

Fall 2013 Joint Conference of TECSCU and TRG: Reflections

Michael Giovannetti, Executive Director, The Renaissance Group (TRG)

Katy Heyning, President-Elect, The Teacher Education Council of State Colleges and Universities (TECSCU)

After months of preparation by the conference planners of TECSCU and TRG, the two national organizations and perhaps the very best “friends” of educator preparation programs and initiatives in America, greeted approximately 80 colleagues and friends at Key Bridge Marriott in Arlington, VA, a most welcoming, familiar location. This year’s event marked the eight anniversary of the Fall Conference at this facility, five years for The Renaissance Group (TRG), and three years as a joint venture with TECSCU and TRG.

Overlooking the nation’s capital and historic Georgetown, the Key Bridge Marriott is located four miles from Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and within three blocks of the Washington Metro system. The riverside hotel is a five-minute walk to the Francis Scott Key Bridge, linking Arlington, Virginia to the Capitol district. The Iwo Jima Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery, the Pentagon, the Kennedy Center, and downtown Georgetown are all within five miles of the hotel.

The conference program was purposely designed to address various aspects of America’s latest educational reform, the Common Core State Standards. The Theme, *“Parlez Vous Common Core Standards? Implications and Recommendations for P-20 Instructional Leaders at Local, State and National Levels”* was successfully delivered as intended. However, given opportunities to improve teaching and learning are no stranger to public P-20 education, it is important to note that speaking the language of the Common Core State Standards is only a first effort, and the ultimate goal is to achieve high levels of proficiency, if educators hope to attain a meaningful level of success with its implementation.

The dates of the Fall Joint Conference, September 28-October 1, 2013 proved to be a great choice. Although prominent signs of a beautiful fall season were displayed throughout the countryside, with picture-perfect weather that could redirect even the most dedicated professionals to the outdoors, the conference content and engaging sessions did not give way to those temptations, as evidenced by the impressive number of participants at all presentations. The “shut down” of government offices and facilities prior to the closing of the conference did however limit the final phase of the conference, which was dedicated to congressional visits.

The Deans’ Leadership Institute held on Saturday, September 28, opened three and one half-days of timely professional development for educators from a number of states, higher education institutions, as well as their partner school districts. The program provided opportunities for participants to actively engage in effective leadership and partnership building scenarios particularly as they related to engaging faculty in the Common Core State Standards. Using rubrics designed for managing change in the adoption of the Common Core Standards, participants were invited to conduct an audit of existing opportunities within their respective institutions. Finally, using a case study approach, program facilitators presented on Effective Advocacy as it related to strengthening voice of higher education in teacher education related

policy and practices. Much of the day, Sunday, September 29, was dedicated to TECSCU's Executive Committee and TRG's Board of Governors for the purpose of conducting the organizations' regular business, including discussions and plans for the future.

The official conference opening took place at 5:00 p.m., with welcome messages by TRG's and TECSCU's leadership, followed by a motivating keynote address by Dr. Jacqueline (Jaci) King, Director Higher Education Collaboration, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Dr. King provided an overview of the work of the Smarter Balanced Consortium, the opportunities and challenges for all educators in K-12 schools and school districts, as well as in higher education institutions. The Consortium is comprised of 26 states and territories, working collaboratively to build next-generation formative, interim and summative assessments for K-12 schools tied to the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. Preparing all students to be college and career ready is the ultimate goal of this initiative, offering all educators new opportunities to improve teaching and learning, including opportunities for higher education to enhance educator preparation programs, improve college readiness, reduce remediation, strengthen lower division courses and boost completion rates. Her message was very well received, setting the perfect stage for the next two days.

The Capital View Ballroom, located on the 14th floor of the conference facility, was the site of the Conference Reception, which followed the keynote presentation, offering all guests a spectacular moon-lit view of Georgetown and Washington DC. The ambiance, the assortment of delicious treats and libations, and the lively exchange of thoughts, ideas and stories by the participants brought perfect closure to the first day of the Fall 2013 Joint Conference of TECSCU and TRG.

The following one and one half days were carefully designed to offer a menu of promising/best practices in the form of concurrent and general sessions. Twenty such presentations were offered, including: *Common Core Across Higher Education: Implications for Practice*; *Common Core Implementation: Leadership Opportunities for School of Education*; *Higher Education's Role in Developing Education Professionals*; *Transforming Teacher Education Through Coaching Pre-Service Co-Teaching*; *Bringing Computational Thinking to K-12 Teachers: Effective Professional Development Models and Strategies*; *The Mouse is Dead: Welcome to the post PC Era*; *Professional Development Partnerships: Growth for Educators and Students*; *Partnerships Make a Difference: Pre-Service Candidates Working with Diverse Populations*; *Teacher Residency: Collaboration for Instructional Shifts in Common Core*, and many more, all focused on the challenges and opportunities for the implementation of Common Core State Standards.

The Luncheon on Monday, September 30, featured Dr. John Welty, President Emeritus of California State University, Fresno, long-time supporter of educator preparation programs, TRG and TECSCU. Dr. Welty shared his *Reflections on the Future*, reminding us about some of the inevitable changes resulting from technology innovations and consumer demands, and the opportunities these present for all educators in P-20 instructional settings. Dr. John Welty was also the recipient of this year's **Renaissance Leadership Award**, in recognition of his many years of support and commendable leadership to educator preparation programs and to The Renaissance Group. Dr. Paul Beare, Dean, Kremen School of Education and Human Development at California State University, Fresno was given a special award for his leadership and unconditional support in hosting The Renaissance Group for the past nine years. Effective January 1, 2014, The Renaissance Group's new home will be the University of Central Missouri, and Dr. Cathy Barlow, Provost Emeritus at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington will

lead the “*Next Generation*” of TRG as Executive Director, replacing Dr. Michael Giovannetti after his retirement in December 2013.

The Fall 2013 Joint Conference of TECSCU and TRG closed on Tuesday, October 1 on a very positive note, following the AFT Panel Presentation and Discussion led by Dr. William Buxton, Associate Professor at the State University of New York Cortland and Ms. Marla Ucelli-Kashyap, Assistant to the AFT President for Educational Issues, the take-away session led by Dr. Arlinda Eaton and Dr. Kenneth Witmer, and closing remarks by Dr. John Counts, President, TRG and Dr. Mary Gendernalik-Cooper, President TECSCU.

During the three and one half days of the conference, particularly in the evening, participants found time for networking and personal/social enrichment experiences, individually and collectively planned. The Renaissance Group is now preparing to present the next issue of its eJournal, *Educational Renaissance*, to feature Fall 2013 Joint Conference Proceedings, and other important aspects of the program. The conference evaluations received thus far have spelled success, and work is underway for planning meaningful professional development opportunities for all members of TECSCU and TRG during 2014 and beyond.

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