



PNAIRP



# PNAIRP News

April 2009

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## Hello from the PNAIRP President



It is a troublesome time to address my fellow members of PNAIRP. As we enter the spring of 2009, shrinking state and provincial revenues mean the threat of reductions in funding for many public post-secondary institutions. It seems that with each week, projected budget shortfalls grow. And at the same time, enrollments are growing. The situation is probably most dire in Washington (compared to British Columbia, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska), where the state faces a \$9.5 billion

shortfall and post-secondary funding may be cut by \$500 million, representing 10,000 fewer slots available for students at the state's post-secondary institutions.

Perhaps the most immediate concern for institutional researchers and planners is a reduction in their offices' budgets. While most are not threatened with a reduction in personnel, this may happen in some cases. Most are likely to experience a reduction in travel budgets, meaning that national conferences of CIRPA and AIR may be out of reach. It may also influence your ability to travel to PNAIRP in the fall. (Our conference is scheduled to be in Portland, September 30<sup>th</sup> through October 2<sup>nd</sup>). I surely hope that is not the case and I'll tell you why.

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## Hello ... continued

In the state of Washington, the community and technical college researchers and planners group (WARP) recently held its spring conference via teleconference one day and through the use of Elluminate (interactive web meeting software) the next. While I appreciate the effort that people put into the planning of the conference via teleconference and the web, it presented some challenges. At times the troubles were technological and at others, it was simply difficult to conveniently interact. Rather than have each institution participate separately, several "cluster sites" were selected so that there was some face-to-face interaction among members. Despite this, however, it couldn't replace what transpires at a regular conference.

I realized just how worthwhile those discussions over morning coffee or a dinner drink are to me. Beyond the formal conference presentations, there's much value in asking questions of, and sharing experiences with colleagues, as well as learning of others' research endeavors. These important connections cannot be replicated via teleconferences.

It's going to be a trying year. It's difficult to watch as investments in education remain static or are reduced. At the same time, our own IR budgets and our ability to provide information to our respective institutions may suffer. Despite these challenges, I'm hopeful that I'll see you at our conference in Portland in September. For those with budget restraints, PNAIRP offers travel grants to assist members with attendance at the annual conference – application details are found on the website at [pnairp.org](http://pnairp.org). If there were ever a time in which we need to recharge our batteries, it would seem to be now.

**Darryl Dieter**  
PNAIRP President

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## Thank You to PNAIRP Colleagues

Greetings from the Last Frontier. I understand it is practice for those who receive travel grants for the PNAIRP conference to share experiences from attending and presenting a paper. I am very happy to do so.

As a bit of context, I made the request last year upon the encouragement of my AIR colleagues at the national forum to share and initiate national dialogue about an alternative model for tracking student learning goal progress/attainment that addressed the many deficiencies of the traditional "Student Success" metric. I had already wanted to share this model with our regional association. Alaska Higher Education was facing stringent budget circumstances, and outside travel was the first item under the microscope. Timing was very important, because postponing it for a year would significantly reduce the possibility of a hearing on this strong national issue. I was delighted that PNAIRP helped me over that significant hurdle and provide the face-to-face opportunity to have that dialogue with colleagues.

Presenting the model at the PNAIRP conference was important to me. I received good questions on challenges encountered in the design and implementation, inquiries about current and projected impacts on our institution, etc. Although it was expected, what I particularly enjoyed was the professional hearing by those in attendance. They gave me a respectful but critical hearing and their questions showed a genuine willingness to understand first before passing judgment. I received interaction after the presentation and interest in further exploration among institutions who were interested in the feasibility of jointly testing the model parameters. My purpose was not to "sell" the model, as we were willing to give it to those who were interested in exploring the capability with us. This conference and presentation provided an essential opportunity to vet the model with professional colleagues, as it began to be discussed as an alternative approach.

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## Greetings ... continued

Coming to Tacoma was a treat for me because most of my professional career has been in higher education in Washington State. I spent 25 years in IR at Yakima Valley College and seven years heading Institutional Studies at University of Washington. I particularly enjoyed the opportunity this conference presented to meet new IR members and to network with “comrades in the trenches”. It is a setting where we can candidly share issues we face, strategies to address them, what works and what doesn’t, etc. The conference also provides the opportunity to learn of regional issues on the horizon that will impact our offices as we support our institutional decision-makers.

Networking, the opportunity to present our IR efforts for important peer critique, and early warning are the three interrelated and important outcomes of attendance at PNAIRP. Any one of them is worth the cost of attendance, but together the individual and the institution both get a great return on their investment. My sincere thanks to PNAIRP for the travel grant and the opportunities it provided. My hope is that I was able to give back in some small measure.

### Gary Rice

Director; Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment  
University of Alaska Anchorage

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## 2009 Conference in Portland, Oregon

**When:** September 30 to October 2, 2009

**Where:** Portland State University, Portland Oregon

**What:** Institutional Intelligence

**Why:** Connect with colleagues, present your work, get feedback, ask questions, network, learn from your peers, professional development, take workshops, hear presentations, and get involved with your association!

**How PNAIRP can help:** Apply for a travel grant. A total of \$1,250 is available to assist 2-3 applicants. Details at [pnairp.org](http://pnairp.org) under “News”.

**More details are coming soon!** Watch e-mail and the website!

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## Benefits of Presenting at PNAIRP

My introduction to PNAIRP came over a delicious barbecue dinner at the Kansas City AIR Forum in June 2007. In 2008, the University of Alaska Fairbanks IR staff signed up as PNAIRP members, and we discovered PNAIRP had an annual conference. Still, it was with some trepidation that I submitted an abstract for a talk and a travel grant application – and with even more trepidation, persuaded my boss to take a chance on sending me to the Tacoma conference. None of us here knew quite what to expect from the conference (we've seen a few hastily thrown together local “conferences” in our time), and no one from our office had travelled out of state to attend any IR meetings other than the Forum in years.

I am happy to say the PNAIRP conference exceeded all expectations. The meeting rooms were well suited to the size of the audiences and nicely grouped together so there was no hunting around trying to find the right session. Perhaps most memorable was the exceptional food provided every day. Besides filling our stomachs, the breakfast gatherings provided a natural opportunity to meet a few new colleagues each day. This was much more comfortable for me than having to force myself to “work the room” at a cocktail party.

The mix of session topics and attendee backgrounds was strikingly different from the AIR Forum. The focus on small- to medium-sized public institutions made the material covered in the talks much more relevant to me than the average AIR Forum presentation. Surprisingly often I found myself wishing I could attend two of the three talks going on at once. Many of the speakers were addressing topics very familiar to us in Alaska that get little attention at the national forum: helping underprepared high school students get ready to tackle college; the flow of students in both directions between 2- and 4-year programs; finding ways to effectively communicate our progress and our needs to state legislators who don't quite understand what we do.

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## Benefits ... continued

I am by training a geologist and statistician, and worked in the physical sciences for several years before getting an IR position. My own research (when I am not busy filling out surveys!) is in mathematical modeling of student behavior: in what order and at what pace do they complete their degree requirements? Which points in the path from enrollment to graduation are hardest to get past? What does this tell us about how well we are scheduling our classes, how effective our advisors are, how reasonable our pre-requisites are, and how adequate our tutoring services and remedial course offerings are? I am delighted to be able to bring a somewhat "scientific" approach to topics that administrators so often addressed based on anecdotal evidence alone in the past.

In Tacoma, I presented some of our work on how well developmental math students fare when they advance to core-requirement math. On the one hand, this was an opportunity for me to share some applied statistics with my audience, adding a bit of meaning to the theory many attendees studied in the mini-courses earlier in the week. On the other, it was a chance for me to get feedback from my audience about how they had tackled similar issues in their own institutions, giving me ideas for fresh ways to view my own data. (I had given this talk before, but the feedback before was all from University of Alaska faculty and staff, and from other statisticians.)

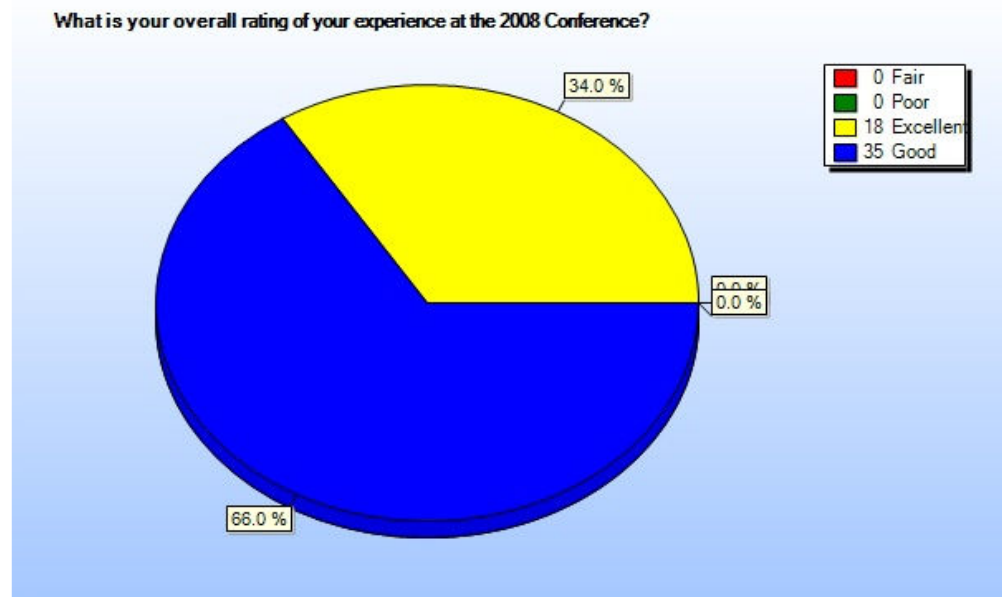
I hope to return to PNAIRP conferences again in the future, both to speak and to listen. I have recommended it to my boss as a great place for our newer employees to present to a supportive and engaged audience, and as a great place to get a new perspective on how other open-enrollment public institutions that aren't in the spotlight at AIR are coping with the same challenges we face here. Thank you for helping make this possible through your travel grant program.

**Gordon Bower**

Research Associate; Planning, Analysis and Institutional Research  
University of Alaska Fairbanks

## Evaluation of the 2008 Conference

Every year, the Executive Board invites conference attendees to participate in an on-line evaluation of the conference shortly after their return. 53 PNAIRPers completed the evaluation form after the 2008 Conference in Tacoma.



Overall satisfaction with the conference was fairly high. On a four-point scale (1 = Poor to 4 = Excellent), 34% gave an excellent rating and 66% gave a good rating. None rated the conference as fair or poor. This year, workshops received the most favorable rating (M = 3.60). The overall quality of the concurrent sessions and IPEDS also received high ratings (M = 3.25 and M = 3.21 respectively). The keynote speech received a rating of 3.02 and the session for newcomers received a rating of 2.75.

This year, the number of previous conferences attended was evenly distributed. Just over a third (36%) of participants had not been to a conference prior to 2008, 36% had been to between two and four conferences and just under a third (28%) had been to five or more.

Over half of the attendees (53%) represented two-year institutions. The rest were from four-year institutions (38%) or other institutions (9%), including system and governmental agencies and research organizations.

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## Evaluation ... continued

Conference attendees also had an opportunity to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the conference and make suggestions for the future. Many attendees stated that the variety of topics covered and the quality of presentations were major strengths. Most PNAIRPers noted that the opportunity to network with colleagues and share ideas and resources was another important strength. In addition, many respondents talked about the low cost, the nice accommodations and the focus on technology as strengths.

Most attendees' comments about the weaknesses of the conference focused on the breakout rooms. Conference attendees found the meeting rooms too warm and small. Also, a few attendees found that the conference had a limited number of session options.

Attendees' suggestions for future conference included many diverse ideas. Some participants hoped for different tracks so they could enter the conference with a focus, such as a beginner track or a strategic planning track. Also, some attendees stated that they would like more sessions and workshops offered (so, members – you can make this happen by submitting a proposal). Finally, some attendees discussed having a future-focused theme.

The Executive Board appreciates those PNAIRPers who took the time to complete the evaluation form and provide their feedback on the conference. The information gleaned from the evaluation is a valuable tool that will assist the Executive Board in making this year's conference in Portland an even greater success.

**David Burgess**  
PNAIRP Past President

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## What I Learned at the 2008 AIR Forum

I was asked if I would write an article for the PNAIRP newsletter to describe my experience at the AIR forum in Seattle. Unfortunately, the deadline was at a crucial point in my work schedule and I didn't submit the article in time for the last newsletter. However, the timing may be very good now as you consider your professional development opportunities for the year ahead.

I was very fortunate last year to receive a travel grant from PNAIRP. As well, my name was drawn from applications for a workshop. I went out and bought a lottery ticket that evening, but was not three times lucky; as you can surmise, I'm still working. Nevertheless, two times lucky is more than I'm used to and I'm grateful.

On reflection, while I learned much from the workshops and presentations, the most valuable lessons didn't come directly from them. I learned four key lessons from my participation at the AIR forum.

First, I went to the *Test of Means* and *Forming Peer Groups* workshops on Saturday. *Test of Means* was conducted by Linda Mallory of the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Linda is a terrific instructor and gave out cool pens and stickers from the academy. **Lesson number one: Even if your institution's swag seems mundane to you, others will love it.** I was thrilled to get a Navy sticker.

The *Forming Peer Groups* workshop was interesting. I learned much about the IPEDs system and some of the indicators available. This workshop was put on by Rich Howard and Gerry McLaughlin. **Lesson number two: Humility.** These two have forgotten more than I'll ever know.

My interests at the forum were pretty select. I was interested in dashboards, program review, increasing response rate of student surveys, and studies on student engagement and satisfaction. I learned that our primitive dashboard prototyping efforts aren't so bad after all. Also, I learned that we are doing a fair job at response rates and survey reporting. **Lesson number three: We are doing things better than we think we are.**

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## What I Learned ... continued

The last presentation I attended was on student engagement and satisfaction. As we know, more engaged students are generally more satisfied. This makes sense. However, it was interesting to me that we don't always take our own advice. We tell students to be involved, but we don't always do this ourselves. (That isn't the fourth lesson, though – keep reading! [Ed.]

This year I was very engaged, even more than at previous forums. In fact, I was double booked much of the time, but it was the activities outside of the formal presentations that really made the forum for me. I am on the AIR Professional Development Services Committee. I had the privilege of joining this group through my association with PNAIRP; two years ago, the committee chair was looking for representation from the Pacific Northwest and I applied. I have had the pleasure of being director of the *Foundations II Institute* in Philadelphia in 2007 and the *Applied Statistics Institute* in Cincinnati 2008 (see Roseanne's article in the September 2008 PNAIRP newsletter and the completely unsolicited plug). Again this summer, I will be co-director of the *Foundations II Institute* in motor city – Detroit. Should be a gas (sorry).

As well, I was on the forum's best poster committee. This was challenging but fun. I certainly would not have paid as much attention to the details of the posters and learned as much as I did had I not been judging them – and I met more great people.

I also had the pleasure of staffing the "Welcome to Seattle" table for PNAIRP. I sat there smiling and trying to look like I knew something. Fortunately for me, my shift was late in the forum schedule and most people already had an idea about what they were doing so I didn't make too much of a fool of myself.

I attended the Reshaping IR, CIRPA, and PNAIRP special interest groups to hear what was happening in these, meet new people, and reconnect with people I hadn't seen for ages.

## What I Learned ... continued

As well, I also signed up for all of the social activities. I went to a social for AIR committee members and met a bunch more great people. I went with my Canadian friends to the baseball game. Very fun. I went to the Tableau Software party and show. They served two kinds of beer there: Fin du monde (end of the world) from Quebec, and Delirium tremens (no translation needed) from Belgium, both delicious and both over eight per cent alcohol. I had fun there and I think there are pictures to prove it.



So, to wrap up, my **fourth and final lesson** from the AIR Forum is “**greater engagement leads to greater satisfaction**”. This for me was the best forum yet. I’m looking forward to seeing you in Atlanta. My advice to you, in the immortal words of Captain Picard: Engage!

### Jan O’Brien

Manager; Institutional Research  
Okanagan College

Jan O’Brien enjoys the benefits  
of professional engagement