

## Fall Conference Preview



When I talk about education, I have a phrase I like to use: *the big work*. The Iowa Organization for Student Success is focused on uniting educators around the state who do the big work. From advisors to tutors to instructors to

administrators, IOSS members seize opportunities to help students find their purpose, to offer support when they struggle, to give them the tools they need to succeed, and to change lives.

The work has only gotten bigger these last sixteen months. And the need to connect with one another, to share our struggles and our successes, to learn the best of what each of us does and to take those strategies back to our own institutions, has only gotten more important. With this in mind, I am pleased to invite you to the 2021 IOSS Conference. Make plans to be with us on Thursday, November 4, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., for rewarding conversation, insightful collaboration, and groundbreaking ideas. The conference is once again virtual to allow as many educators as possible to participate, and sessions will be recorded for later viewing by registered attendees.

The theme this year is **Making Mindful Connections**, which couldn't be more appropriate after the last year and a half. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Sarah Montgomery of the University of Northern Iowa, will deliver her presentation, "Connection and Care: Mindfulness for Resilience in Higher Education," and will lead a follow-up session as well.

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The conference will also feature an update from the Iowa Department of Education, breakout sessions, roundtable discussions, door prizes, and our annual business meeting with election of officers. And, for the first time ever, IOSS will be honoring a deserving educator with our 2021 Award for Outstanding Service to Students. If you've never attended before, this year promises to be one of our best! Conference registration is only \$46.60 and covers your annual membership in IOSS. You can register on our [event page via The NOSS](#).

Please help spread the word about our 2021 conference at your institutions. With our broad focus on student success, all higher education employees are invited to join our organization and contribute to the 2021 conference. We are still accepting session proposals for presentations and roundtables on any strategy or resource (individual or institutional) that impacts student success. You know, *the big work*! Use our [Proposal Form](#) to submit your session proposal for consideration.

We hope to see you November 4<sup>th</sup>!

*Justin Robertson, IOSS President*



## IOSS Conference Keynote Speaker

**Sarah Montgomery, Ph.D.**, is a Professor of Curriculum & Instruction and serves as Administrative Fellow for

Faculty Development in the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at the University of Northern Iowa. Sarah is a Certified Mindfulness Educator who has been teaching mindfulness practices in her undergraduate and graduate courses at UNI. She has been researching the impact of mindfulness on student academic success, connection, and overall well-being. Her current book project explores how we can integrate mindfulness practices into higher education contexts to better support student resilience.

## NOSS 2021 Conference Highlights

The virtual NOSS conference this summer offered, as usual, a valuable variety of topics relevant to our practice and the options for our students. In fact, those who participated in the 2020 IOSS conference may have noted sessions featuring our keynote speakers. Alex Goudas, one of our presenters at the IOSS conference, conducted another session featuring research which directly impacts policies in community colleges. As some may know, reform policies over the past several years have suggested preparatory and remedial work is an obstacle to students, causing them to stop out or not reach their goals. In this year's conference, Goudas offered analysis and data showing that preparatory work actually benefits students, and students taking preparatory work show just as much persistence and retention as other student



populations. This material remains important as policy makers continue to implement programs that may restrict access to preparatory support based on inaccurate or misleading arguments. Not only might this disrupt our institutional programs, but it also unnecessarily deprives students of valuable academic opportunities. Goudas's work may be reviewed at his [Community College Data](#) website.

The challenges of the online teaching environment, as might be expected, appeared as a common topic among presenters. Multiple sessions offered presentations related to how instructors respond to students in online feedback. These sessions recognized the difficulty of maintaining positive feedback for writing assignments and managing the often-overwhelming process of responding to students through a learning application. David Starkey from Santa Barbara City College advocated a feedback loop addressing both cognitive and noncognitive factors. The presentation noted the use of real-life connections in prompts and suggested finding ways to encourage empathy in written, online tasks as a way to build positive engagement. In another session, Fenecia Foster and Debra Hunking from Southeast Technical Institute suggested a conscientious review of the feedback process in order to overcome the often depersonalized and distanced exchange between students and instructors. In order to maintain positive connections and build student engagement, these instructors began practicing a structured response format, which features affirmations along with critiques. This process included a model in which the reader presents a statement that reflects the impact on the reader before presenting the material needing correction. The instructor identifies the writer's action, notes the effect, and then offers corrections with reasons. Not only does this build a positive sense of control for students, but it also attempts to provide authentic, specific, achievable goals for the students. These instructors also utilized voice recordings of their responses for those

students who preferred this as a more personalized option.

Like many instructors using online grading tools, Michael Herren of Purdue Global confronted the often time-consuming challenge of providing responses to common writing issues while adding personalized comments. While many instructors create a list of comments, he created an Excel spreadsheet tool in which he built a bank of responses with notes addressing frequent errors, issues, and rubric remarks. Rather than copying and pasting comments, this spreadsheet was programmed to rapidly fill comments into the instructor's response, which then allowed more time for personalized commentary and improved efficiency, particularly when dealing with a large number of online students.

The conference offered insights and support across the range of experience in our instruction, from providing detailed advice for working with individual students to addressing large, institutional policies. Further, the conference exhibited the value of a gathering to help instructors address common, relevant, and current issues.

*Dan Nelson, DMACC  
IOSS Community College Representative*

## **A New First-Year Experience at Mesa Community College**

The recent implementation of Guided Pathways at Mesa Community College provided the opportunity to redesign the student experience at the institution, and the first major change came in the launch of a new first-year experience program for incoming high school graduates. In the presentation "First-Year Experience: Dealing a Better Hand to First Generation and Foundational Students," Director Melissa Carpenter, Learning Facilitator Bianca Altamirano Kelly, and English Faculty member Dr. Leanna Hall explained how MCC designed and

implemented a successful first-year program for incoming freshmen.

The program was designed by a small group of faculty and staff. Their goal was to provide incoming students with the necessary "college knowledge" to be successful. This was especially important as 82% of the college's students are first generation and 70% place into developmental education courses. A large population of students are also English-Language Learners (ELLs), indicating additional barriers to success would need to be addressed. "College knowledge" includes helping students navigate the systems of higher education, particularly through understanding the differences between high school and college; gain financial literacy skills, with an emphasis on budgeting and paying for school; and find and make community connections, especially through effective communication with faculty and staff and locating resources available across multiple campuses.

Students entering the first-year experience program have two options—a five-week Summer Bridge program prior to the fall semester or a program that occurs concurrently with their normal class schedule in the fall. The Summer Bridge program is highly encouraged as students work within their own cohort in their classes, enabling them to learn the ropes of college while also earning three credits for free before enrolling as a full-time student in the fall. Classes as varied as Reading, Psychology, Art History, and Sociology are offered during the Summer Bridge, and yes, they are free (minus a \$15 registration cost; however, all tuition and textbooks are paid for by the college). An orientation that kicks off the program invites the incoming students, their parents, and their siblings to attend, so everyone in the family can learn about services offered by the college and how the family can support their new freshman. Activities, games, and workshops were devised to give students the opportunity to meet faculty and staff in a less

stressful environment. Interactive workshops include topics such as having a growth mindset, managing stress and anxiety, avoiding imposter syndrome, and exploring careers.

Additional strategies to help students in the transition from high school to college come down to removing as many barriers as possible. For instance, full-time advisors have been embedded at the “feeder” high schools in the area so an expert can help students with the application process and answer commonly asked questions. The application process itself has been made as simple as possible, with no essay component required so as not to dissuade students from completing the process. Student engagement is prioritized, with multiple events offered, such as a College Fair and Hispanic Heritage Festival. Those unable to attend events are given opportunities to get involved by making flyers or posters. Student Ambassadors are also utilized to reduce staffing needs, help students make connections sooner, and give additional leadership opportunities to students (many of whom serve in this role for multiple terms). Ambassadors are enrolled in classes with others in the cohort, but they also receive a small stipend and participate in additional training in the areas of empathy, resilience, work-life balance, and campus and community resources. Students who successfully complete the Summer Bridge program are also awarded scholarships to help them pay for classes once the school year begins in the fall.

Ultimately, the new first-year experience at Mesa Community College has proven successful by empowering students at the outset. They are given the tools and connections to navigate their education, take ownership of their success, embrace new experiences and people, and start accumulating credits without breaking the bank. With the increasing emphasis on Guided Pathways in Iowa, the opportunity to analyze and improve the first-year experience for our students has arrived; we can learn much from the model provided by Mesa Community College.

*Justin Robertson, ICCC  
IOSS President*

### **Scaling Proactive Learner Support**

During the NOSS conference, I participated in a session called *Scaling Proactive Learner Support in the COVID19 Environment and Beyond*. This was presented by Amy Davis, Chelsea James, and Jeff Thies at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona. The discussion revolved around student success courses, testing and placement, and changes in the learning centers and libraries.



Best practices to promote student success and opportunities for change were discussed. One example was to offer several class delivery options and have frequent term start dates. At Pima, classes are either 5 weeks, 8 weeks, 14 weeks, or 16 weeks long. New students are also required to complete the “Orientation to Online Learning” course before beginning online, virtual, or hybrid classes. A final takeaway was related to placement testing. Pima began to use multiple measures of placement, implemented the EdReady online assessment as a placement tool, and hired placement coaches to work with students through the process. My college has researched the EdReady placement option, so I was happy to hear they have found it beneficial. I thought this presentation was very engaging and took note of many useful strategies that could be implemented at my own college.

*Molly Struve, NIACC  
IOSS President-Elect*

## Mathematics Transition Summit



On April 27-28, 2021, I attended the virtual version of the Iowa Statewide Summit on the Mathematics Transition from High School through College, hosted by the Jacobson Institution for Innovation in Education at Grand View

University, the Iowa Department of Education, and Iowa State University Mathematics Department. The two-day summit engaged in critical discussions about effective high school curricula, high school to college transitions, two-year college to four-year college transitions, and college curricula. Multiple stakeholders from high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges across Iowa participated in the summit. The stakeholders were invited to engage in two breakout sessions, each time in one of three groupings: high school curricula, transitions in education, or college curricula. Therefore, any attendee could opt to engage in two of the three major areas of focus by changing to another for the second set of breakout sessions.

I participated in groups focused on transitions in education and college curricula. However, summaries of all the groups' discussions and recommendations were shared with everyone at the summit. The largely siloed nature of institutional practices at the different levels of education became a key overarching theme that emerged from all of the groupings. Summit participants identified other problems and challenges for mathematics at every level of the education process, but collaboration between high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges and universities seemed to be the most persistent call to action from participants. The call for collaboration was based on a pair of persistent challenges that participants identified.

During a breakout session on transitions from high school to college, one persistent challenge shaped

most of the discussion: High school educators wanted more information about expectations for students at the college level. In particular, the high school educators expressed concern about mathematics proficiencies for college-level coursework and being able to ensure that students were prepared for their degree or career aspirations. The discussion around this issue became robust and complicated. Essentially, however, the complications regarding student preparation for the college level boiled down to two sub-themes.

The first sub-theme centered on students who knew whether they wanted a career in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) or a non-STEM career. Educators wanted to provide realistic pathways in mathematics for students in either a STEM or a non-STEM career trajectory. This sub-theme alone has its share of challenges for implementation. For example, if students change their minds later and want to shift from a STEM path to a non-STEM path, the student probably would not face major obstacles in terms of math proficiencies. In contrast, a student who wants to shift from a non-STEM path to a STEM path is likely to face some significant challenges in terms of math proficiencies.

The second sub-theme relates to the first, in that high school educators were uncertain how to ensure their students were properly prepared for the math skills path they might need to complete to achieve their educational goals. This uncertainty derives mostly from the inconsistencies in course and program content from one postsecondary institution to another. As someone who works with students who are often seeking to transfer from a two-year community college to a four-year institution, I am familiar with this challenge. If there are significant challenges for transfer of credits between postsecondary institutions, then it is no wonder that high school teachers struggle to prepare their students for the range of potential aspirations of their students.

The other breakout session I attended focused on college curricula, which one can probably imagine overlapped significantly with the challenges expressed during the breakout session with high school faculty. In fact, high school teachers were present in that session, and the teachers voiced frustration over different content depending on the postsecondary institution for what ostensibly should be the same math content based on the course title. So, if a teacher is trying to prepare students for a STEM-track entry-level college math course, such as college algebra, then the teacher should feel confident that the preparation would be adequate for any postsecondary institution, in the nation ideally, but at the very least, the state of Iowa, offering a course titled college algebra. The experiences of the high school teachers suggested that major inconsistencies have hindered their efforts to prepare students for postsecondary education, regardless of the aspirations of the students.

These concerns and others were documented by the Iowa Higher Education Mathematics Transition Advisory Council to help guide further actions and recommendations for mathematics in the state of Iowa. More information can be obtained from the [Jacobson Institution for Innovation in Education](#) website.

*Mike Cagley, WITCC  
IOSS Treasurer*

## **White Paper: Developmental Education as a Force for Equity and Justice**

Most IOSS members are aware of assertions by groups like Complete College America that developmental education harms students, reducing their chances for academic success by unfairly locking their enrollment in such traditional gateway courses as freshman composition and college math. At our 2020 virtual IOSS conference, both keynote speakers, Dr. Emily K. Suh and Alexandros M.

Goudas, addressed these attacks and offered alternative perspectives on the role of developmental coursework in meeting student needs.

In July 2021, members of the NOSS Equity, Access and Inclusion Network contributed a white paper to the discussion of this topic: “Clarifying Terms and Reestablishing Ourselves within Justice: A Response to Critiques of Developmental Education as Anti-Equity.” The authors—Emily K. Suh, S. Owens, Ekateryna O’Meara, and Leanna Hall—have defined key terms, distinguishing between *equity* and *equality* and describing *access* and *justice*; responded to four common objections to developmental education programs; and provided a list of resources for developmental educational professionals to use in research and dialogue with institutional, political, and community stakeholders.

This must-read white paper has been posted in the announcements section on the [NOSS](#) homepage. Both NOSS members and non-members can access and download the document directly: [Developmental Education as a Force for Equity and Justice](#) (PDF).

*Sue Wickham, MCHS  
IOSS Newsletter Editor/Webmaster*

## Join the IOSS Conversation

- Have you recently attended a conference of another professional organization? Summarize a session relevant to our membership for the *Reader's Corner*.
- Has your institution revamped its placement policies, developmental studies offerings, or academic support program? Provide a quick update.
- Have you located a great academic resource for student or faculty to use? Share the wealth.
- Have you transitioned to a new position or received special recognition for your professional accomplishments? Let us celebrate with you!

To submit articles or information for future editions of the *Reader's Corner*, please send to:

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Check the IOSS website for 2021 conference updates; student scholarship information; Executive Board contact information; and member resources, including IOSS meeting minutes and materials from conference presentations.

### [The NOSS Website](#)

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