

Student Employees in the Financial Aid Office: Capitalizing on our Resources ~ *Wisconsin Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators*

In June, 2007 the executive council and committee chairs of the Wisconsin Association for Student Financial Aid Administrators (WASFAA) held a 3 day retreat to assess the current activities of the association and to plan for the upcoming year. During this retreat, the idea was brought forth to invite financial aid work study students to attend a portion of the fall conference. The rationalization behind the idea was that several present had gotten their start as student workers in the financial aid office so it only made sense to promote this among current student workers. And, there was concern that due to the tumult the financial aid industry was experiencing, the profession could experience a decline in the number of new dedicated, hardworking, knowledgeable individuals entering the field. What better way to cultivate new professionals that to capitalize on those who are right within our offices? Those who work with us, beside us, and already know many of our acronyms?

It was decided that for the fall conference, which was scheduled for November 7-9, an invitation would be sent from the WASFAA president to all financial aid offices in the state inviting the offices to send work study students from their offices to attend the second day of the conference. The one-day registration fee would be waived and the fall conference committee would include this program in their conference planning. They had already started working on a “cub track” for new professionals and would recommend the sessions in that track to the work study students.

In October, an invitation (Appendix A) was posted to the WAFAA list serve. The reaction from the membership was very positive, with numerous reply emails to the president of “great idea”. Over the next few weeks, four registrations were submitted to the president and forwarded to the fall conference committee. The work study registrants were contacted by the committee to confirm meal options while also to inquire about any questions they might have.

During the conference welcome session, the membership was reminded that there would be several work study students in attendance the next day and encouraged members to seek these individuals out, enter into dialogue with them, and make them feel welcome. The following day, the students were asked to stand during the president’s remarks and were thanked for what they bring to our profession and for being a part of the conference.

Student attendees included 4 females. Two were undergraduate sophomores, one an undergraduate junior, and the fourth a second year graduate student. Experience in the financial aid office ranged from 4 months to more than 2 years. Three attendees were employed in financial aid offices at technical colleges, although one was a graduate student doing an internship in the financial aid office at the technical college. The fourth attendee was a work study student in the financial aid office of a large four year public institution.

Initially, WASFAA had hoped to have 8-10 work study students in attendance; however for a first time event targeted at a relatively small population, the conference planning committee was pleased with the turnout. Class schedules and extracurricular commitments are two of the primary roadblocks impacting a student's ability to attend

the conference. For some institutions, the transportation cost may also be a deterrent. These are areas that will be examined by the next conference committee assigned with planning the event. Despite these obstacles, email evaluations submitted by the student attendees pointed to positive outcomes. In response to whether or not they would recommend this to other student employees interested in pursuing a career in financial aid, one attendee wrote, "Without a doubt. The sessions that I attended were perfect for someone just starting out. They gave the basic information that any person needs when first entering the financial aid field."

Overall, the project was a success. The executive committee hopes to again offer this opportunity in a future conference, most likely spring 2009 in Madison, WI. With a large number of schools to draw from in the Madison area (and little-to-no travel costs), the association could reach out to a greater number of work study students interested in pursuing a career in financial aid.

Appendix A

Dear WASFAA Colleagues,

Do you have a student working in your financial aid office that has expressed an interest in pursuing a career in financial aid? If so, please read on!

As you know, many financial aid officers, myself included, got their start in financial aid as a work study student in a financial aid office. As such, I firmly believe that WASFAA should capitalize on this opportunity, not only as a way to encourage and educate these work study students, but also as a way to grow and secure the future of our profession. We have the potential to show these students what financial aid is really about - to have them hear the issues that concern us, to experience the expertise and knowledge we share with each other and perhaps most important, to witness the camaraderie among us.

I am pleased to invite WASFAA member institutions who have work study students in their office that may be interested in pursuing a career in financial aid to register those students to attend the fall WASFAA conference on Thursday, November 8, 2007. These work-study students will be encouraged to follow the "cub" track which will take them through some of the basics of financial aid. The one-day registration fee for these individuals will be waived; however any travel costs will be the responsibility of the student or the institution.

If you would like to register one or more of your student employees, please email me directly with the following information:

Student's name

Student's grade level

Number of years the student has worked in the financial aid office

Student's email address

I sincerely hope that you take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to encourage your student employee's growth and passion for the financial aid profession.

Warm Regards,

Sara Beth

WASFAA State President

Conference Feedback Questionnaire

1. Did you find attending the conference beneficial to your knowledge & growth? Please explain.
2. What sessions did you attend?
3. What did you like best about the conference?
4. What did you like least about the conference?
5. What could WASFAA do to make this experience better?
6. If given the opportunity, would you attend another conference?
7. Would you recommend this to other student employees interested in pursuing a career in financial aid?