

NEACRAO

▾ VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

NOTES

Registration Reimagined

From Hunger Games to the Land of Oz:
Reimagining New Student Registration

Strategic Planning

More Than Words: Mission,
Vision, and Values as the
Launching Pad for Strategic
Planning

NEACRAO 2025 Conference

A Sneak Peek!

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 VP of Professional Development

Joe Wolk

Welcome to the Inaugural issue of NEACRAO Notes! This new opportunity for NEACRAO members is something I've thought about for a number of years and is centered in the concept of spotlighting the amazing work being done across the region, sharing important perspectives on key issues or trends emerging in the field, but most importantly providing a voice to our members.

Remember, NEACRAO is your organization, here to support your growth, provide opportunities to connect with others across the region, and help facilitate lasting connections.

It's my hope that with each issue, we will see more and more new authors excited to share their expertise. Remember, we all have a story to tell, let NEACRAO Notes be your outlet to do that!

Joe

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From Hunger Games to the Land of Oz: Reimagining New Student Registration

By Jen Thompson, Middlebury College

Orientation week for new students at Middlebury College is notoriously stressful. In a few short days, students are tasked with not only moving in and acclimating to a new environment, but also with preparing for registration by taking placement exams, attending academic forum, and meeting with faculty advisors to make schedule plans. This hectic pace culminates just before classes begin, when students register via a process some have dubbed Middlebury's version of The Hunger Games, hoping for perfect internet connections and fast fingers to vie for the few seats available in in-demand courses. That is until spring 2024 when a new idea was imagined.

Charged with a request to move registration out of orientation week entirely, the associate provost and I met to consider our options. As we sifted through alternatives, a faculty member stepped forward and expressed interest in helping us. At an initial meeting, we outlined our project goals and scope, and then just a few short days later, we met to preview his vision: an individualized, online portal integrated with Banner catalog and student academic records data where students could add course preferences to a ranked priority list. Then, using students' ranked lists, we would run an algorithm to place students in as many of their highly ranked courses as possible.

As a new process took shape, we consulted with campus constituencies of faculty, staff, and administrators to determine how their work with students around registration fit into the new model. In our meetings, we emphasized the primary goals of the project:

- 1.) move registration out of orientation;
- 2.) increase access to in-demand courses;
- 3.) reduce student stress around registration;
- 4.) measure course demand.

We aimed to keep the entire process simple – we didn't want to transfer the stress students felt during orientation week to their homes where they had less access to campus resources. Our messaging was presented in short, bulleted lists accompanied by explanatory videos, webpages, and both scheduled and impromptu Zoom sessions to answer questions about the curriculum and the course preference selection process.

From planning to implementation, our experiment paid off: in that first round, 96% of new students were initially placed in a full schedule of courses from their ranked lists, and following some advisor outreach, all incoming students ultimately arrived for orientation with a full schedule of classes. We saw marked increases in student satisfaction around registration (from 58% very or somewhat satisfied to 78%). Many faculty and administrators commented on the elevated quality of conversations with students that moved away from registration strategies to genuine curiosity and exploration of academics and opportunities at Middlebury.

Throughout our pilot phase, we were reminded of several truths: space must be made for faculty advisors and students to discuss curricular options; changes to longstanding practices take courage, time, and patience; and communication and collaboration are key elements for success. After several successful rounds, we have moved from Hunger Games to the land of Oz and a recognition that we had the power all along.

More Than Words: Mission, Vision, and Values as the launchingpad for Strategic Planning

By Joe Wolk, Bridgewater State University

At a time when higher education faces rapid change and growing complexity, strategic planning isn't just a task to be completed it's a critical way to ensure your team is prepared for the future. Over the past year, the Registrar's Office at Bridgewater State University embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process, looking ahead to the next five years. What we discovered is that while the process can feel overwhelming, it's ultimately transformative when done with purpose.

Starting with Mission, Vision, and Values

Our journey began in the summer of 2024 with an office retreat focused on revisiting our mission, vision, and values. We found this to be the best starting point, engaging the team around why we do what we do. Since we drafted a mission statement five years earlier, we used it as a baseline, exploring what still resonated and what needed to evolve.

Knowing the priorities of Academic Affairs helped us frame our discussions. We asked ourselves key questions, such as: How does this priority support our mission, vision, or values? If we truly excelled in this area, what would it look like? Using sticky notes and brainstorming sessions, we surfaced core ideas that were distilled into themes.

The result was a refined mission statement and a clear articulation of our core values: Integrity, Respect, Responsiveness, and Innovation. These aren't just words on a page, they capture the essence of who we are and how we serve our institution.

Envisioning a Future State

Defining a vision was equally important. While a mission and values ground you in the present, a vision challenges you to imagine who you aspire to be. This can be difficult for teams accustomed to focusing on immediate demands. We made it easier by returning to the key words identified earlier, like empower, transparency, collaboration, and inclusivity, to anchor our thinking.

The alignment we saw between our vision and our mission and values was encouraging. It meant we were on the same page about who we are now and who we hope to become. By the end of our retreat, we felt proud of the work we accomplished together. As much as team members may groan at the idea of a retreat, structuring it around shared purpose won real buy-in.

Why It Matters

Mission, vision, and values are only the starting point of a strategic plan, but getting them right lays a critical foundation. In higher education, where student needs, technology, and policies continually evolve, having a shared sense of direction helps teams adapt without losing sight of their purpose.

By taking time to thoughtfully define who we are and where we want to go, we've positioned our office to navigate challenges and seize opportunities with confidence. It's a process we'd recommend to any team ready to plant their own flags for the future.

NEACRAO 78th Annual Conference

November 5-7, 2025

Renaissance Providence Downtown Hotel Providence, RI



We hope to see you in beautiful Providence, RI for our annual conference. Whether you are new to NEACRAO or a long time member, the conference has something for you:

- Federal Updates from AACRAO colleagues
- NECHE representative speaking on accreditation
- Networking and Connections
- SIS Roundtable
- Connect with vendors
- FERPA refresher session
- Informative and Relevant sessions presented by your peers
- So much more!



Registration Opens Soon!