



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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NISOD'S MIDDLE NAME—STAFF!

Few professional development opportunities are as lauded by faculty and administrators alike more than the annual International Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence, affectionately known by all as NISOD. Entire leadership teams attend as part of their annual retreat. Departments and department chairs attend together to build upon the new ideas offered at the conference. Faculty find abundant learning innovations and learn first-hand how to implement innovations.

While you were in Austin attending the NISOD conference and coming up with all sorts of new and creative ideas to improve the learning process at your college, did you ever ask yourself these questions:

- Who will provide support for these innovations next year?
- Who filled out your travel request and made your reservations?
- Who verified the budget to determine if you had enough funds?
- Who helped make your overheads, programmed your laptop, or gathered data for your outstanding presentation?
- Who kept things rolling in your absence?

Did the word “staff” come to mind in answering these questions? If we pause and look around us at the people who make us look good, we will find the folks who register, assess, and often advise our students; those who facilitate financial aid, tutor, set-up for science lab demonstrations, and generally support student learning; those who write many of our grants, track the funding and accountability, hire and support the grant employees, and type up the study results; and those who maintain and clean our facilities so that the college environment may instill institutional pride and be conducive to student learning.

Developing staff for a learning environment

As surely as faculty are the facilitators of student learning, so also are staff the mentors who assist students in the process. The more staff see themselves as key supporters of student learning and valued members

of the educational team, the more they take pride in contributing to this common goal. If staff members learn to see the difference they make, they will take more ownership in their jobs and the results of their efforts.

Specialized staff certainly have specialized development needs, including software skills, computer innovations, and grant-writing updates. Yet, each one of our staff members contributes, directly and indirectly, to the learning process. Try operating a college in the triple-digit Arizona heat if the HVAC engineer is not an integral part of your team!

Value for staff at NISOD

Staff members who attend the NISOD conference, along with faculty and administrators, develop a sense of ownership and belonging to the same team. At Pima Community College's East Campus, we have brought staff to NISOD for three years with some interesting and wonderful results.

- Staff members get to know the faculty attending, especially those who may be presenting.
- A mutual understanding develops among the attendees, and that enhanced understanding continues to support the entire college team back at campus.
- Faculty come to understand better the quality and dedication of the staff who serve their needs.
- Administrators and faculty learn to appreciate the contribution that each staff member makes to student learning.
- Staff members develop a greater understanding of how important their job and their contributions are and the importance of completing all responsibilities and efforts in a timely and consistent manner.
- Staff members enjoy the same development opportunities as faculty and administrators.

What can we do to include staff and maximize their benefits of attending NISOD?

Most staff members have not attended conferences away from their hometown and do not know what to expect. The following steps have helped our staff enjoy the conference experience and maximize their learning.



- Decide early who will attend. This gives the staff members time to “own” the event and builds excitement.
- If you can afford to take more than one staff member, those with some commonality of jobs may provide mutual support. In 2001, we took two young men from warehouse and audio-visual and two administrative assistants.
- Ask any staff attending a second time to be a mentor for those attending the first time.
- Encourage any faculty or administrators who are presenting to include the attending staff members in the presentation—whether as planners, assistants, or as participants in the interactive portions. This contributes to staff members’ learning and enjoyment of the conference, and integrates them into the educational team.
- Arrange for staff members to stay at the same hotel where everyone else is staying. We make reservations a year in advance to have a block of rooms reserved; then we ask folks to double up so that we can afford to take more.
- Assist the staff members with airline reservations. Try to get everyone on the same flights so that they can car pool and/or take the same shuttle. This is very helpful for people who have never traveled by air nor visited Austin, and it helps build camaraderie.
- Send a memo or email in advance to all attendees from your college, introducing them to the conference and outlining such details as weather, location of hotel, appropriate dress for the conference, and schedule of special events. Be sure to send a copy to the staff members who may not have email. This can help to allay fears and keep the attendees informed.
- Download the preliminary program, and go over the schedule and options for sessions. The program can be very intimidating to staff who are not directly involved with classroom instruction. Help them choose sensible and interesting sessions to attend, and plan to attend some with them.
- Encourage the staff to attend the pre-conference sessions, especially the session offered by John Roueche. Many staff members have not had the opportunity to truly internalize the community college mission, and this presentation about increasing student success clarifies our mission and our goals, and strengthens everyone’s commitment to this unique phenomenon in higher education.
- Encourage staff to attend all general sessions, and *be there with them*, including the Sunday evening recep-

tion and the Monday evening southwestern-style buffet and dance. Many staff have been indoctrinated to believe that receptions are “not for us” and that they do not belong with the big group. At NISOD, everyone belongs!

- Set aside Sunday evening (after NISOD’s opening reception) to take your entire team to dinner. We choose the County Line (restaurant) for excellent Texas barbecue, and we take a plethora of pictures that become part of a subsequent sharing back on campus. This event gives staff the added sense of belonging and gets everyone ready to begin the conference Monday morning.
- Once the conference is in full swing, let your staff members and faculty enjoy the conference and the city on their own. Do not hover! They will be fine and enjoy the entire event.
- Develop some little saying that belongs to the NISOD teams. We use “What happens in Austin, stays in Austin!” It is especially helpful if someone does something silly or clumsy (or worse) and puts us all on the same playing field.
- Invite your staff to participate in any presentations you give back at home to your campus community. It shows that they continue to be an integral part of student learning and that their contributions are appreciated.

Staff can make or break your college. They often lack the power and voice of faculty and administrators, but neither could function without them. Perhaps the single most significant lesson we have learned from NISOD is the importance not of *sending* faculty and staff, but of *taking* them. The time spent with leadership is more important than 100 presentations. NISOD is a world-class team-building experience. Use it for that purpose, and bring the whole team!

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This issue was originally published as a *Celebrations* when the author was President, Pima Community College—East Campus (AZ). The author is now President, Cerro Coso Community College, 3000 College Heights Boulevard, Ridgecrest, CA 93555-7777.
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