

**South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities  
Board of Trustees Class of 2024  
Term: September 1, 2021 to August 31, 2024**

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**M. Blake Dowd**

**Market President**

**Synovus**

**Lexington**

Blake currently leads the Lexington market commercial and retail teams for Synovus and has held the position since 2018. He joined Synovus following his 2012 graduation from SCICU member institution Presbyterian College. While at PC, Blake played on the offensive line for the Blue Hose. His extensive volunteer work includes the United Way (Young Leaders Society), March of Dimes / March for Babies (Synovus team co-chair), Easter Seals (board member), and the S.C. Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Finance committee member).



**Steve Groth**

**Senior Vice President / Director of Government Lending**

**First Citizens Bank**

**Columbia**

Steve currently serves as First Citizens Bank's director of government lending, a position he has held since 2012. He has worked in banking and insurance in South Carolina since receiving his MBA from the University of South Carolina in 1993. Before earning his MBA, Steve was a naval flight officer on the P-3 Orion (submarine hunter). He holds a B.S. in industrial engineering from Iowa State University.

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**Dennis Lynch**  
**Member / Attorney**  
**Nexsen Pruet**  
**Columbia**

Dennis practices in Nexsen Pruet’s business and commercial litigation group. The majority of his work is dedicated to complex civil and antitrust litigation, as well as trucking and transportation law. Dennis was elected member (partner) of the firm in 2009. He received a B.A. in English from Villanova University in 1986 and a J.D. in 2000 from the South Texas College of Law.



**Jada McAbee**  
**Shareholder / CPA**  
**Halliday, Schwartz & Co.**  
**Spartanburg**

Jada oversees the audit, tax, and advisory services of Spartanburg-based Halliday, Schwartz & Co. She has been with the firm since 1998. Jada was appointed by Governor Henry McMaster to the S.C. Board of Accountancy in 2020. She is a former board member of the S.C. Association of Certified Public Accountants. Jada currently chairs the Converse University Board of Visitors and serves as an ex-officio member of university’s Board of Trustees. She was an economics and finance double major at Converse and received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1994.

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**David Murphy**

**Vice President, Growth and Risk Operations**  
**Unum and Colonial Life and Accident**  
**Columbia**

A three-decade leader in insurance, David currently serves Unum and Colonial Life as vice president in Growth and Risk Operations. He originally joined UNUM in Chattanooga in 1998 and moved to affiliate company Colonial Life in Columbia in 2015. David holds an MBA from UT-Chattanooga and a Bachelor of Science degree in marketing from the University of Tennessee. He serves on the board of trustees for Epworth Children's Home.



**D. Shannon Stephens**

**President - Midlands**  
**United Community Bank**  
**Columbia**

With more than two decades of banking experience, Shannon leads United Community Bank's operations in the Midlands of South Carolina. Before joining United Community Bank in 2019, Shannon served banking markets in Hilton Head and Columbia with First Citizens Bank and TD Bank / Carolina First. His community involvement includes the Columbia Chamber of Commerce (Finance Committee chair and Midlands Business Leadership Group) and Leadership South Carolina. Shannon is a graduate of Francis Marion University.

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**John Sullivan**

**President  
Allegiance Industries  
Lexington**

John has served as president of Allegiance Industries, a Columbia-based multi-industry facilities management company, since 2005. He holds an M.Ed. in educational leadership and administration from the University of South Carolina. John was a baseball letterman at USC and served as an assistant baseball coach for the Gamecocks 1985-1996. John's sons both played baseball for USC.