

## Strategic Affiliation Monthly Newsletter

December 2023

### Peter Laipson Selected to Lead Affiliation Initiative Implementation

Dr. Peter Laipson, a higher education executive with more than two decades of senior higher education leadership experience, was chosen from a nationwide pool of candidates to lead Fort Hays State University's, North Central Kansas Technical College's (NCK Tech), and Northwest Kansas Technical College's (Northwest Tech) strategic affiliation initiative.

As the Director of Strategic Affiliation, Laipson will coordinate the efforts of governance and implementation teams from the three institutions currently working to create robust, efficient, and cost-effective solutions that meet the key affiliation goals of delivering market-smart and highly accessible programs and unparalleled student services.

"I am eager to work with all three institutions to help move this initiative forward, and I am enthusiastic about the opportunities it will create for the students and communities of rural Kansas," Laipson said.

Laipson joins the Affiliation Initiative in time to guide the effort through its final major administrative milestone, securing the approval of the Higher Learning Commission (the accrediting body for all three institutions) of a Change of Control request that, once approved, will finalize the affiliation and permit the process of integrating academic programs and student services to commence.



### Affiliation Industry Partner Perspective-Construction Management *By Brett Ottley, Design-Build Manager for Commercial Builders*

I joined the strategic affiliation of NCK Tech, Northwest Tech, and FHSU because I firmly believe the future of the construction and manufacturing industry must offer adaptable avenues for the emerging workforce to receive comprehensive training. This training should not only be transferrable between educational institutions but also directly applicable within the industry itself. An enthusiastic workforce equipped with at least a foundational understanding of trades is vital for our industry's success, particularly in rural communities.

At 17-18 years old, making definitive life decisions can be daunting. My hope is that through this affiliation program, we can alleviate some of this pressure on young students' minds. It should enable them to pivot in their career paths without completely nullifying the work and money they've invested to further their education. While a four-year college education has been emphasized for years, it's not the ideal path for everyone. This is where the roles of NCK Tech and NWK Tech become pivotal in nurturing young talent who are seeking rewarding, hands-on careers with substantial growth potential.

We're optimistic that this affiliation will encourage local young professionals to remain and contribute to our community. There's something distinct about individuals from the Midwest—the inherent work ethic, demeanor, and strong family values ingrained in most of our youth are truly invaluable qualities. There are abundant opportunities right here at home. Through this program, we hope to cultivate a local workforce comprising highly skilled tradespeople who can fill the current and upcoming job openings.

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- Brett Ottley, Commercial Builders

## AFFILIATION STORY OF THE MONTH

### Finding Synergies in Agriculture

On September 22, Fort Hays State University's Dr. Grady Dixon, Dean of the Werth College of Science, Technology and Mathematics, Dr. Sophie Ano, Chair of the FHSU Department of Agriculture, and Dr. Brian Sancewich, Assistant Professor of the Department of Agriculture at FHSU, traveled to Northwest Kansas Technical College (Northwest Tech) in Goodland to meet with their affiliation colleagues, including President Ben Schears, Vice President for Information Technology Brad Bergsma, Vice President of Academic Advancement Lisa Blair, and faculty members Jack Polifka and Thatcher Jones. At this gathering, FHSU personnel toured the Northwest Tech facilities and discussed ag-related programs and policies at the technical college.



The 2023 Western Agricultural Summit

While the agriculture-focused Affiliation Implementation Team (AIT) is still in its infancy, Dean Dixon already sees areas of synergy. "Our three institutions offer complementary programming, and conversations with faculty and students make it clear that there is no competition among the campuses. Instead, I think we all see huge possibilities to work closely together and better service our past, current, and future students, and help them become more well-rounded professionals," Dixon said.

Following that visit, on November 9, Polifka and Jones joined more than 60 participants from agriculture-related businesses and political and civic leaders at FHSU's second annual Western Ag Summit. This event was created to bring greater awareness to the critical issues facing Kansas farmers, ranchers, financial institutions, and ag businesses. While on campus, the Northwest Tech contingent toured the FHSU Department of Agriculture and the University Farm.

The FHSU agriculture team next visited the campus of affiliation partner North Central Kansas Technical College in Beloit on December 6.

### Strategic Affiliation Initiative Timeline

