

NAFSA Region I Travel Grant Article: Sara Alstrom

A new professional in the field of International Education: Region I Conference

The quiet serenity of Boise Idaho was a beautiful backdrop for a conference full of passionate discussions, regulation updates and the coming together of friends and colleagues. As a new professional in the International Education field, it was an opportunity to meet the faces behind the e-mails and take advantage of the vast human capital Region I has to offer. Not to mention, it helped to replenish my repertoire of DSO memes and DHS puns, which is always a plus.

One of the best aspects of the conference was the people. I know networking is always an area of focus when discussing attending a conference or training, and the networking at the Region I Conference was very well facilitated and quite useful in cultivating professional contacts. In addition, with networking aside, the people themselves were incredibly welcoming. It was my first time attending a Regional NAFSA conference, and the individuals I met were fun, personable, and made the experience one filled with laughter. I met colleagues with a wide range of personal and professional experiences, and with such an open atmosphere, we were able to have deep discussions about our work, how we see it evolving, and the differing perspectives we bring to our students and institutions. After the conference, not only did I leave with many more resources with a vast range of knowledge, but I also left feeling comfortable sending an e-mail through the ice of professional correspondence in order to get into the nitty gritty of an issue.

In addition to the people, the breadth of information offered at the conference was very comprehensive. My area of primary responsibility is in international credential evaluations. The sessions on Anglo-African Secondary systems, Understanding Chinese Credentials, and the Education system in Vietnam were especially helpful for me, especially with professionals from three credential evaluation agencies represented: AACRAO, ECE and FIS. Other presentations ranged from Consular Corner: Visas and Travel, with an immigration attorney as a presenter, to Finding your place in NAFSA leadership. All the presentations I attended were well researched and put together, and the presenters were knowledgeable and made themselves available for further discussion.

The conferences was not only packed full of information and opportunities to expand resources and knowledge, but it was also a lot of fun. There was a Restaurant Hop, a Pub Crawl, a visit to the Basque Museum, and you cannot forget about the Gala Auction with the Basque Dancers. There were opportunities to expand your personal and professional potential in the sessions like "Leadership Tips for International Educators: Refining your Leadership Skills", followed by lively discussions comparing stories about crazy student cases. You could not help leaving the conference, a little exhausted yes, but more importantly, rejuvenated in the work that we all do.

This conferences was an amazing experience and opportunity for a young professional. I left with excellent contacts, more information than I could possible take in in such a short time, and a sense that International Education in Region I is in incredibly capable hands. I cannot wait for next year.