

Influential Women Showcases Megan Ellis: Vice President for Institutional Advancement at Cottey College

OH, UNITED STATES, September 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Combining Fundraising Leadership, Institutional Strategy, Team Excellence, and a Commitment to Student Success

Megan Ellis is an accomplished advancement executive specializing in major and principal gifts, campaign leadership, and institutional strategy. As Vice President for Institutional Advancement at Cottey College, she leads comprehensive fundraising, donor engagement, alumnae relations, and strategic partnerships, helping connect institutional priorities with philanthropic support and long-term growth.



With more than two decades of experience across nonprofit and higher education settings, Megan has developed a reputation for translating institutional vision into measurable outcomes, strengthening philanthropic pipelines, and aligning stakeholders around sustainable institutional advancement. Her leadership is grounded in a belief that successful organizations are built through strong teams, meaningful relationships, and a clear connection between mission and impact.

Megan's professional journey includes significant leadership experience at Ohio Wesleyan University, where she spent more than a decade building and scaling advancement initiatives. During her tenure, she led cross-functional teams of up to 28 staff members, directed signature programs integrating student experience with academic and community engagement, and contributed to a record-breaking campaign.

Throughout these roles, Megan has focused on developing high-performing, collaborative teams

and designing programs that connect donor investment directly to student success. Her work has supported opportunities involving research, career development, service, and global learning, reflecting her commitment to ensuring philanthropy creates tangible benefits for students and the broader institution.

A Career Built on Mentorship and Opportunity

Megan attributes much of her success to the mentors and colleagues who have believed in her and supported her growth throughout her career. She has also remained open to new opportunities, allowing her to expand both her experience and her impact.

A significant part of her leadership philosophy centers on team development and program integration. Megan believes that institutional work is most effective when teams are aligned around common objectives and can clearly connect their efforts to positive student outcomes.

The importance of mentorship has been particularly meaningful throughout her career. Megan's academic advisor encouraged her to pursue an opportunity at her alma mater at a time when she doubted whether she was ready. That experience taught Megan the importance of trusting someone else's belief in her potential and remaining open to paths she may not have initially envisioned for herself.

Her academic advisor has continued to serve as a direct and trusted mentor throughout Megan's career, reinforcing the lasting value of relationships built around encouragement, perspective, and professional development.

Another influential mentor was a former university president who demonstrated the importance of investing in both people and knowledge. As he prepared to retire, he invited Megan to take books from his personal library. For Megan, the gesture became a lasting reminder of the importance of continuous learning and making use of shared wisdom.

Encouraging Women to Embrace Possibility

Megan's advice to young women entering higher education and advancement is to remain curious and open to possibilities, even when the entire path forward is not yet visible.

Many of the opportunities Megan has pursued emerged because other people recognized potential in her before she fully recognized it in herself. Their encouragement gave her the confidence to step into roles she might not have initially considered.

For Megan, being willing to take that step before feeling completely ready can open doors that significantly shape professional growth and career trajectory. She encourages emerging professionals to remain receptive to unexpected opportunities and to allow trusted mentors and colleagues to challenge them to see possibilities beyond their current perspective.

Her own experience demonstrates how a career can evolve through a combination of

preparation, openness, mentorship, and the willingness to say yes to opportunities that may initially feel outside one's comfort zone.

Advocating for the Value of Higher Education

Megan believes one of the biggest challenges facing her field today is the ongoing conversation around the value of higher education. As questions continue to emerge about the cost and return on investment of a college education, advancement leaders increasingly have to communicate and demonstrate the broader impact of institutions.

Megan believes higher education plays a critical role in developing future leaders, while also recognizing that access and affordability remain significant concerns. The conversation around value is complex and nuanced, requiring institutions to clearly articulate how educational experiences prepare students not only for careers but also for meaningful engagement with their communities and the world.

Another shift Megan has observed is changing student behavior, with more students choosing to remain closer to home. She understands why this can be appealing, particularly from a family perspective, but believes it can also limit some of the broader developmental experiences that come from living in new environments and encountering different cultures and communities.

These experiences can play an important role in helping students develop independence, perspective, adaptability, and a deeper understanding of the world around them.

Scholarship, Leadership, and Team Excellence

Megan's academic background complements her extensive professional experience. She earned a Bachelor's Degree in Economics Management from Ohio Wesleyan University and a Master's Degree in Higher Education with a Certificate in Institutional Research from Pennsylvania State University.

She recently completed her Doctor of Education in Higher Education Leadership at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation research focused on team excellence and examined how senior leadership teams in liberal arts institutions cultivate trust, accountability, and sustained performance.

Her scholarly work reflects a philosophy that has remained central throughout her career: organizational success is rooted in strong team culture.

For Megan, effective leadership is not simply about individual performance. It involves creating environments where people can collaborate, communicate openly, take accountability, and remain connected to a shared mission. This approach informs how she builds teams, develops programs, and works with institutional stakeholders.

Service as a Foundation for Leadership

Service, community, and perseverance are among the values most important to Megan in both her professional and personal life.

She places a strong emphasis on giving back through community engagement, including involvement with organizations such as PEO, which supports educational opportunities for women. She has also supported local efforts involving the humane society, Feed America, and Neighborhood Bridges, an organization that connects individuals in need with discreet and dignified support.

These experiences reinforce Megan's belief that leadership extends beyond the workplace. For her, leadership is rooted in how people show up for others and how they use their time, knowledge, and resources to create positive change.

Her commitment to perseverance is also deeply personal. Earning her doctorate while working full-time and raising twin daughters required significant discipline and resilience. The experience strengthened her perspective and sense of purpose while reinforcing the importance of balancing professional ambition with family and personal commitments.

Advancing Opportunity Through Purposeful Leadership

Influenced by her lifelong connection to higher education, extensive nonprofit leadership experience, and commitment to mentorship and access, Megan continues to focus on building mission-driven teams that elevate institutional impact and student opportunity.

Her approach to advancement extends beyond fundraising. Megan works to create meaningful connections between donors, institutions, programs, and the students ultimately affected by philanthropic investment. By aligning stakeholders around shared goals and demonstrating the tangible outcomes of institutional priorities, she helps organizations build stronger foundations for long-term sustainability.

Her career reflects the power of remaining open to opportunity, trusting mentors, investing in people, and maintaining a clear sense of purpose. As she continues her work in higher education advancement, Megan remains committed to strengthening institutions, supporting students, developing talented teams, and demonstrating the lasting value of education and community.

Through leadership grounded in service, curiosity, perseverance, and collaboration, Megan Ellis continues to make a meaningful contribution to higher education and the advancement profession, helping create pathways for institutions and students to thrive.

Learn More about Megan Ellis:

Through her Influential Women profile, <https://influentialwomen.com/connect/Megan-Ellis> or through her profile on Cottey College, <https://cottey.edu/leadership/>

Influential Women

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