technology. How does a business protect itself from technology it

may not even understand? How does a business secure itself from cyber threats? How does a business provide and gather information through its website without creating a risk to itself or consumers? The truth is that technology is great step forward – but you can't just move forward and think that new technology is free from risk management. This class will help identify technology in deathcare as well as the ways you can reduce the risks.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Implementing and Automating Your CRM to Maximize Sales Efficiency

Tim Kolasa

With so many moving parts in the sales process and marketing outreach, how can you connect all of the dots to ensure that prospects are not falling through the cracks? How can your CRM help keep leads warm and moving through the sales funnel? This class will cover practical steps to launching a new system for your team, as well as how your sales process, follow up, scheduling, analytics, and more can be automated.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Why Digital First Impressions Matter: Also Known As You Spent \$1MM on Your Cemetery Entrance but Your Neighbor's Kid Built Your Website

Jason Cavett

As our culture continues to evolve through generational, regional, and societal changes, more people are getting their first - and sometimes only - impression from your website. What considerations should you take when presenting your funeral home or cemetery online? How do you capture the attention and, more importantly, the trust of families who are making huge decisions at emotional times? How do you prompt them to engage with your organization? This session explores design considerations, usability, and a family-focused approach.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–4:30 PM

Lab: Live Website Evaluations

Jason Cavett

This morning we learned the critical elements

for a successful and impactful website. Today we will use these skills for live evaluation of actual websites in our profession. Students will work in groups to evaluate funeral home and cemetery websites, report their critique to the group, and then hear professional feedback from professors.

4:30 PM–5:15 PM

University Graduation

5:15 PM–6:00 PM

Classroom Wrap-up | Presentation of Certificate

Required to attend to receive certificate (certificates will not be mailed).

6:15 PM–7:30 PM

Graduate Reception

Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served

Wednesday, July 22

Travel Day





J. Asher Neel College of Sales and Marketing

Dean Patrick Downey, CCE

The terms Sales and Marketing can mean different things to different people and different businesses in the cemetery and funeral service profession. But, without an understanding of, and a process for, delivering results in these two areas, your success may be limited. This year's curriculum will zero in on driving personal and professional success by embracing three elements of successful sales and marketing strategy: Service, Process, and Culture. Daily sessions will deliver proven "How To Do It" best practices for group presentations, post-service follow-up, connecting with cremation families and recruiting top talent to your organization. There will also be interactive workshop sessions on coaching skills and using AI in sales and marketing. Students will learn the differences in the leader mindset vs the manager mindset and how to build a culture of service excellence and high performance. All presented by an exceptional faculty with decades of experience working across all channels of the cemetery and funeral service profession. A comprehensive course for both sales and non-sales professionals.

Friday, July 17

2:00 PM–5:30 PM

Registration & Check-in

4:30 PM–5:00 PM

Orientation

5:00 PM–6:00 PM

Welcome Reception

6:00 PM–7:00 PM

Dinner

Saturday, July 18

8:00 AM–8:45 AM

Breakfast

8:45 AM–9:00 AM

Introductions

Patrick Downey, CCE

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Why Sales is Vital to Every Funeral and Cemetery Business (and How to Get it Right)

Patrick Downey, CCE; Doug Gober; Gary O'Sullivan, CCFE

In this session, three sales and marketing leaders; Doug Gober, Patrick Downey, CCE and Gary O'Sullivan will each present the principles and best practices of three critical elements of sales and marketing success: Service, Process and Culture. Each presenter will draw from their decades of learning and personal experiences in the death-care profession to share a blueprint and formula for long-term personal and business success that every student can use..

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

The ROI of Event Marketing and Community Outreach

René Negrete

This course will focus on how strategic

engagement through events and community initiatives drives measurable sales and marketing results. This presentation will break down methods for tracking ROI, from brand awareness and lead generation to customer loyalty and revenue impact. Participants will learn best practices for aligning outreach efforts with organizational goals, selecting meaningful KPIs, and leveraging data to justify and optimize marketing spend.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Learn the Six Most Powerful Ways to Influence Your Prospects to Buy

Andrés Aguilar

Selling is more psychological than it is logical. In this session, you will learn what these six powerful tools are. You will also learn the principles of why they work and how to use them in a positive way to influence people to buy from you. This is a session you don't want to miss.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Cremation Myths Debunked

Néctar Ramirez

So many families who choose cremation are selecting no services. There is a misunderstanding of the cremation consumer, which is leading to an abundance of direct cremation policies. In this module we will take a deep dive into the psychology of the cremation consumer and gain a better understanding of their needs and wants. With that understanding we will tailor our presentation of products and services to maximize the probability of a service, higher policy value and family satisfaction.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Student Night - Trivia

College vs. college! Join your classmates to see which College walks away with bragging rights as the 2026 Trivia Champions!

Sunday, July 19

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

The Marketing and Sales Matrix

René Negrete

The course highlights how aligning marketing and sales efforts drives growth through digital-first engagement, community outreach, and data-powered strategies. It shows how technology, analytics, and coordinated team execution improve reputation, call volume, and measurable performance outcomes.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Sales Leadership

Andrés Aguilar

Leadership is a key component for any sales organization. This class will explore the aspects of good sales leadership.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

The Paradigm Shift that Elevates Performance

Gary O'Sullivan, CCFE

How an individual responsible for a sales organization views themselves has a significant impact on the organization's success. Most individuals responsible for a sales organization see themselves as sales managers. And while management skills are required, management alone does not elevate an organization. What's often missing is a sales leader's mindset. The difference is significant—and it changes everything. In this paradigm-shifting session, you will clearly understand the distinction between sales management and sales leadership—what managers focus on and why you must lead your way through the management process and why having a leadership mindset is required to build a thriving, high-performing organization.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

What a Lawyer Can Teach Me About Sales

Poul Lemasters, Esq.

Seriously? Everyone thinks that lawyers are there when things go wrong, and probably would never compare the world of a lawyer to the world of sales - but the two worlds have a lot in common. In fact, there are probably a few things a lawyer can teach you about sales! There

are the obvious items such as HR and general employment issues. But go a little further and consider the regulatory and licensing side of sales. How about the general world of advertising – not only by mail, but by telephone and online? Now let's jump into all those contracts and forms that are used in every sale you make. And - wait for it - how about ethics? I know you are curious what a lawyer can teach about ethics. You can quickly see that lawyers are more involved in sales than you may have thought. This seminar will cover the spectrum of law and sales – ranging from the day-to-day legal issues all the way to tips and tricks a lawyer can share to help with anyone's sales.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

Monday, July 20

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

AI and the New Competitive Landscape in Deathcare: Who Wins the Future

Chuck Gallagher

AI is reshaping how families search, compare, and prearrange funeral and cemetery services. In this forward-focused session featuring live demonstrations, discover practical AI applications that drive preneed growth, enhance family engagement, and strengthen competitive positioning – while maintaining the trust that defines the profession. Who wins the future?

Attendees will gain clarity on how AI can:

- Improve preneed lead identification and prioritization
- Personalize outreach at scale while preserving trust
- Strengthen digital visibility and online engagement
- Reduce administrative burden so teams can focus on families

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

The Invisible Force in Sales

Gary O'Sullivan, CCFE

When sales leaders are experiencing high turnover, inconsistent performance, and poor communication both inside the sales team and with other departments, they think they have a people and performance problem—when in reality, they have a culture problem.

In this session, you will learn how to build a sales culture intentionally that creates an environment based on defined values, a strong mission, and a clear vision. Only by having a defined culture can accountability, collaboration, and transparent communication become the norm.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

The Nuts and Bolts of an Effective Lunch and Learn Program

Kyle Aler

How do you create an effective Lunch and Learn program? This session will give you practical tips on creating an effective Lunch and Learn program. From large combination companies to stand alone cemeteries or mortuaries, everyone can benefit from these programs.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Aftercare with Purpose: Building Value Beyond the Service

Erin Creger

Take your Aftercare program to the next level by transforming routine follow-up into meaningful relationships built on trust and value. This session will guide you in designing and implementing an Aftercare program that goes beyond the standard approach and delivers genuine value to the families you serve. With practical tools and actionable insights to establish trust and build long-term connections with client families.

Learn how a proactive, caring and consistent approach to Aftercare ensures families feel engaged and supported early in the process, and every step of the way. You will leave equipped with the verbiage, resources, and strategies to confidently create an Aftercare plan that fosters lasting trust, loyalty and results.

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Sports Night

Join your ICCFAU colleagues for a friendly game of bowling or cornhole! Appetizers, salad, pizza, wings, and dessert will be served.

Tuesday, July 21

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

The Follow-up Formula: Lead Nurturing from First Contact to Close

Erin Creger

Discover tools and techniques that transform initial interactions into lasting relationships, guiding client families seamlessly through the process of making their pre-arrangements. Learn the art of personalized follow-up, leveraging insights from each touchpoint to tailor your approach.

From the first point of contact to the final close, and beyond, this session will give you a comprehensive framework to cultivate leads, build trust, educate families, and maximize conversion rates.

Uncover the secrets to developing compelling follow-up scripts and strategies that connect with your families and move toward a positive outcome for all. Whether new to sales, or refining your skillset, you will learn how to cultivate your approach to lead nurturing and follow up, ensuring families feel peace of mind knowing they have been carefully guided and educated through the decision-making process.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Coaching and Communication Techniques to Keep Your Team Positive and Productive – An Interactive Workshop

Patrick Downey, CCE

Learn and roleplay communication skills and techniques to implement a coaching and communication system to stay connected with every member of your sales team and build a “Top Gun” proactive team culture within your sales organization.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Stop Recruiting Like HR, and Start Recruiting Like Marketers!

Eric Battles

In the battle for today’s top talent, posting and praying is no longer a winning strategy. In this session, you’ll learn the power of clearly defining your company’s brand-story, how to build a top-notch marketing strategy to tell that story to the right talent, and the importance of delivering world class support to your current top talent so they’ll tell your story for you. Let’s do this!.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–4:30 PM

Putting it All Together With an Action Plan to Make a Difference

Patrick Downey, CCE

In this session Dean Patrick Downey, CCE will lead the class in a look back at all of the previous sessions against a framework of how each topic presented fits into the blueprint of the three key elements for sales and marketing success covered in session one; Service, Process and Culture. Each student will be tasked with presenting their most valuable and important best practice, concept or idea learned at the college and specifically how they will implement it at their company when they return.

4:30 PM–5:15 PM

University Graduation

5:15 PM–6:00 PM

Classroom Wrap-up | Presentation of Certificate

Required to attend to receive certificate (certificates will not be mailed).

6:15 PM–7:30 PM

Graduate Reception

Heavy hors d’oeuvres will be served

Wednesday, July 22

Travel Day





Todd Van Beck College of Funeral Home Management

Dean Mike Watkins

Too many managers consider “creativity” someone else’s department. In funeral service, creative management is the key to differentiation.

Friday, July 17

2:00 PM–5:30 PM

Registration & Check-in

4:30 PM–5:00 PM

Orientation

5:00 PM–6:00 PM

Welcome Reception

6:00 PM–7:00 PM

Dinner

Saturday, July 18

8:00 AM–8:45 AM

Breakfast

8:45 AM–9:00 AM

Introductions

Mike Watkins

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Course Introduction & The “WHY” of Funeral Service

Mike Watkins

This course will provide an overview of the College of Funeral Home Management and the importance of understanding the “WHY” of funeral service and connecting with your personal “WHY.” This foundational information brings value to you personally and the communities and families you serve.

This launching-off session sets the table for the valuable information and topics to come throughout the course.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Overcoming Deritualization: Saving Funerals Through Private Rituals

Dr. Jason Troyer

Many funeral professionals lament that “no one values funeral rituals anymore.” It is true that families may not agree on what a public funeral service will look like. However, there are many other valuable opportunities to help individuals acknowledge their loss and honor their loved one. In this presentation, Dr. Troyer will review numerous examples of how funeral professionals can help facilitate private grief rituals that families will find valuable and meaningful.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Can’t I Just Fire Them? Some Do’s and Don’ts of HR and Management

Poul Lemasters, Esq

Employees are not only one of the biggest expenses for a company; employees can also be the most problematic. Good employees are hard to find, and it seems even the best can cause

problems. So, what do you do when your best employee continues to come in late? How do you handle an employee that makes the nightly news - and not for a good reason? And can someone tell me if all my employees are high? This seminar provides insight to real, current HR and other management issues affecting the funeral profession today. The focus is on some tough, prevalent, and new problems that could lead to a lawsuit; and of course, the prevention measures needed to avoid the problems.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Families Gone Wild: Defusing Conflict in the Arrangement Room

Dr. Jason Troyer

Increasingly families fight among themselves and clash with their funeral arranger regarding service options, the cost of services and products, and many other topics. In this presentation, I discuss specific examples of conflict, examine the psychological roots of specific behaviors, and propose tactics for defusing and resolving the conflict. The strategies are drawn from clinical psychology and family therapy where therapists must quickly decipher challenging family dynamics and work toward positive outcomes. Attendees will leave with practical strategies they can use immediately to defuse conflict in the arrangement conference.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Student Night - Trivia

College vs. college! Join your classmates to see which College walks away with bragging rights as the 2026 Trivia Champions!

Sunday, July 19

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

What Will and Will Not Work in 2026

Welton Hong

As competition and consumer behavior evolve, funeral homes must be more strategic about where they invest their marketing time and budget. In this session, Welton Hong explains what marketing tactics are working in 2026, what's losing effectiveness, and how different digital strategies support goals such

as generating at-need calls or building long-term pre-need demand. Attendees will gain practical guidance on search visibility, pay-per-click advertising, website performance, online reputation, and other key elements needed to protect and grow market share.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Beyond the Service and Where to Begin

Lauren Blevins, CCFE, CPLP

As we progress inside the shift in our industry and move more toward a hospitality mindset, how do we begin? Implementation of a new way of doing business from catering to specialized services can be the most challenging part of the process. Lauren will give some clear how-to's. How she started and what she learned from some of her winning solutions and from some ideas that flopped. Embracing change will not only affect our personal lives but can have a profound impact on our businesses if our teams believe in it.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Cremation Risk Management

Poul Lemasters, Esq.

Poul has customized this program specifically for the school of Funeral Home Management. He will provide best practices for firms to mitigate their risk exposure and ensure you, your employees, and the families you serve are protected.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

AI in Action for Funeral Homes

Welton Hong

Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing how families search, communicate, and make decisions—and funeral homes must adapt. In this hands-on session, attendees will learn how tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Midjourney can support daily operations, from family communication and content creation to staff training and workflow efficiency. Through live demonstrations and practical exercises, participants will gain ready-to-use prompts and strategies to integrate AI responsibly while maintaining the compassion and trust families expect.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

Monday, July 20

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Crematory & Prep Room Management

Lauren Blevins, CCFE, CPLP

This two-session course is not a crematory operator or embalming seminar. Rather, students will be presented with proven policies, procedures, and practices to assure safe and prudent crematory and prep room management. This course will cover topics from proper handling, recording, and tracking of human remains to inventory and cost management.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Crematory & Prep Room Management (Continued)

Lauren Blevins, CCFE, CPLP

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Why Keeping Score Matters

Doug Gober

Historically, Funeral & Cemetery service professionals tend to be focused on serving their community. While important, care must be taken to not ignore the fact that they are running a significant business. In this presentation, Doug will explore easy to implement methods to consistently evaluate financial progress through the use of operational performance indicators and comparative analysis.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Are You Just Going Through the Motions?

Doug Gober

Research has shown a disconnect between our message about our offer and the family's opinion as to whether or not they have sufficient information to make a logical buying decision. It is evident that there is often a breakdown between how we are presenting information and

how the consumer receives it under extremely stressful circumstances. Join Doug as he helps you evaluate your method of communication and proposes meaningful skills and tools needed to help bridge this gap.

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Sports Night

Join your ICCFAU colleagues for a friendly game of bowling or cornhole! Appetizers, salad, pizza, wings, and dessert will be served.

Tuesday, July 21

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Service or Serving: The Simple Shift to Unlock Your Scalability

Brent Thomas

We all know service is important, but are you truly serving? Making this simple mindset shift can change the way you approach your team and customer interactions and unlock scalable success. This session breaks it down with unexpected strategies that drive loyalty, strengthen your team, and build lasting customer experiences. We'll cover:

- ▶ Turning off transaction mindset and humanizing your customer experience
- ▶ Long-term vision, generational customers, and extra-mile mentality
- ▶ Effects of underutilized tools like thankfulness and empathy on your physiological, emotional, and financial success

Discover how serving is the secret to growing your business the right way.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

The Art and Science of Connecting with the "Researcher"

Brent Thomas

Today's shoppers research before calling. Studies reveal a significant gap between what deathcare professionals believe they communicated and what consumers understand. In this competitive profession, managers set the standard for service excellence. This course challenges the notion that consumers are focused solely on price and instead highlights the importance of engaging the "researcher".

Learn practical ways to coach your team in both the art of meaningful conversation and the science behind the discussion. Discover how the telephone can become your most valuable tool when you approach each interaction with empathy and expertise.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Grass Roots Marketing

Phil Zehms

In this lecture session, Phil will present on the development and application of a comprehensive grass roots marketing plan. He will share proven strategies and provides a framework for developing your own grass roots marketing plan.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–4:30 PM

Creating a Grass Roots Marketing Plan

Phil Zehms

In this workshop session, Phil will lead students in developing their own grass roots marketing plan, specific to their business, it's goals, and the community it serves.

4:30 PM–5:15 PM

University Graduation

5:15 PM–6:00 PM

Classroom Wrap-up | Presentation of Certificate

Required to attend to receive certificate (certificates will not be mailed).

6:15 PM–7:30 PM

Graduate Reception

Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served

Wednesday, July 22

Travel Day





School of Graduate Studies

Dean Robbie Pape, CCFE

The School of Graduate Studies is designed for C-Suite leaders and senior executives who are ready to drive collaboration, innovation, and growth while reaching the highest levels of leadership. Limited to 12 participants, this intimate and highly interactive program will be conducted by industry leaders and leading non-industry professionals and will offer fresh insight and learning to empower you to improve the performance of your operations and lead your organization more effectively. To apply for the program, visit iccf.com/university.

Friday, July 17

2:00 PM–5:30 PM

Registration & Check-in

4:30 PM–5:00 PM

Orientation

5:00 PM–6:00 PM

Welcome Reception

6:00 PM–7:00 PM

Dinner

Saturday, July 18

8:00 AM–8:45 AM

Breakfast

8:45 AM–9:00 AM

Introductions

Robbie Pape, CCFE

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Servant Leadership

Dave Brown

What leaders want is to have an organization of motivated, productive team members. However, most leaders have never been taught how to truly be servant leaders. Instead of understanding that their role is to serve the people in which they are entrusted and knowing how to lead by putting others first, most leaders are overly

focused on driving results. Consequently, they unintentionally create cultures with low morale, high turnover, and decreased production.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Navigate for Leaders

Dave Brown

Statistically, if you're like most leaders you lead others well when they are the same behavioral profile as you. But that also means that you are potentially improperly leading as much as 75% of your team. Because leading properly is not about leading people the way you want to be lead; it's about leading people the way they want to be lead. Yet the vast majority of leaders have never had any formal education or professional psychology training about how to identify, understand, and relate to people they lead who are of opposing behavioral types to themselves. As a result, each day relationships are damaged, team camaraderie is weakened, and millions of dollars are lost in potential sales.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Innovative Strategies for Funeral Homes and Cemeteries: Mastering Digital Marketing and AI

Welton Hong

This session explores how funeral homes

and cemeteries can succeed in a rapidly evolving digital landscape by combining proven marketing strategies with practical AI applications. Attendees will learn which online tactics—such as search optimization, pay-per-click advertising, social media, and high-converting websites—drive both at-need and preneed growth, while also gaining insight into how AI can support lead generation, marketing, and follow-up processes. Participants will leave with practical ideas for using these tools to improve efficiency, build trust, and stay competitive in 2026 and beyond.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Effective Board Management: Getting Things Done Through Good Governance

Darin Drabing

As a C-Suite leader, it is often difficult to navigate the world of Board of Directors to have an effective, cohesive organization. Join Darin as he guides you through the ins and outs of effective Board of Directors Management. The class will study the best practices of Board selection, organization, committee structures, deliverables, for profit vs non-profit, the need for diversity and much more.

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Student Night - Trivia

College vs. college! Join your classmates to see which College walks away with bragging rights as the 2026 Trivia Champions!

Sunday, July 19

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Staying on the Right Side of the Grass - and Lawsuits, Part I

Poul Lemasters, Esq.

We all 'hear' the story about someone who had a lawsuit, but somehow never hear the details. Did they really get sued, or just threatened? Was it even a lawsuit or was it something else? Did they just settle? What did the insurance company do? What is the process of an issue that may or may not become a lawsuit? As a leader of my company - what role do I play?

This course will provide a detailed look into several deathcare situations that can become a bigger issue, if you don't handle them correctly.

From a subpoena to a demand letter; a state regulatory matter to a federal OSHA violation; a customer complaint to a bad viral online review; this course will use real examples to:

- › Analyze several issues, all based on actual lawsuits and claims;
- › Discuss the cause of the underlying issue;
- › Identify the steps involved in each claim, from initial response to settlement;
- › Discover steps to prevent issues from happening; and
- › Create plans to implement practices into your business.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Staying on the Right Side of the Grass - and Lawsuits, Part II

Poul Lemaster, Esq.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Built To Last - Developing a Strategic Plan to Carry Your Organization Through the 2030s, Part I

Bob Gordon, Jr., CCE

In an era of rapid technological advancements, evolving consumer preferences, and unpredictable global dynamics, organizations must chart a resilient course to thrive in the 2030s and beyond. Join us for an insightful session where we explore the essential elements of building a sustainable strategy that withstands the test of time. From harnessing innovation to fostering adaptability, we will delve into practical approaches for future-proofing your organization against emerging challenges and seizing opportunities on the horizon. Discover how to cultivate a culture of innovation, leverage digital transformation, and cultivate strategic partnerships to navigate the complexities of tomorrow's business landscape. Whether you're a seasoned executive or a high potential manager, this session will equip you with actionable insights to steer your organization towards enduring success in the decade ahead. A pre-work packet will be sent out to all attendees. This is an interactive two-part session, come prepared, stay engaged through the session and leave with more clarity on your path forward.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Built To Last - Developing a Strategic Plan to Carry Your Organization Through the 2030s, Part II

Bob Gordon, Jr., CCE

5:30 PM–6:30 PM

Dinner

Monday, July 20

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Seeing Beyond Tradition

Lee Longino

Lee will guide us in examining our profession's evolution and applying that knowledge to adopt a contemporary approach. This method transforms funeral services from mundane to dynamic by creating meaningful and unique celebrations of life. We will also consider the significant impact of the cremation consumer, emphasizing that they are more than 'just a direct cremation'.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Unlocking the Mysteries of Government & Advocacy Involvement in the Funeral and Cemetery Profession

Caressa Hughes

Join Caressa for an insightful presentation designed specifically for funeral home and cemetery leaders. This session will demystify the complexities of federal and state government regulations and their impact on the funeral and cemetery profession.

Key Highlights:

- › Understand key strategies for navigating state and federal laws and regulations.
- › Learn about state-specific government issues and their implications for your business.
- › Discover the legislative process and the importance of advocacy.
- › Gain insights from real-world case studies and recent legislative changes.

This is your opportunity to enhance your knowledge of the governmental process in the funeral and cemetery profession.

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

From Strategy to Results: Building and Sustaining a High-Performance Culture

Carlos Quezada

Participants will understand how high-performance cultures are deliberately designed rather than organically hoped for. Students will learn how leadership teams translate vision into strategy, strategy into operating priorities, and priorities into daily behaviors and measurable outcomes. They will gain a practical framework for diagnosing cultural breakdowns, aligning teams around clear expectations, and sustaining momentum through accountability, communication, and disciplined execution. The course emphasizes real-world application, equipping students with tools and mental models they can apply immediately in their own organizations. At the end of this course, students will leave with these practical takeaways:

- › Why Culture is the Strategy
- › You Cannot Transform What You Do Not Understand
- › Designing the Culture You Actually Need
- › From Words to Operating Reality
- › Where Most Organizations Fail
- › Avoiding the Regression Trap
- › The Leader as Chief Cultural Architect.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–5:00 PM

Encouraging Staff Creativity and Enthusiasm

Glenda Stansbury

One of the most pressing issues in funeral service today is staffing. Finding and keeping funeral professionals is an on-going topic of conversation.

- › Statistics show that within the next 10 years, approximately 2000 Baby Boomer funeral directors will be retiring.
- › According to NFDA "Over 60% of funeral homeowners said they will retire in five years."
- › Statistics also show that mortuary school enrollment is up 24%.

Why are we struggling to find people to hire while watching staff walk out the door? Perhaps it is time to begin to think differently about work culture, support, and expectations to provide an inviting and healthy work environment. To

de-adapt from tradition and embrace creative. We will provide ideas, suggestions, and food for thought as we look toward the future of our profession. This includes providing the right environment to grow and nurture employees, creating a space for creativity and unique approaches to service, giving examples of ceremony that bring the community back to your firm.

7:00 PM–10:00 PM

Sports Night

Join your ICCFAU colleagues for a friendly game of bowling or cornhole! Appetizers, salad, pizza, wings, and dessert will be served.

Tuesday, July 21

8:00 AM–8:55 AM

Breakfast

9:00 AM–10:30 AM

Applied Finance in Deathcare

Gary Freytag, CCFE

Regardless of what role you have, understanding finance is critical to assessing the health of your organization. Finance drives both current decision-making and long-term planning. Should we build a new reception facility? Is my cemetery endowment large enough to maintain the grounds? How well am I managing critical resources? This class will take students through financial analysis as applied to cemeteries and funeral homes. It will teach how to understand financial statements, critical ratios, financial modeling, cash flow, return on investment, portfolio theory, and business valuation.

10:30 AM–11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM–12:30 PM

Finance Workshop

Gary Freytag, CCFE

Part two of the Finance model will apply the theories introduced in applied finance to analyze the very different real-world problems faced by cemeteries and funeral homes.

CEMETERIES

- ▶ How much does it cost to maintain the grounds?
- ▶ Am I making money operating the cemetery?
- ▶ Are my goods and services priced appropriately?
- ▶ Should I be in-sourcing or outsourcing functions/
- ▶ Is my endowment invested for the long haul?

FUNERAL HOMES

- ▶ How can I tell what is appropriate workload for a funeral director?
- ▶ What is my business worth?
- ▶ Can I afford to expand my operation or facilities?
- ▶ Why should I sell pre-need funerals if I lose money?
- ▶ If I am profitable, why am I always short on cash?
- ▶ How can I finance an acquisition? .

12:30 PM–1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30 PM–3:00 PM

Leadership and the Power of Strong Leaders Starts from Within

C. Lynn Gibson, PhD, DPhil, CFSP

Leadership is a powerful ideal and being a strong leader takes skill and self-understanding. Understanding your personal skills, traits and characteristics is the first step of strong leadership. Great leaders/managers possess a balanced level of both leadership and managerial traits. What exactly are these tendencies and what distinguishes the two varying disciplines. We will dissect both sides of the coin and clearly define what skills are necessary to be a great leader, but also a strong manager. Like the Yin and Yang, a strong leader must have strong managerial tendencies to lead from a position of strength and clarity.

3:00 PM–3:30 PM

Break

3:30 PM–4:30 PM

Building Success From the Ground Up

Doug Gober

If you were starting over with a blank sheet of paper, a big pile of money, and no preconceptions, what kind of business would you design to serve 21st century funeral customers? How would it compare to the funeral home/cemetery of today? Doug Gober will look at all the elements that would make up the new funeral and cemetery business, including facilities, staffing, products, and services plus the capital required to put it all in place. He will look at what we can learn from the funeral home or cemetery of tomorrow and how we can put it to work in our businesses today.

4:30 PM–5:15 PM

University Graduation

5:15 PM–6:00 PM

Classroom Wrap-up | Presentation of Certificate

Required to attend to receive certificate
(certificates will not be mailed).

6:15 PM–7:30 PM

Graduate Reception

Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served

Wednesday, July 22

Travel Day





REGISTER ONLINE AT
www.iccfa.com/university

One-day Cremation Operator Registration

The ICCFA offers a one-day registration for those who wish to attend only the Crematory Operator Training Certification on Saturday, July 18. The cost to attend this one-day option is **\$650 per person**. This includes:

- › Admission to the Friday night reception and dinner
- › The all-day crematory operator training and certification on Saturday
- › Breakfast, lunch, and refreshment breaks on Saturday

Please visit www.iccfa.com/university to register for the one-day Crematory Operator Training.

Cancellation Policy: Registrants canceling their registrations prior to June 19 will receive refunds. All cancellations must be made in writing and will be subject to a \$125 cancellation fee. **No refunds after June 19.**

2026 ICCFA University Registration

July 17–22 • Emory Conference Center Hotel at Emory University

Class sizes are limited so act now to reserve your spot! Registration must be received by July 8. After this date, registration will be on-site only. Please go online to www.iccfa.com/university to register for the event and make your room reservation. Due to the high volume of applications, paid registrations will be processed first.

School of Graduate Studies requires a separate application. Please visit iccfa.com/university to review the application to apply.

Cancellation Policy: Registrants canceling their registrations prior to June 19 will receive refunds. All cancellations must be made in writing and will be subject to a \$125 cancellation fee. **No refunds after June 19.** Registrations received by June 19 will be included in the attendee directory.

Housing Reservations

Students should make their reservations directly with the Emory Conference Center Hotel. To reserve your room at the discounted rate of \$189, please visit www.iccfa.com/university and click on the room block link. We do expect the room block to fill up quickly, so make your reservations early.

Registration Fees*

College of 21st Century Services; College of Cremation Services; Todd Van Beck College of Funeral Home Management; College of Hospitality & Customer Experience; College of Land Management & Grounds Operations; College of Leadership, Management & Administration; J. Asher Neel College of Sales & Marketing; College of Technology	\$2,195
School of Graduate Studies	\$3,000
Additional Meal Package (for guests not attending ICCFAU)	\$1,350 each

* Fees include all meals from Friday's dinner through Tuesday's Graduate Reception, as well as the receptions and refreshments during breaks and the Sports Tournament. Fees cover a 20% service charge and a 9.25% tax on all food service.

2026 ICCFAU Faculty

Andrés Aguilar

Los Parques
Miami, FL

Kyle Aler

Precoa
Portland, OR

Eric Battles

Precoa
Portland, OR

Lauren Blevins, CCFE, CPLP

Williams Funeral Homes &
Crematory
Columbia, TN

John Bolton, CCE, CCRE, CSE, CXE

Park Lawn Corporation
San Jose, CA

Lori Bolton, CCFE, CSE, CXE

Park Lawn Corporation
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Dave Brown

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Nashville, TN

Kathy Burns

InSight Books, Inc.
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Jason Cavett

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Erin Creger

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Salt Lake City, UT

Clift Dempsey, CCRE, CCFE

Leaf Cremation
Acworth, GA

Pierce Dempsey, CCRE

Leaf Cremation
Acworth, GA

Christina DiBari

Spring Grove Cemetery &
Arboretum
Cincinnati, OH

Patrick Downey, CCE

Fairfax, VA

Darin Drabing

Forest Lawn Memorial-Parks &
Mortuaries
Glendale, CA

Rachel Essig

Green Burial Council
Folsom, CA

Morgan Eubanks

Arlington Memorial Park
Sandy Springs, GA

Ashley Freeman, MBA

Flourishing Work LLC
Snellville, GA

Gary Freytag, CCFE

Spring Grove Cemetery &
Arboretum
Cincinnati, OH

Chuck Gallagher

Chuck Gallagher, LLC
Greenville, SC

C. Lynn Gibson, PhD, DPhil, CFSP

Smith Life & Legacy
Maryville, TN

Doug Gober

Foresight
Phoenix, AZ

Nancy Goldenburg

Laurel Hill Cemetery & Funeral
Home
Bala Cynwyd, PA

Bob Gordon Jr., CCE

Cypress Lawn
Colma, CA

John Gouch Jr.

Harpeth Hills Memory Gardens
Nashville, TN

Mark Harrison

Certified Safety Training

Brooke Heldman

Dignity Memorial
Tampa, FL

Welton Hong

Ring Ring Marketing
Las Vegas, NV

Caressa Hughes

Service Corporation International
Houston, TX

Greg Kent

Spring Grove Cemetery &
Arboretum
Cincinnati, OH

Jeff Kidwiler, CCE, CSE

Blackstone Cemetery Development
San Clemente, CA

Tim Kolasa

Merendino Cemetery Care
Linden, NJ

Haley Laurence

Funeral Directors Life
Abilene, TX

Poul Lemasters, Esq.

ICCFA/Lemasters Consulting
Cincinnati, OH

Carol Little

The Little Training Company, LLC
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Lee Longino

Dignity Memorial
Tampa, FL

Beverley Manning

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Gino Merendino

Merendino Cemetery Care
Linden, NJ

René Negrete

Carriage
Houston, TX

Gary O'Sullivan, CCFE

Gary O'Sullivan Company
Winter Garden, FL

Robbie Pape, CCFE

Carriage Services
Houston, TX

Olga C. Piehler

Service Corporation International
Houston, TX

Carlos Quezada

Carriage
Houston, TX

Néctar Ramírez

Forest Lawn Memorial-Park &
Mortuaries
Glendale, CA

Erin Schwanitz-Vogt

Coldspring
Cold Spring, MN

Angelique Simpson

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Glenda Stansbury

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Larry Stuart Jr.

Raven Plume Consulting
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Brent Thomas

Dead Ringers
Batavia, OH

Nick Timpe, CSE

webCemeteries
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Healing Path Cemetery
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Mike Watkins

Park Lawn Corporation
Houston, TX

Kimberly Weis

Dignity Memorial
Tampa, FL

Bill Williams, Jr.

Funeral Services, Inc.
Tallahassee, FL

Phil Zehms

Terrace Park Cemetery & Funeral
Home
Kansas City, MO

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