



# AILACTE

Association of Independent Liberal Arts  
Colleges for Teacher Education

## Views & News April 2026



**Kevin Thomas, PhD**  
President, AILACTE

### Message from the President

Spring has sprung here in Louisville, Kentucky! This is my favorite time of year. I spent the Easter break working in my yard among the flowering azaleas, lilacs, and dogwood trees. Typically, I enjoy yard work because it provides me an opportunity to take a break from the mental rigor of academia; however, this year was an exception. I spent much of my time in the yard reflecting on my new position as AILACTE president and my goals for this year.

As I considered these goals, I was reminded of AILACTE's mission: to support and advocate for educator preparation programs at private liberal arts institutions. We accomplish this mission by:

- providing a communication and information system for sharing concerns, issues, and viewpoints in teacher education as they pertain to member institutions,
- raising the general level of awareness of the needs of member institutions and of those who do not fall within its membership,
- making available to educational policy-making groups the talent, values and perspectives represented in the membership, and
- cooperating with other associations to promote quality teacher education.

Central to fulfilling this mission are two primary vehicles: the AILACTE National Conference and the *AILACTE Journal*, both of which are shaped by our membership. With this in mind, **my goals for 2026 are to work with the Board of Directors, state representatives, and members of AILACTE to develop strategies to increase membership, boost submissions and**

attendance at the conference, and enhance the visibility and impact of the *AILACTE Journal*.

Focusing first on the conference, the AILACTE National Conference serves as one of the key “communication and information systems” supporting our mission. I want to acknowledge the work of Past President Dr. Chandra Foote and the planning committee for organizing a successful conference this year in New Orleans. As always, the conference provided an invaluable opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and engage in professional development. Presentations addressed a variety of timely topics, including challenges and opportunities facing teacher preparation programs: Redefining Teacher Recruitment, Strengthening Dual Credit Programs & Partnerships, Humanizing AI, Leveraging Data for Equity, Digital Tools and Literacy Gains, and The Critical Importance of Belonging. I especially appreciated the panel discussion, “Life During and After Program and University Closures,” and the candor and courage with which the panel members—Dr. Christina Pfister, Dr. Doug Scheidt, and Dr. Lori V. Quigley—shared their experiences and the lengths they went to care for their students, staff, and faculty during this process. Notably, this year’s conference also featured a new format reflecting increased partnership between the AILACTE and AACTE conferences. I want to recognize the collaborative efforts of our AACTE representative Dr. Yolanda Gollardo and Past President Dr. Foote, who, in partnership with AACTE, created this mutually beneficial format. I would also like to thank Dr. Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy, President of AACTE, for welcoming our participants.

While the conference is essential to achieving AILACTE’s mission, its effectiveness is closely tied to participant numbers. Unfortunately, as the figures below demonstrate, attendance at the conference has been declining over the last decade. From 2017 to 2023, the average conference attendance was 78, with a high of 96 in 2020 (Atlanta) and a low of 46 in 2025 (Long Beach).

In addition to the conference, the *AILACTE Journal* serves as another vital “communication and information system” for advancing our mission. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Co-editor Dr. Caitlin Riegel to increase the journal’s visibility, update the review process, and recruit new members to the Editorial Review Board. I also want to recognize Dr. Jackie Crawford, who is stepping down as editor after serving since 2018, and who has graciously agreed to continue as copy editor. Despite these efforts, the journal experienced a reduction in submissions last year and has historically struggled to attract a significant number of submissions from faculty at member institutions.

Both conference participation and journal submissions are, in turn, affected by declining membership. Given the financial challenges facing higher education over the last decade, this trend may not be surprising; however, I suspect that many AILACTE stakeholders are unaware of the extent to which these challenges have diminished our membership. A 70% decrease in membership over eight years not only significantly reduces AILACTE’s ability to achieve its mission but also presents an existential threat to the organization.

Reflecting on these challenges, I am reminded of how, over the long winter, mother nature makes a mess of my yard, requiring significant effort each spring to repair the damage. Similarly, the challenges facing AILACTE have accumulated over time, and it will take time and a collective effort to restore our

organization. My goal this year is to work with the Board of Directors to increase membership, conference attendance, and the visibility of the journal. However, our greatest strength has always been our members and our shared purpose. Therefore, I am calling on all members to work together to face and overcome these challenges. I invite you to join me in identifying strategies to increase membership, conference attendance, and the visibility of the *AILACTE Journal*.

If you have any suggestions or would like to meet to discuss these challenges and/or solutions, please email me at [ktthomas@bellarmine.edu](mailto:ktthomas@bellarmine.edu).

## Conference Highlights

The 2026 AILACTE Conference showcased a strong national presence and vibrant professional engagement, featuring 25 refereed presentations alongside six additional AILACTE/AACTE sessions and a joint AILACTE/AACTE panel. In total, approximately 20 unique institutions were represented, with participation spanning 14 states, reflecting broad geographic diversity and a wide range of institutional perspectives. Over 50 educators and scholars contributed to the program, highlighting the depth of expertise and commitment within the AILACTE community.

The conference program emphasized key themes of innovation, equity, and sustainability in educator preparation, with sessions aligned to advancing inclusive practices, strengthening program impact, and responding to evolving educational contexts. In addition to scholarly presentations, the conference included an Orientation Session for new members, supporting engagement and connection among participants, as well as collaborative sessions designed to foster dialogue across institutions.

Attendee engagement remained high throughout the event, including strong participation in the annual business meeting, where members contributed to organizational updates and future planning. Overall, the conference successfully advanced AILACTE's mission by promoting collaboration, sharing research and practice, and reinforcing the collective impact of independent educator preparation programs nationwide.

*We extend our sincere thanks to all presenters, participants, and organizers whose contributions made this conference a success!*



## Awards Summary

### 2026 Global Excellence Award Recipient:

**Department of Teacher Education, Azusa Pacific University**

The Department of Teacher Education at Azusa Pacific University has developed a transformative Zambia Study Away Program in partnership with Breath of Heaven Academy in Lusaka. Moving beyond traditional "study abroad" models, this initiative utilizes a reciprocal co-teaching framework where APU candidates and Zambian educators learn alongside one another. Grounded in the principle of *Ubuntu* ("I am because we are"), the program challenges candidates to adapt to resource-constrained environments, prioritizing human connection and culturally responsive pedagogy over technological dependence.

### 2026 Graduate Scholar Award Recipient:

**Diana Vetter Moore, Bellarmine University**

Diana states this award will provide meaningful support as she completes her dissertation research on faculty thriving at small, private colleges. A portion of the funds will be used to encourage faculty participation through donations to student food pantries and emergency funds—an approach that aims to strengthen both faculty well-being and the student communities they serve.



## Apply for an AILACTE Award

Apply for one of the AILACTE Awards:

- Diversity and Inclusion Change Agent Award
- Scholar Award
- Graduate Scholar Award
- Global Excellence Award
- Partnership Award

Learn more about each award online and apply today! Applications are **due October 15, 2026** and recipients will be **notified November 15, 2026**.

[Apply for an Award](#)



## 2027 AILACTE Conference

AILACTE's 2027 National Conference will be held in **Columbus, Ohio** in **February 2027**.

More information to come!

[Conference Website](#)



## 2026 Call for Manuscripts

Consider submitting a manuscript for the 2026 volume of the AILACTE Journal!

Manuscripts may address any issue that enhances the work of teacher educators in a liberal arts context. Topics that are appropriate for the journal include teaching and learning strategies; diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice; responding to state mandates; candidate and faculty recruitment; tenure track and the use of adjuncts and professors of practice; budget issues; candidate and program assessment; program leadership; clinical practice and partnerships; policy changes; program models; etc.

Manuscripts are due **June 10, 2026** and can be submitted online.

[View the Submission Guidelines](#)



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Follow AILACTE on LinkedIn for the latest in teacher preparation and professional development!

Stay connected with our community of educators and gain access to valuable resources, events, and insights that support the growth of aspiring teachers.

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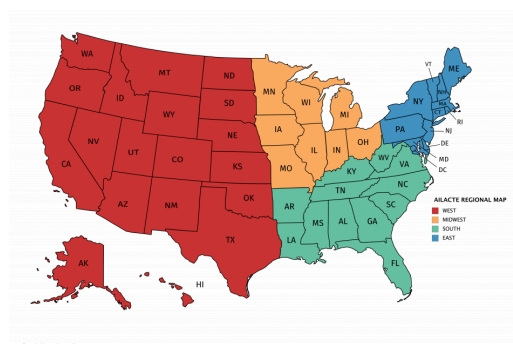


## Call for Nominations

The AILACTE Executive Board is requesting nominations for the **Communications and Media Chair**.

Please submit a nomination today!

[Submit a Nomination](#)



## Get to Know your State Representative!

Are you familiar with your AILACTE **State Representative**? If not, take a moment to find out who represents your state. If your state doesn't have a representative, consider stepping up to fill that role.

[State Representatives](#)



## AILACTE Institutional Spotlight



### **Niagara University (New York, USA and Ontario, Canada)**

Founded in 1856 by the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians), Niagara University is a private, Catholic, and Vincentian institution committed to educating students for lives of purpose, service, and professional leadership. In addition to its historic campus in Lewiston, New York, the university operates a campus in the Greater Toronto Area, Ontario, extending its Vincentian mission across an international border and providing educator preparation grounded in a global and cross-cultural perspective.

Niagara University's College of Education offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs designed to develop skilled, reflective, and compassionate educators who are prepared to serve diverse learners. The College offers a wide range of programs leading to initial and advanced certification, as well as graduate degrees in teacher education, educational leadership, school counseling, and related fields. Programs are offered at the New York campus and at the Ontario location, allowing the university to prepare educators for service in multiple educational systems while maintaining a shared commitment to academic rigor, ethical practice, and professional excellence.

As a bi-national institution, Niagara University provides unique opportunities for candidates to engage with educational policy, practice, and diverse student populations in both the United States and Canada. Faculty across campuses collaborate to ensure program quality, alignment with professional standards, and responsiveness to the needs of partner schools. This structure supports a broad network of school partnerships and clinical placements, enabling candidates to develop their skills in a variety of educational settings and cultural contexts.

Field-based learning is central to Niagara's approach to educator preparation. Candidates participate in extensive clinical experiences through partnerships with schools in New York State, Ontario, and surrounding regions. These experiences emphasize the integration of theory and practice, reflective teaching, and the development of professional dispositions that support student success. School partners consistently note the strong preparation, professionalism, and adaptability of Niagara graduates.

Consistent with the university's Catholic and Vincentian identity, educator preparation at Niagara University is grounded in the belief that teaching is both a profession and a form of service. Programs encourage candidates to address issues of social responsibility while promoting respect for the dignity of every learner. Through coursework, service-learning, and community engagement, candidates are prepared to respond to the needs of schools and society with competence, compassion, and integrity.

Through its long-standing tradition of teacher preparation and its distinctive bi-national presence, Niagara University continues to prepare educators who are

equipped to lead in diverse classrooms, educational systems, and communities throughout the United States, Canada, and beyond.

[Learn more here](#)

[Membership](#)

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