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A Letter from the President April 2020

*NOSS exists to assist education professionals
in making a positive difference in the lives of students.*

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but so much has happened since then that it seems as if it was months ago. I hope that this message finds you well. As you are transitioning to this new world, NOSS wants to assure you that we are here to support you and are working on your behalf to strengthen and move the organization forward.

Conference Recap

The conference in Nashville was indeed a good one – even with a tornado and pandemic. I am so thankful you all attended. It was the largest conference we have had in three years, with over 700 people in attendance, with 56% percent of them first-time attendees. In fact, many of the first-time attendees said that they came to the conference because of the name change, and additionally said they thought the conference was excellent. **Here are some highlights of the conference:**

Key Note Speakers – 92% of you thought they were **EXCELLENT!**

Conference Sessions – 90% of you thought conference sessions were **GREAT!**

Registration Process – 95% of you thought that registration was **EXCEPTIONAL!**

**Thank you to our conference team, presenters and
Dr. Windrow and Dr. Bloom**

Most importantly – the comradery was amazing and a much-needed respite!

As it is with all conferences, there are things where we can improve. One of those things provides a better space for the Poster Sessions – we hear you and will work on it for next year. Secondly, there were many comments regarding the hotel – location, costs, size, etc.... To explain a bit, in 2016, the NOSS organization signed a 3-year contract with the Marriott Hotels. This was the third year of that contract. Next year, in Las Vegas, you will find that the hotel is a bit smaller and MUCH MORE AFFORDABLE! The cost of next year's hotel room is \$143 per night.

Moving Forward

We are now officially in our second year as the National Organization for Student Success. This past year was spent working on rebranding and changing the organization. Now, though, it is time to take our next step. As such, the NOSS board has been working on a strategic plan, and during Leadership Congress, we rolled it out with our Chapter Leaders, Committee Chairs, and Network Chairs. We worked with them to add details to our strategic plan, and over the next few months, we will flush out those details to create initiatives for the organization.

NOSS's strategic goals are to:

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- [Expand Professional Development](#)
- [Evaluate Operations and Structure](#)

One of our first objectives is to create an advisory task force that will help us develop our plan – stay tuned as we work on these goals.

[Updates: Committees](#)

As we move forward and as part of the evaluation of operations and structure, the NOSS board working with the Committee Chairs have changed some of the NOSS committees to Networks. NOSS defines a committee as a group established to meet a specific need and is limited in time. The committees NOSS have are on-going and inclusive of NOSS members. The changes we have made are below:

The Cultural Diversity Committee is now the [Equity, Access, and Inclusion Network](#) led by Emily Suh

The Research Committee is now the [Research Network](#) led by Alex Goudas

Please go into your NOSS membership to add these new Networks to your profile so you may get their information and communication.

Additionally, NOSS had a few committees made of one member and with one specific charge. As such, the following changes were made:

The Awards Committee disbanded, and [Tammy Bishop](#) will now be the [Awards Coordinator](#).

The Marketing Committee disbanded, and [Jennifer Hulehan](#) will now be the [Media Specialist](#).

The International Committee disbanded, and [Lara Rosenberger](#) will now be the [International Liaison](#).

This year promises to be another year in which NOSS builds on our history and plans for the future. We invite you on this journey and solicit your opinion. A survey will be coming asking what types of professional development you want NOSS to offer. Keep an eye out for that communication.

As I conclude this newsletter, I want to share with you an essay written by Jeni Ussery, chair of the Literacy Network. In this ever-changing environment, we need every ounce of support, ideas, and positivity we can get. **Enjoy.**

[You're Syllabus – Moving into the Future by Jeni Ussery](#)

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At this year's NOSS meeting in March (as I write this, only a month ago, BUT WHAT A MONTH IT HAS BEEN!) the Equity, Access, and Inclusion Network (formerly the Cultural Diversity Committee) sponsored a conference session in which we discussed various ways in which equity could or should inform our practice. My section of the presentation focused on equity in assessment, on my personal journey of growth in how I perceived and implemented equitable classroom and course assessments, and in facilitating an exercise in which I asked participants to critique an anonymous syllabus in terms of how it might disenfranchise various communities of learners (spoiler alert: it was my syllabus from my first semester of teaching and it was pretty terrible).

Little did I know that a week later, we would all be reconsidering our own syllabi as colleges and universities around the country rapidly moved most instruction online to cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 virus. The sudden and dramatic move to online instruction is not my topic here today: excellent articles have already been published and widely dispersed over the past month by wiser souls than I regarding the ways in which we should move to emergency online teaching.

But when the adjustment has been made and we start to move out of emergency mode with regards to our teaching, our students' learning, and maybe even the world, how can we learn from this experience? How can the changes we have made in response to a global pandemic highlight the ways in which we might better serve students? How can the extraordinary flexibility we have demonstrated be leveraged in our future courses? In what ways might this abrupt and unasked for interruption in our practice help reveal the ways in which we were stuck in old routines which no longer served us or our students?

Most of us have heard stories from our students at this point about what their lives are like right now. They've lost a job. They're at home with younger siblings and are expected to keep them safe. They are being asked to work double shifts. They must make their own facemasks. They are suddenly homeschooling their children. They are out of toilet paper. They went home for Spring Break on March 6 and now can't get back. They are cut off from seeing their extended social network. They do not have the technology they need to transition to online learning. Their family member has become ill and needs care.

In response to these needs, many of us have made changes to assignments, our parameters for demonstrating success, and our requirements for engagement in the course. We've tested countless iterations of conferencing software, trying to find the best fit for our students and the needs of our class. We've slashed assignments, focusing with laser precision on the best ways for students to demonstrate competency in our course objectives. We've given extensions, gone asynchronous, learned how to create captions, and created veritable Rube-Goldberg machines that allow us to show a PowerPoint, our faces, and us drawing on a legal pad to our students at

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students now. We have allowed modifications for assignments—a reflection paper has become a reflection video; a capstone project on local history has become a crowd-sourced student blog on daily life during COVID-19; and internships, work experiences, and other service-learning opportunities are being reinvented at every turn.

We are all bound in a common purpose to help our students find success. We may have differing beliefs about what best serves our students at this time (I have seen, among my colleagues near and far, a lively and spirited debate about synchronous versus asynchronous classes) and we may have constraints upon us which we do not control (the particular technologies that are licensed or used by our institutions, for example). But as we are making the choices we do have available to us, we are actively considering our students and their stories—the student who doesn't have a computer at home and is trying to finish the class on her mobile phone; the student who works in healthcare and is finishing a double shift to come home to try to finish an essay for his English class; the student whose grandfather has suddenly fallen ill. These situations are not unique to this time, but they take on a new poignancy in a time of global pandemic. I have heard from many of my colleagues around the country about the extraordinary grace that they are extending to students at this time for circumstances beyond their control. What I ask is that we remember this: our new perspective on the lives of our students, our flexibility in meeting their needs, our capacity for grace—I ask that we remember all of this as we are planning our courses for the future. These situations are not unique to this time, and I hope that our extraordinary work to meet our students' needs in the spring of 2020 turns out not to be extraordinary at all.

As you look at your syllabus moving into the future, I hope that you question it critically and then recognize where you already shine. I hope that you dig into a critique of your own practice as diligently as the participants in our conference panel dug into my terrible syllabus, then acknowledge the growth that this critique represents. I hope you consider how each piece of your course serves the broadest possible contingent of students. I hope that you write and rewrite and rewrite your assessment schema, considering carefully the student populations for whom that schema will be helpful and for whom it might be disenfranchising. I hope, most of all, that you do all of this with your students, our students, all students, in mind. We have, in the midst of this epidemic, the opportunity to do real, lasting, and meaningful work to provide a more equitable educational experience for our students.

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