



Two years ago, we decided to profile the National Institute of Staff and Organizational Development, a faculty development program at the University of Texas at Austin. Our reporter talked to John Roueche, head of the Community College Leadership program at the university, who reminisced on the organization's beginnings. This year, as we mark 20 years of publishing, NISOD celebrates its 30th anniversary. This article originally appeared on June 19, 2006.

## NISOD Approaches Three Decades Of Mentoring Faculty Leaders

BY GARRY BOULARD

As John Roueche remembers it, it all started with a handful of ambitious comments hastily written on stray pieces of paper and napkins during a breakfast meeting three decades ago.

"That is really where our program began," says Roueche of what was to become the National Institute for Staff & Organizational Development (NISOD), a program that has dedicated itself to the professional development of faculty, administrators and staff at the community college level and has since become one of the largest efforts of its kind in higher education both nationally and internationally.

That meeting included Roueche and Arlon Elser, a senior program officer at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the same foundation that had previously provided support for the Community College Leadership Program (CCLP).

"Basically Arlon asked if we had talked about ways of getting some good information into the hands of faculty," Roueche, who is a professor and the director of the CCLP at the University of Texas at Austin, recalls.

"He knew that I had done a lot of research on at-risk students and developmental education, but had I thought about ways of getting those findings to faculty members?" Roueche continues.

Roueche answered indicating that he had thought about the problem long and hard, but until the breakfast meeting with Elser, had not come up with any one solid answer. It was then that the two men penned out the basics for what would later be a formal proposal to the Kellogg Foundation establishing NISOD.

Roueche admits his interest was particularly sparked when he told Elser that he had written about the issues of faculty and staff development for a series of scholarly publications and Elser responded: "But a lot of people don't read those kinds of publications."

The end result was the beginning of

NISOD, which today serves in an outreach capacity for the CCLP and has more than 700 member community colleges engaging in an ongoing discussion of issues centered around teaching, learning, and leadership at the two-year level.

"It is really a very innovative and greatly needed effort that focuses on the specific issues that confront higher education professionals in our community colleges," says Dr. Belle S. Wheelan, the president of the Commission on Colleges with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Dr. George Boggs, the president and CEO of the American Association of Community Colleges, calls NISOD a "wonderful organization for community college faculty; sharing innovative ideas through its publications and providing the best faculty professional development opportunity through its conferences."

The dialogue between NISOD and community college faculty, staff and administrators is crucial to the organization's success, says Roueche, and is also seen in the creation of *Innovation Abstracts*, a weekly publication with a circulation in excess of 200,000 that goes to all of the NISOD member community colleges.

"Most of what is written in it is written by practitioners in the colleges," explains Roueche. "We have faculty members describing how they work with students, what they do to motivate students, class room techniques, and other things that are being tried and used to motivate student success."

Dialogue is also greatly evident in the annual International Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence, which brings together a wide variety of community college faculty, staff and administrators for a series of seminars, sessions, and roundtable discussions about what works and how to maximize the effectiveness of two-year schools everywhere.

This year the conference, taking place in Austin, attracted more than 2,200 participants. Among the many presentations were discussions on how to use digital games and simulations in online classes, increasing visual learning in the classroom and what happens when an adjunct professor becomes a full professor.

"One of the great things about these conferences is that so many of the people who come to them and make presentations are themselves award-winning faculty members," explains Roueche. "So you really do end up with a conference made up almost entirely of the people who are perceived to be the best at their home colleges."

And many of those same faculty members, as well as community college staff, are recognized and saluted through the NISOD Excellence Awards. In both text and video format, members submit narratives of their particular challenges and goals during a typical academic year. The result, says Roueche, is sometimes humorous, often very human, but always instructive.

Succeeding beyond even the most optimistic dreams of both Roueche and Elser, Roueche thinks NISOD's success has a lot to do with the particular character and mission of those community colleges.

"Two-year colleges have really made their names by being open-door facilities," he says. "But I think what they have also learned is that by being an open-door school you have a much more difficult mission in front of you because very often the students who come through those doors need a lot more assistance, a lot more help and a lot more direction."

Adds Roueche: "If we can in any substantial way help our community college members in that mission, then I think we're doing a good job and that, more than any other reason, is why NISOD has lasted this long." ▲

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