



Strong relationship between AIKCU, CPE benefits higher ed in Kentucky



Mason Dyer
AIKCU President

As I prepare for AIKCU's annual presentation to the Council on Postsecondary Education, I must reflect on the positive relationship that exists between CPE and AIKCU. I talk frequently with my colleagues representing independent colleges in other states, and few have the constructive relationship with their state higher education agency that AIKCU enjoys.

This relationship didn't come about by chance — it's the result of decades of conscious effort, mutual respect, cooperation, collaboration, and the integration of Kentucky's independent college sector into CPE's Strategic Agenda. And it's a testament to CPE leadership and our institutions, who have embraced the important roles that independent colleges and universities play in Kentucky's education and talent development ecosystem.

AIKCU institutions provide critical choice and access to higher education. They are economic drivers, many in parts of Kentucky that are economically challenged. They serve high percentages of first generation and low-income students. They enjoy rich histories, with some extending back to the earliest days of the commonwealth (or before).

Most importantly, AIKCU members are devoted to student success and continue to evolve and adapt to meet the needs of today's students and tomorrow's workforce.

After all, we are all in this for a better, more prosperous Kentucky.

Spalding and Union Commonwealth celebrate inaugurations

Spalding University and Union Commonwealth University celebrated the inauguration of their new presidents in September.

Spalding University installed Anne Kenworthy, Ed.D., as its 11th president in Louisville Sept. 19.

"To be inaugurated as president of Spalding University in this moment is so powerful," Kenworthy said in her inaugural address. "I'm humbled by the tremendous outpouring of support I received at today's beautiful ceremony and the celebration that followed. Nothing could have been more meaningful than having my daughter, Brooke, speak at my inauguration. I'm excited for Spalding's future and privileged to be chosen to lead this remarkable institution."

Union Commonwealth University inaugurated DJ Washington, Ed.D., '03 as its 20th president in Barbourville Sept. 19.

In his inaugural address, Washington reflected on his journey as a first-generation college student and Union alumnus. "As I stand before you today, I am humbled by the weight of Union's history and energized by the promise of its future.

Bellarmine, Spalding, University of Pikeville awarded large federal grants

Three AIKCU members have received prestigious federal grants.

For the first time, **Bellarmine University** and **Spalding University**, both in Louisville, have earned competitive TRIO Student Support Services grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

Bellarmine received a five-year, \$1.36 million grant, which will fund a new program designed to help first-generation and low-income students persist, thrive, and graduate.



Spalding University President Anne
Kenworthy

Photo courtesy of Spalding



Union Commonwealth University President
DJ Washington

Photo courtesy of Union

"This is not my journey alone — it is our shared journey, a partnership between students and faculty, alumni and trustees, church and community. You and me. Together, we will ensure that Union remains a place where barriers are broken, bridges are built, and lives are transformed."

Spalding also received a five-year, \$1.36 million award, which will support the academic success, retention, and graduation of students who are first-generation, low-income, or have disabilities.

In addition, the **University of Pikeville** has been awarded two U.S. Department of Education grants totaling over \$2.3 million. These grants will support initiatives that improve student career pathways and strengthen civic education.

Excerpted from the Bellarmine, Spalding, and University of Pikeville websites.

AIKCU Affinity Groups gather at Berea College for fall meetings

It was a beautiful day on the campus of Berea College when three AIKCU Affinity Groups met Oct. 10 for their fall meetings.

The Chief Academic Officers shared news from their schools and discussed matters affecting academic deans.

The Business Officers got an update on federal student funding from Tim Powers, vice president for Government Relations & Policy Development for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.



Kacey Coleman, a local attorney with Sturgill Turner, provided a session on legal issues facing higher ed.

AIKCU President Mason Dyer gave both groups a look at how changes to the higher education landscape are affecting Kentucky's independent colleges and universities.

The Library Directors also met the same day.

AIKCU appreciates its member Berea College for hosting these peers from across the state.



The Chief Academic Officers met at Berea College in October.



The Business Officers held their fall meeting at Berea College.

AIKCU to launch Advancing Leaders Class of 2026

AIKCU will kick off the second class of its successful Advancing Leaders Program in February 2026. Eighteen participants completed the leadership development program as the inaugural Class of 2025.

"We're excited at the positive response from those who took part in our inaugural class," AIKCU President Mason Dyer said. "AIKCU is offering this program to help our member institutions prepare outstanding mid- to senior-level managers to take on even greater leadership roles in higher education."

Dyer said AIKCU is collaborating on the programming with Credo, a higher education consulting firm that specializes in leadership development for middle-talent campus leaders and aspiring presidents.

The 2026 Advancing Leaders program will last five months and consist of in-person and virtual sessions.

What Advancing Leaders participants are saying

"... This program has been very helpful in building community, seeing what's happening across other campuses, and having a place to better understand some of the language and ideas that are being discussed in the President's cabinet ... I think the program would be good for anybody who works with or is likely to become a cabinet member."

— Joe Christensen, Ph.D., Dean, St. Elizabeth College of Natural and Health Sciences, Thomas More University

"... The workshop leaders provided insightful and engaging sessions about the current landscape of higher education, including issues related to intercollegiate athletics, governance, philanthropy, institutional finances, and team dynamics ... I highly recommend this program for institutional leaders who want to learn more about their leadership abilities and expand their capacity to navigate contemporary challenges in higher education."

— Tiffany Wheeler, Ed.D., Interim Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean, Transylvania University

