



### Fall semester begins with excitement, challenges for independent colleges



Mason Dyer  
AIKCU President

With the fall semester underway, Kentucky's independent college campuses are alive with the sense of possibility and excitement of a new academic year.

I was recently invited to speak with a group of faculty leaders at Bellarmine University about challenges facing higher education. There's no shortage of challenges to discuss — a difficult financial model (particularly for independent colleges), demographic changes, student mental health, issues of trust and public confidence, AI and new technologies, and a rapidly shifting policy environment, to name just a few.

Yet despite these obstacles, I also emphasized the opportunities for independent colleges to lean into their missions, adapt, focus on student success, connect more deeply with employers, and lead. I encouraged them to look beyond their own campuses to partner with the Commonwealth (through the many initiatives led by CPE) and to embrace collaboration, both within and outside our sector.

Experiential learning, internships, undergraduate research — all help students connect their classroom experience to workforce preparation. And while these are not unique to independent colleges, they are areas where AIKCU members excel as they prepare students for careers and for life.

Kentucky's economy needs an educated, skilled workforce. We also need graduates who are adaptable, think critically, engage in civil discourse across differences, and communicate well.

Here's to another year of developing those graduates.



Higher ed officials support Brescia University President Madison C. Silvert at his inauguration ceremony. Sporting caps to recognize 1925 — the year Brescia was founded as a private Roman Catholic university — are (l to r) CPE President Aaron Thompson, President Silvert, AIKCU President Mason Dyer, and CPE Executive Vice President Travis Powell.

### AIKCU, CPE officials celebrate Silvert as Brescia's new president

Representatives from AIKCU and the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education were on hand in Owensboro Aug. 15 to celebrate the inauguration of Madison C. Silvert as Brescia University's sixth president.

Silvert has strong ties to both higher education entities. Brescia is a member of AIKCU as one of 18 independent colleges and universities in Kentucky. In addition, Silvert currently serves as chair of the CPE Council, a 13-member board appointed by the governor.

Silvert made the case for higher education during his inaugural address.

"If you only believe that education is practical and about jobs, you're missing half the picture," he said. "And, even if you only believe that education is about jobs, you still need higher education, and, I'd argue, you especially need one rooted in the liberal arts."

Silvert added, "An education, and particularly a broad-based liberal arts education, is an investment in making yourself a better person, and it does this in a number of ways."

CPE President Aaron Thompson echoed those sentiments in his remarks.

"Private institutions play a critical role in providing accessible, affordable, high-quality postsecondary opportunities across the Commonwealth," Thompson said. "Last academic year, Kentucky's private colleges and universities enrolled approximately 60,000 students and awarded 15,000 degrees, two-thirds of which were at the graduate level."

Thompson said, "The massive gains we've achieved in Kentucky's educational attainment rate over the last decade would not have been possible without the contributions of our private institutions."

## Transylvania University hosts 3 AIKCU Affinity Group meetings

One of AIKCU's many benefits is the opportunity for members to exchange information and ideas with peers from other independent colleges in Kentucky. The Affinity Groups meet virtually and in person at AIKCU member campuses.

Transylvania University hosted three AIKCU Affinity Groups Aug. 15 at its William T. Young Campus Center in Lexington.

The Human Resources Officers and Campus Culture & Community Relations Officers met jointly for an update on HR-related state and federal legislation with Kacey Coleman, an attorney with Sturgill Turner PLLC.

The Advancement Officers learned how colleges can secure transformational gifts from University of Pikeville President Burton J. Webb, who is also chair of the AIKCU Board of Directors.

They also gained insight into how colleges can connect with community foundations from Scott Fitzpatrick, vice president of advancement for the Blue Grass Community Foundation.



*Transylvania University President Brien Lewis (l) catches up with University of Pikeville President Burton J. Webb during Affinity Group meetings at Transy. Both serve on the AIKCU Board of Directors, with Webb serving as chair and Lewis as treasurer.*



*Human Resources Officers and Campus Culture & Community Relations Officers met in August as part of the AIKCU Affinity Groups.*



*The Advancement Officers also gathered for an Affinity Group meeting at Transylvania University.*

### **AIKCU teams up with Steptoe & Johnson to offer compliance webinars to members**

Thanks to a "Meeting the Moment" grant from the Council of Independent Colleges, AIKCU is offering its members a series of webinars in 2025 titled "AIKCU Legal and Compliance Issues."

The webinars are designed to help Kentucky's independent colleges navigate rapid regulatory changes by providing legal updates and guidance on strengthening their institutional compliance and ethics programs.

AIKCU is collaborating on the webinars with Steptoe & Johnson PLLC, a national law firm with offices in Lexington and Louisville. Attorney Jim Newberry, leader of Steptoe & Johnson's Higher Education Team, is presenting the programs along with fellow attorney Ryan G. Stevens.

### **Coming Up: 2025 Fall Affinity Group Meetings**

AIKCU Business Officers Fall Meeting

Friday, Oct. 10 | 10 a.m. ET

In Person: Berea College, Berea

AIKCU Chief Academic Officers Fall Meeting

Friday, Oct. 10 | 10 a.m.-2 p.m. ET

In Person: Berea College, Berea

AIKCU Library Directors Fall Meeting

Friday, Oct. 10 | 10 a.m. ET

In Person: Berea College, Berea



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