



Contributors this Issue:

Amanda Cantú
Molly Flesher-Sanderson
Nichole Anderson
Madalynn Swanson
Brittany Tweed
Pam Engebretson
Carol Swenson

Inside this issue:

President's Column	1
Spring Conference is Coming!	2
Outreach Committee	2
Professional Development	3
MAFAA Goes to DC	4
FAFSA Completion Event	5
Business Partner Spotlight	6
Living With Passion	7
Calendar of Events	7

MAFAA Matters

A Newsletter for the Minnesota Association of Financial Aid Administrators

February 2024

President's Message

Amanda Cantú, 2023-24 MAFAA President

My Fellow MAFAA Members,

Well, here we are...February 2024. I can't believe the holidays were just a few weeks ago. I am grateful to have been able to spend time with family to celebrate the holidays and take my mind off work. I hope everyone had a chance to spend the holidays with loved ones as well as had a relaxing and rejuvenating holiday break because we are sure in for a ride this season.

Some of you are in full swing of spring semester, while others are just getting started. We're learning that FAFSA Simplification isn't that simple and now FAFSA data will be delayed longer than any of us anticipated (ok, so maybe some knew it all along). Institutions that would have been sending out award offers in a few days are having to pivot and families continue to be nervous and frustrated with this "simple" process. It certainly is a challenging time for everyone. But remember...we are all in this together.

While we can't make FAFSA Simplification any simpler for our families, we can attempt to make the process a little more bearable for each other. Institutions are working vigorously to prepare for the new changes, but you can't do so alone. We mustn't be afraid to ask questions or look inept and we must give each other grace as we navigate through the complexities of this process together. Use each other as resources and the resources of MAFAA to share ideas and suggestions for what you find to work and what didn't work as well.

Your committee members continue to work hard. Our Outreach Committee is working diligently in pairing up our members with high schools to assist with FAFSA Completion Nights and financial aid presentations. The Professional Development Committee had another successful event at Dakota County Technical College providing training to our non-financial aid colleagues. Your Conference Planning Committee is hard at work planning for the 2024 Spring Conference at Madden's May 8-10 and looks forward to some riveting training. I anticipate many conversations will be had regarding the impact FAFSA Simplification has had on our schools. Executive Council continues to meet monthly to discuss the future of our organization and what it looks like five years from now.

I am thankful to work in a profession where I can rely on colleagues not just from my own institution but from those across the state. Thank you to our members who have volunteered their time to assist with a FAFSA completion event or presented at a training. As we keep saying, our success depends on you and the next generation of leaders. Election session is upon us. If you've considered running for a position, now is your time!

Here's to 2024 and all its excitement!

Got plans for May 8-10? You do now!

Plan to attend MAFAA's Spring Conference

Molly Flesher-Sanderson, Co-Chair Conference Planning

Join us at the MAFAA Spring Conference with your colleagues for this incredible training, learning, and networking event that you simply don't want to miss. This year we are

"Keeping it Simple"

The chosen charity in 2024 is [Ruff Start Rescue](#), and, yes, there will be dogs present! Be sure to bring your a) donation item for the basket raffle b) cash to purchase said donations, and c) good petting hands for those adorable pups!

Whether you want to hear from a panel of fraud experts, commiserate about FAFSA Simplification, or simply play a round of golf in the conference downtime hours, there's something at Madden's for everyone. As the session proposals are compiled and the agenda gets crafted, follow the [MAFAA Event Page](#) for the latest and greatest on the content that will be offered.

Registration will open very soon so keep an eye on your email for the opportunity to register promptly.

See you at beautiful Madden's Resort in scenic up-north Minnesota for an epic conference!

Outreach Committee has New Sign-Up Process for MAFAA Volunteers

Madalynn Swenson, Chair Outreach

MAFAA IT created a new online process for MAFAA volunteers to sign-up to help at High School FAFSA completion events. This new method has been working well for tracking which events have volunteers and which events still need volunteers. As MAFAA members sign up to attend, the Outreach Committee is notified and then the chair sends an email to the high school counselor and shares the info of the person that signed up so they can connect & coordinate details.

As of this January writing, there were 28 upcoming high school sessions and 25 of those were in need of at least one or more volunteer to attend. The Outreach committee has been sending an email to MAFAA Members with the sign-up sheet to MAFAA members every other week.

The *Ready, Set, FAFSA!* event with MOHE took place in January with some MAFAA members assisting. Your volunteer assistance is invaluable for these important events. Thank you!

Professional Development Busy with Events

Nichole Anderson, Professional Development Co-chair

MAFAA is offering an opportunity to earn a **NASFAA Credential in Verification** at no additional charge for MAFAA members! The review will take place via zoom. Lori Auxier, Director of Outreach & Financial Literacy at ECMC, will be presenting the credentials material.

March 18 & 19, 2024 from 9 AM - 12 PM

March 18 - Monday

Introduction

Lesson 1: Introduction to Verification

March 19 - Tuesday

Lesson 2 - Changing Application Data

Lesson 3 - Disbursements, Timeframes, and Policies & Procedures

Questions & Wrap Up

[REGISTER HERE](#) Please include your NASFAA Individual ID when registering so the test can be added to your NASFAA account. You will not be able to take the test if we do not have this information. To find your NASFAA ID: Click on [myNASFAA](#) > Show Dashboard > Individual ID

Zoom Link and class materials will be emailed to registrants. You will have 40 days from the review date to take the test and you'll have two attempts to successfully complete the test.

Professional Development committee sponsored two recent events

A **FAFSA Simplification** webinar was held for the MAFAA community on December 5th. Thank you to Ali Facklam and Kaity Sharp from the University of Minnesota for presenting on this hot topic and to Bao Vue for hosting. The recorded webinar and PowerPoint can be found [here](#).

Attendance was excellent at the Professional Development Committee event, [Financial Aid for Other Professionals](#), held at Dakota County Technical College on Thursday, January 25th. The training is intended to teach basic elements of financial aid to other professionals within our institutions so they are more familiar with financial aid as a whole. The great array of topics included Minnesota Financial Aid, Federal Loans & Grants, Cost of Attendance, Impact of Withdrawals and Academic Performance, 2024-2025 FAFSA Expectations & Top 10 Changes, and FAFSA Resources.

A huge shoutout to the presenters Shawn Reynolds, Michael Crider, Pam Engebretson, Amanda Cantú, and Molly Flesher-Sanderson for providing their expertise on the variety of topics.

Thanks to the members of the Professional Development committee, Nichole Andersen, Bao Vue, and Olivia Hodge for organizing this event. The committee is also appreciative of Dakota County Technical College for setting up and loaning MAFAA the meeting space.



Professional Development Committee: Nichole Andersen, Bao Vue, Jennifer Williams, Olivia Hodge, Jenny Truebenbach, and Monica Ehalt.

MAFAA Goes to Washington DC for NASFAA

By Brittany Tweed, Pam Engebretson, Carol Swenson

Representatives from MAFAA attended NASFAA's Leadership and Legislative Conference February 4-7, 2024, in Washington, DC. The attendees representing Minnesota were Brittany Tweed (Metro State), Pam Engebretson (Century College), Danielle Hayden (Carleton College), Scott Andrews (Lake Superior College), and Carol Swenson (Ascendium Education). There was a variety of informative general sessions including the opportunity to hear from Federal Student Aid representatives on FAFSA simplification implementation challenges. A unique experience occurred when Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona (pictured) spoke to the entire group and introduced his FAFSA College Support Strategy. While there was a respectful vibe in the room when Secretary Cardona addressed us, the Financial Aid Professionals were left feeling that many more details were needed to determine how effectively this strategy could help them.



Pam, Carol and Brittany in DC



Secretary Cardona

One session from the Strategic Enrollment Management Pathway was instruction on how to more effectively use AI in day-to-day work. Brittany said, "For me, this session sparked inspiration and opened up another realm of possibilities in time saving techniques for things as simple as email drafting and calendar management."

As MAFAA's incoming President, Pam had the opportunity to attend the Association Leadership Pathway of the conference. Pam shared, "It was an outstanding conference that caused state and regional leaders to think about what their organization is known for, what does your organization do best, what should your association continue to do, what can your members do better going forward and is there anything the association should stop doing. State/Regional leaders discussed how important it is to the long-term financial health of the organization that budgets get carefully reviewed and expenditures do not exceed revenue...meaning we need to stop dipping into our limited reserves and save our reserves for extraordinary purposes."

Other opportunities that the Association Leadership track afforded were to network with peers in similar roles within State/Regional associations and to encourage participants to generate ideas to identify what their organization is known for to help kick off their year leading the association.

What does Pam want to implement for 2024-25 you ask? Pam reports, "Your Executive Council will definitely be implementing what is called 'consent' agendas so reports will be submitted prior to the board meetings, Executive Council members will review reports before the meeting and the meeting discussions will be topics that need to be discussed, not just 'for your information.' We will be carefully looking at our training events and determine how we can best afford to continue the professional development opportunities for our association members. I am very interested in learning what our members get from MAFAA and your \$75 MAFAA dues, what do they want from this association, and I wonder why some financial aid professionals are not MAFAA members. We need to get more members involved in the work our association does so expect to hear more about that in the near future."



~continued~

NASFAA Leadership, continued

During time set aside for DC hill visits, Pam and Brittany spent time with Chris Mirabella, a staffer with Senator Tina Smith's office discussing the need for the federal government to level fund Pell grants and retain FSEOG and FWS funds to schools to best support our students. They also discussed the impact that additional ISIR delays would have on all students but particularly to students who most need financial aid information to be able to determine enrolling in courses.

Pam had the opportunity to meet with Senator Amy Klobuchar on Thursday at her Minnesota Morning event to talk about higher education funding, and even venture outside of FAFSA woes to chat about farm bills.

Overall, we had many key takeaways. We walked away feeling that the most important lessons gleaned were from other aid administrators' experiences, sharing knowledge, cultivating work-friendships, and the conversations at worktables about aid implementation or training offerings on the association end.

Attending the NASFAA Leadership & Legislative Conference was a top notch professional experience.



Senator Klobuchar and Pam Engebretson

FAFSA Completion Event

Amanda Cantú, MAFAA President

FAFSA season is officially upon us. Students and families are in full swing of navigating the new changes to the FAFSA form. While there have been some setbacks and challenges, students and their families are unwavering in this process. However, they need our help more than ever. With the help of MN Goes to College, MAFAA's Outreach Committee and IT team have worked to improve the FAFSA volunteer process to streamline the partnership between high schools and MAFAA.

MAFAA has had over 30 requests from high schools seeking assistance from financial aid professionals to help their students complete their FAFSAs and the number of requests for FAFSA completion assistance continues to grow.

This photo from the January event is at the Hmong College Prep Academy with volunteers from St. Kate's, St. Benedict and St. John's, St. Thomas, St. Paul College, and The College Place.



Families are eager to complete the FAFSA but with arising issues in completing the form, seek our guidance to help troubleshoot and provide reassurance that they are accurately completing their forms. While some FAFSA errors cannot be troubleshooted at that moment, families have been very appreciative of the time MAFAA has taken to assist them and feel a small sense of relief that they are not the only ones experiencing issues. Even so, the process has been slightly nerve-wracking, to say the least, but families are understanding that we're all experiencing the new FAFSA together.

Thank you to all the volunteers who have assisted our students. It can feel counterproductive to assist families given the current FAFSA issues, nevertheless, your presence at FAFSA completion events has been valuable and appreciated.



SPOTLIGHT: Meet Your Business Partners

LISA ALBERS Director, Business Development, Monogram



My journey into student lending: It started way back in 1991. I began working as a student loan assistant with Bank One (now JPMorgan) in the call center helping answer student loan questions. Now 30+ years later in the student loan industry, with the last 13 at Monogram (formerly Cognition Financial), I continue working with schools and families to find private loan solutions.



Family: I have been married to my husband, Jim, for 31 years and we have one beautiful daughter, Ashlyn, who is a junior this year at UW-Madison. We also have one dog, Piper, who is a spirited 3-year-old lab. People often confuse her name with Hyper (and boy does that name fit!).

Best place to travel: The beaches on the Gulf of Florida!

Favorite Memory: Summers spent at our cabin in Northern Wisconsin. Nothing beats being on a lake, boating, swimming and relaxing lakeside with family and friends. We loved it so much, we moved up there 6 months ago! I am not through my first winter, so check back with me on if I still love it!

HEATHER GAUMER Director, Region Head - Midwest, Sallie Mae



My Financial Aid journey: I've been working in the admissions and financial aid fields for 18 years. My very first job out of college was an admissions counselor. I loved it but was so fascinated by financial aid and wanted to understand it better. One year later, I was working for a lender running their financial literacy program and learning everything I could. I took my first true financial aid job as loan coordinator at my alma mater in 2010. I ended up at another school as director of admissions four years later and have been with Sallie Mae for almost seven years. I love how financial aid, admissions and college planning are all so important and impactful. I have the privilege of working with schools in Minnesota, North Dakota, Iowa and Missouri.

Family: I'm married to my high school sweetheart, Doug, and we have an almost three-year-old son, Forrest.

Who do you look up to: The AVP of financial and admissions at my alma mater, Tracie Pavon. She taught me so much and always gave me opportunities to learn new things and grow professionally with association involvement. Most of all, she taught me the importance of always doing what's right for students within the bounds of regs and policies. If I couldn't solve an aid issue, she'd have me look for the answer in all the available resources and formulate the answer myself. When I'd bring it to her, she'd take the time to help me understand why I was right or wrong. For example, did the regulation say "the school may" or "the school must." She is a great mentor and a true advocate for students and the profession!

A favorite memory: My husband (boyfriend at the time) proposed to me during a canoe trip up in the Boundary Waters. Spoiler – I said yes! But then I yelled at him for taking my engagement ring on a canoe trip that required us to portage multiple times. He said he was terrified he'd lose it in the water, too. We still laugh about it!

Favorite Travel Destination: We recently took a quick trip to Oregon and Washington. We hit up the national and state parks for hikes, swam in the ocean, and found some great breweries. The highlight was seeing the house and iconic rock from the movie The Goonies. I could retire there for sure!



MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS

MAFAA Matters is published online four times per year. Submission deadline for the next issue will be in **May**. Please email contributions to MAFAA Matters Editor, Carol Swenson
cswenson@ascendiumeducation.org

MAFAA's Statement of Purpose

The Minnesota Association of Financial Aid Administrators (MAFAA) is an association of professionals committed to the principle that no one should be denied access to higher education for financial reasons. MAFAA is dedicated to working with students, educators, policy makers, and others to ensure that adequate programs of financial assistance are available to every student attending a Minnesota institution of higher education.

Living With Passion

Kris Parker has departed Student Financial Aid and moved to the Music Department at Carleton College. Her email and work phone are still the same.

Karen Samstad is retiring from Northwestern Health Sciences University after an amazing 44 years in financial aid. She will now be able to spend more time with her four grandkids. Congratulations, Karen!

Jacquelynn Mol Sletten has accepted the position as the Assistant Manager in the Office of Higher Education Grants and Workforce Initiatives division. Jacquelynn has served at OHE since 2016 as a State Program Administrator Principal administering financial aid and competitive grant programs.

MAFAA 2024 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FEB 16	Executive Council Meeting	Virtual via Teams
MAR 8	Executive Council Meeting	Virtual via Teams
MAR 18 & 19	NASFAA Credential: Verification	Virtual via Zoom
APR 12	Executive Council Meeting	Virtual via Teams
MAY 7	Executive Council Meeting	Madden's Resort
MAY 8-10	MAFAA Spring Conference	Madden's Resort
MAY 8	NASFAA Credential: P J	Madden's Resort
JUN 16-19	NASFAA Conference	Milwaukee WI

— Live with Passion —