

PCACAC Living History

Submitted by Joel Lang, PCACAC President 2019-2020

I didn't know what I didn't know. This summed up my professional standing prior to joining both NACAC and PCACAC. My mentor and colleague, Larry Fletcher, suggested that I attend the annual NACAC conference to gain more knowledge and insight into the college admissions world. I was excited about going to New Orleans, a city I'd never been to before, to learn 'whatever I could' about college admissions. When I walked up to the registration desk and saw the thousands of lanyards waiting to be picked up by attendees, I remember thinking "what did I get myself into?" Those next 3 days were the most intensive professional development sessions I'd ever experienced. I went from excited to overwhelmed to blown away by the intelligence, dedication, and college knowledge permeating throughout the conference. I left thinking that I never wanted to miss NACAC again, and aside from the conferences being altered due to COVID, I haven't missed one since!

In the next year or two, I joined the Potomac & Chesapeake ACAC. It was one thing to attend NACAC and sit in on sessions but an entirely different experience getting fully involved with PCACAC where I could engage in on-going conversations about ethics, processes, new online platforms, standardized testing, equity, and all that is involved with the college admissions world. With increased conversation came the inevitable "you should join our committee!". That started my path to the PCACAC leadership team and ultimately the Presidential cycle. Now I was part of the behind-the-scenes work, planning the sessions, and encouraging younger colleagues to join what I now knew was the key to success in the college admissions profession.

The impact that NACAC and PCACAC have had on me is evident in the conversations and relationships that have developed from those conversations. It's comforting to know that I can email or call a colleague in almost any other state and clear across the country to ask for assistance. The reply is not simply a courtesy. Since we know each other well and have the same strong commitment to serve our students and families to the best of our abilities, our conversation is rooted in mutual respect and admiration for the work we do. PCACAC and NACAC have reassured me that there are tens of thousands of people with a commitment to doing this work with great passion and empathy and that we're all in it together. If I had not invested my time and energy into these organizations, I'm not sure what professional path I would have pursued. I consider myself a "geek" when it comes to college admissions – I'm reading articles daily on trends, issues, and the latest updates in the world of admissions. I'm fascinated with data and events that lead to policy changes, why those changes are being made and who benefits from those changes. I love learning about admissions and enrollment management every day, even while working on the high school side.

I still don't know everything and probably never will. But now, I know better what I don't know and PCACAC and NACAC have ignited a professional passion within me that has moved me forward in my career. More importantly, I've created working relationships and friendships that will last a lifetime!