June is here, although to be honest I only know that because I saw the date on my phone and reflexively flipped the page of my calendar this morning. (It’s a wine calendar from the dollar store, and this month’s varietal pun reads, “Everyone needs a Riesling to be cheerful!”) If this were the June 2020 I had planned on living, I would be at the beautiful campus of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, mingling with more than a hundred financial aid administrators from around the region in attendance at the Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute. A little later in the week, we would be joined by an additional 40 or more volunteers who serve as WASFAA Executive Council members and committee chairs. Together we would learn from one another, share stories, possibly over some Riesling at the graduation reception, and build valuable connections in support of our personal and professional development. Those intangibles represent the real value of our association – the conversations and sharing of knowledge, the relationships that develop over time, broadening our resources and ability to be successful and feel supported in our professions.

Instead, the June 2020 we are actually facing includes no travel, no in-person trainings or meetings, and no opportunities to share a bottle of Riesling with old or new friends. It does include a global pandemic, financial insecurity for many, and social unrest across our country. However, it also still includes a team of volunteers at WASFAA who are working right now to create new ways for us to share knowledge and build valuable connections within our membership. During the WASFAA Wednesday broadcasts over the past two months, we discussed themes like resetting, pivoting, and engagement. WASFAA is in the midst of a reset, as we will not be able to accomplish our mission this year unless we pivot and explore different ways to engage one another. We see this as an opportunity to refine our efforts and provide timely and relevant content along with meaningful opportunities to interact.
Later this month, the WASFAA Sister Dale Brown Summer Institute will sponsor a series of free-to-members virtual events focusing on several timely issues, with offerings for beginner, intermediate and advanced audiences. Some topics we will discuss include customer service in the time of pandemic, special circumstances appeals and their impact on office operations and staff, and providing leadership in times of crisis. While nothing can hold a candle to the experience of the full-week event, we hope to kindle a spark of the Summer Institute campfire discussions at these sessions. We would love to hear what you think and what topics you would like the opportunity to explore with your colleagues in upcoming offerings we will produce this year. Please email me at president@wasfaa.org and let me know how WASFAA can support you and those you help. Hope to see you around the virtual campfire!