



Iowa Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

# THE INFORMER

*The Quarterly IASFAA Newsletter*

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POLL: IS DIE HARD A CHRISTMAS MOVIE?



### IASFAA Christmas List

- Working FAFSA
- Kind parents & students
- Appreciation for our hard work
- "It depends..."





# A Message From Our New President-Elect, Jess Graham

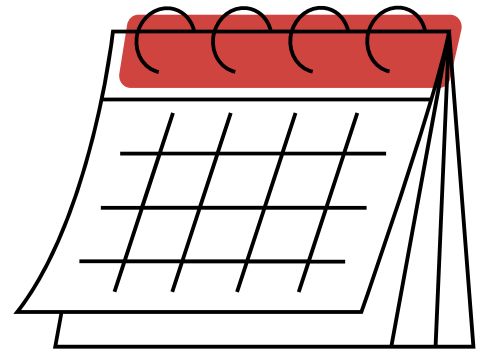
I'm so honored and excited to step into the role of President-Elect for IASFAA. This transition brings both excitement and a healthy amount of nerves, and I'm embracing these emotions as motivation to serve IASFAA with authenticity and purpose. I believe our association's strength comes from its incredible community of members, and I look forward to working with the membership and Executive Council to create opportunities for meaningful professional development and to continue fostering connection and belonging.

I also want to extend my sincerest thanks to Sara Sroka for taking on the Vice President role. Her leadership and dedication have continuously strengthened IASFAA over the years, and I could not be more appreciative of her and the work she does!



## Upcoming Events

- **IASFAA Director's Drive In Workshop**
  - More information coming soon from the Professional Development Committee.
- Mark your calendars! **Day at The Hill** is scheduled for February 25th, more details to come!



## MASFAA 2025 Recap

MASFAA 2025 delivered high quality professional development, meaningful engagement, and a strong sense of community. From timely sessions to memorable networking moments, the conference reflected the strength of the Midwest financial aid community and the value of learning from one another.





## Strong Iowa Presence in the Program

Iowa professionals played an active role in shaping MASFAA 2025, contributing to sessions that addressed enrollment strategy, advocacy, wellness, systems, and student-centered policy. Iowa led or contributed to a number of sessions and some of them are listed below:

- Fueling Your Enrollment Objectives: The Value of Transparency and Simplicity in Connecting with Today's Students with Heather Gaumer and Vanessa Wiest
- Mental Health for All: Supporting Students and Financial Aid Staff with Jess Graham
- Excel Tips and Tricks: Using Functions and Pivot Tables with Sarah Freestone and Jeff Pierpont
- Advocacy in Action: Empowering Financial Aid Administrators to Make a Difference with Sarah Freestone and regional colleagues
- Bridging the Gap: ADHD at Every Level of Financial Aid Leadership with Chad Olson and regional colleagues
- Lifting the Fog While Heading into the Cloud: Transitioning Staff to a Cloud Based SIS with Sarah Heller and Brittany Peterson
- Cultivating Connections: Strategies for Off-Campus Work-Study Employment with Tricia Stouder and regional colleagues
- Preferred Lender List Panel with Isaac Ehlers, Ryan Zantingh, and regional colleagues

## Recognition and Awards

- Chad Olson was honored with TWO awards!
  - Allan W. Purdy Distinguished Service Award, and the
  - Committee of the Year Award for his work on the MASFAA Finance Task Force
- Vanessa Wiest received the Outstanding New Professional Award

Their work reflects a strong commitment to students, colleagues, and the broader MASFAA community. Congratulations, Vanessa and Chad!







ISL Education Lending is your local nonprofit lender offering lower-cost private loans for student and parents and serving lowans for more 40 years. In addition to private loans, ISL Education Lending offers scholarships and no-cost college planning financial literacy tools. We recently rolled out a new national scholarship search database, for high school students, college students and their parents called [Step 1 Scholarship Search](#). ISL Education Lending also supports our Iowa colleges and their loan processing through the iLink Service Center. We look forward to seeing you at the spring conference.

**Opens Jan. 5**

**Forty-five  
\$1,000  
Scholarships**





# Get Involved with IASFAA

## Find your perfect volunteer match!

IASFAA is run by so many fantastic volunteers! If you are looking for a way to get involved but aren't sure where to start, the newsletter will be spotlighting IASFAA Committees that could use YOU as a volunteer.

Find something that piques your interest? Contact the committee chair for your potential new committee to learn more.

### Association Communications

The Communications Committee manages and enhances the content, design, and structure of key IASFAA publications, including the quarterly IASFAA Informer, the annual IASFAA by the Numbers, and our social media channels (Facebook, Instagram). We also support other IASFAA committees by leveraging these tools to amplify our collective goals, achievements, and successes.

*Time Commitment:* The committee meets monthly for 30-60 minutes. Members are expected to dedicate approximately 1-10 hours outside of meetings, depending on what they are working on.

*Chair:* Tatiana Turnbough, [tatiana-ochoa@uiowa.edu](mailto:tatiana-ochoa@uiowa.edu)

### Exhibitor Relations

The Exhibitor Relations Committee of IASFAA acts as a liaison between the association and its exhibitors.

*Time Commitment:* Very low! Involvement increases as we get closer to conference time.

*Chair:* Sultan Karim, [sultan.karim@kirkwood.edu](mailto:sultan.karim@kirkwood.edu)

### Professional Development

The Professional Development Committee is dedicated to fostering the growth and development of financial aid professionals across Iowa. This committee is responsible for planning and organizing various educational opportunities, such as workshops, webinars, and conferences, aimed at enhancing the knowledge, skills, and competencies of individuals working within the field of student financial aid.

*Time Commitment:* The committee meets monthly, and typically spends 1-3 hours per month on various professional development events and activities.

*Chair:* Renae Armentrout, [rarmentrout@coe.edu](mailto:rarmentrout@coe.edu)



# Seasonal Affective Disorder

## Diversity Committee Winter Article

Snow is falling, fireplaces are lit, Christmas lights are showing up everywhere and the wrapping paper is still not quite right. Joy to the World, eight days for the Festival of Lights, and seven days of celebrating and reflecting on core principles and ringing in the New Year. The holiday season is certainly a time for celebration.

There are also things that can make those winter days a little more difficult: Daylight hours are shorter, and cold weather keeps people inside, which leads to less human interaction. It's no secret that people deal with depression and sadness around the holiday season. It can be easy to write it off as someone is missing a family member or longing for the holidays of the past. While those are very valid feelings, what if there is another reason for it?

SAD, or Seasonal Affective Disorder is typically a person's depression that appears in late fall and early winter. While specific reasons are still unknown, it is believed that lack of light exposure and how it affects the circadian rhythm can be attributed to depression.

Performancehealth.com reports that more than 10 million people in the U.S. have experienced SAD affects four times as many women as men.

What are symptoms that people usually experience during these times?

Symptoms can include oversleeping, fatigue, changes in appetite, weight gain, being anxious and feelings of sadness. People might not feel all of those; they might just suffer from one.

There are some treatment methods that can help with SAD. Exposure to bright light that mimic natural sunlight can help with symptoms. Light boxes that mimic sunlight can be used for a period during the day may be helpful. In some cases, medication can help someone who is suffering. An individual can also make changes to their daily routine to include a healthier diet and regular exercise. When is the time to address the situation? Everybody has difficult days, but when these become overwhelming where it's a struggle to function, please reach out to your healthcare provider. If you suffer having thoughts of self-harm, or that the world would be better without you, help is available at 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.





# NEW FAAC MEMBERS!

Congratulations to the new FAAC Members in IASFAA! Your hard work and dedication to the financial aid profession are recognized in this great accomplishment!

- **Krystal Crandall** - Iowa Central Community College
- **Kelly Carrell** - University of Iowa



## Stay Connected with the IASFAA Listserv!

Are you taking advantage of the IASFAA Listserv? This valuable tool is designed for IASFAA members to quickly and efficiently share relevant information with fellow members.

### [What is the IASFAA Listserv?](#)

The IASFAA Listserv is an email-based platform that allows members to easily disseminate and receive updates, announcements, and other important information related to the financial aid profession and our association.

### How to Subscribe or Post a Message

It's simple!

1. Click on IASFAA Listserv.
2. Navigate to My Features > E-Lists to subscribe or post a message.

Join the conversation and stay in the loop with timely updates from your IASFAA community. Don't miss out—sign up today!

### Connect with us!

Please send content suggestions or member updates to  
[tatiana-ochoa@uiowa.edu](mailto:tatiana-ochoa@uiowa.edu)



Like the IASFAA page on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#)!





# IASFAA Stars!

## Nominated IASFAA member spotlight



Do you have someone in mind who deserves recognition?

Be sure to submit a nomination in the next IASFAA newsletter survey!

**Patti Demers** - Director of Financial Assistance at BVU. For the 2nd summer in a row, we were down a person in our small office. She did an amazing job at leading our small team as we all juggled the normally heavy summer workload along with the job duties of the position we had open. She showed up early, stayed late, to be sure things got done. She is always one to advocate for our office to upper administration and does a great job leading our small team.

**Renae Armentrout** - I don't directly work with her, but Renae Armentrout at Coe College is one of those silent heroes who dives into a project and does the work without being her own cheerleader or expecting others to take on the bulk of the work. Plus she's always smiling!

**Taylor Beyal** from the University of Iowa., Senior Financial Aid Advisor. Taylor's attention to detail and meticulous need to understand each student case is critical to ensuring that students have the best possible aid offer they can. She goes above and beyond to dig into strange student situations, advocate for students, and ensure that all possible factors are taken into account (not to mention her spreadsheets are immaculate).

**Melanie Hausmaninger** serves as the Administrative Assistant in the NIACC Financial Aid Office, and she truly keeps the wheels turning in our small but mighty team. Melanie consistently looks for ways to make others' work easier and goes above and beyond to connect with students, ensuring they get the answers they need. Her positive attitude and joyful spirit are contagious, creating a welcoming environment for students, families, and staff alike. We are fortunate to have such a friendly and helpful face greeting everyone who visits our office.

Thank you for all you do, Melanie!

The **IASFAA Professional Development Committee** has delivered outstanding value to our entire membership this year. They expanded training and growth opportunities for staff across Iowa, no matter their role or experience level. Their work includes monthly Zoom sessions on practical topics, a year-long Leadership Forum that builds confidence and skills, and consistent outreach that supports both new and seasoned financial aid professionals. Their commitment has strengthened our community, created space for learning, and helped members grow in ways that directly improve service to students across the state.



**Courteney Kuehl** has gone above and beyond to set up the new 2026-2027 year in Workday and hold down the verification area as a team of one since early this summer. Courteney has carefully navigated the process to ensure everything is set up and processed accurately. She's worked very hard with a team of folks on campus and her hard work is deeply appreciated!



## What's new with the IASFAA Crew?

- **Chris Weber** joined the ICAN staff on Oct. 27th as a Student Success Advisor in our Hiawatha Office.
- **Esi Aniwa** will start at the University of Iowa in January as a Financial Aid Advisor on the Processing and Verification team.
- In October, Buena Vista welcomed **Kasey Goodman-Jepson** as a new Financial Aid Counselor.
- **Lola Anaman** started at the University of Iowa in November as a work-study and private loan specialist.
- **Allie Pitz** will be transitioning from a student Peer Advisor onto the Advising, Financial Wellness, and Outreach team at the University of Iowa.
- **Teresa Blyther** was promoted to Assistant Director (Funds Management) at Iowa State.
- **Reece Downey** was promoted to Senior Financial Aid Advisor at the University of Iowa in November.
- **Courteney Kuehl** was promoted to Assistant Director (Verification) at Iowa State University.
- **Sarah Freestone** will be leaving her role at Iowa State to join Drake University as the Director of Financial Aid beginning in January.
- **Sheri Knipe** is officially retiring on January 5, 2026. **Shannon Weaver** has officially taken over as the Financial Aid Director at Southeastern Community College. Congratulations, Sheri, on your retirement!
- On November 7th, **Ryan Zantingh** joined the Bureau of Iowa College Aid as Section Chief for Financial Aid Program Administration and State Authorization. Prior to that, Ryan had served as the Director of Financial Aid at Drake University. Additionally, Bureau Chief **David Ford** has taken a new position with the Strada Education Foundation as Vice President of Quality Coaching. David's last day at Iowa College Aid will be December 12.





# MASFAA 2026



## Iowa Voices Needed for MASFAA 2026

MASFAA 2026 is coming to Iowa for the first time since 2015, and this is our opportunity to highlight the depth, talent, and leadership across our state. The call for session proposals for the 2026 MASFAA Conference is now open. The conference will be held October 18 through October 21, 2026, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. We want as many Iowa voices represented as possible, and we want your ideas and experiences shared.

## Why Iowa Participation Matters

MASFAA has not been in Iowa in more than a decade. Hosting the conference gives Iowa professionals a unique chance to showcase the work happening on our campuses and across our offices. If you have presented at IASFAA, you already have something valuable to share. If you have never presented before, believe in yourself. First-time presenters are encouraged, and you will not be alone. Support is available to help you refine your idea and prepare for a successful presentation.

## What Makes a Strong MASFAA Proposal

Strong MASFAA sessions focus on real experience and practical outcomes. They highlight both successes and lessons learned.

## Consider submitting if you have:

- Improved a process or workflow
- Navigated OB3 or increased private loan volume
- Built communication strategies that improved clarity
- Trained staff or student employees
- Created tools, calendars, or resources others could use
- Presented at IASFAA or another conference

If your work has helped Iowa colleagues, it can help institutions across the Midwest.

## Important Dates

- Proposal submission deadline: February 3, 2026
- Notifications sent: March 2026
- Conference dates: October 18 through October 21, 2026

Full submission details and examples are available in the [Call for Proposals PDF](#). MASFAA is coming to Iowa. Let's make sure our state's voices are heard. Submit a proposal and help shape the MASFAA 2026 Conference.

**[Submit your session proposal TODAY!](#)**



# IASFAA Member News



Not all financial aid departments have two Diane's but Southwestern Community College (SWCC) does! Diane McCall and Diane Palmer recently received SWCC's We Are ONE Customer Service Award and they couldn't be more deserving! These two are the definition of phenomenal customer service and they exemplify it every day! Diane McCall is co-chair of Community Outreach Committee this year.



I had the wonderful opportunity to perform at the Iowa Music Awards in Burlington at Memorial Auditorium. I also helped hand out awards to some of the most talented artists in the state!

*Alyssa Dalton, University of Iowa*



We have embarked on our first year of Elf on the Shelf for my three year old. Please be thinking of me as I try to remember to move this elf every night.

*Kelsey Ryder, University of Iowa*

A note from **Andrew Brimeyer**: Greetings from a Maniac (yes, that's really what Mainers call themselves)! As many of you know, my wife and I moved to Maine at the start of November, and we're finally settling into New England life. It's absolutely gorgeous up here with so much to see and do. And don't get me started on the pho restaurant across the street. They do not know our order by heart yet, but they will! I'm working at Unity Environmental University as an Accounts Receivable Specialist, which still keeps me closely connected with our financial aid and bursar office. My wife is rocking it as a nurse in Portland. Maine life is good, cold, and full of delicious soup.





I won 1st place in my age division at the Thanksgiving Turkey Trot, that I ran with my family! (It pays to be old, I guess!)

*Alice Bunjer, Faith Baptist Bible College*



Excited to share that my daughter got married in September!

*Debbie Murphy, Ascendium*



I got married on October 4 and traveled to Europe with my husband for our honeymoon!

*Tatiana Turnbough (Ochoa),  
University of Iowa*

## Is Die Hard a Christmas Movie?

The votes are in!  
IASFAA members have spoken, and the consensus is... **YES!**

Thank you to everyone who participated in the poll. Be sure to check out the next Newsletter Survey sent via the IASFAA Listserv to cast your vote in our upcoming IASFAA poll!

Could go either way...  
41.2%

