Newcomer’s Initiative

Discussion Notes
National NAFSA Conference: Washington, D.C.
May 2008

At an open meeting of the 2008 national conference for NAFSA, approximately 75 individuals from across the US and other places joined to discuss topics relevant to newcomers in the field of education abroad. This was the second annual national meeting to connect new Education Abroad Professionals.

The meeting’s purpose was to continue building a network of new professionals to the field of EA. Membership has been strong in Region IV and the co-chairs hope to grow participation across the US.

BJ Titus and Stacey Tsantir presided over the meeting as the current co-chairs.

Below are the discussion notes from the meeting.

Dru Simmons, co-chair of the mid-career Education Abroad Professional group presented on the mentor/mentee program available to any who is interested. This is a great opportunity to have an additional resource outside of your current office. For more information, visit the website at: http://www.umabroad.umn.edu/educators/newcomers/mentors.html

Michael Nelson presented briefly on the networking opportunities for newcomers especially those with the NAFSA organization. He encouraged the group to stay involved and continue with research in the field. He also reminded about the importance of the Simon bill. Finally he urged anyone looking to get more involved to volunteer.

Stacey and BJ presented an overview of the goals and purpose of the Newcomer’s Initiative. For more resources and information please visit our website at: http://www.umabroad.umn.edu/educators/newcomers/index.html

Peggy Retka presented on the annual meeting from last year. These minutes are available at: http://www.umabroad.umn.edu/educators/newcomers/activities.html

The participants were split into regions to continue dialogue around the questions of:
- Biggest challenge that you face
- Where do you see yourself professionally in five years
- What do you hope to see addressed by this group

After 20 minutes, the small groups reported the following themes:
- Establishing a sense of community among newcomers to the field
- As young professionals, how can we involve faculty
- The challenges of one or two person offices
- Being thrown into the field without significant training or orientation
- How to build a culture of study abroad
• Underrepresented students
• Whether or not to pursue an advanced degree. If yes, what area of study?
• Differences between working for an institution or a 3rd party
• Diversity of experiences
• Increasing state-wide involvement
• Networking, networking, networking!
• Navigating different institutional organizations
• Using Facebook to our advantage
• Professional sustainability in EA (not burning out)
• Building a sense of belonging for study abroad participants

All members are invited to consider a regional open meeting to continue this networking. Contact BJ Titus if attending your region’s conference.

The meeting finished with a call for nominations for the new co-chair. Several were received via email and voting is taking place via the list serv.

The 2009 Annual Open Meeting at NAFSA will focus on:
• How long to stay in the positions
• Smooth transitions from one university to the next or a provider
• Continued discussion on advanced degrees