

NEACRAO

∇ VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1

NOTES

Being a Leader in Higher Education During a New Era of Commotion

Confessions of a Review Procrastinator:

Stop Guessing and Start Logging

Students Experience Interpretations, Not Policies

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Registration is open!**

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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**

Summer means time for rest, relaxation, and vacation, right? How many times have you been asked if you have the summers off? So much of the work we do as administrators is often misunderstood by those not directly involved in higher ed. We know that summer is our time to clean up things from the past academic year, and try to get through as many of the projects or initiatives we couldn't slot in during the year. For our admissions and enrollment management colleagues, it means kicking into high gear to combat summer melt and have as robust of an incoming class as possible.

Summer also offers a great chance to reflect on the past year. Consider what were your successes (hopefully many), challenges (hopefully few), and what opportunities may lay ahead? In between the debriefs, the recruitment, the catalog production, and planning for the upcoming year, I hope you had a chance to rest, recharge, and reconnect with friends, family and colleagues!

Happy Reading!

Joe

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Confessions of a Review Procrastinator: Stop Guessing and Start Logging

By Linda Gauvin, Roger Williams University

I have a confession to make: Every year, I head into annual performance review season gung-ho. And every year, without fail, those reviews end up buried on my back burner. If you are a fellow review procrastinator, you know the feeling. Attempting to summarize an entire year of work from memory feels completely overwhelming and it is just as stressful for our employees who are waiting on those final paragraphs.

To get properly prepared, we first need to recognize our own cognitive biases. If we wait until the last minute, these psychological traps can heavily affect our evaluations. We can minimize these biases by recognizing that they exist.

Understanding Our Cognitive Biases

Recency Bias: It is only natural for the human brain to recall recent events with more clarity. However, this bias can heavily skew a performance review if a supervisor bases the entire evaluation only on recent actions. The negative impact is that excellent workers might be unfairly penalized for a single recent mistake. Consequently, employees will realize that only what is done in the last couple of months matters, motivating them to only work hard only right before review season.

Primacy Bias: This happens when we tend to remember the first piece of information or a first impression. We then unconsciously look for behaviors to support this initial impression rather than looking at what is really happening now. The negative impact here is that an employee who started out struggling but improved considerably may still receive low ratings. Conversely, early strong performers can end up coasting for the rest of the year while still receiving top scores. Others may simply stop trying to improve if they realize their growth is going unnoticed.

Because annual performance reviews are typically written just once a year, a huge time gap is created. If we depend solely on our faulty recall, a recent big win or a major mistake can overshadow months of solid performance. Likewise, relying on an initial good impression could blind you to the fact that an employee is not actually performing up to expectations anymore.

Three Ways to Avoid Bias

1. **Keep Consistent Notes:** Maintain a running log throughout the year. Detail both the good and the bad, tracking major accomplishments and successful projects as they happen.
2. **Ensure No Surprises:** Check in with your employees regularly so feedback is a continuous conversation.

3. **Utilize Self-Evaluations:** Ask employees to complete a self-evaluation to bring their own achievements to light. Many employees hesitate to do this if it's not mandatory. I always sell it as a great way to "Toot Your Own Horn".

In our busy work environment, it can be impossible to accurately think back to what happened last month, let alone 12 months ago. With a maintained log, you do not have to trust your brain. Frontloading this history takes a few minutes, but it lowers stress, stops procrastination, and gives you great material to copy and paste. Final confession. I still have one more to go!

Being a Leader in Higher Education During a New Era of Commotion

By Andy Marx, Clark University

However far back you credit the start of the current era of commotion in higher education, a persistent feeling of disorientation persists. The slow climb of the roller coaster up to the peak, the moment when you cannot sense the tracks or ground beneath you, and the sudden rush to the next turn.

Lately, it feels like we are experiencing all of it at once. My first recognition was in late fall 2024 when the enrollment management team wondered how to evolve our recruitment strategy considering what was then still unconfirmed (and still mostly ponderous) limits on international student visas. The feeling of disquiet bloomed in ways that were slow to crystallize but were nevertheless distinct from the Covid-19 era that overlapped it.

Those of us with longevity in higher education have seen tectonic shifts before. Belt-tightening in 2008 led to operational innovations due to a meaningful attempt to reduce the workload on staff in the name of cost savings. The Covid-19 years drove us into a wall but proved that units could function remotely, reimaged but without a loss of service to the community. The worst of what happened to us and around us was offset by adapting and improving how we function.

This time around feels different because there is an extraction of energy on staff and faculty that is not being replenished. The emotional toll of the last six years compounded by renewed financial exigency gives the impression that retrenchment is self-defeating instead of rejuvenating. It is incredibly hard to lead people in an environment where what is under your control continuously contracts.

As leaders, we need a path forward that rejects surrender explicitly, for our teams, for ourselves, and for those ideals of higher education that we still believe in. We need to be vocal in our convictions, not that everything is perfect and should never change, but that there are more elements of higher education that are worth investing in than there are worth discarding. Whether you believe in self-discovery, career skill-building, scientific contribution, or civic engagement (not an exhaustive list), those things are worth preserving in our institutions and in the educational sector as a whole.

As leaders, we need a new set of tools to survive the commotion. We need to take control of what we have control over and let go of those things we do not. We need intentional cross-functional networks within our institution and among our institutions. We need to, emphatically and often, acknowledge the humanity of our workforce and our community and take every possible step to protect them from harm. Leading in this new era of commotion means reminding ourselves and our colleagues that mission and values are not abstractions when we make organizational and operational decisions with those ideals in mind. Disorientation is not defeat but a chance to remind ourselves that we are not just along for the ride.

Students Experience Interpretations, Not Policies

By Donovan King, Wellesley College

Rarely do students experience academic policy as a neat paragraph in a handbook. In reality, they experience it through emails, conversations, forms, deadlines, or guidance from someone they trust. That distinction matters because the same policy can feel crystal clear in one office and endlessly confusing in another.

In higher education, inconsistent guidance is often treated as a communication problem. Sometimes it is. More often, though, it reflects something larger: policies are interpreted and carried across different roles, systems, and institutional contexts. Registrar staff, advisers, faculty, and student-support professionals may all be working from the same written policy while applying different assumptions about what it means or requires in practice.

This isn't necessarily evidence that anyone is doing poor work. Colleges and universities are complex, loosely connected organizations. People make sense of policy locally, using their experience, information and understanding of their responsibilities. As organizational scholar Karl Weick and his colleagues have argued, meaning is often constructed through action. In administrative work, that means policy becomes real through the decisions people make every day.

Here's the problem: students absorb the consequences when those decisions fail to align. A student might receive one interpretation while planning a course schedule and another when the policy is enforced. They may then be sent between offices, asked to explain the situation, or expected to recognize which answer is the most correct. What looks like a minor difference in interpretation to us can mean lost time, missed opportunities, frustration, or a decision made with incomplete information for a student.

Research on administrative burden, including the work of Pamela Herd and Donald Moynihan, helps explain why this is so important. Institutional complexity creates learning, compliance, and psychological costs. Those costs are not distributed evenly. Students with prior knowledge, strong support networks, or confidence navigating bureaucracy are better positioned to sort through conflicting information. Others may be more inclined to accept the first answer they receive or disengage.

Administrative clarity, therefore, is more than just good customer service. It's part of creating an equitable student experience.

Clarity can strengthen staff confidence by giving colleagues a foundation for difficult conversations and reducing the need to reinvent answers independently.

The goal isn't perfect uniformity. It's reasonable consistency, visible decision-making, and a shared understanding of where questions should go when the answer is uncertain. Students shouldn't need insider knowledge to navigate our institutions. When we make administrative systems clearer, we reduce unnecessary burden, build trust, and give students a more reliable foundation for making academic decisions that shape their futures.

Improvement doesn't require eliminating professional judgment or writing a procedure for every possible situation. It requires making interpretation less dependent on who happens to answer the question. Offices can identify authoritative policy sources, document recurring decisions, clarify ownership, review points of confusion, and create opportunities for colleagues across functions to compare how policies are being communicated and applied.

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NEACRAO 79th Annual Conference-

November 4-6, 2026

[Hotel Champlain](#) Burlington, VT



Conference registration is now open!

REGISTER TODAY!

Conference Registration Scholarships are available for:

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

We are heading north for the NEACRAO 2026 Annual Conference! Some of the sessions you can expect include:

- Education Abroad Course Approvals
- Communication 9-1-1: Registrar and Faculty
- Making the Invisible Work Visible: Practical Process Documentation
- Data, Process, Teamwork, and Deployment: Honest Lessons from an SIS Deployment
- Personalized Admissions
- CRM Implementation: From Soup to Nuts
- Making the Grade: Securing and Navigating your first leadership role
- Inclusion by Design: Navigating institutional belonging
- Herding Robots: Keeping up with AI as Policy chases practice
- Check out our [Sessions-at-a-glance page!](#)



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

Have you renewed your NEACRAO membership yet?

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 2026 AACRAO Elbert W. Ockerman State & Regional Professional Development Activity Award
 - Receive each issue via email
 - Publish in NEACRAO Notes

[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
- Vice President for Registrar & Records

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.