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Veronica's Conference Takeaways



What a journey this has been to have been a part of the NISTS Annual Conference. Being in a room with so many professionals striving for a better education and experience for transfer students has been rewarding and eye-opening. As a transfer student ambassador, I have had the inside scoop on the happenings of the conference, and I'm sure you would like to know what I think! Here are some questions and answers regarding my experience at the NISTS Conference in Atlanta, GA.

What were your original thoughts on transfer professionals/initiatives and how did they change as a result of your conference experience?

From a student perspective, we typically think that no one at our college campus are listening to our concerns regarding our education and experiences. Being at this conference has changed my perspective immensely. Not only are the professionals present and engaged at their campuses, they are passionate about change! It was a pleasure to see so many people going to bat for transfer students, and students as a whole. I have learned the importance of this conference and initiatives and look forward to all the progress the professionals will make.



What did you hear that particularly sparked your interest or inspired you?

During the sessions, professionals spoke about research they have conducted to improve the transfer student experience. One thing mentioned that sparked my interest was the study about college students who are experiencing a lack of food. I know students at my own campus who are experiencing financial strain because they are paying for their college tuition. Scholarships and grants are practically non-existent, and with the extensive time spent in school, hours worked at a job are severely limited. In turn, their pay is going towards keeping a roof over their heads, which means that food is the last item on their list of priorities. Hearing that there are professionals who recognize this strain in student's lives was fulfilling to me as it is a concern that needs to be addressed. I'm hoping that more initiatives/programs will be put in place to help combat hunger among students and in the communities.

What was your biggest takeaway?

Simply put, I have made new friends and learned more about how the educational system works. There are so many people fighting for transfer students, and although slow, progress is being made. I have found that the focus has been primarily on getting students to come to their campuses and getting them engaged, but more needs to be done to keep students at their campus and bringing back their later generations. I encourage everyone to take a moment to look at their own lives. Think of your families, household responsibilities, and workload. Then think about having to handle all of those issues while going to school full-time. Add little to no sleep to the equation, and you have put yourself in a transfer student's shoes. I encourage the professionals to think of the things you would need to be successful at school given these responsibilities, and

gear your programs around creating solutions for them. This is how you will create a program that transfer students will want to come back for.



What are you going to do next in regard to transfer based on something you learned at the conference?

As soon as I returned home from the conference, I reached out to the Assistant Director of the Office of University Recruitment at our campus. I raised awareness about two initiatives that hopefully will gain traction at our campus:

On-Campus Daycare

My hope is that students who are parents have a safe haven to bring their children when they are in need of a sitter while going to school. The idea is that our Parent Mavericks Organization could collaborate with the Early Childhood Education Department on our campus to form a solid program. It could be funded by state grants and possibly included in tuition costs. In March, I will be returning to my alma mater, Skyline High School, to speak at their Career Day. When I was a student there, I took courses in their Child Care cluster, which housed a fully functioning child care center operated by the high school students and two teachers. I'm hoping to connect with my old teachers to see if they can provide tips on or information on how this program got implemented at the high school campus. This same concept could be implemented at our campus so that students can get hands-on learning, count towards their internship hours, and get first-hand experience with what it's like to work with children. I think it will be a great opportunity.

Hunger Relief Day

The second idea is to create a hunger relief day where students can get a free meal once or twice a month (to start with) to help fight student hunger. We currently have a "Pizza with the President" day once a month, and I think this could be implemented through the same program, in conjunction with the campus cafeteria, to provide a meal for low-income and struggling students. Our TRiO program currently has a list of low-income students to whom they provide free tutoring services. I think we could connect with this program's students to see who might need this food assistance, and possibly even partner with the Texas Summer Food Program to see how this could be implemented on campus in a wide-scale manner.

These two initiatives will require a lot of logistics to be worked out, but I don't think the ideas are so far-fetched that they couldn't be implemented. The assistant director believes that these are good ideas, but both will definitely take time to get it going. My hope is that they won't receive too much push back. We shall see what the future holds!



Regarding the conference as a whole, I really enjoyed my time there and have learned so much. I thoroughly enjoyed the student panel with my peers, as well as the Education Design Lab session where we had to draw out our ideas on paper. This interactive, hands-on activity really brought this program close to home and provided a great lead to solutions. I hope those things stay in the conference for next year.

I would also like to say thanks one last time to NISTS and all the program directors that have worked diligently to make this conference a success and for the award. Everyone was so warm and inviting. I really loved getting to know the other ambassadors and form new relationships. It was a great experience! All-in-all, NISTS is making great strides towards advancing education, and I look forward to what the conference holds in the future.

Cheers!

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