



# THE CURRENT

KACRAO'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

June 2025



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## *Updates from the Executive Council*

BY WYNNTER COLSTON

The Executive Council meets bi-monthly, with their most recent meeting held on June 17 at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. While on campus, council members toured the facilities that will host the upcoming KACRAO Annual Conference and made schedule adjustments accordingly.

Key topics of discussion included the ongoing Memberclicks platform upgrade, with updates and outcomes shared during the meeting. Looking ahead, the council has officially approved the transition to the Whova app for the 2026 Annual Conference, which will take place at Kansas State University in Manhattan. Whova—commonly used by AACRAO—offers improved functionality, a more user-friendly experience, and long-term cost savings. However, the Memberclicks app will remain in use through the 2025 conference.

The College Planning Conference (CPC) Committee has finalized the circuit calendar, and registration for these events is now open! Be sure to check upcoming issues of The Current for CPC survival tips, light-hearted advice on what not to wear, and other fun content to help keep spirits high during this busy season.

Another exciting discussion at the meeting centered around the development of a "New to KACRAO" mentorship program. The council believes this initiative will provide long-term value, increase support to the organization, and they are eager to continue shaping the concept.

As always, the Executive Council remains committed to improving communication, strengthening member engagement, and ensuring the continued success of KACRAO events and initiatives. Stay tuned for more updates, and thank you for being an active part of our community!

# SUMMER DRIVE-IN PREVIEW

July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Emporia State University



## Do you feel like you're floating alone in space?

- Worried about where higher ed is headed?
- Dodging staffing shortages and budget asteroid belts?
- Running on empty while trying to support students and care for your crew at home?
- Craving connection with your fellow star travelers?

## You're not alone, and we've got just the mission for you!

Join us for the KACRAO Summer Drive-In on July 15, where we'll launch into a day of cosmic connection, refueling, and rediscovering our purpose in higher education. It's time to chart a course for renewal—and have some fun along the way!

Our day includes remarks from our keynote speaker, Ben Schears, who will be speaking on the topic "Demographics, Disruption, and Direction: Musings on the Future of Kansas Higher Education."

As Kansas faces shifting demographics, regional population changes, and evolving expectations from students and employers alike, higher education is rapidly approaching a critical crossroads. We'll explore how institutions across the state can navigate uncertain enrollment, adapt to population trends, and strategically align for long-term success. Rather than viewing disruption as a threat, we'll reframe it as an opportunity—one that calls for collaboration, innovation, and a renewed commitment to access and impact. Join us for a forward-looking conversation on how admissions, registrar, and campus leaders can help shape a resilient and student-centered future for Kansas higher education.

## Guest Speaker: Ben Schears

Ben Schears serves as the new Vice President for Economic and Workforce Development at Fort Hays State University, bringing over two decades of experience across Kansas's higher education landscape. His career spans roles in technical and community colleges, and now a regional university—including, most recently, nine years as President of Fort Hays Tech | Northwest. Schears, along with two colleagues, played a key role in fostering a strategic affiliation between Fort Hays State University and its two affiliated technical colleges. His commitment to aligning education with workforce needs will be pivotal in addressing demographic shifts and promoting regional collaboration across Western Kansas. Schears is also a proud past president of KACRAO, which he credits with sparking his passion for Kansas higher education.



# Managing Student Mental Health - What LCC Is Doing

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BY ELIZABETH KITTERMAN

Across the country, colleges and universities are recognizing a growing crisis that extends beyond academics: student mental health. According to the American College Health Association, over 75% of college students report moderate to serious psychological distress, and nearly 1 in 4 have considered dropping out due to mental health challenges. These numbers are not just statistics—they represent students who are struggling to balance coursework, employment, financial pressures, and personal responsibilities, often without adequate support.

Mental health has become a critical factor in student success, retention, and overall campus climate. As institutions of higher learning, colleges have a responsibility not only to educate but to cultivate environments where students can thrive—mentally, emotionally, and socially. Fortunately, some institutions are leading the way with innovative, compassionate approaches to support student well-being.

This article takes a closer look at one such institution and the impactful strategies it has implemented to prioritize mental health on campus. The hope is that by sharing this story, other colleges and universities will be inspired to launch or expand their own mental health initiatives—because caring for students' minds is just as important as expanding their minds.

At the core of LCC's mental health initiative is a full-time, non-clinical Case Manager/Advisor, located in the Student Success Center. This professional provides assistance to students facing crises, life traumas, academic struggles, or other personal challenges by offering weekly appointments, drop-in access, and regular check-in messages. While the Case Manager does not offer clinical therapy, they play a vital role in coordinating care, facilitating referrals, and connecting students to resources.

One key partnership is with the Labette Center for Mental Health Services (LCMHS), a licensed community mental health center serving Labette County since 1979. Through this collaboration, LCC offers up to three free counseling sessions for students who do not have health insurance. The Case Manager helps students access these services quickly and confidentially. LCMHS provides a broad range of care, including outpatient therapy, psychiatric services, substance use treatment, and 24/7 emergency crisis response.

To support students' emotional regulation and mental rest, LCC also offers a Quiet Room, a peaceful space with dim lighting where students can relax, recharge, or practice mindfulness. This space is available by appointment through the Case Manager.

LCC also empowers faculty to support students through RedZone, an early alert system that allows instructors to flag concerns about a student's academic or personal well-being. These alerts go directly to the Case Manager, enabling early intervention and support before issues escalate.

Beyond mental and emotional support, LCC understands that basic needs can be significant barriers to student success. That's why the college created the Cardinal Kindness Program, which offers emergency aid to students struggling with essential expenses like gas, food, or other necessities. Students can apply for assistance on an as-needed basis, ensuring they never have to choose between their education and meeting basic life needs.

Together, these services reflect Labette Community College's deep commitment to holistic student support, fostering a compassionate, inclusive environment where every student has access to the tools, care, and resources they need to thrive.

# Transfer Students - How Can We Better Serve Them?

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BY CHARLES PEITSCH

While we all know both Admissions and Registrar offices play critical roles in onboarding and supporting transfer students, our structural, philosophical, and operational barriers can hinder progress and fuel frustration for staff and students alike.

## **Barrier 1: Misaligned Priorities and Metrics**

What gets celebrated on your campus: record-breaking freshmen enrollment or record-breaking transfer enrollment? Graduation rate or transfer success rate?

It's not that one is better than the other—but institutional priorities are often shaped by what's tracked, celebrated, and shared. Since graduation rates, freshman enrollment, and retention are often the focus, resources naturally gravitate toward first-time freshmen. And the reality is, the freshman applicant pool is usually much larger, offering more options for selective recruitment.

Transfer students, on the other hand, frequently operate in the shadows. Their college experience may appear more straightforward—they've been through orientation before, they bring transcripts—but we often underestimate their need to understand new systems, policies, and support networks. We may not know why they transferred or what challenges they faced at their previous institution. And that can lead to gaps in support.

## **Barrier 2: Fragmented Communication**

Another challenge lies in the disconnect between departments—and assumptions that may go unchallenged.

How much time is admissions spending on transfer recruitment vs. freshmen? What goals guide those decisions? How quickly are transcripts evaluated? Who decides how a course is articulated—and why?

Additionally, faculty may be protective of their course content, reluctant to accept transfer credit as equivalent. One KACRAO member said it best, "we put too much stock in the faculty review process, especially for general education classes. I get it for professional courses - nursing, law, etc. Why can't the admission/records office determine equivalencies for [gen ed] math, English, history, etc.?"

This leaves parents and students trying to understand the nuanced rules and policies associated with transfer credit and why different schools do different things.

State-wide transfer rules, a shared core, and established articulation agreements help. However, these require institutions to give up some independence.

## **Barrier 3: Self Sabotage**

Let's not forget that students themselves can unintentionally sabotage their own success. Some students fail to do the research required to understand the policies. Lacking knowledge about required residential hours, course transfer policies, or course rotation can extend the completion timeline.

Lack of planning is also a common issue. Not all students know where they will transfer when the time comes. If they do, they haven't checked on the gen ed requirements or pre-requisite needs for a desired major. They may not even know what courses are going to transfer.

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# Transfer Students cont..

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## **Jumping over the barriers**

So how can we, as KACRAO professionals, better support transfer students across institutions?

Here are some suggestions from your fellow members:

- Work Toward the Same Goal: Build interdepartmental relationships centered around one shared mission—helping students earn a degree, regardless of where they finish.
- Celebrate Their Arrival: Create unique traditions or orientation programs specifically for transfer students to help them feel seen and valued.
- Recognize Their Value: Many transfer students have a clearer sense of their academic goals and strengths.
- Understand Their Journey: Learn about what helped—or hindered—the student at their previous institution.
- Support Open Admissions with Strong Structures: Provide resources that help students understand how to learn and succeed in your academic environment.
- Collaborate Across Institutions: Pair students with advisors from both their current and future schools to ease the transition and build continuity.
- Invest in Dedicated Support: Assign dedicated transfer counselors and provide digital tools to help students build clear, accurate plans.

# Upcoming in 2025

## 2025 CPC REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN

Log in to [www.KACRAO.org](http://www.KACRAO.org) to access the CPC Members Only section and click the 2025 Registration link.

**Deadline to register is  
Friday, August 29th!**

For questions, contact  
**Amy Morris**  
[collegeplanningconference@kacrao.org](mailto:collegeplanningconference@kacrao.org)

## THE CURRENT

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July 25th  
Aug 15th  
Sept 12th

## Executive Council

September 23rd

**2025 KACRAO  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE**



**September 24-26, 2025**  
DoubleTree by Hilton  
Lawrence, KS

## REGISTRATION OPEN

Sign-up before  
September 8th to get the  
early registration rate.

# #KACRAO ShoutOuts



*Charles Peitsch*

Charles Peitsch, Benedictine College Registrar, has been a wonderful addition to KACRAO committees. He is always eager to learn and help where he can. Charles offers enthusiasm on any project you put him on and does a great job no matter the details. Thank you Charles!

# #KACRAO ShoutOuts

Have something going on at your institution you would like to share? Maybe a wellness tip or advice you think your fellow KACRAO members might benefit from? Please share it with us by emailing [KACRAO@kacrao.org](mailto:KACRAO@kacrao.org) and we will share it in the next issue!



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