



A Letter from the President

Good morning/afternoon/evening, NAGPS, wherever you are in the world today,

I hope that this letter finds everyone safe and well as we move towards the end of this historic and unprecedented semester. The semester is almost over and there is a lot to go over. So let's get to it.

As you are aware, this past November we held our annual National Conference. For the 2020 National Conference, NAGPS partnered with our colleagues at the University of North Texas Graduate Student Council. The theme for this year's conference, "**Resiliency in 2020: Redefining Normalcy**," resonated with attendees and presenters. The conference was an unqualified success, with over 150 registrations and 30 member institutions in attendance. The presentations were exceptional and the business meetings smooth and productive. I want to commend our colleagues at UNT-GSC, specifically GSC President and National Conference Director Tiffany Miller, as well as NAGPS Vice President & COO Dr. Fang Zhang for their hard work commitment to the event's success.

One of the major business items of the conference were elections for the 2021 Board of Directors. While not all positions are filled, we nonetheless are moving into 2021 with a strong group. Allow me to introduce the 2021 Board-elect:

- President & CEO - **Gwen Chodur**, *University of California-Davis*
- Vice President & COO - **Kaashifah Fnu**, *University of Nevada-Reno*
- Director of Finance & CFO - **David Klein**, *University of North Texas*
- Director of Communications & CCO - **Chenxi Wang**, *University of Massachusetts-Lowell*
- Director of Administration & CIO - **Tiffany Miller**, *University of North Texas*
- Director of Legislative Affairs - **Thaddeus Potter**, *University of Massachusetts-Lowell*
- Director of Outreach - **Parul Suri**, *University of Kentucky-Lexington*
- Director of External Affairs - **Nikki Kindred**, *University of Kentucky-Lexington*
- Director of Employment Concerns - **Alex Seto**, *Purdue University*
- Director of International Student Concerns - **Meindert Montenegro**, *Syracuse University*
- Director of Social Justice Concerns - **Francisco Cartagena Baracamonte**, *University of Maryland-Baltimore County*
- Northeast Regional Director - **Nigel Kidder-Wolff**, *Tufts University*
- Southeast Regional Director - **Sudipta Saha**, *University of South Carolina*
- Midwest Regional Director - Unfilled
- South Central Regional Director - **Vivek Gurung**, *University of Kansas Medical Center*
- Western Regional Director - Unfilled



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Please join me in welcoming our 2021 Board-elect! The 2020 Midwest Regional Director, Paulina Alariste, is currently serving as the Interim MWRD. She has convened a MW Regional Meeting for this Saturday, December 12, at 1pm EST. There are candidates for the 2021 MWRD as well as other positions on the Regional Board. If you are interested in a position or would like to attend, please contact Paulina at mw-rd@nagps.org. If you are interested in the Western Regional Director position, please contact me at president@nagps.org. Several of our 2021 Board members-elect have indicated a desire to have Assistant Directors working with them. Be on the lookout for more information about these positions in the new year.

Another result of the 2020 National Conference was that several resolutions were passed at the business meeting. First off, the membership passed the [2021 NAGPS Annual Budget](#). This budget has contingencies and careful planning in place to adapt to the uncertainty of 2021 vis-a-vis COVID-19. We're very pleased with the budget and a massive amount of praise is owed to Director of Finance & CFO Paul Welfer, Director of External Affairs Kristofferson Culmer, and the entire Finance and Fundraising Committee, for their hard work on this endeavor.

Other major resolutions include increased financial controls, clarifying Board Member responsibilities, re-establishing the Strategic Planning Committee, creating an NAGPS Compliance Officer position, and realigning the member year with the Board year (aka a calendar year). A list of all resolutions can be found [here](#) and the updated bylaws can be found [here](#).

One of the things about the event we were particularly excited about was the fully-digital format allowing us to make the conference more accessible than ever. We were very pleased to see how successful this was, particularly guaranteeing every member institution of NAGPS one free individual admission to the business meetings. These digital components were well-received and very successful, and I suspect that we will be incorporating such components into future NAGPS events, whether fully-online or a hybrid of in-person and online.

As many of you are likely aware, **the new NAGPS member year began on September 1**. However, per the above-mentioned Bylaw Resolution realigning the member year, membership is extended by four months for this year, running through December 31, 2021. For those of you who have already paid your dues, you're fine. Anyone who still needs to can do so. Information on membership and membership rates can be found [here](#). If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Director of Finance & CFO, Paul Welfer, at fin@nagps.org.

As a part of the NAGPS support structure, the National Advisory Board (NAB) provides NAGPS with a variety of resources and expertise that we otherwise would not have access to. Much of the support for the financial reconciliation process has come from the NAB. We are happy to announce that the



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Board of Directors has placed a new member on the National Advisory Board, 2018 and 2019 Director of Legislative Affairs and two-time Board Member of the Year Kaylynne Glover of the University of Kentucky-Lexington. As many of you know, Kaylynne is a tireless advocate for graduate and professional education and we know that she will bring the same passion and dedication to the NAB that she did to the Board. Please join me in welcoming Kaylynne back into the NAGPS family!

And now, for the last time, I am going to leave you with some final remarks.

This year was awful. There is no way around it; it sucked. Nothing ever seemed to work out as planned and any time something was going well, the perpetual gut punch that was 2020 came back with another hit. Many of our institutions failed us or were unable to help us and many of us were forced into a state of self-reliance that none of us were likely prepared for. Every day seemed like a struggle.

I've said it multiple times this year, every month, in point of fact, but it demands repeating; you are an incredibly impressive group of people. Success this year was often impossible. And yet you all did succeed and are successes. By being what you are and who you are, you achieved success this year. I am awed by your resiliency in the face of extreme pressure.

For the last 3.5 years, I've served this Association, first as Northeast Regional Employment Concerns Advocate, then as the Northeast Regional Director, the Vice President, and eventually as the President & CEO. It has been a profound honor to have served this Association, all of you, these past few years. I know that I have not been perfect in my role as President and I accept any imperfections and the mistakes that they may have caused. However, I'd like to think that I did a few things right and I am grateful for the support I received. I appreciate that you let me into this Association, giving me a sense of purpose and community at a time I needed it most, and for trusting me with the task of serving as President this year. I want to thank the entire 2020 Board of Directors for their service, support, and camaraderie this year. Any successes this year were the result of teamwork and without the Board, none of the gains we have made would have been possible.

One last thing; I will be serving as the 2021 Immediate Past President, an *ex officio* position which serves as a counsellor and provides institutional memory. So, unfortunately, you're stuck with me a little longer, even if in a limited capacity.

Wherever you are, I hope you are well. It is important that we continue to stick together during this time. Lend a hand when you can. Support one another. Even if we cannot physically be together, we can still be there. Take care of yourself. Wear a mask. Wash your hands.

You are the Association. We are NAGPS.



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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bradley J. Sommer", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bradley J. Sommer

President & CEO

National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS)