

Strategic Affiliation Monthly Newsletter

July 2025

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

Summer Affiliation Summit Recap

To mark the first anniversary of the FHSU Affiliation effort, members of the Affiliation Initiative leadership gathered this month in Beloit on the campus of Fort Hays Tech | North Central. Affiliation Initiative Team (AIT) chairs and vice-chairs reflected on the progress made so far, and each AIT offered a summary of progress and achievements to date and a preview of their intended next steps.



Key Summit Themes

Creating a culture of trust: A shared sentiment that prevailed throughout the day's discussions was an appreciation for the strong bond between the people leading this initiative. The initial sense of awkwardness that characterized the first Summit in January of 2024 has been replaced by a culture of shared collaboration and purpose.

Significant progress on academic pathways: Several AITs reported significant progress on creating new and multi-dimensional academic pathways between the three institutions. AITs shared examples of the pathways that have been implemented. The teams are working to ensure that program pathways are reciprocal. For example, AIT #3, the Construction/Applied Technology team, shared an example of an FHSU construction management student who decided to expand his professional skill set by earning his commercial driver's license (CDL) from Fort Hays Tech | North Central.

A commitment to integrating student services: AIT #1, the nursing and allied health collaborative, reported on the establishment of an integrated admissions process and the launch of expanded joint job fairs for students of all three institutions. Joint job fairs are scheduled this fall

for applied technology (September 4) and nursing (September 22). Other joint job fairs are also held in the fields of agriculture and informatics.

The morning concluded with attendees in mixed groups by institution and AIT, creating a SWOT analysis of the Affiliation, identifying its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. After lunch and a 'gallery walk' during which everyone saw other groups' analyses and 'upvote' points of interest, the groups regathered for a design exercise using the Innovator's Compass, a tool by Ela Ben-Ur. Each group focused on one or two issues that had attracted significant interest and made informed observations about the nature and effects of the issue and what those observations revealed about "what mattered most." Next, they generated a wide range of possible ideas to address the concern and considered what experiments they might try.

Work in the afternoon focused on using a SWOT analysis to explore significant Affiliation challenges and opportunities. Using an organizational tool called the Innovator's Compass, small groups selected subject areas in the "Weaknesses" and "Opportunities" categories and



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drilled down on identifying essential people, making informed observations, establishing key underlying principles, generating new ideas, and creating potential experiments to test those ideas.

Areas explored included: how to maintain engagement and momentum as we enter year two of the affiliation, the need to improve internal and external communications, and finding innovative ways to tackle the ongoing challenge of recruiting and retaining skilled technology instructors.

Leadership presents at AASCU about affiliation

Provost Jill Arensdorf, Dean of Health and Behavioral Sciences Jeff Briggs, and Director of Strategic Affiliation Peter Laipson recently presented on the Affiliation at the 2025 annual summer conference of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).

Their session, entitled “Students, Communities, and Industry: Stories and experiences from a three-institution affiliation,” described the genesis of the Affiliation and its goals, the process by which it was accomplished, and the organization of collaborative efforts among the three partners. The session concluded with a discussion of the achievements and ongoing challenges of the affiliation and invited session participants to contribute their thoughts about what ‘success’ for this relationship might look like over the long term.



Corey Isbell announced as next president of Fort Hays Tech | Northwest

Dr. Corey Isbell, Vice President of Student and Instructional Services at Fort Hays Tech | North Central, has been selected as the next president of Fort Hays Tech | Northwest.

Isbell will follow Ben Schears, who was selected to serve as Vice President for Economic and Workforce Development at Fort Hays State University.

Isbell grew up in Beloit. The son of a man who worked in the auto collision business for more than 50 years, Isbell learned firsthand the value of hard work and hands-on experience.

“I have always loved working with my hands and have spent my entire career passing that passion on to students across Kansas,” Isbell said.



Isbell began his journey in higher education in 2012 as the Dean of Instruction at North Central Kansas Technical College, where he led campus instructional teams through several curriculum changes and accreditation maintenance efforts.

In 2019, he was selected as the Vice President of Student and Instructional Services at North Central, where he proved to be an effective leader and fundraiser, securing \$250,000 in funding that directly supported the development of a new academic program and the acquisition of state-of-the-practice robotic welders. Isbell also played a key role in securing state and federal grants for North Central, totaling more than \$3.25 million.

During his time at Fort Hays Tech | North Central, Isbell worked with local businesses to help develop and build their workforces. He also facilitated multiple sponsorship agreements with local businesses to create unique apprenticeship opportunities and attract and retain skilled workers.