

Strategic Affiliation Monthly Newsletter

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

Affiliation Update: Year Two Begins

As the affiliation enters its second official year, the three partners are continuing the work of integration. Thanks to the efforts of AITs such as Marketing and Recruiting and Student Accounts, this includes not only completing pathways in shared or related disciplines, but also ensuring that students are aware of these pathways and can navigate them with clarity and ease.

Integration also extends to the sharing of academic resources and student success initiatives. Within days, all technical college students will be entered into Workday, giving them remote access to FHSU's library databases. The Student Success AIT is coordinating the sharing of additional resources as well. Plans for this year also include more activities across campuses -- clubs, student government, athletic events -- designed to strengthen the sense of community among all affiliates.



The addition of students to Workday will also enable the partners to gather more precise data about how students are engaging with the affiliation. With the support of the Institutional Research AIT, we will soon know with accuracy how many students are moving from one institution to another and in what ways.

Another exciting development is a new tool designed for high school students across the region. Working with Jeremy Skrdlant at Fort Hays Tech | Northwest, the Secondary Partnerships AIT is developing a searchable database of concurrent and CTE courses offered in each partner's service area. Updated every semester and accessible from each partner's website, this "one-stop

shop" will help high school students accelerate their progress toward a degree.

Equally important is explaining the affiliation not only to students, but also to the broader community. That effort will include a forthcoming series of success stories as well as the launch of ForgeKansas.com. Funded by a Kansas Department of Commerce grant, this website—coming online in the next few weeks—will showcase how each affiliate can meet regional workforce and employer needs.

Looking ahead, the five academic AITs (Nursing/Allied Health, Agriculture, Applied Technology, Business, and IT/Informatics) are taking on a new initiative: a focus on experiential education. This term covers both opportunities outside the classroom (such as internships, apprenticeships, community projects, and mentorships) and the development of educational resources for business and industry (short courses, professional certification, and micro-credentials).

This initiative is just beginning. Each academic area will first inventory its existing efforts in experiential education, then re-engage with industry partners to understand their needs and priorities. From there, the affiliates will create programming aimed at current students, new students, and the regional workforce alike.

Meet Affiliation Student Brandon Nunez

Brandon is from Holcomb near Garden City. His passion for building things began at a very early age. "In first grade, I got really big into Legos and the Lego Ninjago series, and started trying to build the characters and machines I saw on the show," Brandon said.

Brandon gets much of his passion for building from his dad, who repairs and sells lawn equipment, and his mom,

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who indulged him in his habit of commandeering household items for his projects.

“I’d throw together a bunch of random household items and try to recreate a new toy. The next thing you know a whole roll of tape and a cereal box were gone,” Brandon said. “I always just had fun trying to make my own things before I even thought about buying them.”

Throughout high school, Brandon knew he wanted to go to tech school. “I visited Northwest Kansas Technical College during my freshman year and saw the engineering program. And I just really liked it, which was always my number one spot.”

After high school graduation, Brandon completed a semester at Garden City Community College and then enrolled in the engineering technology program at Northwest Tech. He knew attending tech college would be more affordable than pursuing a full four-year degree right out of high school.

For his mechanical engineering technology capstone project at Northwest, Brandon decided to do something that aligned with his passion for gaming, especially auto racing games. He designed a mechanical system that linked a steering wheel, shifter, pedals, and brakes to his gaming controller. When he finished the project, he was able to sit in a makeshift driver’s seat and, through the linkages he created, race his car in online competitions. Brandon fabricated most of the parts with a 3D printer; other parts were machined from wood. But he really wanted his pedals to look like race car pedals, so he machined them out of metal.

“The steering was probably the hardest part because I wanted to make it as realistic as possible, where there was some play in steering,” Brandon said. “So, I had to tune that gearing up. Once I got that, it was kind of smooth sailing.”

Nearing the end of his academic career at Northwest, Brandon initially only considered going to Kansas State University as his next step. However, as time passed, he became concerned with the cost of going to K-State and saw FHSU as a better option. “I also decided to figure out my own professional pathway through internships,” Brandon said.



Brandon stayed true to his decision and completed three internships in the years before he enrolled at FHSU. Between his first and second year at Northwest, he interned at Kanamac Hydraulics, where he worked as a draftsman designing hydraulic power units. Brandon’s second internship was also in Garden City, where he worked for Boaldin Livestock Enterprises, LLC. There, he worked on a device known as the “John-Ease Small Calf Chute,” which provides a safer and more efficient way to hold and work on the small animals. Brandon interned with Black & Veatch in Kansas City this past summer as an engineering technician on several HVAC and plumbing system modeling projects.

This fall, Brandon launched the next phase of his academic career as an Applied Technology program student at Fort Hays State.

