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PROFESSIONAL BOARD STAFF MEMBER 2014-2015 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

OFFICERS
Mechell Downey, President
Administrative Assistant to the President
Seminole State College, Oklahoma
m.downey@sscok.edu

Christina Heskett, Vice President
Executive Assistant to the President
Hillsborough Community College, Florida
cheskett@hccfl.edu

Alonia Sharps, Secretary
Chief of Staff
Prince George’s Community College, Maryland
sharpsac@pgcc.edu

Debbie Novak, Immediate Past President
Assistant to the College President
Colorado Mountain College, Colorado
dnovak@coloradomm.edu

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE
Heather Lanham
Executive Assistant to the President
Edison Community College, Ohio
hlanham@edisonohio.edu

Carla Patee
Executive Assistant to the President
And Clerk for the Board
Dodge City Community College, Kansas
cpatee@dc3.edu

Sherri Bowen
Director to the President
Forsyth Technical Community College, North Carolina
sbowen@forsythtech.edu

Margaret Lamb
Executive Assistant to the Chancellor
San Diego Community College District, California
mlamb@sdcdd.edu

Jane Thomas
Executive Associate to the President and
Secretary to the Board of Trustees
Chesapeake College, Maryland
jthomas@chesapeake.edu

Your Connection to ACCT

IN OKLAHOMA, WE ARE FACING EITHER BUDGET CUTS OR A flat budget. While the verdict is still out for us, as budgets become tighter and funding dwindles across the nation, we need to assist each other by sharing ways to save money.

As these cuts become a reality, our students, faculty, and staff are feeling the effects in many ways. Tuition and fees are rising, salary increases are slim or none, and staffing is at a minimum. Amid all these cuts, the quality of education at community colleges remains a good value. A well-educated workforce is imperative for the economic future of our nation. Let’s all do our part to keep it this way. We may all have to wear several hats when all is said and done, but our students are well worth it.

Being a part of the ACCT Professional Board Staff Network (PBSN) has been a highlight of my career as an administrative assistant to the president and secretary to the Board of Regents of Seminole State College. This year has been especially rewarding to me as president of the PBSN. Getting to know the ladies and gentlemen that are part of this network has been wonderful. I know that I have made some lifelong friends, and I am part of a network that can help me in an instant when I need it. I recently polled the network for some information about trustee/board orientation, and the response was amazing. I received so much great information from the membership, it was unbelievable. This organization is the most responsive group I have ever seen. I would like to encourage all of you to be active in the PBSN. It is an invaluable group of people, and we can help each other in many ways.

The PBSN Executive Committee is diligently working on the sessions for the 2015 ACCT Leadership Congress, to be held October 14-17 in sunny and warm San Diego, California. The theme for this year’s Congress is “High Expectations: The New Community College Model.” We hope to have informative and useful sessions for you to attend. Think about running for a spot on the Executive Committee for PBSN. It is a small commitment with big rewards. Remember, we are here for you. Please contact any of us if you have issues, questions, or problems, and don’t forget to “like” our Facebook page, “ACCT Professional Board Staff Network.”

MECHELL DOWNEY
SEMINOLE STATE COLLEGE, OKLAHOMA
THE WORDS “21ST CENTURY” CAN BE USED TO DESCRIBE many things, but for the professional board staff member, the term “trustee” is not usually one of them.

For those of us born prior to 1970, who watched the Apollo 11 lunar landing and marveled at the technological advancements of mankind and who stood helplessly by as computers moved from the office to the family room, as video games replaced playing outside, and as cell phones replaced, well, *everything*, the digital age can be daunting. Now, that’s not to say that our stewards of education don’t have the ability or desire to learn how to use these electronic wonders; rather, it’s the transition and letting go of old routines that can be most overwhelming.

I personally have railed against buying a so-called smartphone, much to the chagrin of my president, but I know that I am losing this battle and need to make the change before I lose the technology war. Having acknowledged that, I can now say without a doubt that it is imperative that the modern trustee also begin this transition sooner rather than later so as not to be left behind.

In August 2013, Hillsborough Community College (HCC) transitioned to electronic board packets and, over the course of several months, phased out the use of the oft-misplaced paper agenda. We never looked back. This was only the beginning of the transition to a paperless board, the “one small step for man” moment for the college, and a turning point in helping the board take that “one giant leap” into the digital age.
When asked about the transition, HCC Board Chair Randall Reid stated that “the days of not embracing new technology are about over. Technological advances dominate our lives, so I think I speak for everyone on our board in saying we welcomed the transition. Additionally, I think the world has come around to embracing sustainability, and we all appreciate less paper.” HCC Vice Chair MarDee Buchman added that “the transition was seamless and promotes a new level of efficiency for our board meetings.”

As a student of computer science, the transition seemed simple enough: upload the agenda each month on the date that the paper agenda would normally have been couriered to the board. That’s not to say that the transition did not have its difficulties. Problems which were not anticipated included having to wait for e-documents from each department, not being able to wirelessly connect at off-site meetings, difficulty syncing devices prior to a meeting, and presentations that were too large to upload, just to name a few. These were basically behind-the-scenes issues that rarely impacted the trustees. With each challenge, though, we were able to problem-solve and either correct it or provide a temporary workaround. And as each meeting went by, we became more and more adept at preparation and implementation.

It has been almost two years since our transition, and we are finding new and exciting ways to utilize this technology to deliver information to our board. For example, during ACCT’s National Legislative Summit in Washington, D.C., the board’s flight information, hotel reservations, maps, invitations, agendas, fact sheets, and other materials were organized and stored on their iPads for easy access. The last-minute additions and changes that occurred after trustees had boarded their flights were made with ease and a simple sync of the device was all that was needed upon arrival.

Knowing that the software isn’t just limited to meeting use can increase its value and help justify the cost, if any, in purchasing it. Most of these applications can also be used to store the board orientation manual, college/campus information, budget information, campus maps, and other documents that a trustee should have readily available with the push of a button or the swipe of a stylus.

At the ACCT Leadership Congress last October, many professional board staff members expressed concern that their trustees may not be open to using electronic devices or transitioning to a paperless process. But just because HCC started the paperless process with the board agenda doesn’t mean it has to begin there for you. If you, as a trustee or an assistant, have a desire to make a change, we are there to help ease you through this transition. It can begin with something as simple as a meeting notice — but it has to begin somewhere. Each of us really needs to affect real change is a little patience, flexibility, and the willingness to adapt. The paperless process is (to quote the Martin Scorsese film The Aviator) “the way of the future,” and the future is now.

ACCT Recognizes Outstanding Professional Board Staff

PROFESSIONAL BOARD STAFF NETWORK MEMBERS are some of the hardest-working, most committed people working at community colleges. We want to help you get the recognition you deserve.

Each year, ACCT recognizes outstanding professional board staff from each of the association’s five regions. It’s our way of saying “thank you” and helping you to get the recognition you deserve.

Nominate yourself or colleagues at www.acct.org. The nomination process is simple and there’s no fee to enter — just make sure to submit your nomination by the June 16 deadline. Contact awards@acct.org with questions or for more information.

Regional and association-wide awards will be presented this October during the 2015 ACCT Leadership Congress in San Diego, California. We look forward to seeing you there!

2014 Professional Board Staff Member ACCT Awardee Jeannie Odle from Chemeketa Community College