

Dr. Kedrick A. Nicholas Professional Biography

Dr. Kedrick Nicholas was born and raised in New Orleans, LA, where he was educated as a gifted student and scholar athlete at Edna Karr High School. His McNeese story began when he was recruited and signed a letter of intent to play football on scholarship. During his five-year playing career at McNeese, Dr. Nicholas received several honors, including numerous defensive player of the week awards, leading tackler for his senior year, and being the recipient of the Voris King Memorial Team Captain Award following the 2004 season. While being a standout student-athlete, Dr. Nicholas was named to the President's Honor List several semesters and was a student leader through involvement in several student organizations. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from McNeese State University and a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. For his doctoral program, he graduated at the top of his class and was the first student of his 18-student cohort to complete the program. Dr. Nicholas's doctoral research and continued research interest focus on the relationship between professional development and career advancement in higher education and how both intersect with leadership growth.

Dr. Nicholas has been employed at McNeese State University for over 20 years. While he initially anticipated pursuing a career in K-12 educational leadership, he was offered the opportunity to serve as a graduate assistant in the Office of Student Services near the end of his undergraduate career. He accepted the offer in 2005 and began his career in higher education while pursuing his master's degree. It was this two-year experience as a rising professional that completely changed the trajectory of his professional ambitions. Dr. Nicholas developed a love for higher education and specifically roles that impact the student experience and involves leading others to success through vision, coaching, and complex decision making.

After completing his Master's of Science Degree with a concentration in Educational Technology, Dr. Nicholas was a candidate for several entry-level administrative roles at universities within the southeastern region of the United States. He ultimately decided to begin his full-time employment career at McNeese State University as an entry-level professional in the Office of Financial Aid. Dr. Nicholas worked in this area for just under a year before moving back to the unit that was the genesis of his higher education career. He accepted a position as the Coordinator of Student Activities in the Office of Student Services.

For six years during the early phases of Dr. Nicholas's full-time professional career, he also served as an in-person and online adjunct instructor in the College of Education's Department of Education Professions. While maintaining stewardship to his full-time administrative role, Dr. Nicholas taught up to nine credit hours of courses each semester in the educational technology discipline until his professional rise became too demanding to continue adjunct work. While serving as an adjunct instructor, Dr. Nicholas continuously received excellent ratings from his students, including commentary that spoke to his ability to be highly organized, motivational, and astute in his pedagogical approach. His student evaluation of instruction surveys had a mean score of 4.85 out of 5.

Dr. Nicholas's rise through professional ranks began just three years after being named Coordinator of Student Activities. In 2011, he was promoted to Assistant Dean of Student

Services, followed by multiple elements of directorship over the next several years. Then, in 2018, Dr. Nicholas was named Associate Dean of Students and quickly advanced to Dean of Students in 2019. After a reorganization of the division of student affairs in 2022, he was elevated to Dean of Student Affairs, responsible for the oversight of the entire division of student affairs. Dr. Nicholas simultaneously served as the university's Title IX compliance administrator while serving in the two dean roles. Following a presidential change and adjustment to the cabinet in 2024, Dr. Nicholas was appointed to the role of Senior Vice President, the second ranking executive role on campus. The position involves broad management of the institutional budget and finances, continuous assessment of process improvement, oversight of the division of student affairs, management of numerous university third-party relationships, vision for campuswide special programs for faculty and staff, and navigating University of Louisiana System Board and system office relations.

Dr. Nicholas credits a significant impact on his professional growth to his 2017-2018 participation in the inaugural class of the University of Louisiana System's Management Institute. During this experience, he was the self-proclaimed and unlikely debated class president. His contributions to the program's capstone project led to operational improvements at McNeese and other University of Louisiana System institutions.

Throughout his McNeese career, Dr. Nicholas has been impactful and visionary by playing a key role in the continuous evolution and progress of the campus. He has spearheaded the start of several campus initiatives that live today as deeply rooted traditions. Dr. Nicholas constructed the first Cowboy Camp in 2008, which began as a one-day extended orientation program for first-year students. Under his oversight and leadership, it was elevated to a two-day program and has now become the featured campuswide orientation program for first-time freshmen. Dr. Nicholas is also the creator and founder of the CARE Mentorship Program, which was developed to provide one-on-one support to at-risk students and other students who elect to participate. He was also the influence on the development of a staff senate to align with the shared governance approach of the Dr. Wade Rouse administration. Dr. Nicholas developed the core principles of the senate and led a designated task force to construct the founding governing documents. Staff Senate is now an essential piece of the university's governing structure. There are several other examples of Dr. Nicholas contributing to McNeese's rich history, such as his development of the first strategic plan for the Division of Student Affairs and constituting in-house professional development programs, including the LEAP (Leverage Emerging and Ascending Professionals) Program and McNeese Leadership Circle.

Dr. Nicholas has led the efforts of overseeing the distribution of funds from a \$2.4M grant received from the United States Department of Education to establish robust first-year experience and student success programs. His vision established the university's first Office of First Year-Experience Programs and completed the composition of the Center for Learning and Student Success, which he inherited as an incomplete project from prior oversight. The establishment of each area programmatically bridges the gap between academic and student affairs; a feat most institutions may believe is impossible to achieve. The initiatives are poised to positively contribute to the university's student retention and persistence rates.

While his full-time career has been solely at McNeese, Dr. Nicholas's professional impact has extended well beyond Lake Charles. In the early stages of his career, he used foundational knowledge from his bachelor's and master's programs to develop a thoughtful approach to planning student programs. The concept ties student engagement experiences to institutional objectives and learning outcomes to prove the notion that higher education is enhanced through engagement. The practice led to Dr. Nicholas being invited to be a featured speaker at numerous conferences, and he was highlighted during a professional development series for professionals at Rice University in Houston, TX. Furthermore, Dr. Nicholas was invited to facilitate a workshop at Louisiana Delta Community College to assist with their development of a mentorship program like McNeese's CARE Program, which he created. Additionally, he has been invited to speak, present, or consult with other higher education institutions in the region, such as Southeastern Louisiana University and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

One of Dr. Nicholas's most notable professional accomplishments outside of McNeese was his 2023-2024 appointment by the University of Louisiana System Board of Supervisors and then system President, Dr. Jim Henderson, to serve as a consultant and advisor through a presidential transition at the University of New Orleans (UNO). The assignment required Dr. Nicholas to spend time working in person on both the UNO and McNeese campuses as he assisted the UNO student and employee communities with identifying holistic challenges and opportunities impacting the institution. His work was among the initial indicators of UNO's cultural and financial weaknesses that have led to the institution's return to the Louisiana State University System. The work Dr. Nicholas completed at UNO is indicative of his well-respected interpretations of best practices for higher education operations and student success initiatives. He frequently fields calls and emails from professionals at peer institutions who seek his advice and counsel.

Dr. Nicholas has held a plethora of leadership positions throughout his career. He is a former President of the Louisiana Association of College and University Student Personnel Administrators (LACUSPA), a former national advisory board member for the Association for the Promotion of Campus Activities (APCA), and a former council member for the Southern Association for College Student Affairs. Dr. Nicholas is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and serves as the Executive Director for the Louisiana District. He also serves as the Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Louisiana. Dr. Nicholas moonlights as a high school basketball official and currently serves as a three-term President of the Lake Charles Basketball Officials Association.

Dr. Nicholas has received numerous awards during his professional career. To mention a few, he was named National Advisor of the Year by the Association for the Promotion of Campus Activities and National Advisor of the Year by the National Pan-Hellenic Council. He received the University of Louisiana System's Innovation and Inclusion Award and the Dan Seymour Award for Outstanding Service in Student Affairs from LACUSPA. Dr. Nicholas is a sports enthusiast, following all McNeese athletic programs and his hometown's New Orleans Saints! Most important to him, he enjoys a blessed life with his college sweetheart and wife of almost two decades, Tabitha, and their two children, Kyle and Kamden. His family provides his daily

inspiration and motivates him to be an example of sedulously dedicating yourself to service and the growth of others.