Greetings from the Grand Canyon State of Arizona,

As some of you may have already become aware, the AASFAA community recently received some devastating news. Our AASFAA president, Rebekah Salcedo, passed away suddenly, following the 2019 AASFAA Spring Conference in Tucson. Rebekah was an amazing president. Since her first volunteer experience with AASFAA as part of the 2008 Decorations Subcommittee, Rebekah’s achievements, both professional and personal, are too numerous to list. Among the most notable, however, are those she accomplished just this past year as president. With the help of the AASFAA executive board and committee members, she successfully set up multiple drive-in trainings at different locations throughout Arizona. She established a partnership with WASFAA to include a recent pre-conference session regarding SAP. Rebekah also helped forge valuable partnerships with various volunteer organizations, to help a diverse demographic of students be able to attend school. Her legacy continues, as AASFAA is currently in the process of establishing a volunteer committee to help with similar projects around the state.

Rebekah’s leadership shone as she assisted in setting up one of AASFAA’s most successful conferences in the month of February. We were able to partner with Scholarships A-Z and donate a $500 scholarship for DACA students who need funds to attend school. We also had a very successful out-reach campaign with our Native American partners to incorporate training and student assistance with Tribal Funding access and institutional admissions requirements.

A huge advocate of education for all, Rebekah worked tirelessly to ensure that any student, regardless of their demographic, was provided the access to education and the help they needed to pursue their higher education goals. We hope to pass her passion forward in the years to come and be as successful as she was in getting the community together on important education topics. Let us all remember Rebekah fondly, for her contribution to the AASFAA community, and for her collaborative spirit, which shall serve as a touchstone for all of us.

Aside from Rebekah’s passing, AASFAA looks forward to other board transitions that will be happening in June. We are also excited to be the host for this year’s annual WASFAA conference and hope to see everyone there.

Rebekah was a fierce advocate for students and an innovative leader in financial aid. She was a constant friend to many of us, and will be deeply missed.

Rebekah’s obituary is viewable here.

In lieu of flowers, please make donations to the University of Arizona Memorial Scholarship Fund in Rebekah’s name.
I knew Rebekah for only 12 short months, but I will remember her for the rest of my life. Even though it is emotionally difficult, out of respect for her memory, I will try to reflect on the reasons why.

I first met Rebekah at a WASFAA Transition meeting in February of 2018 in San Diego, CA. She was there to represent the state of Arizona in her role as the AASFAA President, and I to serve as the Co-Chair of the Leadership Task Force, along with my colleague, Mike Johnson. I was asked to give a presentation to the incoming Executive Council concerning the History of WASFAA, with which Rebekah was immensely intrigued. In the very first conversation I ever had with her, she had a boatload of questions concerning WASFAA’s history and the evolution of the organization’s Executive Council structure. I was immediately drawn to her because of her engaging personality, her obvious intellect, and her interest in WASFAA both past and present. Even though I am old enough to be her father, we bonded fairly quickly, because I shared with her that one of my son-in-laws is a U of A graduate and perhaps the most obnoxious Wildcat athletic fan that anyone could possibly imagine. She was pleased to hear that and began sharing with me her personal pride in U of A, both as an employee and as a student.

In subsequent conversations, I learned that Rebekah began employment at U of A in 2008 as a Financial Aid Counselor. I could sense her pride in the fact that she had worked herself up the ranks to become the Executive Director, while at the same time completing her Ph.D. there in Higher Education. We spoke of her dissertation, which is titled Third Party Scholarships and the Students Who Receive Them: Increasing Opportunity or Perpetuating Inequality? And we talked about the discipline it takes to complete such a program, while at the same time working full-time.

During conversations at future meetings, I got a glimpse of the enormous enthusiasm she had for working with needy and under-represented students through some of the unique programs her office administered including the UA Scholarship Universe and UA Earn to Learn programs.

I also learned of Rebekah’s great enjoyment in working in the community of Tucson with the Junior League. I recall her telling me that she joined the organization in 2012, and later she shared with me in a subsequent conversation that she had already served as the Secretary and then the Nominating Director of the organization.

Rebekah demonstrated to both Mike Johnson and I her great interest in leadership development, most likely piqued from classes she had taken in her Ph.D. program. She was most interested in our thought process for conceptualizing such a program for WASFAA including how we were contemplating the incorporation of both professional and association specific leadership skills, mentorship aspects, training delivery, etc. into the program. We both learned quickly that Rebekah was a very special young lady with a most inquisitive mind.

The Western Region lost a bright and shining star at the young age of 36, one who showed a special compassion for students and demonstrated tremendous potential for leadership positions in the future. I have no doubt that Rebekah would have eventually become a WASFAA President, even possibly a NASFAA Chair, and with the manner in which she was rapidly developing her professional skill set, possibly one day even a college or university president. To me, she showed that much personality, grace, confidence, intellect, work ethic, and potential.

We don’t know why Rebekah was taken from us at such an early age, with so much yet to contribute and accomplish. It doesn’t seem fair. Those of us who are believers try to rationalize her loss this way – that it was in God’s plan – that He has a more meaningful calling for her elsewhere. This requires enormous faith and understanding, which I am still endeavoring to acquire. My thoughts and prayers are with Rebekah’s family and friends, her staff, and with the entire U of A campus community, which I know she touched immensely.

Rest in peace, Rebekah. Knowing you for one short year was such a privilege. So much so that I will never forget you. You touched more people in your brief 36 years than most of us will in a considerably longer lifetime.
REMEMBERING REBEKAH

Reflections from the WASFAA Executive Council

I was deeply saddened to hear of Dr. Rebekah Salcedo’s passing shortly after the AASFAA conference I attended in Tucson. I had just started to get to know Rebekah a little through her WASFAA EC participation this past year, and I was warmed and impressed by her. Rebekah had all the makings of a great financial aid leader: deeply intelligent, insightful, unfailingly professional, passionate about our work for students, kind, warm, friendly, funny, and articulate. I so appreciated the opportunity to watch her preside over her conference in Tucson and to meet her staff, who clearly admired and adored her. I was looking forward to spending more time with her and watching her grow as a leader and mentor in our profession, and all of us on the WASFAA board felt her loss deeply at our February board meeting in Las Vegas. I send my deepest condolences to Rebekah’s family, friends, and colleagues. I will miss her sweetness, her wit, her insights, and her beautiful smile. The financial aid community has lost a great friend and leader.

- Helen Faith, 18/19 Past-President Elect

My first formal introduction to Rebekah was at the WASFAA Executive Council transition meeting in February of last year. We sat next to each other at the pre-dinner cocktail hour and grilled each other on our time in Arizona, mine 10 years prior, and our future goals within our profession. From that moment, I knew Rebekah was an extraordinary person, and began plotting how I could get her involved with WASFAA’s training initiatives. We travelled to DC that same month to attend NASFAA’s leadership conference and made a visit to the Hill together as well. Throughout our year together on the EC, Rebekah was one of the people around the table I knew I could look to for a “knowing glance,” to tell if I was on the right track with what I was saying, and who would speak up to support the views of her constituency.

It wasn’t until I was scheduled to present at this year’s AASFAA conference that we learned that she and I had crossed paths almost 10 years ago, when she was on the committee for her first AASFAA conference, which happened to be my last before relocating to Nevada. The theme was Prom Night, and she fondly recalled all of her work constructing balloon arches. At this year’s conference, Rebekah was there to make sure we had everything we needed for our sessions and joined in at the end for a game of SAPardy. We were even talking about the possibility of holding another joint Arizona/Nevada state conference like the one we remembered from years ago with a wedding theme and the two states were “married.” In some small way, I hope the work we do can live up to Rebekah’s amazing legacy, and she will remain in my heart as an example of true commitment and leadership.

- Anthony Morrone, WASFAA Training Chair & 19/20 President Elect
REMEMBERING REBEKAH

Reflections from the WASFAA Executive Council

In the relatively short time I knew and worked with Rebekah, I got a clear sense of how committed and enthusiastic she was in her approach to financial aid administration. As a result, I think she represented the best possible future of our profession. On her campus, she cared about and worked actively toward creating compliant best practices that met the needs of students while facilitating the complementary work of staff and faculty to make those students successful. In her state and regional financial aid associations, she looked critically and broadly to offer suggestions for how we could best work together to follow our missions and accomplish our goals. I have no doubt that her knowledge, ideas, eloquence, and leadership abilities would have allowed her to make a national impact. While I am sad that she won't be able to do that, I think that the example she set, and the potential she so clearly demonstrated, will continue to be an inspiration to others to further the profession in ways that will optimize students’ access to and choice in higher education.

- Mike Johnson, 18/19 State Presidents Liaison

Back in November, we had an Executive Council meeting in Tempe. Right before this meeting the e-scooter trend had slammed Boise hard. I had a traditional point of view about this new technology and viewed the scooters as motorized litter that took away from the natural beauty of the area. Rebekah went to a bottle shop with me and the plan was to walk back to the hotel. A 20 minute Uber ride convinced us that it was too far to walk. After much effort, Rebekah was able to convince me that scootering back was the way to go. So we downloaded the app and were on our way. It was a magical scooter ride from the bottle shop to the hotel, filled with laughs and joyful hollering. I have enjoyed scooter rides many times after this experience and shared the fun with others. The story presents me with a great lesson about Rebekah. She had the power to not only change your perspective, but to make you enjoy the change. She was filled with youthful exuberance and had a great ability of making an inclusive environment for people from all walks of life. I will miss her company deeply but am so thankful for the time that I got to share with her.

- Daniel Lemus, IASFAA President

I met Rebekah for the first time last year at our 18/19 Executive Council Transition meeting in San Deigo. Directly from that meeting several of us traveled to Washington DC for the NASFAA Leadership and Legislative Expo. During that time I got to know Rebekah and could tell right away her passion for leadership and helping others. When I relocated from Washington to Arizona over this last year, Rebekah was one of the first people to welcome me back to Arizona. She jokingly point out that we were now at rival schools, but said she'd try not to hold that against me, and at the same time asked me how I wanted to get involved with AASFAA. Her innovative thinking, sense of humor, and overall joyful presence will be sorely missed in WASFAA and in Arizona.

- David Downing, 18/19 WASFAA Secretary

- Daniel Lemus, IASFAA President
Rebekah was my boss in some fashion for most of the last ten years. She was always an asset to me as an employee and a friend. She knew what I could do better than I knew myself and that is why I always used her as a reference on any job-related quest. The last ten years of my life would have played out completely different without her. God only knows where I would be now without the influence of her.

She once helped me out with a book I was writing as an editor a few years back, and I always thought she would be able to write the best management book with her talents as a writer and a manager. Since fate has intervened so unfairly, I thought I would write down the lessons that I learned from “The Doctor” as I liked to call her.

Lesson 1- Be humble
I called Rebekah “The Doctor” because she didn’t make anyone else call her Dr. I know how hard she had worked on getting her Ph.D. She did this while working a full-time job at the University. So, I wanted to recognize that, but she never wanted to get respect for something that she did before. The Ph.D. was just one of her many goals.

Lesson 2- Have goals
Having goals is a good way to make sure you are continuing to grow as a person. A good boss has to have something to strive for in life, so they don’t have to live their life through their employees. These goals allowed her to continue to become a better manager.

Lesson 3- Help people grow
Rebekah was always helping the people under her watch grow in their professional life. She even went out of her way to create classes before work (on her own time) to help them grow in their career. It was one of the many ways she always went the extra mile.

Lesson 4- Work hard
Rebekah was always working hard on her many personal and professional projects. She was always striving towards finishing something every time I ever talked to her. But she wasn’t all work.

Lesson 5- Play hard
Rebekah’s non-work-related injuries were epic Arizona legends. I remember the stories of the time she fell into the cactus. Her faithful partner Edgard had to start trying to veto her having a motorcycle because of the way she attacked life. (And she was a little clumsy)

Lesson 6- Be kind
It is very easy for the boss to lose track of the consequences of their decisions. You will hear people say about their work that “it is just business.” Rebekah never thought her job was “just” business; she was more interested in it being a “just business.” She knew that the work she did in financial aid made a huge difference in the student’s lives. She handled her interactions with everyone with the kindness that you would give to your kin. Whether she was talking to a manager, a student working on federal work-study, or a student wondering where their aid was, she was always empathetic to the other person’s plight.

Lesson 7- Be able to help everyone do their job
Rebekah worked her way up through the ranks of Financial Aid. Because of this, she knew how to do the jobs of the people under her management. In fact, in the opening week of school, she would go to the front lines and help bring down the massive queue of students needing help. When I did the statistics on who helped the most people, it was Rebekah who ended up helping the most students on the days that she helped out.
Lesson 8- Keep the people in power in check
Sometimes people in high positions will make promises and sometimes they are slow to deliver. Rebekah would make people who gave promises have the accountability they deserved. When her staff was handcuffed by a person in power, Rebekah was the one to come to the rescue.

Lesson 9- Remember you are a steward for your workers
Rebekah realized that the people under her guidance were people who were trying to accomplish things and had lives outside of their jobs. Rebekah always thought about how she could help the person and that she was responsible for helping that person in their professional life. She was also cognizant of her workers and what stage of life they were in and how she could help them.

Lesson 10-Be an inspiration
Rebekah was the personal equivalent of the city on the hill. She accomplished more in her 36 years than most people do in a lifetime. She was just named one of the 40 under 40 this year by the Chamber of Commerce. She was a much-beloved leader in the Junior League. She was a Ph.D. She was a person that everyone could look at her life and find something to inspire.

That is what I will remember most about the Doctor. She was an inspiration for how I could live a better life and be a better person. I still can’t believe she has left this world, but I will keep the lessons of her leadership throughout my life.

Dr. Rebekah Hoppel Salcedo
1982 – 2019