Hello from the Land of the Midnight Sun! We’ve reached the longest days of the year and in my hometown of Fairbanks, Alaska, we celebrate in style. The sun doesn’t set today, but dips below the horizon about 1:00 AM tomorrow morning and pops back up about two hours later. It won’t get dark, just dusk. It’s a fun, but busy time of year. The extra sunlight gives us some extra energy to take care of all the things we put off over the winter.

WASFAA has spent those extra hours of daylight well over the last month. During the first week in June, 117 financial aid administrators attended the Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute in Reno, Nevada. With tracks for beginners, intermediate and advanced folks, our WASFAA members were well trained, having an opportunity to earn over 900 NASFAA credentials!
That same week, the Training Committee met to write content for the Fall Training series. I love the topic! I’ve had a month to practice what I learned in the sneak peek, and my negotiation skills have improved already. Keep reading this newsletter for more information.

Also in Reno that week (see, I told you it was a busy month!), the Executive Council met. We discussed our goals and strategies for meeting our Strategic Plan, set dates and locations for our upcoming events (hint: you’ll be visiting the wettest and greenest desert in North America) and started preparations for ways to celebrate the milestone of WASFAA’s 50th anniversary.

Since we had such a productive meeting this quarter, the volunteer I’d like to highlight for A Year in the Life of a WASFAA Volunteer is David Downing. David is our Secretary. Before the meeting, he made sure that everyone had access to committee reports and minutes. During the meeting, he kept track of discussion and recorded names of who made and seconded motions as well as the outcome of the vote. He did this for Strategic Planning Committee, Fiscal Planning Committee and Executive Council over the course of a day and a half. After the meeting, he reminds us of what we signed up to do and helps us follow through. He is the one person on council that can never take a mental break and will always remember who said what during this year. If you would be interested in learning more about WASFAA business than anyone else, consider running for Secretary this year. Nominations will open this fall.

Enjoy the sunshine!
Sincerely,

Ashley Munro
2018-2019 WASFAA President
Hello WASFAA! I hope everyone is enjoying summer. Our executive council meeting at this year’s Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute in Reno, NV went great. I’m looking forward to incorporating some of the feedback I received into future communications strategies. As always, if you would like to send any feedback or contribute to the newsletter, please send your articles or submissions to communications@wasfaa.org by July 20th.

WASFAA Social Media Links

[Facebook icon] [Twitter icon] [LinkedIn icon]

WASFAA Communications Committee

Sun Ow • David Downing • Ashley Coleman • Wendy Olson •

Newsletter Ads

Newsletter ads are a great way to advertise your products and services. The newsletter will be published electronically on a monthly basis. To purchase ad space click here.

Cost for 3 months:

- Full page: 7 ½” x 10” $500
- Half page: 7 ½” x 4 ¾” $250
- Quarter page: 3 ½” x 4 ¾” $100

WASFAA is pleased to share web-based training opportunities for financial aid administrators provided by our industry partners during the month of July.

Topics range from financial aid compliance to helping students managing debt and repayment. These training and informational sessions are available to you free of charge.

Click here for more detailed information on the sessions offered and the registration links.

WASFAA welcomes all views and invites submissions of articles, essays, photographs or information of general interest to all members. Submissions should be brief and should not advertise specific products or services. Submissions may be edited. It may not be possible to publish all articles submitted. Opinions expressed in the WASFAA Newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily of WASFAA, its members or the institutions represented by the authors. Email items for publication to communications@wasfaa.org.
Hope everyone’s summers are off to a great start and that you all find some time to read a good book! WASFAA Training Committee members are reading three great books this summer in preparation for this fall’s training events: Your Perfect Right, Crucial Conversations and Getting to YES. Drawing from these three classics on assertiveness, communication and negotiation, the committee is developing a day-long, interactive event where participants will learn and practice new skills. These topics will be interwoven with NASFAA U’s curriculum on Satisfactory Academic Progress, which will prepare participants to take and pass the credential test that is included with the event registration fee of $55 for WASFAA members, $105 including the membership fee or $105 for nonmembers. This may be the perfect opportunity for non-financial aid staff on your campus to learn more about SAP and gain some valuable skills in the process. We look forward to bringing you more updates as fall approaches.

Anthony Morrone
Director of Financial Aid
Nevada State College
WASFAA Training Committee Chair 2018-2019
SISTER DALE BROWN SUMMER INSTITUTE WRAP UP

June 4-8, 2018, 117 financial aid administrators from across the WASFAA region gathered on the campus of the University of Nevada Reno for a weeklong boot camp style training! Leading the training were WASFAA volunteer “faculty” who presented on a variety of materials developed by both NASFAA U and WASFAA. Summer Institute participants also have access to take the NASFAA U credential tests for the topics in their assigned tracks at no additional charge! Department of Education Training Officer, Bruce Honer, also joined us at the end of the week to provide sessions on hot topics and the latest news from ED.

The 2018 Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute Faculty/Committee:

- Kelley Christianson, Co-Chair – Central Washington University (WA)
- Laura Hughes, Co-Chair – Lewis Clark State College (ID)
- Kaleo (Shawn) Domingo, Faculty – Hawai‘i Community College (HI)
- Shellee Kilbride, Faculty – Prospect Education (NV)
- Kay Soltis, Faculty – Pacific Lutheran University (WA)
- Calvin Black, Faculty – University of Nevada Reno (NV)
- Sarah Everitt, Faculty – Gonzaga University (WA)
- Ryan West, Faculty – Chemeteka Community College (OR)
- Dwight Berreth, Faculty – Northwest Nazarene University (ID)
- Jose Quiroga, Faculty – University of Nevada Reno (NV)
- Kathy Campbell, Faculty – Columbia Gorge Community College (OR)
- Jenna Eastman, Committee – Nevada State College (NV)

The overall group was assigned to beginner, intermediate and advanced tracks for a set agenda of topics and a couple of opportunities for concurrent session choices. A unique part of Summer Institute is the assignment to small groups (of about 15) where participants can closely interact with their colleagues and faculty to work case studies and have in-depth discussions about best practices for the day’s topics. One participant remarked: Financial Aid can be long and boring but you guys made it great!!

The best part of Summer Institute was staying on campus in Peavine Hall and eating at the dining services’ Down Under Café. It was just like being a college student again! Shout out to the University of Nevada Reno staff who took great care of us during our stay!

Summer Institute also tried something new this year by offering the event app Whova for participants to access materials electronically, network with other participants, share photos and connect with organizers to get answers to a variety of questions throughout the week. It was a great resource and I hope you all get a chance to experience a future WASFAA event with the app.

Thinking about attending 2019 Summer Institute? It will be held at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. Sarah Everitt (Gonzaga University) and Andy Promsiri (UCLA) are Co-Chairing the event!
FEDERAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE UPDATE

First off, I would like to thank Tami Sato, who has served as the WASFAA Federal Relations Chair for the past few years. She has been a tremendous asset and wonderful friend to WASFAA. I congratulate her on her pending retirement from our wonderful profession, and wish her the best as she begins a new chapter in her life.

Now on to the latest news:

On July 19th, the Department of Education announced that it will allow for additional time, until July 1, 2019, for institutions to comply with the requirements of the Gainful Employment regulations in 668.412 (d) and (e) 34 CFR 668.412 (d) and (e) requires institutions to:

1. Include the disclosure template, or a link thereto, in their GE program promotional materials; and
2. Directly distribute the disclosure template to prospective students.

The Department intends to develop proposed regulations that would replace the GE regulations. As part of this rule making process, the Department continues to evaluate the efficacy of these disclosures to students and the implementation of these requirements.

Consistent with previous announcements, institutions must comply with the requirements in 34 CFR 668.412(a), (b), and (c) to post disclosures on their GE program web pages using the approved disclosure template provided by the Department. The deadline for these actions was April 6, 2018.

We anticipate the next few months to be rather busy, with the pending release of the proposed regulations for GE as mentioned above, and for Borrower Defense. In addition, ED has submitted to the OMB requests for two negotiated rule making sessions. The topics – One session on Credit hours, CBE, direct assessment, and “regular & substantive engagement” the second, on state authorization.

A wise mentor once told me we cannot take issue with the regulation, if we did not attempt to sit at the table. That being said, if you wish to volunteer for the Federal Relations Committee, please complete a volunteer form found on the WASFAA website, or reach out directly at Barbara.bickett@adtalem.com

STATE NEWS

IDAHO

For those of you who were able to make the WASFAA spring conference, I truly hope you enjoyed your time in the City of Trees. It has been a rainy summer so far in Boise leaving our foothills here greener than they typically are this time of year. Hopefully that will translate to a mild fire season later on.

This June I went to Reno and am thankful for the 24ish hours I got to spend there. Although there for the WASFAA Executive Council meeting, the Sister Dale energy could be felt from the University of Nevada all the way on the 25th floor of the El Dorado :). It was great seeing everyone from Idaho and other states celebrating the completion of Sister Dale at the banquet.

In Idaho, we have concluded our elections and have our 2018-19 Executive Council set. It brings me great pleasure to welcome our newest members. President-Elect: Leslie Hammes from the University of Idaho. Vice President: Derek Moore from the University of Idaho. Secretary/Treasurer Elect: Ann Crabb from Northwest Nazarene University. I look forward to working with these individuals to make IASFAA a stronger organization. We still have some finalizing to do but all signs indicate that we will be having our Fall Conference on October 9th and 10th at the Grove Hotel here in Boise. If you enjoyed visiting Boise in the spring, we would love to entertain you again during our beautiful fall season!
PACIFIC ISLANDS

Aloha from the Pacific Islands! If you have not been keeping up with the national news, you are probably unaware that Pele; the goddess of fire, has been working non-stop since May 3, 2018 on the Island of Hawaii (aka The Big Island). There has been much devastation to the southeast part of the island due to the volcano eruption and the lava has destroyed over 700 homes. The good news is that besides dealing with the vog and ash fallout, our fellow colleagues at the University of Hawaii at Hilo and Hawaii Community College who reside on the island are safe.

It is also with deep personal regret that we lost a dear friend and valued retired colleague; Aileen Lum-Akana, at the end of March. Aileen retired from Leeward Community College in November 2015 after 44 years of service and was able to enjoy spending time with her grand babies and travel during her retirement. We miss her deeply.

In March, we held our annual spring conference and were lucky to have several WASFAA attendees who were willing to come out to Honolulu to present. Mahalo nui loa (thank you very much) to Helen Faith, Nicole McMillan, and Anthony Morrone! Also special thanks to Billie Jo Hamilton who represented NASFAA and Bruce Honer and Adam Shanedling from the U.S. Department of Education who made time out of their schedules to come out and present. At our conference, we presented the 2018-19 Executive Council; Sherrie Padilla, University of Hawaii at Hilo – Past President, Jennifer Bradley, Kapiolani Community College – President – Elect, Eli Jennings, Pacific Rim Christian University – Vice-President, Nani Munekata, University of Hawaii at Hilo – Secretary, Kilohana Fujii-Miller, University of Hawaii Maui College – Treasurer, and Kim Harada, University of Hawaii Maui College – Treasurer-Elect.

In May, we had our transition meeting where we officially voted in our representatives at large – Heather Florendo at Honolulu Community College, Sean Ho at University of Hawaii at Manoa, and Kalei Ruiz at Leeward Community College. We also started to look at how we can change the way we schedule and present for our high school financial aid nights and FAFSA completion workshops; as well as looking at restructuring the format for our annual fall and high school counselor training and conference.

In June, we had several PacFAA attendees; traveling as far as Chuuk, at the WASFAA Summer Institute and had our very own Shawn (Kaleo) Domingo participating as one of the faculty members!

I am looking forward to a productive and fun-filled year!
I am wrapping up my first year as a financial aid counselor and what better way than to attend this WASFAA event! I had never traveled alone before, or been to Nevada so attending this year’s Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute in Reno was a first for me in many ways. Having been a scholarship recipient only made my experience more meaningful and valuable. Upon arrival, smiling faces who were eager to help me were there to greet me and guide me, which continued throughout the entire week. Who would have guessed that you could make so many meaningful connections in such a short time? I know that those who were in my small group which was led by Dwight Berreth will be connections I carry with me throughout my career in financial aid which is encouraging and exciting!

Outside of my experience meeting other new financial aid professionals and networking within my region, I had the opportunity to attend sessions and trainings on a variety of NASFAA certified topics in order to strengthen my skill set and share that information with my office upon my return. Some of the sessions that really stood out to me are packaging basics and theory, need analysis where I had the chance to perform an EFC hand calculation and verification. I really enjoyed the presentation on need analysis and calculating an EFC by hand using only a paper FAFSA because it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how and why we award what we do to our students. The expected family contribution is not an easy or simple calculation, which gave me a greater appreciation for our student information system, Banner and will help me as I continue to interact with students and families as they navigate the federal financial aid process. Overall, I am grateful for this opportunity and am extremely pleased with my experience, all that I learned and the friendships I made in Reno this summer, until next year SDBSI!

I have been in financial aid for over 9 years, and I have attended many different conferences/trainings throughout my years, NASFAA, FSA, CASFAA, and some State Trainings. This was my first time attending WASFAA Summer Institute, and I can honestly say, that it was by far, my favorite training. I enjoyed the small group sessions because it allowed everyone attending to express their concerns and/or get their question(s) answered right away. Being able to ask questions during and after each presentation was another plus. At larger trainings, it is easy to forget what you were going to ask because you have to e-mail the presenter due to time constraints, and rarely did I ever remember.

With smaller groups, it was easier to network. I was able to meet people, some starting out new in financial aid, and some veterans of financial aid (that were around when hand calcs were still used for EFC’s). I felt comfortable asking and answering questions and taking as much advice that I could get. The knowledge that I gained from this training is more than all of the previous trainings I’ve attended put together. I will definitely be returning next year for the advanced track!
My experience, in the Advance Track in this year’s 2018 Sister Dale Brown institute, was far different than my experience in the intermediate track 4 years ago. My group leader, Kathy Campbell, has over 46 years of financial aid experience. I was surrounded by others with less and more experience than I, which was comforting, and I was able to connect with directors of schools of similar size as my campus.

Financial aid events provide networking opportunities that I wouldn’t have access to anywhere else. I was able to have Weinerschnizel with a colleague from Alaska. Nancy Grant’s campus is located as far North as you can go in the USA and she hadn’t had this popular fast food in many years, and neither had I. She comes from Barrow, Alaska, and works at one of our country’s few indigenous tribal schools. We discussed professional development, hopes for our students, and ways that we can help our students that need it the most. I’m looking forward to visiting her one day to see the Arctic Aurora; these are the types of conversations that keep me in financial aid. We, as administrators, have the opportunity to help students that can’t get help from anywhere else.

Every day we deal with processing struggles and regulatory changes, but seldom have time to stop and just appreciate all of the good work that we do. It was nice to take a break out of the office to learn and to appreciate the good work that so many other financial aid professionals are continuously doing for all of our students. It makes my efforts feel appreciated as well—knowing we are all out here fighting the same fight! I was also able to share some good laughs and conversations with Nick Johnson, of Feather River College. He looks forward to earning all of the NASFAA credentials, and he actually convinced me to earn them all myself. We will keep in touch as we both work towards obtaining all of our credentials.

For all of this, I’d like to thank WASFAA for your scholarship, and for allowing me the opportunity for me to connect with other experienced, like-minded administrators at the 2018 Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute

Receiving this scholarship meant so much to me as I have been wanting to attend Summer Institute since I heard about it in 2016 after moving to Washington. One of my goals is to obtain as many NASFAA U Credentials as possible and this conference was the spring board in helping me to obtain that goal. This was by far the best conference I have attended since becoming a Financial Aid Professional and would recommend it to anyone in the field who is looking at advancing their career or simply becoming more knowledgeable in their particular field.

At first, I wasn’t sure what to expect having to room with someone, being in class all day, and being back in a classroom setting in general, but I was not disappointed. My roommate was amazing and she was from a school somewhat similar to mine so we were able to have lots of enriching conversations at the end of each day about our personal experiences and practices. The sessions were engaging and very informative on each topic and I can actually say I learned at least one new thing in every session. Two of my favorite things were the small group sessions and having Bruce Honer from the Department of Education available to answer questions for us. Small group took place twice a day every day and those were the really in-depth discussions that were most helpful as we were able to hear from other sessions that we were not able to attend.
All of my questions were answered, but I also left the conference with so many questions for my Director and administrative team to ensure we are maintaining compliance and keeping up with best practices. Bruce was very informative and down-to-earth with his presentations and having him available as a resource was excellent.

Overall, Summer Institute was an amazing learning experience and I am so happy I was able to attend. The sessions prepared me to take the NASFAA U Credentials and provided me with additional resources on top of the information that was given in the sessions to ensure my success. Thank you so much for this scholarship.

I’d like to express my appreciation for the scholarship to attend the Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute. I’ve been working in the financial aid field for 15 years and thoroughly enjoyed participating in the advanced track.

Professional development is so important in becoming a better leader. Having the monetary help made it possible for me to attend. I came away from the conference feeling more confident that I’m performing my daily duties at work accurately. I gained a better understanding of SULA, Cash Management, Consumer Information and Time Management, just to name a few. I look forward to taking the NASFAA University Credential Tests to confirm that I have the knowledge!

This year I was fortunate to have received this wonderful scholarship and partake in this great experience. I was not sure what to expect, however, some time before the event and the day before, I received several e-mail notifications with information and details, as well as, instructions to use the Whova app. I do believe the Whova app eased the anxiety I felt over traveling. This app was easy to use, and the details provided in all sections, especially the logistics, really helped me navigate through the first half of the day.

Check-in was quick, easy, and organized, I really appreciated the efficiency of all staff members. The dorms were nice and clean, though, I may not have read the fine print regarding toiletries (hand soap or additional toilet paper may be needed) but not to fret, a Walgreens was within an 8 minute walk which doubled as a good stretch for the legs. The materials we received were great, I found myself constantly using the water bottle and due to a series of unfortunate events with all of my gadgets (tablet, phone, and laptop) the schedule printed on the back of our book became an essential tool for me. Furthermore, in my rush to get to the airport I forgot to bring my glasses, needless to say, the printed slides in our book were a life saver.

I attended the intermediate track. Though there were topics discussed on this track for which I already had a credential from NASFAA U and felt comfortable with, I would have liked to have been able to attend other sessions (from the beginner track) for which I may not have had much experience in.
However, in the grand scheme of things I do believe the selection of topics discussed in our track was fitting and I enjoyed every single one, yes, even the topics I had already felt comfortable with. Furthermore, I felt that all the sessions were both informative and entertaining and created great conversations amongst our peers from schools of various backgrounds, thus, allowing me to learn from everyone around me.

Our day also consisted of meeting with our group leader in small sessions to either start the day or to end the day. In both occasions, our group was usually pretty slow to start, however, our group leader was great in kindling those questions and once we got started we tended to have invigorating conversations that went beyond our timeframe.

Last but not least, meal times and graduation dinner. The cafeteria food on the first day had me questioning whether I was going to have to purchase food elsewhere, however, it was much improved on the second day and onward. There was a variety of selections for each meal time and I appreciated all the staff there, they were both very nice and helpful. With regards to the graduation dinner, it was simply an overall enjoyable time with good drinks, delicious food, and great company.

I had an amazing week at the Summer Institute and am so very grateful to have received a scholarship to attend this great training opportunity. I had heard from my fellow co-workers that this was one of the most beneficial trainings and it did not disappoint! I have been in financial aid for nine months and I think this Summer Institute came at a perfect time in my career where I was easily able to follow along as well as learn many things I did not know. The schedule, faculty, materials, and location were all accommodating and made for a smooth and informative week.

Being a Financial Aid Verification Coordinator means we really need to dive in sometimes and be detectives and make sure the student is able to receive their aid on time with as little issues as possible. This week definitely gave me the tools to be better-rounded and learn things that will give me the tools to succeed so that I can help our students succeed in my own way as well. A couple of my favorite things were the small groups and the networking opportunities with my fellow financial aid colleagues from the west. The small groups gave us a chance to talk about our own experiences and work case studies together with people that were also in the beginner track. The networking opportunities were excellent and I am very glad I was able to make the connections that I did. All of the speakers and faculty gave good presentations and the guide they gave us is a great tool I can refer to at any time. After all of our minds were packed with knowledge we enjoyed a fun and relaxing evening at the graduation banquet. This gave us another great opportunity to network and have a great time while reflecting on the past week. I really want to thank the faculty and WASFAA for making this a very beneficial, eye opening, informative, and fun event! I would recommend the Summer Institute to any other financial aid professional and I look forward to hopefully being able to attend the intermediate track next year. I truly value the connections and experiences I had and look forward to many more throughout my career.
My name is Tayneerah Miller and this year, 2018, I attended the Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute. This was my very first time attending a financial aid conference like this and was blessed to have received a scholarship that allowed me to go. I just started working for a new college as a financial aid counselor after being at my previous university for over 10 years. Previously, I worked in an office that was very segregated. The university was so large that we had one team for verification, one for R2T4, one for scholarships, one for new certifications, one for continued certifications, and so on. At my new college, I am now responsible for everything, from verification and PJ to packaging and awarding. Attending the Summer Institute helped me learn more about my everyday responsibilities from a more holistic approach, rather than my previous more departmentalized training. I understand so much more about what it means to be a counselor and am more confident in my job. The resources we received and the opportunity to gain credentials is priceless! I know my coworkers have attended Summer Institute and they still use their training materials to this day. Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend and for allowing me to learn the skills I need to be a better financial aid counselor. I know my student’s deeply appreciate it. It was also amazing to meet other professionals that work in financial aid and share and learn from everyone’s experiences.

Greetings from California State University Channel Islands! I was fortunate enough to attend this year’s WASFAA Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute at the University of Nevada, Reno. What makes this conference so successful is the degree to which networking is interwoven into every aspect of the conference, from enjoying a bite to eat at UNR’s Down Under Café with someone new, to getting to know other conference goers while staying at UNR’s Residence Hall, Peavine Hall, and my personal favorite - small groups! My small group was an Intermediate Track lead by the one and only Laura Hughes. Laura’s charisma made for a great discussion environment where we discussed the materials presented for the day as well as some best practices. What made the small groups so special was how all members were so kind and eager to help and share some of their insights and best practices from their respective campuses. I truly appreciate and value the connections I made during the conference (shout out to Laura’s Small Group!).

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the session topics as a primary highlight for the conference. These critical topics were presented by some of the leading experts in the field - faculty members who are an inspiration and example of what I aspire to be within the Financial Aid industry. These speakers demonstrated a wealth of knowledge and I benefited greatly from the interactions I had with each presenter. A few of my personal favorites were topics that included Packaging Theory, Protecting Student & Institutional Data, 3 Generations in the Workplace, and Time Management. I am very grateful that I was given the opportunity to attend the Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute on a scholarship, and I return to work full of energy and with renewed commitment to my financial aid community- and hopefully armed with NASFAA Credentials soon!
I had the pleasure of attending the 2018 WASFAA Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute hosted by University of Nevada, Reno. The campus is absolutely beautiful and within miles of Reno’s downtown as well as midtown. I had to arrive a day early to campus and I am happy that this was the case. I met three other amazing women at similar institutions and we became fast friends. The four of us were in the basic track together but had separate small groups. We would attend the morning sessions and discuss our opinions/responses to the lectures over lunch. At the beginning and end of each day we would break off into our small groups and discuss case studies involving the application process, EFC calculation, packaging, etc. The small group was a great setting to ask questions. Most questions would spur a discussion about how different institutions handle the same situations.

I am grateful that I was awarded the WASFAA General Scholarship in order to attend Summer Institute. The lectures were track appropriate and the presenters always took time to answer questions from the audience. The connections, knowledge and friendships gained from this experience were priceless. I walked away from WASFAA’s Summer Institute with a deeper understanding of Financial Aid. Summer Institute was an invaluable experience.

Heather Leis
Financial Aid Counselor
California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly San Luis Obispo)

In my first couple of weeks at Pitzer’s Office of Financial Aid, I decided that parents could smell fear. They zeroed in on the slight waver of hesitation in my voice or an inadvertent stumbling over words, and they pounced. Even when I knew the information, I was so worried about being wrong that I undercut my own authority. Of course, no one was actually out to get me. My on-the-job training had simply left gaps in my knowledge—gaps I could acutely sense when I answered questions or explained policies. So, when my boss suggested I attend the Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute, I was eager for the opportunity to travel to Reno and to undergo training in the basics of financial aid.

In the weeks leading up to the conference, I felt unprepared. The excitement of going on my first business trip faded into an anxiety that I was in over my head. However, after the first day of sessions, I found myself pleasantly surprised. I expected to be among experts in comparison to whom I would feel ignorant and inexperienced. Instead, I met a group of people with all different levels of knowledge who were earnestly invested in being better at their jobs. And while some, particularly the faculty who organized the Summer Institute, were undoubtedly experts in their field, they were just as eager to learn as they were to teach. I also discovered that I knew more than I thought I did. The sessions were informative, but not overwhelming because the basic concepts were familiar to me.

Throughout the week, my self-assurance grew, especially when we worked on case studies. Actually packaging students with financial aid awards gave meaning and value to the lectures and presentations. It reminded me of the human element of my job—that every school, every family, and every student is different. I am not yet a financial aid counselor; I work at the front desk. However, graduating from the Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute gave me the confidence that someday I could be.
I’m back at my campus after attending the 2018 WASFAA Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute in Reno, NV and I am so much more confident in my knowledge and abilities after having attended this year’s conference. I had the privilege to attend due to the scholarship I was awarded and I am so very grateful for the learning experience. Initially, I was not sure what to expect. I’ve been working in financial aid about four (4) years and I have to admit, even with prior knowledge and experience, attending Summer Institute was at first a bit intimidating but once I arrived I was greeted with warmth and enthusiasm.

Until Summer Institute, I’d had a challenging career in financial aid since the financial aid knowledge I had gained was through researching, and with no proper training. Summer Institute provided me the opportunity to ask questions and speak with knowledgeable financial aid professionals that could answer long held questions about why certain regulations are in place, and best practices. Other attendees were given the opportunity to inquire whether certain practices at their campus were in line with regulation, and we even had the opportunity to direct our questions to a Department of Education Trainer, Bruce Honer.

Every morning I found myself excited to attend each session, ready to listen and learn, and ask questions. All of the presenters were not only extremely knowledgeable about financial aid, but they were also passionate about the duties we are entrusted to carry out. At the end of the day it is all of our students that are to benefit when we have advanced our knowledge, and we are all better able to communicate complicated concepts to students and parents already under pressure and stress to complete enrollment and their financial aid.

It’s only been two-weeks since I completed Summer Institute and I still feel the excitement from having been an attendee for 2018. My excitement shows when I speak and interact with students and their families. Listening and interacting with financial aid advisers and counselors from different states and different types of schools; traditional schools, proprietary, vocational, trade schools. Learning what their challenges were and how financial aid advisers were able to overcome those challenges helped me understand that although schools and programs may differ, we have all accepted a duty to better ourselves so as to better serve our students and our various communities.

I think everyone working in financial aid has had that question of how it is that we are able to do everything that we are tasked to do? There’s never enough time; one missing document can derail everything; we’re always looking at the clock and calendar due dates for something or other. There’s questions you don’t have an answer for; phone calls and emails to return; an answer to a question to have to research; and someone always waiting to be next that you need to assist. Summer Institute helped in all of those areas with sessions on Time Management, sessions relevant to your skill level, the opportunity to ask other financial aid professionals, and even the opportunity to ask a Department of Education Trainer, ask a Fed. The amount of material and the way it was seamlessly presented was impressive.

As I drove back home to the Bay Area, I can with all honesty say that nothing has taught me, challenged me, strengthened me, and encouraged me as much as the presenters at Summer Institute have. I am grateful to all of the volunteers, because WASFAA is all volunteer based. Financial aid professionals that encouraged us, supported us, gave us guidance and challenged us to our best.
(Continued from previous page)

I want to thank everyone at WASFAA for the scholarship and the opportunity to attend the 2018 Summer Institute. It was an honor to have been selected and I am truly grateful beyond words. To anyone considering attending Summer Institute: bug your director, apply for the scholarship, find out who approves your department’s budget or travel expenses. Really, just get there. Summer Institute is an amazing learning experience and not only will you be grateful for having attending but so will your students and your campus.

When I was offered the chance to attend the 2018 WASFAA Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute, I jumped at it – and I am so glad I did! I’m new to financial aid, so my goal for attending the event was to gain a broader understanding of the field. The sessions I attended as part of the Beginner Track provided me with the information I was looking for.

I really enjoyed exploring the connections between the contents of the sessions and the policies and procedures at my institution. I was lucky enough to attend the Summer Institute with a few colleagues and we’d spend breaks discussing how we’d apply our new knowledge once we returned home. Additionally, the faculty also provided examples of how certain regulations are interpreted and applied at their schools. Learning from experts in the field was so valuable.

The faculty also did an amazing job making the whole week fun and engaging! It was great to get a tour of the University of Nevada, Reno and to celebrate our achievements with a special banquet Thursday night. I am so thankful that WASFAA gave me a scholarship to attend this great event. I hope to return for the Intermediate Track soon!

Ellora La Shier
Financial Aid Specialist
Concordia University, Portland

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world

Nelson Mandela