

CELEBRATIONS

AN OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (NISOD)

NISOD's 30 Years of Celebrating Teaching and Leadership Excellence: The Past, the Present, the Future

Evelyn N. Waiwaiole and Coral M. Noonan-Terry

The National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) proudly celebrates its 30th anniversary of serving the faculty, staff, and administrators at institutions of higher education around the globe. NISOD is the outreach vehicle and service arm to the Community College Leadership Program (CCLP), the nation's oldest doctoral program with a primary focus on the preparation of key community college leaders, housed at The University of Texas at Austin (UT).

NISOD had a unique birth—at an early-morning meeting, at a breakfast table, at the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges Convention, in 1978.

The Significance of a Napkin

John Roueche, Director, the Community College Leadership Program, and Suanne Roueche, Director, the Community College Teaching Internship Program, at UT, and Arlon Elser, Senior Program Officer, from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Battle Creek, MI), were meeting for a casual and informal breakfast, just good friends catching up over an early-morning meal. Looking back on the details of the discussion, these three cannot recall exactly when the idea of establishing a new professional development association was born. But they suspect that it was shortly after Elser asked the Roueches if they had ever thought about *disseminating good practices* to the community colleges across the country. The Roueches smiled and said, "Well, we think we do that. We write books." With different iterations, each of them remembers some version of Elser's sighing and responding with some seriousness: "Yes, but nobody reads them."

After some lively banter, the three educational trailblazers turned to drafting the bold concept that became known as NISOD—sketched out on a breakfast napkin (now maintained lovingly in the NISOD offices). NISOD was born that morning—a membership organization, designed

to foster the sharing of innovative ideas in community colleges, to disseminate valuable print resources, and to celebrate teaching excellence at an annual conference. Thirty years later, it is *mission accomplished!*

NISOD's Mission

Although much has changed in 30 years, NISOD's mission has not. NISOD has remained focused on serving, engaging, and inspiring, by concentrating on the 3 R's of quality professional development strategies and programs: Relationships, Resources, and Recognition.

Relationship—with Member Colleges

The original goal was to offer such extraordinary, high-quality services that NISOD would be self-supporting within its first five years. The idea, the need, the service, and the response combined to help NISOD achieve that goal within its first two years. During its first year, NISOD had a membership base of 51 colleges, the cost of membership was \$500, and the conference attracted 152 participants. NISOD grew exponentially with the years. In 2008-2009, NISOD will be serving more than 700 colleges, many of which have been members for more than 15 years, and hosting more than 2500 conference participants—many of whom who have missed few conferences since its inception. These more than 700 member colleges reside in 44 states and 6 countries; and the annual membership fee is \$995.

Serving member colleges is **job one** at NISOD. Member colleges applaud NISOD's ability to share the best of current, creative, consistent, successful strategies for student success. Bill Law, President, Tallahassee Community College (FL), observed: "NISOD has transformed our college." Mary Retterer, President, Cerro Coso Community College (CA), a 16-year veteran of NISOD's International Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence, and a former Excellence Awards recipient, shares experiences that confirm NISOD supports the highest level of community college teaching and leadership excellence in the nation. Wright Lassiter, Chancellor, Dallas County Community



College District (TX), has applauded NISOD for the excellent services provided his entire district.

Throughout our history, NISOD has listened to the professional development needs of college faculty and leadership teams, and worked to provide the best resources to meet those needs. Sandy Shugart, President, Valencia Community College (FL), observed: NISOD has served best by “focusing on teaching and learning—the state of the practice.”

Relationships—with Partners

NISOD’s circle of external partners and friends has experienced extraordinary growth over the last decade. In 1999, NISOD had but six exhibitors at its annual conference. Fewer than 10 years later, we enjoy more than 100 corporate partners and benefits lasting throughout the year. Exhibiting at our conference is just one of those benefits—it is consistently either the kickoff or grand finale of the partnership year.

NISOD and its Platinum Partners together give back to the world of community colleges through strategic partnerships. For example, *Community College Week* and NISOD will unveil a new scholarship competition during the 2008-2009 academic year—the *Community College Week*–NISOD Student Essay Contest. Member colleges will have the opportunity to invite their students to submit written tributes about a faculty member who made a difference in their lives. Not only will the winning student receive a \$1,000 award, but the faculty member and the college will, as well. Another benefit of this partnership is that all conference participants receive a complimentary one-year subscription to *Community College Week*.

This past year, NISOD partnered with *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* to create a monthly column—“Community College Forum.” NISOD works closely with invited authors, from NISOD-member colleges, to highlight cutting-edge topics in the community college world. To date, topics have ranged from implementing the latest technology, eliciting student voices with focus groups, funding community college operations, retaining and recruiting students, and providing the best faculty professional development opportunities and access, to name a few. As a Platinum Partner, *Diverse* provides a one-year complimentary subscription to NISOD’s conference participants.

Other high-level partners include Blackboard and the Educational Testing Service (ETS). NISOD partners with Blackboard to identify the most pressing issues facing community colleges and to determine how Blackboard can empower colleges to surmount these challenges. ETS brings its expertise to the conference, conducting a preconference workshop to keep NISOD conference participants current on assessment ins and outs.

Resources

From its inception, NISOD has circulated print resources. Our flagship and trademark publication, *Innovation Abstracts*, is the weekly teaching tips and program development executive summary-style publication (available in hard copy or online—archived and searchable), written by practitioners for practitioners and distributed to more than 250,000 readers. *Celebrations*, occasional papers written by invited authors or abstracted from texts of presentations at NISOD-sponsored events, disseminate some of the best ideas in teaching, learning, and leading from professionals on the cutting-edges of successful practices.

The newest publication, *Hook’Em Up*, a monthly electronic newsletter, showcases the ways in which technology has changed how resources are distributed. This newsletter is available online, packed with links to other websites for readers who are looking for additional information and want to find it 24/7. Our monthly e-newsletters contain podcasts, vodcasts, and blogs, and are intended to bring printed words to life.

More recently, NISOD has expanded its resource portfolio to serve members even better. In the past two decades, the price of textbooks has soared to unprecedented levels. According to the National Association of College Stores, the wholesale price of college textbooks has risen 32.8 percent since 1998, almost double the 18 percent increase in the wholesale price of ordinary books over the same period. In an effort to help colleges better “control” the cost of books, NISOD and Lulu.com have joined forces to create the NISOD Community Press (NCP). NCP is a leading-edge program that allows individual schools to create, buy, sell, and share educational materials on the Web, quickly and efficiently. NCP gives colleges the ability to publish and sell material from one central point which means that the college is able to control the cost, royalties, and brand of each publication, reducing costs to students while creating a new revenue stream for your college.

NISOD has partnered with Valencia Enterprises to create NISOD Learning Scenarios, a series of online professional development courses for faculty that uses real-life scenarios created in a Web-based, asynchronous format to maximize learning experiences. With colleges grappling with faculty retirement and turnover—e.g., studies indicate that community colleges have a higher percentage of faculty members between the ages of 45 and 64 (66.1 percent) than any other type of higher-education institution—the demand for faculty professional development is increasing. NISOD Learning Scenarios is receiving positive feedback. Recently, Kapiolani Community College (HI) faculty member, Krista Hiser, was asked to assess the needs of new faculty hires and design a program that would support these new faculty during their first year. Realizing that the needs of faculty were great, Krista turned to NISOD Learning Scenarios and began using the online professional development courses as

the primary means of training and equipping faculty. Krista notes that her most successful professional development strategy has been the NISOD Learning Scenarios Course, “*Teaching for Learning*,” available to all new faculty across the seven-campus system.

NISOD works to think strategically about how to bring innovative and affordable resources to member colleges. In addition to NISOD Community Press and NISOD Learning Scenarios, NISOD is launching two other new membership resources. To address the problem of dwindling travel dollars, NISOD is developing a monthly webinar series, free to NISOD members, sponsored by Adobe, that brings experts in the field right to your own office or conference center, via the computer screen. The topics will range from developmental education, student engagement, to learning communities, to name a few. A new partner publication, *Partner Voice*, will identify how colleges have benefited from the resources available from NISOD partners. This new publication will be distributed electronically to help answer readers’ questions about potential new resources.

Of all the resources NISOD brings to its members, the hallmark is NISOD’s International Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence, held each May, in Austin, Texas. The conference began with 152 participants and was housed on The University of Texas at Austin campus, in dormitories and classrooms. Colleges use the conference as a team-building experience. In the beginning, Bill Segura, President, Texas State Technical College, brought teams in 15-passenger vans to be housed in dormitories for what he called “Camp NISOD.” Today, we have moved beyond the dorms, hosting more than 2,500 participants. But many colleges—Louisiana Technical and Community College District, Tarrant County Community College District (TX), Cuyahoga Community College (OH), Iowa Central Community College, Piedmont Community College (NC), South Texas College, Houston Community College (TX), and, of course, our host city’s Austin Community College, to name a few, bring 25+ faculty, staff, and administrators to this learning event. Patricia Donohue, President, Mercer County Community College (NJ), and former president of Luzerne County Community College (PA), said it best: “Faculty learning with others away from the college adds value! Participating at NISOD is important for faculty; it’s not just a perk.”

The heart of the conference is its vast array of presentations. From the four general keynote sessions to the more than 350+ breakout sessions—on topics from leadership and organizational development, developing faculty, student success, diversity, culture of evidence, economic and workforce development, educational technology, teaching and learning, to learning together from others in the field who daily practice their craft—the pulse of this four-day learning event is strong and quick.

During the past 30 years, NISOD has remained true to its conference traditions—hosting the conference

in Austin each May; celebrating at the Monday night Southwestern-Style Buffet and Dance; offering the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center Tour; presenting the NISOD International Leadership Award, recognizing leaders in the field; showcasing the Suanne Davis Roueche Distinguished Lecturer; filling the aisles of the Exhibit Hall with College Showcases (a venue for NISOD-member colleges to promote campus innovation, learn about the best practices of others, meet face-to-face with those who design and develop special programs that promote student success, and build awareness of the college’s employment opportunities); presenting the Amado M. Peña, Jr. Journey of Excellence Award, with which Peña Studios, a NISOD Platinum Partner, recognizes individuals and organizations that have given back to the world of education with their talents and largesse; and recognizing/celebrating the NISOD Excellence Awards recipients—the real stars of this celebration!

Recognition

NISOD began the Excellence Awards program 20 years ago, recognizing more than 15,000 award recipients to date. Each year, NISOD-member colleges submit the names of their exemplary faculty, staff, and administrators to receive the NISOD Excellence Award. Recipients are recognized in the Excellence Awards Booklet, in the kiosks stationed throughout the convention center, and on the big screens before the general sessions. The celebration does not stop at the end of the conference. Many Excellence Awards recipients proudly wear their medallions during special ceremonies on their campuses as their colleges celebrate making a difference in students’ lives.

Each year, the Excellence Awards recipients attend an orientation meeting and put the Excellence Awards medallions around their necks to wear during the conference. The room is full of smiling faces and wonderful stories. When asked about what receiving the award has meant to them, Shirley Gilbert, 2006 Excellence Awards recipient and Special Assistant to the President, at El Paso Community College (TX), and Cliff Jones, 2004 Excellence Awards recipient and Vice-Chancellor for Academics at the University of Arkansas Community College-Batesville, proudly declare that receiving the NISOD Excellence Award is one of their proudest and most cherished accomplishments.

Excellence Awards recipients leave a lasting impression on conference participants with the Excellence Awards video, unveiled during the final session of the conference. Recipients share touching and humorous stories about their educational journeys, their students, and their successes. For example, one teacher begins his video by describing a lecture he gives about Vietnam. After one of these lectures, in which he shares his personal Vietnam experiences and mentions the names of a few of his fallen comrades, a student approached him to share that one of the names he mentioned was her uncle. She always had wondered if anyone remembered him!

Some of the video clips leave you wiping away a tear; others leave you laughing. For example, one teacher describes taking her students on trips, trying to enhance their learning, moving beyond textbooks and lectures to experiential learning. She is standing alongside a 15-passenger van, loaded with her students. As she continues to elaborate about experiential learning, the van driver begins beeping his horn, pointing at his watch, wiping his brow—clearly concerned about the time. Then, silly background music commences, the van pulls away from the curb, and the teacher turns and runs after the van, purse and hands flying. Everyone in the audience is left in stitches.

Influencing lives is challenging and rewarding on a daily basis. The NISOD Excellence Awards video reminds everyone why we do what we do. Johnie Sue Hall, from Southern Arkansas University Tech, observed: “The conference and the video remind me why I’m here. Thank you!”

Many colleges have chosen to capture that spirit—the spirit of reminding us why we are here—by using the NISOD Excellence Award video at fall convocations, orientations, and other academic kick-off events. Time and again, member colleges share that the Excellence Awards Video is one of the most valuable resources NISOD provides for their professional development programs.

The Next 30 Years

It has been a privilege to recognize professionals who are making a difference in students’ lives. As we look forward, NISOD cannot and will not lose its laser focus. Never before has the need to invest in faculty been so great. Today, community colleges enroll more than half of all undergraduate students in higher education, and community college enrollments continue to rise. What do these statistics represent to community college faculty? The answer—student diversity! Today’s learners are working part-time and full-time, balancing the demands of their studies, employment, and family. There are more first-generation students attending community colleges than ever. Many of these students have limited knowledge of what is required for succeeding in higher education. And today, community colleges educate more students in remedial courses than any other postsecondary institution.

During this time of increased student diversity, faculty members are being charged and tasked with engaging all learners. Investing in faculty to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge base to teach, mentor, and engage students is critical. Student success is essential, not only for students’ personal goals, but for our society, nation, and the global economy.

We touched on the 3 R’s that drive NISOD’s mission. But we would be remiss if we did not mention that we have 4 R’s that have led to NISOD’s success—Relationships, Resources, Recognition, and the Roueches. This

organization—which has affected so many community college professionals and, ultimately, the educational experiences of thousands of students—would not be possible had it not been for the vision of Drs. John and Suanne Roueche, the proud parents of this organization who have watched their vision grow and develop into the first-class organization that it is today.

Thirty years ago, three trailblazing leaders, sitting together over breakfast, drafted the NISOD concept on a napkin—never anticipating the footprint that conversation would have on the world of higher education. As we think about the next 30 years, we know our methods of delivery will change with technology and innovative strategies for reaching our member colleges. Our mission of serving, engaging, and inspiring will remain the same. We thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to working with you to make a difference in students’ lives.

About the Authors

Evelyn N. Waiwaiole is the Suanne Davis Roueche Director of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) and Lecturer in the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.

Coral Noonan-Terry serves as Associate Director and Conference Coordinator for the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) and is a Lecturer in the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.

Published October 2008