

Strategic Affiliation Monthly Newsletter **February 2025**

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC AFFILIATION - Peter Laipson, Ph.D.

Throughout the first half of the first year of this affiliation initiative, the Governance, Steering, and Implementation Teams of FHSU and FHSU Tech professionals have been engaged in the complex work of aligning our three institutions with the original shared vision of Presidents Mason, Burks, and Schears when they established this partnership. Significant momentum and collaboration has been the hallmarks of this initiative since the outset, and progress has been made in 5 key areas:



1. Charting new academic pathways
2. Creating powerful professional relationships
3. Reducing unnecessary administrative obstacles for students
4. Sharing resources
5. Engaging with regional business and industry

What follows is a brief overview of these early successes.

Charting new academic pathways between the technical colleges to Fort Hays State University

Several Affiliation Implementation Teams (AITs) are currently mapping academic program pathways from the technical colleges to FHSU. The pathways will be designed to provide students with an opportunity to smoothly and efficiently progress in their educational journey and expand their education and training experiences, and, for many, earn an advanced degree. Examples of new academic pathways currently under development:

- Students in two nine-month certificate programs at Fort Hays Tech | North Central, Welding and Construction Technology, can study for two

additional semesters at FHSU and reverse transfer credits to earn from North Central, respectively, the AAS in Building/Construction Site Management and Welding Engineering Technology.

- Students with an AAS in Respiratory Therapy from Fort Hays Tech | Northwest or an AAS in Medical Assistance can get two years of credit at FHSU toward a BS in Health Studies.
- A program pathway will be finalized within weeks for students with an AAS in Precision Agriculture at Northwest and an AAS in Agricultural Equipment Technology at North Central to get a BS in Agricultural Business from FHSU.

Creating powerful professional relationships among faculty and staff at all three institutions

Currently, there are 14 Affiliation Implementation Teams (AITs) comprised of faculty and staff from the three partner institutions. Shortly after their first meeting, the members of each AIT took a tour of all three affiliate campuses and exchanged detailed information about one another’s programs and resources. They meet biweekly, and the chairs and vice-chairs of each AIT meet semi-annually at day-long “Affiliation Summits” held in rotation at Beloit, Goodland, and Hays. A consequence of this frequent contact is the growth of new professional relationships across institutions – relationships that many faculty and staff, especially those in small programs or isolated roles, describe as highly gratifying. These relationships, in turn, have given rise to collaborations that serve students.

Examples:

- Students at the technical colleges have been invited to career fairs in applied technology, informatics, agriculture, nursing, and allied health at FHSU.
- The student success teams at each of the affiliates are coordinating their orientation programs and

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collaboratively reviewing their new student seminars. The Institutional Research staff at the three partners are creating new protocols to track students as they move among the affiliated institutions.

Furthermore, the collaborations have encouraged innovation. To cite just one example, the Agriculture AIT is planning a new series of summer courses based on the expertise of each affiliate. This year, the course will take place in Goodland and focus on precision agriculture, but the AIT aspires to take courses on different topics on the Beloit and Hays campuses in subsequent years.

Reducing unnecessary administrative obstacles for students taking courses at or transferring among multiple affiliate institutions

Improving the experience of students, as well as supporting regional communities and businesses, is the “north star” of the affiliation, and many early affiliation initiatives serve that end.

Examples:

- Starting in January 2025, the technical colleges will be transitioning to the Blackboard Learning Management System so that students who study at more than one affiliate institution will not have to master a new LMS.
- Students who have completed a course at one of the affiliates will no longer have to pay an application fee to study at any of the others.
- To further encourage cost savings and to facilitate exchange among the affiliates, one of the AITs recently completed a guide called “Fast Track to FHSU” to show high school students in the tech colleges’ service areas how they can complete most of their Fort Hays State University general education requirements through concurrent enrollment courses at the technical colleges.

Shared resources

Through the affiliation, the partners can share staff knowledge, services, and space.

Examples:

- The Blackboard Learning Management System will be provided to the technical colleges through FHSU at no additional cost. FHSU is investigating the possibility of offering the technical colleges access to online library databases.
- The Student Success teams at the three partners are coordinating their student activities and working on a “menu” of additional resources, such as access to remote mental health, for the technical colleges.

- Fort Hays Tech | North Central is running its Carpentry program in FHSU space this year while a new building is under construction.

Engagement with regional business and industry

Each academic Affiliation Implementation Team (AIT) has representation from local businesses to provide an outside perspective on the team’s goals. The contributions of those outside representatives have been extremely valuable in guiding the teams’ work in the near and longer term.

Examples:

- A representative of the Kansas Hospital System serving on the AIT working on opportunities in Nursing/Allied Health surveyed regional health care center professional needs that will inform the development of new programs by the affiliates.
- A roundtable of businesspeople catalyzed the AIT working on opportunities in Business to develop additional training for students and employers offering internships.
- The representatives on the AIT working on opportunities in Agriculture have kept the team apprised of grants of potential interest to all three institutions.

A recent project of the affiliation, part of a FORGE grant awarded by the Kansas Department of Commerce, is creating a new website that will serve as a virtual “front door” to the affiliate partners for regional businesses and industry. In addition to illuminating the resources present at each institution – and whom to contact to access them – the site will also provide links to other organizations that can assist with economic and workforce development issues.

