Greetings from Oregon!

For all of us, 2020 has brought unexpected stress, fear, doubt, and, at times, glimmers of hope and improvement. This seems to be true for us personally, professionally and for our associations, as well.

The Oregon Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (OASFAA) is heeding the call to consider new ways of providing for the professional training and recognition of financial aid administrators and other professionals supporting students through the financial journey of college. While it may not be possible for us to hold a large-scale conference in early 2021 as we planned, our members are rising to the challenge of sharing new ideas for how we can accomplish our mission while all of our typical plans have been turned upside down.

OASFAA has an active Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) committee and we continue to look for ways to include components related to equity, diversity and inclusion in every training that we offer and in some of our Executive Board meetings throughout the year. I’m thankful to our committee co-chairs, Rylan Wall and Hallie Jo Price from Oregon State University for their leadership of this group.

The landscape of Oregon higher education is changing. On the heels of the closure of 125 year old Marylhurst University (2018), the closure of Oregon College of Art and Craft (2019), this spring saw the closure of Portland’s Concordia University after 115 years in operations. It is clearly a tough environment for college survival, especially for smaller, private, liberal-arts institutions. The global pandemic has made predicting enrollment and yield rates trickier than ever and I’m certain that many of our institutions are worried about or are already implementing cuts and some may be faced with drastic decisions like these colleges in Oregon have faced in recent years.

But the work never seems to slow down for financial aid. As we all continued to try to maintain office operations like normal this spring, most of us moved our office staff to fully remote work, had to contend with confounding, slow and contradictory ED guidance (or none at all), dealt with an IRS that says they have 10 million pieces of mail they haven't opened, administer the CARES Grants to students and try to hurry up with those financial aid offers! Since financial aid is critical to the continued operations of most institutions and even more important to the survival of our students, we must continually press to be informed, creative, and a knowledgeable resource to our campuses and students. Necessity is the mother of invention and the disruption we’ve seen to operations has the potential to be turned into great new ideas, collaborations and process improvements (don’t get me wrong – there are plenty of crazy ideas out there too – we’ve all been in those meetings).

Wishing you all good health and calm spirits in an uncertain time.
As I write this, the month of June is half over and the first day of summer is swiftly approaching. Normally this is my favorite time of the year in northern Nevada: the days begin with bright, cool mornings then warm to the 70s or lower 80s with lots of sunshine and breezes throughout the day. It is the perfect time for a.m. workouts, walks at lunch, weekend hikes and cycling, trips to Lake Tahoe and family picnics. Of course, this is northern Nevada, so the weather can turn on a dime, transitioning suddenly from the paradise I just described to unseasonably cold or hot. At present time, the weather is just fine, but instead the very wellbeing of our nation has turned on a dime. Our experiences over the last three months have seemed surreal—yet are far too real—as we live through pandemic and an economic crisis that will continue to affect our home and work lives for years to come. Add to this the civil unrest that has occurred as our country struggles once again to confront the systemic racism that has torn at the hearts and minds of our society, and we have what many are calling the perfect storm.

In the Nevada financial aid community, we are all doing our best to not only weather this perfect storm, but to assist students and our colleagues however we can. For NAFAA, this means the executive board deciding to take our fall conference virtual, possibly in cooperation with other state financial aid organizations in the WASFAA region. The chance to network has always been one of the biggest draws for our small state organization and being together in person will surely be missed. However, we do not feel it would be ethical or realistic to plan a fall in-person conference given the limitations all our members are experiencing in terms of health concerns, travel prohibitions and steep budget cuts. We are hard at work figuring out how to best remain a source of support for our state financial aid community, and there are no easy answers. Yesterday the state presidents from around WASFAA met and we are all encountering similar challenges in our home states. Fortunately, we have each other, as well as the WASFAA organization as a whole, and we will figure out the path forward together.