I admit it: I am anxious about serving as the WASFAA President this year. I have volunteered for WASFAA for 10 years and have served on the Executive Council in many different roles off and on for those 10 years. Past presidents have been answering my questions over the last few months and have set great examples for me to follow. I feel mostly prepared, yet still nervous!

Volunteering for WASFAA was one of the best decisions I made. I was somewhat forced into it, when I became the state association president for Alaska. I made amazing friends that first year. Four of us really bonded, and we’re still friends today. When your new friend chairs a committee, you can’t say no to assisting- and that’s how you get hooked!

Ashley Munro  
Associate Director, University of Alaska-Fairbanks  
Fairbanks, Alaska

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The relationships I’ve built over years of volunteering and visiting states for training have kept me in the financial aid industry. Without the support system, and without finding my passion for training, I probably would have moved into a different field. My membership in WASFAA has helped me grow professionally and personally. Professionally, I can call up someone in each state and ask how they are implementing the new regulation. Personally, I can call up someone in each state and ask them to run a crazy race with me.

So, in the interest of being honest and sharing the benefits, fears and fun of serving within WASFAA, I’d like to introduce the theme for my President’s Highlights this year: A Year in the Life of WASFAA Volunteers. Not only will I share what I’ve been up to over the past month (and not just the good stuff), I’ll also share with you what one other WASFAA volunteer has been up to.

In April, I completed my first Presidential duty for WASFAA. I attended the Arizona state conference. It was AASFAA’s 50th celebration (Congratulations!). I flew overnight to get to Gilbert, and when I got to the hotel, my room wasn’t ready yet. I changed in the lobby so I could look some-what professional to give my presentation on SULA. I had a great time meeting new people. I haven’t presented a training site in Arizona in several years, so I didn’t know many people.

AASFAA members made me feel welcome- Thank you for that! After the conference, I flew to Boise, Idaho for the annual conference. I spent several hours on Saturday with some WASFAA friends (Kim Wells, Dept of Education & Kelley Christianson, Central Washington University) running on the beautiful, hilly trials outside of Boise. Somewhere along the way, I picked up a major cold and spend the conference days trying to juggle talking with all of you while not spreading my germs. Honestly, much of the conference was attended with the assistance of medicine and it’s a little fuzzy...

Also in April, many of you volunteered to moderate sessions at the annual conference- Thank you! A moderator’s time commitment is fairly low. To prepare, you work with the presenters of your assigned session the week before the conference to collect biographies. At the event, you introduce the speaker, help track the number of attendees and report back to the conference committee. Many moderators are needed at each conference, and it’s an easy way to volunteer. Consider signing up to moderate a session in Arizona next year.

Sincerely,

Ashley Munro
2018-2019 WASFAA President
Hello WASFAA! I’m excited to take over as Communications Chair for WASFAA 2018-2019. I served as a committee member last year under the formidable and amazing David Downing so I have big shoes to fill. I look forward to organizing my committee over the next couple of weeks and brainstorming on how we can continue to engage our WASFAA members and deliver effective and exciting communications.

Content is EVERYTHING so if you have anything you’d like to share with other WASFAA members, please hit me up. I know our offices are busy doing great things, so let’s celebrate that.

We’re publishing a little later than normal this month due to the timing of the conference in April. 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 May 20th.

**WASFAA Social Media**

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**WASFAA Communications Committee**
Sun Ow • David Downing • Ashley Coleman • Wendy Olson • Adrienne Garcia-Specht • Dana Pride

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WASFAA CONFERENCE RECAP

Thank you to everyone that attended this year’s WASFAA Conference, Together We Rise, in Boise, ID. It truly was an awesome training and networking event and we appreciate all of the valuable feedback you have been providing that will help us continue to make the conference a can’t miss event!

It’s already been almost 2 weeks since the event ended and we thought you would like to reminisce and/or hear about some of the highlights if you weren’t able to join this time.

This year’s conference was a great event that saw many firsts:

- 51 of you were first-time attendees of a WASFAA conference!
- We had an event app that 92% reported as useful. It included: A fun way to share pictures and have a photo contest (120 photos were uploaded)! Congrats to photo contest winners (Thalassa Naylor, Carmen Kienow, Gabriela Vargas)! Lots of ways to connect (546 messages sent and received, 1,229 profile views). Quick and easy way to stay up-to-date on sessions (4,034 session views, 11 announcements with 81% open rate) and keep notes on sessions (134 notes written).
- A conference video that confirmed you are a super hero!
- Many of you stepped up and in to learn traditional Basque Dances with the Oinkari Basque Dancers! Don’t worry there’s plenty of photo and video documentation. :)
- One of the most commented on conference meals ever - Baked potato bar!
- 50 conference speakers and 46 breakout sessions!
- Professional headshots to use for running for WASFAA office and other uses!
- The first and maybe last WASFAA hot potato chuck - uh - game. Sorry chandelier!
- We raised $503 for the Idaho Food Bank which equates to 2,515 meals!
- A new appreciation of how effective elevator and after event hours contacts can be - you know you’d love to volunteer :-(
- For many of you it was your first time to visit the beautiful City of Trees and dare I say it didn’t disappoint?
Huge shout out and thank you to all of the WASFAA Conference Committee who spent hours bringing you this unparalleled event (Dewayne Barnes, John Bender III, Ashley Coleman, David Downing, Kristen Gast, Brian Heinemann, Elizabeth Hilton, Ron Lee, Daniel Lemus, Anthony Morrone, Sun Ow, Tina Phifer, Ciel Senechal, David Shook, Carlene Wallace, and Danette Wells)!

I also wanted to thank everyone for exploring and appreciating so many things about what the place I call home has to offer and experiencing first-hand why I’m proud to be called a daughter of Boise.

Lastly, I want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart for making this year’s conference so memorable. I was overwhelmed with the warmth, positivity, collegiality, and inclusiveness that carried throughout this event!

See you in Phoenix in 2019! Details on venue and date forthcoming

Nicole McMillin
2017-2018 WASFAA Conference Chair

**WASFAA’S NEW INSTITUTIONAL PRICING OPTION**

During the 2018 annual business meeting that was held April 24, 2018 at the annual conference in Boise, Idaho, the WASFAA members in attendance approved unanimously by voice vote the addition of an institutional pricing option for WASFAA membership. This vote was the culmination of a years-long process of researching and discussing a variety of institutional membership models. The details took their final form using the results of a recent survey of the membership. The 2017-18 WASFAA Executive Council greatly appreciates all of the ideas and suggestions that allowed this change to happen.

**What’s Changing**

Beginning in 2019, schools and partner organizations will be able to make annual payments of $275 that will allow all staff members to become WASFAA members. These changes will go into effect for the May 1, 2019 through April 30, 2020 membership year. Members will be able to pay member rates for training and professional development events throughout the year, and for attendance at the annual conference.

Conference Award Recipients

**Outstanding New Volunteer:**
Nicholas Dehaan
Cassie Zimmerlee

**Outstanding New Professional:**
Elijah Herr
Geoffrey Green

**Meritorious Achievement:**
Patricia Peppin
Tami Sato

**Distinguished Service:**
Kimberly Wells

**President’s Award:**
Tami Sato
Mindy Bergeron

**Committee of the Year:**
Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute,
2016-17 Committee

**Lifetime Membership:**
Mindy Bergeron

Nonmembers will be able to attend WASFAA events by paying nonmember rates. The WASFAA Executive Council is currently working out the details of how these changes will be implemented, so stay tuned for more details.

**What Isn’t Changing**

Individual memberships will still be available for annual payments of $50. The definitions of “active” and “associate” members remain unchanged: active members are financial aid administrators and employees interested in financial aid at schools and partner organizations located in the WASFAA region;
(Continued from page 5)

associate members are financial aid administrators and employees interested in financial aid at schools and partner organizations located outside the WASFAA region. All active members will be eligible to cast votes on matters that the Executive Council brings before the membership. Only active members who are financial aid administrators will be eligible to hold elective office.

Why Did We Do This?

This change will provide a progressive cost benefit to schools and partner organizations that employ more than five people. It will also provide increased opportunities for employees in offices other than Financial Aid to participate in WASFAA activities at member prices. Those two changes will move WASFAA toward meeting the first three goals of the newly adopted strategic plan by increasing the size and engagement of the membership, improving operational efficiencies and fiscal controls, and providing optimally effective training and professional development.

Questions?

Feel free to contact any member of the 2018-19 WASFAA Executive Council. Their contact information is available on the WASFAA webpage.

RENEW YOUR WASFAA MEMBERSHIP!

Now is the time to renew your WASFAA membership for the 2018-19 year! Membership is $50 per individual and good through April 30, 2019. Renewing is simple – visit our website to get signed up.

While you’re renewing, make sure to update your volunteer preferences for next year. Committee chairs are looking for committee members right now! Not sure how you want to be involved? Check out our committee descriptions. Already a member for 2018-19 but want to update your volunteer preferences? Simply complete the volunteer form at the bottom of our webpage.

Questions? Contact Membership Chair Ashley Coleman at ashleyjo@uoregon.edu

STUDENT DEBT LETTER BEST PRACTICES

With the recent buzz about student debt letter requirements, you may have questions about how to best communicate vital debt information to your students. Let’s take a closer look at student debt letters and some tips on how you can use them most effectively.

Why Student Debt Letters?

Student loan debt information is already available in a variety of places—between NSLDS, student loan servicers, and your own financial aid office, it’s easy to think your students are covered. However, a recent study by the Brookings Institution showed that 48% of student borrowers don’t know or incorrectly estimate the amount they have borrowed, and as much as 28% of borrowers incorrectly believe they have no federal student loans at all.

Student debt letters provide loan summaries that serve as an overview of what students have borrowed and what they’re expected to pay once they leave school. A well-timed student debt letter can provide a critical reminder of where your students stand while they’re in school so there are no unpleasant surprises down the road.
(Continued from page 6)

Tips for Successful Student Debt Letters

- Keep it simple. Student loan information can often seem complicated and daunting. Make it simple for your students to understand by highlighting the following information in an easy-to-read format.
  - Aggregate loan amounts
  - Estimated repayment amount
  - Loan limits
  - Relevant contact information in case your students have questions

Timing is everything. Students are more likely to take notice of their student debt obligations during times of the year when financial aid is already on their minds. Try to time your debt letters around these times, such as when a new disbursement is about to be made on their loan.

Know your stuff. Make sure your financial aid office staff is aware of the information being sent in your student debt letters, and that they’re fully prepared to answer student questions or direct them to those who can help. You might even consider including senior students as peer advisors and role models to demonstrate responsible borrowing habits.

Make it a group effort. The effects of student loan debt reach far beyond the financial aid office, and your communication efforts should, too. Start a campus-wide initiative that includes support across all departments to help students understand the importance of staying on top of their borrowing. Student debt letters are tied to student persistence and college completion, and that’s something everyone on your campus can get behind.

Learn from those who know. When it comes to student debt letters, there’s no need to reinvent the wheel. Connect with other institutions who are using similar efforts and talk about what works best for them. Collaborating with those who are already successfully reaching students with debt letters means you can start off on the right foot reaching out to students on your campus.

Heather Tapia is a Senior Marketing Associate with Great Lakes, serving schools in CA, NV & WA. You can reach Heather Tapia at (877) 882-4522 or by email at htapia@glhec.org. Additional information about Great Lakes can be found online at schools.mygreatlakes.org.

STATE NEWS

We’re finally starting to see evidence of spring in the weather here in Oregon! This past year we celebrated the 50th anniversary of OASFAA culminating in a gala conference which included many OASFAA alums – past presidents, retirees, and past award recipients. In 2018 we’re walking boldly into our next 50 years with a couple of new initiatives. We transitioned our website contractor and are hard at work to create and maintain a new site which will serve the needs of OASFAA and its members in the years to come. Check it out at www.oasfaaonline.org! The association also approved an institutional membership category to encourage greater involvement from both financial aid professionals and colleagues who work in related areas. Other challenges we’re facing in Oregon include a mandatory loan information summary that all schools will be required to provide to enrolled students starting in the 2018-19 year. This year OASFAA will again be working hard to provide training opportunities about financial aid issues across our state...and also provide our members with opportunities for food, fun, and fellowship!

Anastacia Dillon, Oregon State President Director, Lewis & Clark College Portland, OR
I would like to start off by saying how excited I am to begin my year as President of NAFAA, I have been involved with our state association for a few years now and am thrilled by this opportunity to represent my state on the WASFAA Executive Board. I would like to introduce our Executive Council for the 2018-19 year; President: Ashley Salisbury, University of Nevada, Reno, President-Elect: JW Lazzari, Western Nevada College, Past-President: Anthony Morrone, Nevada State College, Treasurer: Jenna Eastman, Nevada State College, and Secretary: Temple Campana, Western Nevada College. Congratulations to all of you, I look forward to a productive year!

Mark your calendars! We have set our 2018 NAFAA Conference dates. We will be holding our conference in Reno, NV at the Silver Legacy Resort Casino. Please save the date for October 22nd-24th. We are excited to not only continue incorporating our annual Pre-Conference Peoplesoft session but also a Post-Conference NASFAA Training. We look forward to seeing you in October!

Want to come to Reno before October? Please join us on the beautiful campus of the University of Nevada, Reno June 4-8, 2018 for the WASFAA Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute! WASFAA will be providing boot camp-like training for beginner, intermediate and advanced levels that include opportunities for NASFAA Credentials. Please visit the WASFAA website (www.wasfaa.org) for more information!

WASFAA SISTER DALE BROWN SUMMER INSTITUTE JUNE 4-8, 2018 IN RENO, NEVADA

In under 3 weeks, more than 120 financial aid administrators will gather in Reno, Nevada to become financial aid experts. The WASFAA Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute will start on June 4th. Credentialed faculty will teach beginner, intermediate and advanced sessions on Student Eligibility, Cost of Attendance, R2T4, SULA, Cash Management and so much more!

The residential registration rate of $775 includes your housing on the UNR Campus, meals, training and materials. A commuter rate is available for $525 if you live in the Reno area or prefer to stay in one of the nearby hotels.

Find out more by visiting the 2018 Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute Mini Site for more information and a draft schedule to help determine which track is right for you and and Register no later than May 17th to avoid a late fee! Late registrants will be accepted, but materials may be limited.

You don’t want to miss this amazing opportunity! We hope to see you in Reno!

Sincerely,
Kelley Christianson & Laura Hughes
Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute Co-Chairs & Faculty
This past week I was fortunate enough to attend the WASFAA 2018 “Together We Rise” Conference in Boise, Idaho. Working at a local school I was under the impression we would be sending a lot of our Financial Aid office as we didn’t require travel expenses, but I was mistaken. I gladly filled out the scholarship, and was delighted to be notified that I was awarded and would be able to attend.

I recently started my career in financial aid and was thrilled for the chance to attend and start to grow my knowledge and contacts within the profession. Being a student facing position I tried to focus on presentations and sessions that would help me best work with students. It is nothing new for us in financial aid to understand that sometimes our lingo and processes leave students feeling confused and unsure about financial aid in general. I was especially grateful for the sessions “The ABC’s of Gen Z: Adapting Financial Aid Practices for Effective Outcomes” and “How to Make Student Communications Stick”. Both of these sessions gave me valuable information that I can bring back to the workplace in an attempt to better serve our students in our communication and outreach.

I also found the Tax Transcript Decoder session very informative. As a rather new additional to our financial aid team, taxes have always been something I have been weary of. Cheryl Hunt presents the information in a way that makes working with the various tax documents less daunting and helps give me more confidence with these situations using the amazing tool she has created for us.

In all I am very thankful I was given the scholarship opportunity to attend the WASFAA event. I now get to look forward to Sister Dale event in Reno and can’t wait to expand my knowledge, meet more financial aid colleagues, and bring those resources back to my campus to help our students even more.

I walked away from the WASFAA conference this past Tuesday feeling exhausted, yet revitalized. By the time we were done, I had met and networked with amazing financial aid advocates from all over the west, I learned about the decisions being made in the federal government and how it will directly impact what I do for students, and I gained some useful tips on engaging students in financial aid.

Since I work at Boise State University, I did not have to travel very far to reach the conference. This was helpful to me because I was able to collaborate with colleagues at my institution so we could reach multiple sessions and compare notes of what we attended. It made me realize how important it is to have multiple staff members from one institution attend because I did not feel like I was missing anything! Even though I was a local, the Whovaa app allowed me to see how out of towners were spending their time in Boise. It was nice to see so many individuals enjoy Boise and it made me fall in love with my city all over again.
(Continued from page 9)

As a first-time conference goer, my day on Sunday started at the Newcomer Session where I was able to meet with members of the executive council, and other colleagues who are also new to financial aid. It made me feel not so alone in my journey with financial aid, and that other members and offices go through similar challenges that I do. As a group we were able to play a really fun Ice Breaker that taught us all about change. It was an important lesson to learn because financial aid professionals we deal with change almost every day and we have to learn how to adapt quickly and stay positive.

The president’s reception Sunday evening was by far my favorite event of the weekend. The ‘heavy’ appetizers were as delicious as they were diverse. My favorite snack was the seared Ahi in an ice cream cone! The Basque Dancers were so fun to watch. I have seen them before but never have I ever been able to dance with them. After attending WASFAA, I can now say that I have. It was nice to push myself out of my comfort zone and meet new members of the WASFAA community at that event.

As a counselor who focuses most on processing, I learned the most from the Monday session on professional judgement, led by Lissa Wayne, where we went over examples of situations and what steps to take in order to make a correct professional judgment. We talked about why we make professional judgements and my largest take away from that session was the importance of our work and how it directly impacts students. I also enjoyed going to the How to Make Communications Stick presentation and the Showing Up for your Students presentation where I was able to gain some insight on how to engage with students at Boise State University so they can understand financial aid. Throughout the sessions, the Whovaa app was a great tool that I used to navigate my agenda, room location, and learn a little bit about what I was going to learn from each session.

One of the themes I noticed every day was that a least session per day focused on how the current climate of our government and how that will affect the work we do in financial aid. I spent each day sitting in sessions with experienced individuals who offered great insight on the PROSPER act and the changes we potentially face. The federal update on Tuesday was informative and it helped me understand my work on a much larger scale.

We have a unique experience being able to work in financial aid. Our responsibility is not only with our students, but with meeting federal regulations and guidelines. That is why conferences like this are so important. We are able to work with one another on how to best serve our students. Thank you for the opportunity to gain insight of institutional practices to engage students, learn, and network. It was a great experience that helped me grow in my financial aid career. It encourages me to witness the how supportive the community is in WASFAA and I highly recommend everyone to go to next year’s conference to experience something similar!

Jenna Eastman
Assistant Director Financial Aid
Nevada State College

The theme of this year’s WASFAA Conference was “Together We Rise” and that struck me as very fitting. Financial aid administration is challenging on the best of days, and overwhelming on others. Having the support system of colleagues we can reach out to is invaluable. We’re never alone in this work, there are always others out there willing to lend a hand (or sometimes a shoulder when the going gets really tough).

Connecting with other aid administrators; gathering new perspectives and information; connecting with friends and making new ones; taking a step back from the day-to-day trials of the aid office and gaining perspective on my work as an aid administrator – those were my big takeaways from WASFAA 2018.

WASFAA President Helen Faith’s comment in one of the general sessions about what our work as financial aid administrators is about deeply resonated with me. I’m paraphrasing, but in essence she said, our jobs aren’t
about money, they’re about social justice. That’s why many of us got into this business and why we stay, to advocate for our students and for social change.

At the Idaho Ann Frank Human Rights Memorial - an educational park inspired by Ann Frank’s faith in humanity - this sentiment was reinforced. On beautiful rock walls, amidst fountains, trees and flowers, are moving quotes from individuals of both privilege and poverty supporting social justice. The first day I visited the memorial I couldn’t hold back the tears as I read the powerful words. As Helen noted, this is what our work is truly about.

Fun was also a big part of my WASFAA experience. Boise boasts a lively downtown with outstanding restaurants and bars, beautiful parks and paths, friendly people, interesting architecture, street art and shops - Boise is the whole package. This was my first visit to Boise but definitely won’t be my last. I’ve been to all 50 states and Boise is one of the most vibrant and welcoming cities I’ve visited.

WASFAA 2018 was a rejuvenating experience for me. I am deeply grateful to have been supported through a WASFAA scholarship. I hope each of you will be able to attend WASFAA 2019 in Phoenix, another beautiful city. The WASFAA conference is a great opportunity, not only to gain knowledge, but also to develop the support system and perspective to allow us to more effectively be the change agents our students need.

My hope for each of you is that you will make time for the experiences you find rejuvenating, and whatever energizes and centers you, so that you can be fully present with co-workers, students, parents and yourself. Now that I’m back in the real world and despite just getting the “state of the office” update, I’m finding myself more composed, more present, and I hope to hold on to that state of mind despite the ever present issues of administering financial aid. As Dale Carnegie wisely said, “We must always change, renew, and rejuvenate ourselves, otherwise we harden.” That’s my goal as I come back to my long list of to-do items, to hold onto the positive energy I found at the 2018 WASFAA conference.

Berenice Hernandez
Student Aid Program Coordinator
Pepperdine University, School of Law

My first ever WASFAA Annual Conference could not have been better. I am thankful to all that allowed me to take part in the 2018 Annual WASFAA Conference because it has provided me with many more tools to better support my students. “Together We Rise”, the theme of the conference has really stuck with me, because there is no way I could do this job alone. Together, with the WASFAA members, with my school’s financial aid team, with the students, and the school administration, I see that we can accomplish so much.

As financial aid officers, we do not always see a student’s full journey to higher education, but it does not mean we can’t get involved! Attending this conference is my first step towards getting involved, because I believe in equal access to higher education, and I am, as Nicole McMillin, Conference Co-chair, said, a social justice activist. My career in higher education has only just begun, but my primary reason for choosing a career in higher education is because, as a first-generation college graduate and post-graduate, I have first-hand knowledge of how hard the higher education system is to navigate when you have really no idea what you are doing. As a financial aid coordinator, I strive to help my students understand every aspect of borrowing loans by providing access to personal finance workshops, and to loan repayment strategists. I incorporated these financial literacy programs within a short time in my financial aid role, because I know the need for these, and have received nothing but positive feedback from students and administrators alike. This is just a small example of what each of us does to give our students the tools they need to have a successful and positive relationship with their personal finances and higher educations.
In speaking to many other peers about the programs that they teach, launch, or partner with, I see how we are all in this together. Keynote speaker, Dr. Bob Kustra, really hit the nail on the head in his opening remarks about what we can do together to create upward mobility, and to give all students the opportunity to receive a higher education. I am happy to be taking part in evening out the playing field for all students, and for having the opportunity to meet people I wouldn’t otherwise have known. I look forward to seeing many of the people I met at future conferences, and again want to say how thankful I am for the opportunity to have joined you all!

**Kimberly Pinson**  
*Financial Aid Technician*  
*Mendocino College*

First, I would like to thank WASFAA and the scholarship committee for the opportunity to attend this conference by scholarship. This has been a wonderful and educational experience. From the moment I stepped into the very first pre-conference session “Re-Imagining the Financial Aid Experience” on customer service, it was a non-stop two and a half days. The schedule was well planned out, with so many offerings to choose from, even while being served meals you are in information filled sessions.

I was so excited about the wide variety of sessions to choose from and even happier with the size of each session which made them open and interactive. Being able to collaborate during the sessions with peers from other schools was so helpful and informative especially learning what has or has not worked for others. Everyone was friendly and more than willing to share information. The Whova app made the planning of my whole event easy, including my agenda, messages, polls, photos, and so much more.

I had several sessions that I felt were great, mainly because they applied specifically to what I do in my daily job. I enjoyed the “Professional Judgement” session by Lissa Wayne and the many scenarios she paced us through during the session, it gave me great insight into how other schools do their special circumstance process and that it truly is a personal professional judgment. The “Re-Imagining the Financial Aid Experience” pre-conference session and the interactive activity we did as a group was engaging. It was an eye-opener as to how much of the total picture we actually see or don’t see in our own offices. I also enjoyed the session “Processing Guides to Help Your Team Rise to the Top”. It focused on getting your processes put in writing in process manuals, something that I live by in my office. To tell the truth, though, the whole conference was very good!

Being so new to financial aid with no outside training, I thought I might be out of place and I wouldn’t know much, but I felt like I fit right in. I feel like I learned how to do so many new processes as well as how to research to do better practices and support my decisions as a financial aid technician. I’m walking away from this experience more confident and ready to help “my guests” better than ever.

Thanks again, for this amazing training opportunity.

**Matthew Flores (Photo not available)**  
*Student Services Specialist Senior*  
*Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD)*

I am happy to be a part of this wonderful organization; and would like to thank the WASFAA Scholarship Committee, headed by Sandi Guidry, for the consideration and opportunity to attend this event. I also wish to give a special Shout-Out to the WASFAA Conference Co-Chair and “Daughter of Boise”, Nicole McMillin, for being such a gracious host and guide to all who came to visit her hometown in Idaho!
(Continued from page 12)

I will start off my introspection by saying this was the best Financial Aid Conference I have ever attended! From the location, with all the Charm and Character Boise had to offer (for those adventurous or curious enough to explore it), to the WASFAA Staff making this Conference informative and stimulating mixed with some fun and inspiration, and everything in-between. But I'm not the only one: many people including Hotel Staff, special guests and Sponsors who attended WASFAA for the first time were all impressed with the comradery we have, saying this was their best Conference to be a part of!

The theme for this conference was “Together We Rise”, symbolized by Hot Air Balloons that are a famous attraction in Idaho. It was explained during the Opening Session that we Financial Aid professionals go against many odds despite our shortcomings and lack of resources, we wear many hats and play many roles for both our students and our respective Colleges, and we do what we can to help our Students succeed. But it is times like these – when we gather and share our knowledge, ideas, and expertise while socializing like long-time friends – combined with our common passion and purpose to do the right thing and help make dreams come true, is why “Together, We Rise”!

A major plus for this Conference would have to go to the Conference App, Whova! This tool was a great networking tool to connect with other attendees, which also fostered an interactive community where we can post pictures, bookmark certain sessions on the Agenda, and post on the Message Board about certain topics (such as making donations on how you call Idaho’s famous crop: a po-tah-to, or my personal favorite - a spud). It served very well for those of us Fellow Foodies, where we could set up meeting times to gather and explore the city on culinary adventures!

As this was my first time attending this Conference, the Newcomer’s Session was a great starter, as it showcased how adaptive and creative you can be to sudden changes, while learning how perceptive you are to notice such changes in others, and understanding how change can affect us both individually and as a collective whole! Throughout the conference, all the sessions were very informative and insightful. Although most of my visits were focused on Verification and C-Code-related workshops (as this my teams’ main focus in processing), I was nevertheless impressed by both the content and variety of the sessions offered.

But the best part of the Conference was the people: everyone was smiling and having a great time. Whether you showed off your dance moves with the Oinkari Basque Dancers (proud to have join them at least once), revisited your childhood days in a game of Hot Potato (or Basketball, if you made it into the lamp), or toured the city with your new friends (and discover how much we all have in common, both in and out of the office), this was an amazing journey, no doubt! Idaho’s weather may not believe my luck could’ve turned out any better than this!

Amber Goodrich (Photo not available)

Heritage University

I’m fairly new in financial aid – going on two years – and I’m extremely thankful to WASFAA for giving me the opportunity to attend the conference by bestowing me a scholarship. My attendance would not have been possible without WASFAA’s help and I gained so much from the experience.

My expectations for the WASFAA conference in Boise were surpassed. I had the opportunity to discuss and hear from experienced peers and I tried to absorb all the wisdom I could. I was able to interact with the experts from the Department of Education. It was also a pleasure to hear about the work NASFAA is doing in our nation’s capital and from those who advocate for us on a macro level.

I enjoyed the little touches that all the WASFAA volunteers did to make the conference not only informative, but entertaining. The meme bingo card was a fun exercise to do while chatting with vendors. The Whova app brought the experience to a whole new level and I hope it is something I will see again in the future. I especially enjoyed the dinner entertainment of the Basque dancers. It was a really nice to touch to choose entertainment that displayed the culture of our host city, Boise. One of my regrets was being unable to visit the Basque museum nearby to learn more. Is it too early to say that I love Boise, after only spending three days in that beautiful city?

I learned so much that I could take back to my team – tips on how to manage the direct loan program, innovative ideas for jumpstarting financial literacy campaigns on campus, how to better reach students with communications and tips to help consolidate my team’s knowledge in the office. The value of networking at these events is incalculable. I am continually awestruck by what a great community I have the privilege of working with. There is such a comradery among financial aid administrators that I’m grateful to be in this profession. The passion and work ethic that I see among my peers is motivating to be the best I can be. I am so grateful for WASFAA for giving me the opportunity to attend - it was an unforgettable experience.
I learned the value of a good conference as a logistician for the Oregon Army National Guard. The ability to come together with colleagues from all over and brainstorm, problem-solve, get feedback, or simply commiserate is something that any professional can benefit from. However, as financial aid administrators I feel these opportunities are especially important to help combat the burn-out many of us start to feel. Constant changes to policy and significant unknowns in what’s to come create stress in our field and sometimes the best way to deal with that is to be in a room full of people who understand exactly what you are going through. WASFAA’s Annual Conference provided me with just that.

The WASFAA Annual conference provided me with three big firsts:

-My first WASFAA Event. While I have been given lots of opportunities to get involved in OASFAA, our state organization, WASFAA had not yet been possible for me to attend. Thanks to a director who is very supporting of professional development and networking without our region, she gladly agreed to let me attend the WASFAA Annual Conference this year, and I’m so glad I did. I worried that because I didn’t know anyone outside of Oregon I might not feel like I belonged at WASFAA, but that was hardly the case. Meeting people from a variety of institutions, hearing about the unique issues they are facing in their states, coming together on shared challenges and helping to make our region seem much smaller and closer. I had multiple opportunities to chat with colleagues and exchange contact info and know that my network of “phone a friend” candidates has grown. My WASFAA experience has helped me, as a financial aid administrator, feel even more confident in my ability to be successful in my role.

-My first conference presentation. With the encouragement of my director I submitted a session proposal with very little expectation that it would get selected. Imagine my surprise when I received the email from Danette Wells letting me know my session had been selected and I was on the schedule! While I enjoy presenting, the thought of presenting at a professional conference for the first time left me more than a little nervous. Looking at the schedule I assumed that, being up against a hot topic like SULA, no one would attend my session and I’d be off the hook. The nerves only increased when the room was full and Past President Helen Faith was included in the attendance. I soon realized I had nothing to worry about; the session was full of great conversation, sharing of ideas, and problem solving. It was such a wonderful way to be introduced to exactly who the WASFAA community is: supportive, kind, and genuine.

-My first trip to Boise. I’ll admit, I wasn’t particularly thrilled with the idea of attending a conference in Boise, but I quickly realized that I had grossly underestimated this gem of a city. For the four days I was there I ate and drank some exceptionally delicious stuff. Local craft cider and beer, amazing food, and what a wonderfully walkable downtown! Good job, Boise, you are now on my short list for “places to visit again!”

I am extremely grateful to have been chosen as an Annual Conference Scholarship recipient, not only for my own experience, but because this allowed my office to send more people than we might otherwise have been able to. It was a great opportunity for bonding not only for our office but within the larger organization.

I would like to sincerely thank the WASFAA members for creating such a welcoming environment and the conference committee for such a robust schedule. I truly value the experiences I had and connections I made at the 2018 WASFAA Annual Conference and I look forward to many more.