

NEACRAO

▾ VOLUME 1 ISSUE 3

NOTES

**The Workflow Wasn't
Broken. It Just Wasn't
a System.**

A Process Redesign Journey

**Registrar
Transitions:**

Planning for Continuity and Stewardship

**NEACRAO 2026
Membership Renewal
is here!**

Renew Today!

The Pulse of Higher Education in New England

Write for NEACRAO Notes

NEACRAO is full of talented higher education professionals leading transformational change, implementing exciting innovations, and mentoring the next generation of leaders. NEACRAO Notes is your platform to share the incredible work you are doing at your institution or an avenue to share your perspective on key trends emerging in this field or across the region.

What is NEACRAO Notes?

NEACRAO Notes is a periodic publication opportunity through NEACRAO for members to share their stories from the field on a variety of topics including:

Recent project successes and how the impact of the project transformed your work
Research completed and the findings of your research
Current or emerging topics or trends in higher education
Lessons learned shared through a leadership lens

Criteria for submission

- 500 words or less
- Submissions should include:
- Topic
- Executive Summary (3-4 sentences)
- Copy of your article

Why is NEACRAO offering this?

- An opportunity to elevate the voice of our members
- Provide regional opportunities for members who may not be comfortable submitting content nationally to AACRAO
- To share the amazing work and successes across the region

Get more info today





Message from NEACRAO President Elect **Joe Wolk**

The end of the academic year is a special time. For many it means a different, perhaps slower pace, but in the world of Registrar, Admissions, and Enrollment Management it means chasing grades, closing out the term, running academic standing, overseeing a (hopefully) successful commencement, pushing to hit enrollment targets, reducing summer melt, and penciling in all those projects you didn't get to during the academic year!

While juggling all of that, hopefully it brings an opportunity to rest and recharge, have a well deserved vacation, time with family and loved ones. It's from these moments that we get our best ideas and can show up as the best versions of ourselves.

Our Spring issue has some important topics it explores from succession planning and reflecting on a career in higher education to process redesign with an eye towards efficiency. Thank you to all our members for making year one of NEACRAO Notes a huge success!

Happy Reading!

Joe

Table of Contents

1. Registrar Transitions: Planning for Continuity and Stewardship

By James V. Vitagliano, MGH Institute of Health Professions

2. The Workflow Wasn't Broken. It Just Wasn't a System

By Donovan King, Wellesley College

Registrar Transitions: Planning for Continuity and Stewardship

By James V. Vitagliano, MGH Institute of Health Professions

As I look ahead to my retirement in 2026, I believe it is timely to reflect on the importance of planning for registrar transitions. After 45 years of service in a variety of registrar roles, including 25 years in my current position, ensuring a thoughtful and well-prepared transition to the next registrar at my institution has become a central focus as I enter these final months and help position the next generation of leadership for success.

The retirement of a registrar represents a critical inflection point for an institution. For registrar professionals, it is not simply a leadership change but the transfer of academic authority, institutional memory, and responsibility for compliance and the integrity of the academic record. Intentional transition planning is essential to minimize risk and maintain confidence in the registrar function.

Effective transitions begin early. Advance planning allows institutions to move beyond reactive hiring and instead consider succession strategy, leadership development, and whether the role should evolve to meet changing regulatory, technological, or enrollment demands. When internal candidates exist, deliberate exposure to policy interpretation, system governance, and cross-campus decision-making can strengthen continuity.

One of the greatest vulnerabilities in a registrar transition is the loss of undocumented knowledge. Long-serving registrars often hold historical context around policy intent, exceptions, and system configurations that are not captured elsewhere. Structured knowledge transfer should focus on academic policies and precedents, annual compliance and reporting cycles, degree audit logic, and key external relationships. Written process documentation, system walkthroughs, and shadowing periods can significantly reduce disruption.

Transitions also carry compliance risk. Registrar offices must ensure continuity during high-impact periods such as census, degree conferral, veterans' reporting, and federal or state submissions. Clear interim authority, defined escalation paths, and—when appropriate—temporary overlap or interim leadership are essential safeguards.

Finally, leadership transitions affect office culture and staff morale. Transparent communication, clear expectations, and visible institutional support help stabilize operations. At the same time, transitions present an opportunity to review workflows, clarify roles, and invest in professional growth.

Honoring the retiring registrar's contributions reinforces the value of the profession, but successful transitions also look forward. When approached thoughtfully, a registrar transition can strengthen resilience, modernize practice, and reaffirm the registrar's central role in academic governance.

The Workflow Wasn't Broken. It Just Wasn't a System

By Donovan King, Wellesley College

In many registrar and student services offices, workflow documents begin with a clear purpose: to track recurring processes and ensure nothing is missed. But, over time these systems can expand and become unwieldy. New tasks are added, formats shift, and ownership becomes inconsistent. What starts as a shared resource gradually becomes harder to use and harder to trust until it is no longer a functioning resource.

This was the case with a multi-tabbed workflow document used to track major annual projects such as graduation audits, enrollment reporting cycles, and commencement preparation. While comprehensive, it lacked consistency. Individual workflows varied in layout, terminology, and formatting. Completion statuses might read “complete,” “done,” or “finished,” depending on the sheet. Due dates had to be updated manually across each workflow. Some areas contained years of archived data, while others did not. A vast collection of institutional knowledge was there, but it did not function as a system.

The redesign started with a question: what would it look like if these workflows actually worked together as part of an office framework, instead of as separate documents?

A consistent structure was applied across all sheets, including standardized headers, formatting, and conditional cues. More importantly, due dates were rebuilt using anchor dates tied to the college academic calendar. By calculating offset days from those anchors (accounting for weekends and institutional holidays with formulas), due dates could be updated across all workflows through a single input page. What would previously require hours of manual updates across dozens of workflows can now be completed in under twenty minutes.

To support accountability, a primary task structure was created to centralize key information. When anyone can edit anything, small inconsistencies accumulate quickly and status becomes unreliable. Individual workflows display the necessary information, but editable columns are limited to status, completion date, responsible party, and quality assurance. This reduced the risk of conflicting edits while keeping individual workflows focused and functional for daily use.

A dashboard layer further changed how the document is used. At a glance, supervisors can now see what is complete, what is coming due, what is overdue, and where data is missing. Instead of hunting across tabs, the system brings problems to the surface and highlights them in a single location. During a busy week, or when a staff member is out, that visibility can replace a twenty-minute check-in entirely.

Artificial intelligence supported the build process by helping generate formulas, identify redundancies, and speed up iteration. It was utilized as a labor saving tool, not as a solution. The structure of the system, and the decisions behind it, came from experience working within education administration at different levels over the course of multiple years.

What makes this design worth sharing is that a financial aid office tracking SAP reviews, an advising team managing degree audits, or any other office working with annual tasks containing multiple steps could apply this same logic. The specific tasks would change, but the underlying structure would remain the same.

This project illustrates what happens when workflows are treated as systems. The work becomes easier to track, easier to update, and easier to trust. More importantly, in offices that are already carrying a high level of administrative burden, it creates space for staff to focus less on maintaining a document and more on supporting students, faculty, and staff. That time adds up, and in a registrar's office, it tends to go exactly where it is needed most.

NEACRAO 79th Annual Conference-Save the Date

November 4-6, 2026

[Hotel Champlain](#) Burlington, VT



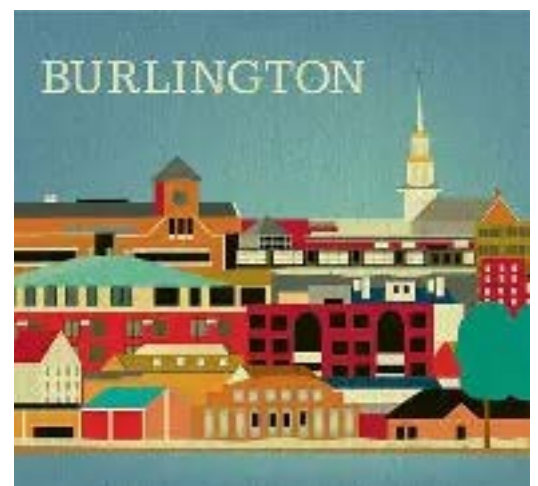
Conference registration opens soon, keep an eye out for an email from NEACRAO!

Conference Registration Scholarships are available for:

- First-Time Attendees
- Presenters
- Limited institutional financial support

We are heading north for the NEACRAO 2026 Annual Conference! Our conference is one of the most affordable professional development opportunities in the region and has a little bit of everything whether you are looking for:

- Practical sessions related to your work
- Professional/personal development
- Networking with colleagues
- Engaging keynote speakers
- Opportunities to connect with industry vendors
- So much more!



[Interested in presenting a session? Submit a session proposal today!](#)

Renew your NEACRAO membership!

Membership renewal is open for the upcoming year! Ensure your team keeps access to all the great benefits of your institutional membership including:

- Unlimited roster of institutional members for one set price of \$375
- Access to high quality professional development throughout the year including monthly webinars
- Ability to connect with colleagues from across New England
- Invitations to other related regional organization's events and activities
- Discounted conference registration
- Access to NEACRAO Notes, our award-winning semesterly publication—recipient of the 2021 AACRAO Elbert W. Ockerman State & Regional Professional Development Activity Award
 - Receive each issue via email
 - Publish in NEACRAO Notes
- Keep an eye out for your renewal invoice from NEACRAO Communications which went out the week of 5/29.

[Renew Today!](#)

Get Involved with NEACRAO

NEACRAO is a dynamic, volunteer-run organization that thrives because of the passion and expertise of higher education professionals like you. By getting involved, you're not just joining a network, you are helping shape the future of admissions, enrollment management, and student services across New England. Whether you are looking to grow your skills, expand your professional network, or make a difference in the higher education community, NEACRAO is the perfect place to engage, learn, and lead.

Why get involved?

- Professional Development
- Networking Opportunities
- Knowledge Sharing
- Advocacy & Representation

Ways to get involved

- Attend a planning meeting
- Present at the Annual Conference
- Present a webinar
- Write for NEACRAO Notes
- Join the board
- Join a committee

Open Leadership Positions

- Vice President for Professional Development

Open Committee Positions

- Conference & Meeting Committee
- Event Registration Committee
- Local Arrangements Committee
- Vendor Committee

All position descriptions can be found on the [NEACRAO Website](#).

To nominate yourself or someone else for one of the leadership positions above, please click [here](#). If you are not interested in a leadership position but would like to volunteer for a committee, please click [here](#).

If you are interested in learning more about NEACRAO and these opportunities, please email communications@neacrao.com to schedule a 15-minute Zoom meeting and a board member will be in touch.