

Reflecting on NASPA Western Regional Conference

Out-of-Class Learning Fall 2015

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Author Note

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## Reflecting on NASPA Western Regional Conference

### **Introduction**

As I started Fall semester, one of the things I looked forward to the most was the Western Regional Conference. I was no longer a first-time attendee and thus had many cohort members who looked to me in their first experience of a larger scale conference. Further, I was selected to serve as a Change Agent for the undergraduate pre-conference, where I would assist in the facilitation of the program. In this process, I was nervous about my ability to guide my peers, work the conference, and continue networking while finding time to attend individual breakout sessions. In attending this conference, I was able to identify areas of continued development in my leadership, develop my communication skills with people I was not familiar with, and work collaboratively with a diverse group of other graduate students (PLO 2, 7, 8). I was also able to identify strategies in managing work-life integration, identify ways to manage stress (Personal Goals 1, 3) and further reinforce the network I developed at Western Regional Conference from last year.

### **Links to Program Learning Outcomes**

In the process of working with other graduate students to serve as a guide for undergraduate students at a pre-conference, I was able to better understand the role that I played in groups where I did not know anyone. Since we were arriving from different parts of California, the Change Agents needed to quickly familiarize ourselves with each other and become a team that would best support the learning of undergraduate students that were attending the conference. I found myself frequently identifying areas of need in tasks that were being conducted and applying myself to help finish things. This ranged from distributing materials to students in a corner of a room to asking pre-conference chairs if they had considered a certain aspect of a program that might need additional staffing or support. In an environment

where I only knew a few people on the team, I found myself being less assertive in my communication but rather passive. This realization was helpful as I further thought about my interactions with professionals at my home institution and how it might impact my work if I had to make requests. As a result, I have come to notice and learn the importance of developing rapport with the people I work with.

### **Links to Personal and Professional Goals**

While I took on a larger role at the Western Regional Conference, I was also intentional about the time that I spent with other people so that I could be a good peer, as well as reinforce the network I had started developing. In this process, I became more comfortable with occasionally missing time slots of breakout sessions where there was not necessarily a strong draw to a certain topic, and spending time speaking with individuals regarding their experiences as professionals. I was able to realize, in balancing these different components, that sometimes compromise is acceptable and that it's important to focus on the outcomes that will result of the conference instead of strictly following a guide and process. As a result of being more flexible in this process, I was able to reconnect with peers I had met at the previous year's Western Regional Conference, as well as meeting new individuals through shared connections.

### **Conclusion**

Attending the Western Regional Conference was something that I had looked forward to, as it was my favorite conference of my first year in graduate school. While I didn't attend every single session this second time around, I was able to share my experiences in networking and attend conferences with my peers, serve as a facilitator for undergraduate students, and strengthen my network of professionals that contribute to my growth and development. Attending the Western Regional Conference was a largely reflective process where I spent a lot of time learning about the interests that I had as a new professional in the field. This conference

was a process where I thought about how I saw myself fitting into groups, into a conference, and into the field.