Standing on the Shoulders of Giants
Historic Vote Inspires Passionate Leadership

BY DAWN AUBREY, PH.D., MBA, CCA, CEC, FMP

The National Association of College and University Food Services (NACUFS) held an historic vote of support for strategic change at our annual meeting this summer. That vote set the stage for NACUFS to continue to be the leader in collegiate dining for the next 50 years. The vote to modify NACUFS’ governance model honors the past, our history, our culture and the dedication and commitment of our former leaders and volunteers. Today’s leaders stand on the shoulders of giants gazing into the future of collegiate dining. This historic vote recognized that our future leaders are passionate about leading NACUFS.

Our profession has the charge to do more with less. This means today’s leaders and our future leaders have less time and different professional needs than previous generations. The changes are based on the changing nature of higher education, the changing demands of students, the necessity to compete for students and the pressure to restrain the cost to attend. NACUFS must help dining professionals succeed and thrive in the current environment.

Members have called upon NACUFS to be responsive and proactive. Our focus on the future is to become one organization united in our mission to promote and support excellence in collegiate dining. We will continue to cultivate a strategic, data-driven board to implement the strategic plan.

We will focus on improving institutional member value, improving industry member value and increasing membership and membership retention. We will provide greater support to the regions.

The revised governance model makes it possible to implement a number of new initiatives and keep pace with the times. NACUFS has always been the birthplace of modern trends because we serve the students who determine those trends. Our governance changes and our new strategic plan will enable NACUFS to retain our tradition of excellence and our focus on the future. For example, we will enhance the quality of education across the entire organization by developing a global education strategy that respects all our different delivery vehicles (national conferences, regional conferences, institutes, webinars, etc.), while focusing on our members’ learning necessities for the future.

We will develop a stronger national voice to articulate the value of dining services to higher education and other communities. We know that the value of dining services is frequently underestimated. Dining is sometimes a silent partner providing meals and experiences to nourish students’ bodies and minds.

As a source of experiential learning, students learn essential life skills while partaking in dining services whether their experience is as a customer or as a service provider. These skills provide the foundation for future professional and personal success. Many students will spend more time with dining services than in the classroom. We will begin to tell this story of our value.

We have challenges ahead. It is important to remember that challenges are opportunities when approached with a positive attitude that embraces the change. Those who have blazed the trail for today’s dining are now leaving the profession, retiring to a well-deserved time of rest and adventure. This creates opportunity for future leaders, but they need to be ready when the opportunity presents itself. NACUFS is the vehicle to prepare our next generation. NACUFS must turn its attention to assisting all dining professionals to succeed and prosper. Preparing professionals for the next step in their career will be a priority.

Our success thus far would not have been possible without our volunteers and our industry members. This next year is a year of transition and growth — growth upon our established foundation. As Benjamin Franklin said, “Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement and success have no meaning.”

A membership in NACUFS provides you with a network of peers and colleagues who are on the cutting edge of change. We have been, and will continue to be, the place where collegiate dining services professionals go to learn about trends, benchmark against their peers to build excellent programs and network with industry members to build relationships from which we all prosper. I encourage you to renew your NACUFS membership today, and join us on our journey to tomorrow.

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