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My experience at the NAFSA Region I Conference

First of all, I would like to thank the NAFSA Region I for giving me the opportunity to receive a travel grants to attend the conference. As a new professional in the field, this conference enabled me to deepen my knowledge in international education and to learn from fellow professionals in the field.

I mostly benefited from the pre-conference workshop for F-1 Student Advising: Intermediate to broaden my knowledge in immigration regulations and practices. The trainers in the workshop guided us to interpret the various immigration regulations along with a range of case studies that examined unclear, or “gray” areas of F-1 immigration situations. Not only did they navigate us through very complex realm of the immigration regulations, but they also provided us with different practices in accordance with the different institutional/office policies. It made me realize that sometimes there is no one definite answer for one situation, and it can be approached by different interpretations of immigration regulations. It also gave me an important insight into the current institutional policies. Overall, this workshop trained me to be a more self-efficient, knowledgeable, and confident advisor when advising students, especially in situations where regulations and guidance do not give a clear answer to situations.

Among the sessions that I attended, I found “Increasing Mental Health Awareness among International Students” very helpful as I advise students who come to the United States for the first time. Two of the presenters were international students themselves and shared their personal experiences, which reminded us of how small daily routines in every day life could be the cause of stress and imbalance in mental health. They also gave good practices on how to reduce stigma international students hold due to their cultural backgrounds and beliefs. In small group discussion, we shared types of resources on campus as well as ideas and practices on combating mental health issues. I found some of them were very creative and worth sharing with my office. Weeks after attending the conference, I encountered several situations with students where I realized the importance of mental health awareness and utilized the knowledge and techniques to assist those students with appropriate resources on campus. With the knowledges and techniques that I gained from this session, I would like to continue developing my counseling skills so that I can better serve our students.

This conference also enabled me to connect with a number of professionals in the field, who shared valuable information and gave guidance on various topics. The sessions like F-1 Advisor-to-Advisor Roundtable and Intensive English Program Advisors Roundtable were great opportunities for me to share current trends in the field and exchange practices with other institutions. IEP advisors at other institutions who were willing to share forms and letters they use at their offices for their sponsored students; I shared those within my office to improve our practices. Meeting with those professionals truly expanded my professional networks and created valuable mentor-mentee relationships.

With experience and knowledge gained from NAFSA conference, I would like to continue developing ideas for a presentation proposal in the future so that I can give back to the community. I would also like to actively seek volunteer opportunities to better support the organization, which would ultimately serve our international student populations.