



PNAIRP



PNAIRP News

September 2008

In This Issue

- 2008 Conference Details
- 2008 Keynote Speaker
- Clearing the AIR About CLA
- What I Learned at Stats Camp
- Inside the Hotel Murano

Contact Us

Dawn Macdonald
Editor & Member-at-Large
dmacdona@
yukoncollege.yk.ca

Hello from the PNAIRP President



Hello to all,

I hope that this finds you and your families in good health and refreshed from the summer holidays. Fall is just around the corner and soon the students will be filling the halls, bringing with them a feeling of excitement and enthusiasm. I think the optimism surrounding each new school year is a result of the contagious spirit that the students bring because they know that they are taking actions that will have positive effects in their lives.

Just as the students are taking action, I invite you to take an active role in PNAIRP. Take the initiative to share your expertise and your questions (use that listserv), teach (present your work or contribute to the newsletter),

and meet with your IR colleagues throughout the Pacific Northwest (perhaps you have ideas for making the PNAIRP website a better professional networking site).

Having the PNAIRP conference in the fall seems to channel the positive energy of the new school year. I have found this annual gathering to be a forum for acquiring new ideas and knowledge, building confidence in our work, networking with colleagues, and renewing excitement and interest in the work we do. So welcome all, it is fall 2008!

I want to thank the members of the PNAIRP board for their work during spring and summer organizing this year's conference in Tacoma, WA. Thanks also to Dorys Crespín-Mueller for her work finding sponsors for the conference. And thanks especially to Darryl Dieter for the many hours he has spent putting together the program, planning the event and working with the hotel. Also thanks in advance to all our members who have agreed to share their work by presenting during the conference.

Continued next page

Hello ... continued from page 1

This year's theme is *Technology: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* and the conference program is filled with topics to match. From our Keynote speaker, Dr Catherine Finnegan, you will learn about opportunities in IR for utilizing Web 2.0 technologies. The concurrent sessions will offer topics in database design, web design, open textbook/courseware models, and survey software. The pre-conference workshops will offer SQL scripting using Oracle and an evaluation of Scantron's Class Climate Course Evaluation Feedback System.

There will also be a wide variety of other topics not directly related to technology, such as measuring student success in math, presentations on assessment and learning outcomes, and alternative evaluation models, to name a few. And for those, like me, who need a little refresher on intermediate applied statistics, you won't want to miss Neal Christopherson's workshop covering multiple regression analysis, logistic regression, and factor analysis.

To complement the great program, this year's venue, the Hotel Murano, will be perfect place for the event. The Hotel is beautiful, filled with wonderful glass art and interesting design elements, and it has plenty of comfortable places conducive to networking. The best feature of the hotel is its size. It will be perfect for our group, big enough that it offers all the amenities but small enough that we will not be lost in the crowds. Check out the PNAIRP website to get all the information about the conference, transportation and the hotel.

I hope to see you in Tacoma!

David Burgess

PNAIRP President

2008 Conference Details

This year's conference will be held in Tacoma, WA at the Hotel Murano from Oct 15-17.

The conference theme is **"Technology: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly."**

Express Bus 590 will get you from the Sea-Tac airport to Tacoma. Bus information is at <http://www.soundtransit.org/x7262.xml>

Don't forget to register!



2008 Keynote Speaker

Dr Catherine Finnegan of the University System of Georgia (USG) will provide this year's keynote address. She is the Director of Assessment and Public Information for Advanced Learning Technologies (an impressive mouthful) in the Office of Information and Instructional Technology for USG's Board of Regents. Her work examines the system-wide impact of information and instructional technology, and the effectiveness of the integration of technology in instruction.

Clearing the AIR about CLA

The 48th AIR Annual Forum, *Adapting to Meet New Challenges*, was a veritable smorgasbord of fascinating educational opportunities. Of particular interest this year were several sessions on accountability in post-secondary education – the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) in particular.

At the University of Idaho, we are wrestling with our participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) that is being developed in light of the 2007 Spellings Commission's findings. Specifically, we are struggling with the accountability testing that is a part of the VSA.

Like many of you, we are concerned that the use of the CLA may reinforce a perception that assessment of student learning does not require faculty engagement. We are also debating whether the tests may be measuring prior learning rather than "value-added" learning. We wonder how student motivation impacts results, what roles student age and commitment play, which students should be tested, how to compare freshmen with incoming transfer students, and how to ensure consistency and comparability with other institutions when our roles and missions vary so greatly. With these kinds of discussions occurring on our campus, I was pleased to see several sessions offered that might enlighten me.

One session, "Assessing the CLA: An evaluation of the psychometric properties of the Collegiate Learning Assessment's 'value-added' in cross-sectional administrations" by Gary N. Larson, provided some very interesting findings. In his summary, the researcher stated that the CLA is an effective conceptual model, but only longitudinally. He also suggested that while it is an "excellent tool for internal assessment – [it is] not yet sufficiently reliable for cross-institutional value comparisons," as is called for by the VSA.

Another session, entitled "The Collegiate Learning Assessment: Using cross-sectional indicators as proxies for longitudinal outcomes", was presented by Philip Garcia of California State University. Dr Garcia also wondered whether or not you can derive value-added scores from cross-sectional data. He raised some of the same questions our faculty has been grappling with, e.g. "should moderately selective schools like CSU ... be concerned about selectivity bias, maturation bias, or experimental mortality?"

Continued next page

Clearing the AIR ... continued

Dr Waddell Herron, in his paper "Postsecondary Education Accountability in the New Millennium: By whose standards?" also focused on accountability issues and reactions. He discussed accountability in the state of California and the need for us to be proactive rather than reactive. His points also covered the challenge service providers face in light of dwindling resources, an issue we all must tackle.

Much as I value the positive approach to the use of the CLA, I think it is appropriate for us to share our perception that even "state of the art" standardized testing for student learning is not a substitute for a carefully designed assessment process. Such a process would involve faculty in setting goals for student learning, designing and/or selecting appropriate measurement techniques, identifying needs for multiple measures, interpreting and evaluating results, using results to make changes, and finally evaluating the success of those changes.

The CLA is only one of a variety of methods, and while it may be appropriate for some purposes, we are reassured that the folks presenting at AIR, and also other attendees, recognize the limited utility of standardized testing in addressing higher education's complex assessment needs.

Jane Baillargeon

Assistant Director, Institutional Research and Assessment, University of Idaho

What I Learned at Stats Camp

During the summer I had the pleasure of attending the AIR Applied Statistics Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. My family was sick of hearing about "Mom's stats camp" as I have been hoping to attend this course since the last statistics institute in 2005.

The first day opened with an overview and review of basic statistics by the amazing and famous Mary Ann Coughlin. Her session was worth the price of admission - she walked around the huge ballroom and involved us individually in her lecture. She gave each of us a sample of 100 M&Ms and we counted the number of blue candies to demonstrate the central limit theorem. It was a memorable and delicious teaching tool. I have read her book, *Intermediate/Advanced Statistics in Institutional Research*, multiple times and each time I read it, I want to rush off and try all of techniques that she and her colleagues present as examples.

The institute included five modules:

- Correlation, simple regression and multiple regression;
- Non-parametric statistics;
- Regression models for categorical data;
- Independent and repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA); and
- Applied multivariate statistics. *Continued next page*

What I Learned at Stats Camp ... continued

Each module was taught by very capable faculty, including Rob Ploutz-Snyder who will be taking up a new position in the fall as a bio-statistician with NASA. Seriously. He is also a great teacher and statistics enthusiast. One of his best teaching images was explaining multi-collinearity among regression variables as everyone bringing potato salad to a barbeque. Although each salad/variable is slightly different, they also have a lot in common and any particular salad/variable doesn't add much to the meal/model. All of the faculty were approachable and willing to discuss not only the material in the modules, and the application of the techniques to our specific projects, but also any other data issues we had. There was a faculty consulting night specifically set aside for people to bring vexing data questions. Each module was delivered in two sessions over two days to help us absorb the material. The ANOVA class even had homework to do in the evening. I found the modules interesting, accessible and challenging.

For our night on the town, I went with a group of Canadians to the Hofbrauhaus to explore the heritage of Cincinnati. Did you know that German immigrants settled Cincinnati? Neither did I. We had a deafening dinner of oom-pah-pah, sausage and mashed potato with not a green vegetable in sight.

To help us get to know our colleagues we had a T-shirt exchange game. My exchange partner was from Hampshire College in Massachusetts. It is a college established in the 1960s with no grades, no majors, and a school emblem that is meant to be the tree of life but looks very similar to another infamous green leaf from the 60s. Apparently most of the students study art.



Left to right: Roseanne Sovka, Dorys Crespin-Mueller and Heather Friesen at the T-shirt exchange.

The institute was well organized and I must give a special word of thanks to our very own Jan O'Brien from Okanagan College who was the director for the institute. Thank you to PNAIRP for the travel grant that helped me to develop my data analysis skills. The Applied Statistics Institute was a very good professional development experience and I would highly recommend it to any PNAIRP member, even if you have to wait a few years to attend.

Roseanne Sovka

Coordinator, Performance Measurement and Research, British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (formerly of Camosun College)

Inside the Hotel Murano

According to the official hotel website at <http://www.hotelmuranotacom.com/>, the lobby boasts a world-class art collection and the rooms incorporate elements of modern design. The hotel is within walking distance of the Museum of Glass and the Tacoma Art Museum. Every floor is dedicated to the work of a different glass artist.



Some of the spectacular glass art at the Hotel Murano

The hotel website lets you have a look inside the chic and comfortable rooms, and even allows you to prepare your taste buds by perusing the restaurant menu. Be sure to check it out before you travel.



Networking on the comfy couches

In-room amenities include wireless Internet and LCD flat-panel televisions. The hotel offers a 24-hour fitness centre, a spa and a salon.