



ALABAMA ASSOCIATION OF FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS

AASFAA Newsletter

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Buddy Jackson

This year is winding down and I can truthfully say it has been a very rewarding time in my life. All of my committee chairs and elected officers have been so supportive to me in addition to doing an outstanding job for our association. Thank each one of you for the successful year, and for making my life a little easier.

After a very successful Fall 2005 AASFAA Conference, your Vice President, Ben Baker, held our NASFAA Fall Training Workshop on November 18th, 2005 at Auburn University Montgomery. Thanks to Ben, University of North Alabama and Clark Aldridge, CFS, for an outstanding job presenting the NASFAA topic "Administrative Capability: Campus-Wide Compliance". Also, we had 72 members in attendance, which is well above our normal attendance. I want to thank everyone who participated and assisted in making this a very successful meeting.

I had the opportunity to attend the SASFAA Conference on February 11-15th, 2006, in Greensboro, NC. I thought the SASFAA Conference Committee did an outstanding job providing us with a good variety of concurrent and general sessions. AASFAA had a reasonable number of our members who were able to travel to the Greensboro area. I am very pleased that one of our AASFAA members, Deborah Byrd, Calhoun Community College was elected secretary of SASFAA for 2006-2008. Congratulations Deborah!!!!

Two of our AASFAA members will be attending the NASFAA Leadership Conference in Washington, DC on March 5th-7th, 2006 - President-Elect, Jonna Gibson and Treasurer-Elect, Lisa Burlison.

Now, plans are being finalized for our 2006 AASFAA Spring Conference. The meeting will take place at the beautiful Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach, Alabama, April 12th-14th, 2006. Spring Conference Program Committee Co-Chairs, Shannon Cross, AmSouth Bank, and President-Elect, Jonna Gibson, Regions Bank, are planning an array of topics and speakers. Ms. Deborah Tarpley, Department of Education, Denver, Colorado, will be presenting three general sessions.

Please do not miss the opportunity to be a part of a very informative spring program, as well as, to be able to network with your fellow colleagues. You can access registration, agenda and even driving directions on our AASFAA website at www.aasfaaonline.org.

See you at the Gulf.

PRESIDENT-ELECT'S REPORT

by Jonna Moses Gibson

It's time for the weather to get warm, so that means it's time to get ready for our Spring Conference! Our conference once again will be at the Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach, Alabama on April 12-14, 2006.

This year's theme is "*How's Your Financial Aid DNA? Dedication, kNowledge, Attitude*". This year's agenda promises to be filled with much needed answers to the new Reauthorization issues.

Also, this year we are fortunate to have Ms. Deborah Tarpley, Department of Education trainer, for Part I and Part II Federal Update, on Wednesday and Thursday afternoon. And on Friday a Question and Answer session - Ask A Fed.

A special thanks to Shannon Cross, AmSouth Bank, Conference Program Committee Co-Chair and her committee for working hard on our Spring Conference. Also, a special thanks to Linda Calvanese, Remington College, and her Local Arrangement Committee for all their hard work. And as always, Lora Kiser, Vendor Sponsor Chair, does an excellent job for our association.

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Reports	1-3
Lending Matters	3-5
SASFAA News	5-6
NASFAA News	6-7
Professional Development	7-8
Upcoming Events	8

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks for your support during the year. I am looking forward to the upcoming year as your President.

PAST PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Dr. Chip Quisenberry

Dear AASFAA Colleagues:

As I write this, the AASFAA Nominations and Elections Committee is preparing for the Spring Conference and the officer elections that will take place. We currently have more than enough nominations to put forward a dual slate of candidates for each office. Nominations (other than a nomination from the floor) will be closed at the end of the day on Friday, March 3. Nominees must be nominated via the AASFAA nomination form, available [online at http://www.aasfaaonline.org/pdf/nomination_form.pdf](http://www.aasfaaonline.org/pdf/nomination_form.pdf). The form should then be faxed to me at (334) 347-5569.

The Awards and Recognition Committee has also received a number of nominations for both the M. Cecil Padgett Outstanding Achievement Award (for a practicing financial aid administrator) and the John H. Buchanan, Jr. Distinguished Service Award (for service to the financial aid profession by someone outside the profession). If you want to nominate someone for either of these awards, you must do so before the end of the day on Friday, March 3, 2006.

If you have questions, I can be reached at (334) 347-2623 extension 2214 or by email at cquisenberry@eocc.edu.

TREASURER'S REPORT

by Charles Markle

With the AASFAA Fall Conference, NASFAA Training, and SASFAA Conference all behind us, the AASFAA Spring Conference looms ahead... and not that far away. I have received several conference registrations as of this date.

Attendees who have not registered:

Please visit <http://www.aasfaaonline.org/pdf/sp06regform.pdf> in order to complete the form and remit to me by fax ASAP at (334) 844-6085. The conference fee is \$100 and includes your meals. Please add \$15 if you have not renewed your annual membership for 2005-06, and please contact me at marklcc@auburn.edu if you are unsure of your current membership status. Registration forms received after Monday, April 3, 2006, will be subject to a \$25 late fee.

A reminder as to your dining plans:

Please indicate with a "1" or "check mark" on the registration form for each meal that you plan to attend. If you plan to bring a guest for any of the meal functions, please indicate with a "2" (you and 1 guest)

for that particular meal. The cost of each meal *for your guest* is listed on the registration form. You may pay your registration fee and the cost of the meals *for your guest* at the conference registration desk. Mailing your payment to me by March 31, 2006 will help to speed you through the line.

The fiscal standing of our association is strong, with assets exceeding \$180,000. In addition, I have already received remittance of several sponsorships for the Spring Conference. Many thanks go to Lora Kiser, Sponsorship Chair for her efforts. Please also be sure to thank each of our lender partners in AASFAA for his/her efforts within the association, as well as for the continued financial support of the institutions they represent. Our conference activities in training and networking would be diminished by a lack of such support.

I hope to see you at what my 3 year-olds call "the pink hotel".

CONFERENCE PROGRAM COMMITTEE REPORT

by Shannon Cross

Your Conference Program Committee has met and we are almost ready to go. Mark your calendars for April 12-14 for the Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach, Alabama, for the Spring 2006 AASFAA Conference. You can see that tentative agenda online with all the conference information.

I would like to thank all of those on the committee for all of their hard work in making this happen: Pat King, Lora Kiser, Buddy Jackson, Jennifer Lynch, Pat Watkins, Belinda Duett, Dr. Sam Chuks, Liz Bailey, Marie Thomas, Tammy Spratlin, Lisa Stephens, Art Weeden, Vickie Adams, Linda Calvanese, and Jonna Gibson.

Our theme this year is "*How's Your Financial Aid DNA? Dedication, kNowledge, Attitude*". We will have special recognition for our new comers, a wonderful diversity speaker, and a two-part Federal Update. Also, don't forget to send all of your new employees to the New Aid Officer's Workshop. Make plans to be there!

SITE SELECTION COMMITTEE REPORT

by Dan Miller

Fall 2006

Auburn's Dixon Hotel and Convention Center contract is all signed and confirmed.

Spring 2007

I have spoken with Debbie Ruhr at the Perdido Beach Resort about a proposal for Spring 2007. We are looking at the dates of April 9-13--the 9th is the board meeting day and the conference starts on the 10th and ends on the 12th, but we have some rooms booked

for the 13th for those who want an extra day at the beach. I asked her to sharpen her pencil and get us a room rate that we can swallow! She will leave it with the Perdido staff for Thursday's meeting!

Fall 2007

On March 6, I have an appointment with April Mullins, PCH Hotels and Resorts, to visit the Robert Trent Jones Marriott Shoals Hotel & Spa in Florence. Ben Baker has been invited to join us since he has been their "spokesman" for over two years!

Fall 2008

Montgomery has a new Hotel and Convention Center 'under construction' with opening set for Fall 2007. April Mullins is preparing a proposal for this new facility. April is also checking on availability and costs for the Robert Trent Jones Montgomery Marriott Prattville Hotel and Conference Center at Capitol Hill in Prattville. They should be completing a room addition in 2007 and should be able to accommodate us. There are two hotels in the Birmingham downtown and Galleria areas that have expressed interest in our conference. They are preparing proposals, but I don't know when to expect them. The Tutwiler also has invited us back so there are three possibilities in Birmingham.

LENDING MATTERS

by Crystal Dempsey, Bill Wall, Sam Casarez, and Sonja McMullen

Alabama Student Loan - KHEAA Update

AlabamaMentor

KHEAA recently sponsored a session on AlabamaMentor at the annual conference of the Alabama Counseling Association in Birmingham. Counselors praised the value of the AlabamaMentor.org web portal as an effective tool for counselors and resource for students and families. The ratings for the session were outstanding.

Katrina Grants

The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) announced a total of \$18,300 in training grants to the Alabama Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, the Louisiana Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, and the Mississippi Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. The grants, funded by the National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs (NCHELP) and the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA), were used to cover expenses associated with NASFAA training provided last fall, including materials, training of trainers, and related costs.

Colleges and universities that were damaged by high winds and flooding due to Hurricane Katrina, particularly in the New Orleans area and the Alabama and Mississippi Gulf Coast regions, are reeling under the toll the disaster took on their operating budgets. Without these training grants, many financial aid

administrators in the affected areas would have been unable to participate in last fall's training series.

Under a "decentralized" training model, NASFAA develops training materials and hosts training-of-trainers in Washington, D.C., while state and regional financial aid associations that choose to participate actually conduct the training workshops. Normally, the state and regional associations bear the costs of training-of-trainers while materials and other costs are covered by registration fees, association dues, and/or sponsorships. Additional costs for participants include travel and per diem.

The topic of last fall's training was "Administrative Capability: Campus-Wide Compliance."

"We are grateful to NCHELP and KHEAA for having made the fall training series possible in states that were affected by Katrina's devastation," said NASFAA President Dallas Martin. "It is a fortunate coincidence that the theme of this year's series is administrative capability, a capacity that many institutions are now rebuilding after losing both infrastructure and records as a result of the storm," he continued.

NCHELP President Brett Lief concurred. "Appropriate and timely training is an ongoing responsibility for all of us," he said. "We all gain when financial aid professionals are up-to-the-minute on the skills required for compliance with the myriad of federal regulations governing student aid programs, and the need is that much more urgent this year than in most others. Our members wanted to support their school colleagues as they continue to meet the challenges resulting from Hurricane Katrina."

KHEAA Executive Director Joe L. McCormick praised the state financial aid associations and the individuals participating in the training workshops. "After all they have experienced—and continue to experience—these organizations and their members are moving on, proceeding with their plans, and getting the training they need and deserve," he said. "We at KHEAA are pleased to partner with NASFAA and NCHELP to give something back to the community."

Federal Changes

Under the recently passed federal budget deficit act, several changes in federal student aid will take effect in July. Under the new law, guaranty agencies, which insure Federal Stafford Loans, will be required to collect the 1 percent guaranty fee. However, The Student Loan People Board of Directors approved a recommendation on February 23 for it to pay the fee on behalf of its borrowers, regardless of the guarantor. KHEAA last charged a guaranty fee in 1996. That waiver had saved students nearly \$41 million through the 2004–2005 school year.

Graduate and professional students will be able to borrow through the Federal PLUS Loan program, previously reserved for undergraduate students. Unlike undergraduates, whose parents must borrow the PLUS Loan, graduate and professional students will be able to take out the PLUS Loans in their own names to help

meet the higher cost of graduate and professional programs of study.

Federal Stafford Loans will have fixed interest rates beginning in July that are higher than the variable rates charged in recent years. The fixed rate will be 6.8 percent; the current rate is 4.7 percent.

Starting in 2007, undergraduate students will be able to borrow more in Federal Stafford Loans their first two years. First-year students will be able to borrow up to \$3,500, an increase from \$2,625. The maximum second-year students can borrow increases to \$4,500 from \$3,500. However, the maximum a student can borrow as an undergraduate will remain at \$23,000.

Other changes will:

- Establish a three-year military deferment on repaying student loans for loans made on or after July 1, 2001.
- Discharge loans taken out as a result of identity theft.
- Ease the process of bringing loans out of default.
- Limit suspension of federal aid to students convicted of drug offenses that occurred while the student was receiving federal aid.
- Permit student loan consolidations to graduates and eliminate in-school consolidations.

Discontinue spousal consolidation loans.

Dr. Joe McCormick Retires as Head of KHEAA and KHESLC

Dr. Joe L. McCormick, who has served for over four years as executive director of the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (administrators of the Alabama Student Loan Program), and the Kentucky Higher Education Student Loan Corporation has announced his retirement effective October 1.

During his tenure with KHEAA and KHESLC, Dr. McCormick has promoted and supported several initiatives to serve students and families in Alabama – including the *Getting In* book for high school seniors, the *Affording Higher Education in Alabama* booklet for students and counselors, the *AlabamaMentor* website that serves as a career planning and college selection tool for Alabama students, and numerous pamphlets and brochures for students in grades 8-12.

In addition, Dr. McCormick has authorized KHEAA and KHESLC to serve as a major sponsor for the programs and services of AASF AA.

We join our AASF AA colleagues in thanking Dr. McCormick for his service to the association and wish him well as he pursues other interests.

Dr. Wall Appointed to Civitan International Scholarship Committee

Dr. Bill Wall, Director of the Alabama Student Loan Program, has been appointed to serve on the three-member Grants and Scholarships Committee of Civitan International for a three-year term.

Civitan International is international service organization with world headquarters in Birmingham, AL. The focus of the organization is to build good citizenship and assist persons with developmental disabilities.

Recipients of the scholarships will receive at least \$1000 to meet educational costs at an accredited institution.

Deciphering Return of Title IV Funds and Unofficial Withdrawals

Unofficial withdrawals. They are the bane of many a financial aid officer's existence. For some schools, every term yields a few of these "alien abductions," in which a student just seems to vanish into thin air.

Schools Not Required to Take Attendance

Sometimes, at a school that is not required to take attendance, these vanishings don't become evident until the end of the term, when a number of students fail to earn a passing grade in any of their classes. In cases like this, the Department of Education (ED) states that a school "must have a procedure for determining whether a Federal Student Aid recipient who began attendance during a period completed the period or should be treated as a withdrawal" (2005-2006 *Federal Student Aid Handbook*, page 5-61). This means that a school must have a process for deciding if a student who received all failing grades either performed really poorly academically or actually stopped attending at some point in the term and should be considered withdrawn.

ED asserts that for such a student, the school must assume that he or she is an unofficial withdrawal, unless the school can document that the student completed the period. If the school can document the student's attendance in at least one class through the end of the period, the school does not have to consider the student withdrawn. If the school cannot document the student's attendance in at least one class through the end of the period, the school must determine the student's (unofficial) withdrawal date, and must perform the return of Title IV funds (R2T4) calculation. The federal regulations in 34 CFR 668.22(j)(2) state that a school "must determine the withdrawal date for a student who withdraws without providing notification to the institution no later than 30 days after the end of the earlier of the payment period or period of enrollment, as appropriate; academic year in which the student withdrew; or educational program from which the student withdrew."

Options for withdrawal date

A school that is not required to take attendance that has a student who is an unofficial withdrawal may use one of a few options in determining the student's withdrawal date. The school may use:

- The date of the student's last documented academically related activity.
- The date the school determines that the student ceased attendance due to illness, accident, grievous personal loss, or other circumstances beyond the student's control.
- The midpoint of the payment period or period of enrollment, as applicable.

Schools Required to Take Attendance

At a school that is required to take attendance, ED states that such a school is "expected to have a procedure in place for routinely monitoring attendance records to determine in a timely manner when a student withdraws" (2005-2006 *Federal Student Aid Handbook*, page 5-32). Thus, a school that is required to take attendance shouldn't have too many of these mystery vanishings, or should be able to identify them fairly quickly.

As a matter of fact, ED states that except in unusual instances, a school that is required to take attendance should be able to determine if student has withdrawn no later than 14 days after the student's last date of attendance as determined by the school's attendance records. This does not mean that the school is required to administratively withdraw a student who has been absent for 14 days; however, after 14 days, the school is expected to have determined whether the student intends to return to classes or to withdraw. If the school determines that the student intends to withdraw, the school should perform the return of Title IV funds calculation, using the student's last date of attendance (per the school's attendance records) as the student's withdrawal date.

More information

Hopefully, your school has to contend with only a few of these unofficial withdrawals each academic year. If one occurs at your school and you need more information, consult the 2005-2006 *Federal Student Aid Handbook*, Volume 5, Overawards, Overpayments, and Withdrawal Calculations (the full 2005-2006 *Federal Student Aid Handbook* is available for download in one searchable PDF document at www.tgslc.org/resources/fsa_handbook.cfm). Or, feel free to call TG customer assistance at (800) 845-6267, or send an e-mail message to cust.assist@tgslc.org.

Sam Casarez is a National Account Representative with TG serving schools in Alabama. You can reach Sam at (800) 252-9743, ext. 4655, or by e-mail at sam.casarez@tgslc.org. Additional information about TG can be found online at www.tgslc.org.

Sallie Mae Education Trust Appoints Nancy Gault Regional Account Executive

RESTON, Va., Dec. 5, 2005 –Sallie Mae, the No. 1 paying-for-college company, today announced the addition of Nancy Gault to the tenured team of student loan professionals representing the Sallie Mae Education Trust lending brand. Sallie Mae Education Trust is dedicated to working with financial aid professionals to educate families about their financing options prior to college and through repayment. The division provides an array of materials and value-added services tailored to educate borrowers on the entire paying-for-college process. Nancy Gault has been named regional account executive and will serve colleges and universities in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Tennessee. For the past eight years, Gault served as the student loan and college work-study coordinator at the Mississippi University for Women in Columbus, Miss. Prior to that, she worked in the Admissions Office, where she evaluated student transcripts and served as the designated school official for international students. Prior to working at the Mississippi University for Women, Gault worked for the National Bank of Commerce in Columbus, Miss. She received her B.S. in communications from the Mississippi University for Women. Nancy can be contacted at (662) 240-9900 or nancy.gault@slma.com.

More information on the Sallie Mae Education Trust is available at www.salliemae.com.

SASFAA NEWS

by Guy Gibbs

Did you attend the 43rd Annual SASFAA Conference? If not, you missed a great conference. "Financial Aid Unmasked" was the theme of the conference, and I feel confident that those attending the conference left with a better understanding of where we are as a profession and what will be facing us in the future as we find better ways to assist student and their families in finding ways to meet educational costs. Over 850 attendees found their way to Greensboro in spite of the weather in much of our association's geographic area.

The conference committee, under the very capable leadership of Lisanne Masterson, did a fantastic job putting together a series of general and concurrent sessions dealing with the most pertinent issues facing the profession. From a humorous opening session that set us in the mood for the conference, to federal updates, to issues of diversity, to the 60 plus concurrent session, I hop that everyone found something of interest. Training was the keynote word for this conference.

Over \$7,500 was raised for the Victory Junction Gang, the charity identified for this conference. The Victory Junction Gang is a camp started by the NASCAR racing family of Kyle Petty in memory of his son. The camp is open to kids with special medical needs that

otherwise would not be able to attend other camps. We are so very pleased that we were able to sponsor this camp as our charity and for the generosity of our many attendees for their contributions. SASFAA also contributed to the charity by giving funds in recognition of our sponsors and speakers rather than giving individual gifts.

Congratulations are extended to Lisanne Masterson of NCASFCAA, Sandy Neel of TASFCAA and Deborah Byrd of AASFCAA, on their election to the positions of President-elect, Vice President and Secretary respectively. They will begin their service to SASFAA in July 2007.

Congratulations are also extended to Karen Koonce who was presented the NASFAA State and Regional Leadership Award. This award was announced at the NASFAA conference last summer in New York City; however, it was official presented to Karen by David Gelinas, NASFAA Chair, in Greenboro.

SASFCAA also recognized Clark Aldridge and David Gelinas. Each was presented the SASFAA Distinguished Service Award the highest honor that SASFAA can bestow. The award is only presented to those individuals that have made outstanding, significant and meritorious contributions to the advancement of student financial aid.

Special Appreciation Awards were given to Bill Mackie and Lynda Sayer for their contributions to SASFAA over their many years of service to the financial aid profession. To Curtis Whalen was given a SASFAA Honorary Membership.

As president of SASFAA, I would like to thank the NCASFCAA membership for their hospitality and hard work. They spend countless hours preparing for our visit and exhibited true "Southern Hospitality." And to each of you, I would like to thank you for your personal support this year and for your continued support of SASFAA. You are truly an amazing group of professionals.

NASFCAA NEWS

by Mindy Kaplan Eline

2006 Marks 8th Year for Financial Aid Review Program

Washington, D.C. (February 16, 2006) – Since 1999, NASFCAA's Standards of Excellence (SOE) Review Program has helped member institutions across the country work towards the highest standards in the administration of student financial aid. While it took a few years for the concept of a "voluntary review" program to catch on with institutions, SOE has found its place in the financial aid arena with an increasing number of institutions requesting a review each year.

"It was great to get affirmation of the things we are doing well and also to learn ideas to help us become even better," stated Jim White of Seattle University

whose institution was reviewed in 2005. SOE Reviews have been conducted at many types of institutions including 2-year public and private, 4-year public and private, and through a unique partnership with the United Negro College Fund, several private Historically Black College and Universities.

All aspects of aid administration are examined during an SOE Review including: student service and satisfaction; program compliance, operations, and delivery; systems automation and technology utilization; and human resources and facilities. "The SOE review is one of the best 'peer-study' evaluations an institution can invest in. It is comprehensive, non-threatening and confidential. This is a grand opportunity to discover best practices as well as provide solid recommendations for improvements and compliance concerns that may need campus support to resolve," states Lois Kelly, SOE peer reviewer and Director of Financial at California Polytechnic State University. There are currently 58 peer reviewers in the SOE program. From this pool, the program coordinator hand-selects individuals with specific institutional experience and qualifications to be part of the institution's peer review team.

Trends and Best Practices Uncovered

While the results of SOE Reviews are confidential, several recent trends have been uncovered:

Institutional Strengths: Surprisingly, the number one compliance issue five years ago – the lack of written policies and procedures – has reversed and now emerges as the number one strength for 2005. Many institutions have developed written policies and procedures that they review and update on a regular basis. The manuals go beyond the areas required by Title IV regulations to include all aspects of Title IV program administration, customer service, technology, and office policies and procedures. In addition, institutions now provide students access to their award information via the internet providing better and timelier customer services to aid recipients.

Common Recommendations: The recommendations made most frequently by peer reviewers fall under the category of administrative capability. Training, organizational structure, staffing, and facilities have been identified as areas that often need attention across all types of institutions. In particular, financial aid training is needed in all aspects of Title IV program administration as well as financial aid systems software usage and functionality. There also continues to be a need to dedicate staff to financial aid systems support. If these areas of program administration are left un-addressed, the compliance risk at the institution will continue to increase.

Compliance Issues: Consumer information provided by the institutions, in many cases, was difficult to read and understand and often did not meet the minimum regulatory requirements for providing annual notices and disclosures, institutional information, and financial assistance information. Failure to provide proper cash management disbursement notifications and improper disposition of stale-dated financial aid checks were

also areas where schools were noncompliant. A number of processing errors were identified in the areas of application processing and file review. When viewed individually the errors appeared insignificant; however, when viewed in the aggregate, the errors were symptomatic of administrative capability issues related to training, staffing, and organization structure.

How Does the Standards of Excellence Review Program Work?

- A formal cost estimate is provided using demographic information specific to the institution.
- Upon finalization of the cost estimate, the scope of the review is established in a letter of engagement between the institution and NASFAA.
- The institution submits demographic data and other information to NASFAA and a preliminary institutional assessment is conducted.
- NASFAA then selects a customized peer review team composed of trained student financial aid administrators who visit the institution and perform an in-depth, on-site review of the financial aid operations. The review team spends two days to one week on the campus.
- Following the on-site review, the team will compile an objective evaluation of the institution's financial aid program and present its findings in an exit interview to administrators designated by the institution.
- Finally, NASFAA will prepare and submit a confidential written report summarizing the peer review team's observations that identifies the institution's good financial aid practices and suggests improvements.

For more information, visit www.NASFAA.org/SOE.asp or contact Susan Luhman, program coordinator at (202) 785-0453 Ext. 147 or excellence@nasfaa.org.

History of the Standards of Excellence Review Program

The Standards of Excellence Review Program grew out of recommendations from the NASFAA Task Force on Institutional Leadership co-chaired by John T. Casteen III, president of the University of Virginia, and Rhonda D. Norsetter, special assistant to the chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In its report, the task force noted that "student financial aid is a matter of urgent concern to institutions, policy makers, and to the nation," and that "colleges and universities face serious challenges in this area."

In a letter to college presidents about the review program, Dr. Casteen warned that "poorly managed financial aid programs can hamper enrollment efforts, cause rifts among campus offices, expose the institution to significant financial liability, and sabotage efforts to

serve student and their families." But, he continues, "Financial aid programs that are integrated into institutional planning and soundly managed can help advance institutional goals."

Copies of *A Report to the Leadership of America's Colleges and Universities: Meeting the Challenges of Financial Aid* are available from NASFAA's Publication Desk, (202) 785-0453 Ext. 5 or pubs@nasfaa.org.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by Martie Adler

Dancing With Change

On any given day, I have the opportunity to observe how change affects me and those around me. As I see the variety of responses to change I begin to see the dance. Sometimes we have a partner sometimes we do not. At times it is like the quick step, or maybe a tango or even a line-dance. How gracefully we move with the change determines the quality and length of the dance. And, how we approach it determines how we experience it. Just as in dancing—when we allow ourselves to move freely in rhythm with the music with no thought of how we look or how good we are—the level of enjoyment and freedom is high. When we approach dancing with fear or trepidation we don't enjoy the activity and may not even hear the music. Then there are times when we want to sit out the dance!

The Dancing with Change training series was developed in response to a request from some of my clients. They understood that change was inevitable (especially in the financial aid industry) and even welcomed it at times, yet they wanted to know whether there was a more positive and less stressful way to deal with it. One client said, "I thought I was getting better at dealing with change when I noticed that it wasn't causing such an emotional upheaval in my life. Then I realized that it hadn't gotten any easier, I was just too exhausted to respond."

The real question is, why is it that so many of us have a difficult time with change (whether we acknowledge it or not)? If you read even a few of the books available on *change management*, you can quickly begin to identify and understand that our responses to change are tied to psychological and emotional triggers. Triggers like: the need to believe we have control, disagreement with the change, a belief that there is a better way, and of course...fear. Even if we acknowledge that these types of personal responses are a part of our life, how can we begin the process of responding in a different way? We begin by observing our response, acknowledging and owning our response, identifying the underlying beliefs that triggered the response, and looking at change as an opportunity for growth and self-awareness.

Shall We Dance?

The emotional responses we experience when facing change are actually the initial invitation to the dance. Our beliefs, and the resulting fears, are the catalysts for our response to change. Our beliefs are often so ingrained that we may not be aware of the influence they have over us—even after we have responded—yet those very beliefs are behind our reaction to change. Let's look at a few examples of triggers. In our industry, change mandated by the government happens frequently, and quite often we may not agree with it. In cases like this, we may not react, simply because we believe that there is nothing we can do about it. If this type of change does not trigger an emotional response, could it be that after years of experience we have come to believe that we have minimal or no control over these changes? If the belief that we have no control in a particular situation results in little or no emotion in our response, what happens when an event forces change to something we thought was in our control? That's when the emotion starts to rise and the dance really begins! What if a Director from another department began to assign work to one of our team members without our knowledge and agreement? I suspect there would be an emotional response of some nature. Why? Because in this circumstance we believe we have control. I also suggest that in both of these examples, our beliefs are so ingrained that we wouldn't even be aware of them—they would simply trigger our response. Our beliefs about control will play an active part of learning the dance.

Learning the Steps

As we begin the dance we start with learning the steps. Once we have practiced them long enough, we no longer have to think about the steps we simply allow ourselves to enjoy the movement and music. It is exactly the same experience when we practice modifying our response to change. Lesson One: begin to observe yourself (the emotions that arise) as opportunities for change come your way. An employee wants to change a process, the government wants to change part of a financial aid program, or your boss wants to reorganize the office. Lesson Two: as you begin to observe the thoughts (and subsequent emotion) that arise when faced with these changes, simply acknowledge that the emotion is present and identify the nature of the event that triggered the response, for later contemplation. This step is an important one because it will assist you in determining

why you are resisting the change. Lesson Three: you then start the process of identifying your underlying beliefs and companion emotions that are being triggered. This process sounds quite simple but in reality it is the most difficult step for most of us because it requires a level of objective self-study and some pretty radical honesty. When you begin to see how your beliefs influence your responses, you can then move toward modifying them. And finally, Lesson Four: you begin to view change as an opportunity.

The management of change always begins with the individual and then can be moved to the team, departmental, and organizational levels. With the strength of resistance many people have toward change, it is critical that we begin with ourselves and then coach others along the same process. A work environment where each team member recognizes and understands dancing with change creates a platform for creative and positive interactions and, increased productivity and teamwork. It also allows us to spend our time focused on work and our customers, not the emotion.

In part two, we will review some dance routines that can be used to actively shift our "triggered" responses to ones that are more positive, healthy, and creative. We will also identify methods we can use to begin the process of modifying our response to change thus experiencing the dance in a whole new way. In part three, we will explore methods that can assist the entire organization in dancing with change. Until then, enjoy the dance!

UPCOMING EVENTS

AASFAA Spring Conference ----- Orange Beach, AL	April 12, 2006 – April 14, 2006
NASFAA Leadership Conference ----- Washington, DC	Mar. 5, 2006 – Mar. 7, 2006
SASFAA Transitional Board Meeting ---- St. Petersburg, FL	June 8, 2006 – June 11, 2006