



# THE CURRENT

KACRAO'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

February 2026



## WHAT'S INSIDE:

Changes to Excel in CTE  
Thank you from Bill Rinkenbaugh  
Meet the Publications Committee  
Upcoming in 2026  
KACRAO Voices

## KBOR Votes on Changes to Excel in CTE Initiative Guidelines

BY ALEXIS STALLARD

During the November 19, 2025 Kansas Board of Regents meeting, a vote approved new guidelines for the Excel in CTE program that will limit what technical programs are eligible for state-funded tuition beginning Fall 2026. While these new changes could impact enrollment, KBOR states they believe this will help combat the rising costs observed in the state-funded initiative over the past several years. The Excel in Career Technical Education Initiative was enacted in 2012 and provides high school students with state-funded college tuition to enter into high-wage, high-demand careers. In previous years, industry-recognized credentials that were approved by the state were eligible for state-funded tuition, usually consisting of high-demand occupations as determined by the Kansas Department of Labor.

Effective Fall 2026, all state funding for Excel in CTE will follow the lead of the Kansas Promise Act pathways, meaning some current programs will no longer qualify for the state-funded tuition. Similar to Excel in CTE, the Kansas Promise Act offers scholarships to full-time or part-time students, instead of dual credit students, that are enrolled in specific high-demand and critical-need industry programs. Technical programs like cosmetology and culinary arts, while currently approved for the Excel in CTE program, are not approved Kansas Promise Act pathways.

These changes won't prohibit dual credit students from enrolling in these programs, but it does mean they will do so without the help of state-funded tuition assistance. A list of approved programs by institution can be found at the link below.

[Kansas Promise Act Approved Pathways](#)

# 2025 Laura Cross Distinguished Service Award

Last September, I was honored at KACRAO to receive the Laura M. Cross Distinguished Service Award. Of all of the awards and accolades that I have received in my career, this one means the most to me. Laura was still working at Wichita State University when I worked as the Assistant Director of Admissions at WSU. I got to visit with her on numerous occasions and learn the proper way to recruit students with professionalism and care! There were none better than Laura at understanding the admissions profession and how to treat students who were making a college decision.

In 1984, I returned to my alma mater, Southwestern College, as the Director of Admissions and Student Life. For those that have any tie to Southwestern College, they know the story of the Jinx and the rivalry between Southwestern College and Fairmount College (now Wichita State). When I returned to Southwestern, there were students at Southwestern that didn't believe the story of students from Fairmount College stealing the Jinx and blowing it up to break the jinx that Southwestern had over Fairmount College in football. Laura was a student at Fairmount College when this was happening, and she graciously agreed to come to Winfield to speak at the Matriculation Convocation and give a first-hand account of the story. The students, faculty and staff were in awe of Laura and her ability to recall all of the events like it was yesterday.

There are not many left in KACRAO that had the pleasure of meeting and knowing Laura Cross. I consider myself one of the lucky ones to have the first-hand experience of spending quality time with her. My favorite Laura Cross story was when people would ask her about her 70 years of service to Wichita State and if she had tenure.

Her response was always, "I don't need to have tenure, I have blackmail and that is much better!"

Laura Cross was called the "Grande Dame" of Fairmount Hill, but to me she was the ultimate professional and one of the first admissions professionals in the state of Kansas that I got to call a friend and colleague. To receive the award named for her is the ultimate recognition that I could ever receive and means more to me than words can express. I look at the award often and think of how blessed I have been in my career to know some of the great people of KACRAO. That includes Dick Elkins, Ev Kohls, Beth Tedrow, and Laura Cross. Nothing can compare to receiving the Laura M Cross Distinguished Service Award.

Again, I'm honored, humbled, and appreciative of this recognition, and thank those responsible for me receiving the award.

- **Bill Rinkenbaugh**, Butler Community College



# Meet the Publications Committee

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**Krysti Yuen - Chair**  
Butler Community College

Hi KACRAO Members! I've been an admissions counselor at Butler Community College for almost 3 years and a KACRAO member just as long. My recruitment responsibilities include 26 high schools, adult students and homeschool students. As Publications chair I am excited to bring you great information on all things KACRAO, with a little fun mixed in. I am also a 2<sup>nd</sup> year committee member on the program committee. Fun Fact: I have recently gone back to college to earn my Masters in Community College Leadership from the University of Arkansas. So, no I don't have any free time!



**Wynnter Colston**  
Neosho County Community College

Hello KACRAO! I have been at NCCC for going on six years and have been apart of KACRAO almost five. I have and continue to participate on the Publications, Program, and CPC committees as well as the Apply Kansas team. Fun Facts about me: I have a sweet daughter, Wrynn.



**Kendra Morgan**  
Pratt Community College

Hi! My name is Kendra. I am the Career and Technical Education Admissions Rep at Pratt Community College. I recruit in Eastern Kansas and help with all things Tech! This is my first time working in higher ed, and I am currently still a college student. I have a 3-year-old daughter named Ella. Not so fun, Fun Fact: I have been in a walking boot for 9 months.



**Emily Luthi**  
Emporia State University

Hi KACRAO! This is my 5<sup>th</sup> year working on the Emporia State Undergraduate Admissions team. I started my career as an admissions counselor for western Kansas and have since been promoted to Associate Director. In my current role, I work beside our Director, Mr. Devan Flegler as many of you may know, to develop recruitment strategies and communications, set enrollment targets, and grow our counselors into the best road warriors they can be. As I continue working in higher education, I hope to build more relationships with those of you reading this newsletter! Outside of my role at ESU, I am currently preparing to become a first-time mom to a baby girl due this spring!

# Meet the Publications Committee

cont.



**Mariah Putman**  
Emporia State University

Hello! I started working in admissions at Emporia State University in July 2025 but have been involved in higher ed for years as a student worker and intern. I live with my boyfriend and our fur baby, Stella, a mini-Husky/Australian Shephard mix who runs the show. Fun facts- I was born in Alaska (but grew up in KS), love coffee, and have been itching to travel and sightsee. My bf and I are going to Japan next month and I'm SO excited! I'm very eager to get more involved with KACRAO committees this year and grow as an admissions counselor. I look forward to seeing you all at the next conference!



**Alexis Stallard**  
Dodge City Community College

This is my first year as a KACRAO member after starting in June 2025 as an Admissions Representative for Dodge City Community College. I am so excited to begin working with all the amazing people on the publications committee and expanding my involvement in KACRAO! I love learning so I can't wait to keep expanding my knowledge on everything college admissions and beyond. Fun fact about me: I am super passionate about sports, my favorite being Formula 1 Racing



**Kylynn Keener**  
Barton Community  
College



**Katie Williams**  
Flint Hills  
Technical College



**Ryan Zafuta**  
Pittsburgh State  
University



**Lindsay Warner**  
Hutchinson  
Community College

# 26-27 Executive Council Nominations

**Deadline:**  
**MARCH**  
**31st**

Nominations for the 2026-2027 KACRAO Executive Council are now open. Open positions include:

- **President Elect**
- **Vice President for Outreach**
- **Vice President for Professional Development**
- **Treasurer**
- **Secretary**
- **Admissions Advocate-At-Large**
- **Records/Registrar Advocate-At-Large**

Who can be nominated?

Eligible nominees must be an active, KACRAO Institutional member (employed by a Kansas institution) and have experience as a Committee Coordinator/Chair or have served multiple years on a KACRAO Committee. Exceptions to the experience criteria are for the Secretary, Admissions Advocate and the Records/Registrar Advocate-At-Large positions.

Position descriptions and additional details are available on the nomination form. To submit a nomination, please visit:  
<https://www.kacrao.org/2627nominations>

You can submit a nomination for one position or multiple positions. Self-nominations are welcome and encouraged—sometimes the best leaders raise their own hands.



# 2026 KACRAO CONFERENCE INFO



## 2026 Call for Sessions

The 2026 KACRAO Program Committee invites you to submit a session idea/topic for the annual conference, this September in Manhattan, KS. Whether it's something you'd like to present or would love to learn more about, please use the link below to let us know!



**Submit your sessions ideas**



# #KACRAO Voices

Got something to celebrate at your institution?  
A win, a resource, or a wellness tip worth  
sharing?

► Send it our way at [kyuen@butlercc.edu](mailto:kyuen@butlercc.edu) and you  
might see it featured in next month's newsletter!



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