Summer Greetings, WASFAA!

I hope that you have been able to spend some restful moments with family and friends, in whatever way 2020 permits. This past holiday weekend, I took the opportunity to watch Hamilton for the first time. Without spoiling anything for those who have not seen it – or diminishing it for those who have – all vocal and dance performances aside, the founding fathers are portrayed as fallible men, often with moral shortcomings and dubious motivations, faced with an uncertain future and with no precedent for how to establish a new nation.

Fast forward to today, our country is again in a place that is unrecognizable. Most states in our western region, including my own, are facing an increase in COVID-19 cases. Some are moving forward with plans to reopen their businesses and institutions, while others are halting or rolling back. Meanwhile, protestors and activists continue to bring attention to the systemic discrimination that Americans of color continue to face 56 years after the Civil Rights Act was signed on July 2, 1964, and 157 years after the last remaining enslaved people in the United States were emancipated, as marked by last month’s Juneteenth celebrations.

One of the communities in the country that has suffered disproportionately from the pandemic lies partially within the WASFAA region. The Navajo Nation, which spans over 27,000 square miles in portions of Arizona, Utah and New Mexico, is home to nearly 175,000 people, yet has grieved the death of almost 400 people as of the beginning of the month. Meanwhile, a fireworks display unapologetically exploded over the sacred land of the Lakota Sioux this July 4th, drowning out the voices of Native Americans demanding justice for transgressions past and present.
Like the founding fathers in Hamilton, we are also figuring this out as we go, without precedent, relying on leadership to guide us and our colleagues and teammates to support us. As I mentioned in last month’s newsletter, I believe one of the most valuable benefits I receive from my participation with WASFAA is the ability to form relationships and learn from other professionals throughout the country.

During last month’s free-to-members Campfire Series, presented by the Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute, participants had a chance to get a virtual taste of the full in-person SDBSI experience. “Leading Through Crisis for Financial Aid Administrators,” led by Dr. Audrey Reille, focused on the unique challenges leaders face during times of uncertainty and rapid change, and how we can shift our mindsets in order to successfully navigate in these conditions. Thanks to the panelists who shared their own experiences: Kelley Christianson, Boise State University; Brian Dixon, Washington State University; and Corinne Soltis, South Seattle College. During the session, members also learned about the launch of the Rebekah Hoppel Salcedo Leadership Development Program, which you can read about in this issue of the newsletter.

The following week, Dr. Jacquie Carroll presented on the topic of “Helping Yourself to Help Others,” focusing on how we must help ourselves first in order to help our colleagues and our students. Participants broke out into smaller groups to share the challenges they and their students are facing, including special circumstances that could be more common during these times. After reviewing some fundamental counseling and coaching principles, participants rejoined small groups to practice guiding students through various scenarios they may encounter.

Members can access recordings and handouts from both Campfire sessions at https://www.viethconsulting.com/members/secure/filearchive/filelist.php?fac=5667. We look forward to bringing you additional topics this summer and fall. Until then, please enjoy a safe and healthy summer.

If you would like to contribute to the Navajo Nation COVID-19 Relief Fund, please go to https://www.nndoh.org/donate.html.