

President's Letter



I joined the IDEA Executive Board in 2013, which also happened to be my first year as a faculty member at Iowa Lakes Community College. I did not realize at that time how beneficial this committee would be at helping me adjust to my new role. For the six years before this time,

I worked at Iowa Lakes as the head men's and women's cross-country coach and an admissions counselor. Becoming a faculty member was a goal I always had, but I had a lot to learn that year! Along with teaching developmental math and student success courses, I was also hired to be the Estherville campus's advising and testing center coordinator. In the years since 2013, I have learned so much more about the field of developmental education and student service areas like testing and advising. I credit this committee to helping me adjust and giving me the confidence to advocate for our students.

Since the 2021 conference in November, our committee has begun advertising for the board positions of President-Elect and Newsletter Editor. We have also begun planning for our 2022 conference. Due to COVID, the world is still often in a state of unknown, but our committee hopes to have a face-to-face conference this fall. Virtual conferences are a great option, which we are thankful to have. Being together, though, allows for more open-ended, roundtable discussions, along with free time to network and get to know each

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other better. More details on the conference to come soon!

We are once again seeking nominations for the Outstanding Educator Award and the student scholarship. Thanks to a generous, anonymous donor, we now have a scholarship total of \$750 to award to a deserving student. Please take a minute to nominate a deserving colleague and pass along the scholarship information on to your students.

To end, I am thankful for my colleagues who serve on this board and the members of IOSS. I appreciate all you do for your institutions and for our students.

I know firsthand the challenges and stresses that can accompany this type of work, but I hope you take some time every now and then to recognize how much of an impact you have on students!

I look forward to serving as president of IOSS for the next year. Hope you all have a wonderful spring semester.

*Molly Struve, Iowa Lakes Community College
IOSS President*

IOSS 2021 Conference Highlights Making Mindful Connections

Keynote: “Connection and Care: Mindfulness for Resilience in Higher Education”



In her keynote address to the IOSS conference this year, Sarah Montgomery encouraged members to evaluate the classroom experience to help students find stronger personal connections and a more socially supportive

space. While instructors already understand some of the difficulties the college experience presents to students, the recent pandemic has highlighted the tenuous emotional, economic, and personal situation students may encounter. The pandemic exposed the challenges students must confront when isolation and uncertainty dramatically impacted engagement, motivation, and well-being. Montgomery, an education professor at the University of Northern Iowa and a certified mindfulness educator, had been integrating mindfulness exercises into her course, and she noted these approaches may be simple and effective tools for instructors. Mindfulness, the process of reflecting on and being aware of feelings and experiences at the moment, may serve to combat some of the turmoil and disconnection students experience, and Montgomery argued that mindfulness may have a profound influence on student resilience, disposition, and success.

Although a classroom instructor often has little time with students, Montgomery noted that small, thoughtful activities build the important characteristic of resilience. According to Montgomery, recent research shows increasing

awareness of mental health concerns for students, including loneliness and disruptions in the sense of community. Asking students to reflect on positive elements of their lives creates a cognitive realignment for students and builds a more positive mindset. Simple acts in a classroom might include assigning a gratitude journal, identifying moments of joy, experiencing nature, sending thank you notes, and practicing mindful breathing or listening. Short conversations about what may have gone well for students during their daily experiences may help restore a more balanced disposition. Montgomery noted research shows mindfulness practices improved focus and empathy along with reduced anxiety, and the practice directly impacts the neuroplasticity in the brain and increases self-regulation.

Classrooms serve as a social environment for students and may help build a supportive social network. Even though instructors have limited time with students, Montgomery advocated integrating mindfulness practices into the classroom, helping create an engaged, connected environment. She elaborated on her practices and the impact on her students in a discussion session following her keynote presentation, exhibiting how small, thoughtful activities integrated into the class may have a lasting influence in a student's educational and personal life. Although the challenges for students may often seem overwhelming, Montgomery noted instructors have tools and the ability to build an environment which remains effective while also enriching and supporting the educational experience for all involved.

Dan Nelson, DMACC

Keynote Follow-up Session

Dr. Sarah Montgomery, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at UNI, followed up her keynote at IOSS 2021 with an interactive session titled “Strategies for Integrating Mindfulness into Higher Education.” In this session, she shared her experiences incorporating mindfulness practices into her classroom and how doing so helped her be more responsive to her students’ needs and interests.

Dr. Montgomery shared several mindfulness strategies with the audience and provided opportunities for everyone to practice these methods. She began with a connection question, asking all attendees to share in the chat something that brings them joy. This gave everyone a moment to reflect and led to connections being made within the group in a positive manner. Breathing strategies were also illustrated in this session. Dr. Montgomery explained how mindful breathing can help to build focus and reduce feelings of stress. She led the group through several exercises, including the Five Finger Breath, Shoulder Shrug, and Extended Exhale. These types of exercises are particularly useful at the beginning or end of a class period to decompress.

Mindful Listening strategies, such as listening to ambient noise, listening to chimes or bells resonate, and taking turns listening to classmates speak, proved to help students better focus not just in Dr. Montgomery’s classes, but in their other classes and personal lives as well.

Another series of techniques that were practiced in the session were Mindful Movements. Students sitting still for extended periods of time can hinder learning, so getting them up out of their chairs, even briefly, can make a big difference in their learning experience that day. Mindful movements include strategies like stretching, posing, balancing on one

foot, wiggling fingers and toes, and focusing on posture.

Lastly, Dr. Montgomery covered the mindfulness strategy of practicing gratitude. The instructor may ask students what they feel grateful for and have them express their gratefulness by journaling about it, texting someone a message of appreciation, or writing thank you notes or emails.

Making sure mindfulness is harnessed in a positive way is important, so Dr. Montgomery clarified that these activities are always optional for students and that instructors should be flexible to let students adapt practices to meet their needs. While students may not always want to participate in every mindfulness activity, the instructor’s involvement is key—students will more likely engage if instructors share their own personal practices and respond positively to students.

Ultimately, there isn’t one practice or strategy that will always work for all students, but regular engagement in mindfulness and positivity strategies throughout a course allows for frequent check-ins with students and more social connections being made among classmates, leading to a healthier, more positive classroom environment. Slowing down and providing time for everyone to breathe, think, feel, listen, reflect, write, sketch, share, and make space for their emotions can be transformative for their individual mindfulness and for the overall sense of community within the classroom.

Justin Robertson, ICCC

America Reads 2021-2022



**AMERICA
READS**

IOSS is pleased to continue our participation in the America Reads program in 2022! We have chosen Duncombe Elementary in Fort Dodge as the recipient for our organization's donations through the summer of 2022.

IOSS members can donate children's books as chosen by teachers and librarians at

Duncombe from this Amazon Wishlist:

http://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/BV2K0UO45KSQ?ref_=wl_share

IMPORTANT: When checking out, on the *Choose a Shipping Address* page, make sure to select “**Stephanie Harvey's Gift Registry Address**” so your order will go directly to the contact person at Duncombe.

“Thank you so much from the teachers at Duncombe!!!”

– Stephanie Harvey, Instructional Coach, Duncombe Elementary School

“Getting books in the hands of our students is a priority at our school and I appreciate your organization's willingness to partner with us to make this happen. From our students and staff at Duncombe Elementary we thank you for providing additional literacy options for our students and helping these future leaders to develop a love of reading.”

– Ryan Flaherty, Principal, Duncombe Elementary School

Student Scholarship

The Iowa Organization for Student Success (IOSS) Executive Board is accepting applications for a student who has excelled in developmental coursework. Please take time to share this scholarship opportunity with students at your school. Below is the link where students will find the information needed to apply for this \$750 scholarship. Applications are due by May 1st.

<https://forms.gle/4Xg3iz5ZdtsXReq49>

Last year our student scholarship winner was Brittany Inmann from Marshalltown Community College. Congratulations to Brittany!

Outstanding Service to Students Award

We are excited to have the opportunity to celebrate and recognize an educator who demonstrates outstanding service and impacts student success!

We encourage each of our members to review the criteria on the form available on the [Member Resources](#) page of the IOSS website at and nominate a deserving faculty member, staff member, and/or administrator for this honor. You will find the full process and award details on the nomination form.

Please note that nominees do not have to be current members of IOSS to be eligible for the award.

Submit nominations to Molly Struve (mstruve@iowalakes.edu) by May 1, 2022.

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:

IOSS Newsletter Editor, Kate Sanders
Katherine.Sanders@witcc.edu

2021-2022 IOSS Executive Board

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Stay in Touch with IOSS and NOSS

IOSS Website:

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.

www.dmacc.edu/ioass

The NOSS website:

<https://thenoss.org/>

IOSS Facebook:



Like us on Facebook to receive updates on IOSS and our annual conference!

https://www.facebook.com/iowaoss/?ref=py_c

Save the Date!

Fall 2022 IOSS Conference

**Thursday, November 3 –
Friday, November 4**

Iowa Lakes Community College