What a great year!

IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT MY YEAR AS PRESIDENT OF the Professional Board Staff Network is over. I was overwhelmed when I was installed as the new president of PBSN last October, but my executive committee and all the members have made this past year a very memorable experience. I have made so many new friends and networking connections during my time as president, and I look forward to meeting many more. In October, the gavel will be passed to Vice President Tina Heskett from Hillsborough Community College in Florida. I have gotten to know Tina very well over the last few years, and she will be an awesome president. She has a flair for getting things done and a personality that will win your heart.

As Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated as he recently outlined the new vision for higher education at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, “We must shift incentives at every level to focus on student success, not just access. When students win, everyone wins. But when they lose, every part of the system should share responsibility.” The theme for this year’s ACCT Leadership Congress in San Diego, California, “High Expectations: The New Community College Model,” seems to fit Mr. Duncan’s statement. We are all in this together to help our students achieve their academic and career goals. This Congress will be an informative and exciting event. Please attend our “Meet & Greet” at the Harbor House at 7 p.m. on October 14 and the professional development workshop at 2 p.m. on October 15. We have an incredible lineup of speakers and roundtable discussions. I learn something new every year at this event. Please take something back from the Congress to your institution to help make your job easier or better.

At the business meeting on Friday, October 16 at 9:30 a.m., a new slate of officers and members-at-large will be elected. Please think about attending this meeting, be involved, and consider becoming a part of our executive committee. The commitment is small, but the reward is great. When your college becomes a member of ACCT, you become a member of the PBSN. This is your network. Call us. Email us. Like our Facebook page, “ACCT Professional Board Staff Network.” We are here for you.

Lastly, I would like to thank my executive committee for all their hard work: Tina, Alonia, Carla, Margaret, Jane, Heather, Debbie, and Sherri. I couldn’t have done it without you. I would also like to say a special “thank you” to past president Terri Grimes for all her support and wisdom.

It has been my great honor to serve as the president of this wonderful group.

MECHELL DOWNEY
SEMINOLE STATE COLLEGE, OKLAHOMA
The Traveling Trustee

By Christina M. Heskett, Hillsborough Community College, Florida

As professional board staff members, we wear many hats, but perhaps one of the most challenging is that of travel agent. In fact, a recent poll revealed that 75 percent of board travel is prepared by the board secretary. Between annual conferences, retreats, and other educational training opportunities, it is easy to overwhelm a trustee with questions about their pending travel — Who will attend? What airline do they prefer? Window or aisle seat? Early or late flight? And the list goes on. While booking travel for many different people with varying preferences can be a dizzying experience, worry not. I invite you to step through the looking glass for some tips on how to smoothly and quickly navigate the time-consuming process of preparing travel to ensure your trustees have a successful trip.

“Begin at the beginning.” While a whopping 89 percent of board staff continues to store trustee information on paper, which can be misplaced (or worse), storing information electronically provides a secure location that can be safely accessed from almost anywhere.

Begin by creating a separate contact database in Microsoft Outlook or a similar program specifically for trustees. Here you can store trustees’ personal information, such as names as they appear on their driver’s licenses, driver’s license numbers, birthdates, known traveler numbers, seat preferences, numbers...

Icebreaker: “Are you a Working Girl or a 9 to 5er?”

Manchester Grand Hyatt, San Diego

Hotel Del Coronado, Coronado Island

Manchester Grand Hyatt

But wait—There’s more! This is your opportunity to make a difference and help shape the future of the PBSN! Elections for open positions on the PBSN Executive Committee will take place at the business meeting along with the ‘passing of the gavel’ to the incoming president. If you are an active PBSN member who has attended at least one business meeting in the last two years, you are eligible to run for a seat on the board. We will also take this time to recognize those nominated for ACCT Professional Board Staff Member of the Year.
for hotel and airline reward programs, meal preferences, and all standard information relating to travel. This database can also be used to store additional information such as shirt sizes, cap and gown sizes, and spouses’ names. Scanned documents can also be stored in the database, such as a tax exemption certificate or a copy of a passport. Information can then be easily copied from Outlook and pasted into Internet travel sites, which will also ensure the accuracy of the data being entered. Once this database is compiled, moving forward with travel should be fairly routine.

“First things first.” Why send multiple emails or make several calls to trustees when a quick poll of the board can give you all the answers you seek? Google Forms (www.google.com/forms) is a great solution to the madness of trip preparation, and best of all, it’s free! Forms can be easily customized to the event and a number of questions can be asked such as planning/not planning to attend, departure/return dates, flight options, meal options, and more. Google Forms is located in ‘the cloud’ and provides a digital summary of the selections made. Trustees can also view these results, which will reveal the selections made by their colleagues. One caveat: While Google Forms and similar cloud-based programs are ideal for polling and related activities, be careful never to post sensitive or private information as security cannot be guaranteed on non-proprietary cloud-based programs.

“I’m late, I’m late!” Don’t procrastinate! Hotel rooms at national-level conferences fill up fast, and staying at the conference hotel is the preferred choice for many, if not all, trustees. Reserving early will help reduce the financial impact of many out-of-pocket expenses for trustees such as cab fares, rental cars, and hotel parking fees. Once a trustee confirms he or she will attend an event, complete the registration and secure the hotel reservation. If you are not planning to travel with the board but will be paying for their accommodations with a college credit card, be sure to request and complete the hotel’s credit card authorization form, which often can be downloaded from the hotel’s official website. With the exception of incidentals, this alleviates most of the financial burden placed on the trustee while traveling.

“If you don’t know where you’re going, any road can take you there.” With airline mergers, fluctuating ticket prices, luggage fees, long lines at airport security, carry-on limitations and flight delays, getting there often requires a trip down the proverbial rabbit hole. Time-saving websites such as Orbitz, Expedia, and Travelocity can help you quickly find out which airlines fly to your destination and what the current fares are. Booking too early or too late can often result in higher prices — so when should you book? According to USA Today, most airlines offer lower ticket prices on Mondays, Tuesdays, or Wednesdays. A search of flights to the upcoming ACCT Congress returned fares ranging from $235 to $597. Researching fares and remaining ever-vigilant will keep travel expenses low and ensure the trustees get their preferred airlines, flights, and seat locations.

The final step to preparing board travel is to compile all of the documents into a trip packet: Trip summary, flight itinerary, registration receipt, event/meal tickets, invitations, and the agenda, et al. Whether preparing the packet electronically or on paper matters not, so long as everything is included. At Hillsborough Community College, the trustees can access all travel documents electronically through their Diligent Board Books software; paper copies are provided upon request. When asked about the completeness of travel packets, Board Chair MarDee Buchman said, “HCC always delivers a stellar performance in handling our travel; I like how my schedule is spelled out from start to finish.”

But wait — you don’t need expensive software to achieve this same feat; the same can be done using Adobe Acrobat. Once all documents are ready, combine them in Acrobat and add hyperlinks to each section for easy navigation. From there, the travel packet can be sent via email or even uploaded to a college’s website portal for trustees to access from anywhere. The end result? No more misplaced documents!

While the board can rest easy in the knowledge that everything possible has been done to ensure a positive travel experience, we must remain flexible to changes. The world of travel is constantly evolving, and as travel agents to the board, we too must evolve. We can also provide flight check-in, remind hotels of special requests, provide weather updates and emergency contact information for trip changes, gather reviews for local restaurants, or even make recommendations on local attractions the trustee may wish to take in after the conference. A visit to the world-famous San Diego Zoo, a tour of the U.S.S. Midway Museum, or even just watching the sunset from Coronado Island can all be experienced while in San Diego for the 2015 ACCT Congress during periods of free time.

Now that you are armed with some new approaches to board travel, we’d like to hear your creative ideas and shortcuts for streamlining the travel process. Send your comments to cheskett@hccfl.edu, and we’ll provide an update of travel tips. We look forward to seeing everyone in San Diego.