



An active ASA helps maximize your OCASA benefits

While OCASA membership can keep you plugged into provincial circuits, and can represent your interests in many forums, a local Administrative Staff Association (ASA) may be the key to maximizing the effectiveness of OCASA membership.

At the same time, the ASA may be a simple remedy for the headaches that many college presidents face.

At a few colleges, the local ASA is active and involved regularly in discussions with the college president on issues that affect administrators (and what issue does not?). Others have no local ASA. *College Administrator* wondered: with workload being a common issue everywhere, is the local ASA worth the effort, both for the college president and the OCASA representative and the ASA executive?

To find out, and to gain some information on how an active ASA does work, we invited both the college president and the local ASA college rep at five colleges to describe how they function, and to describe the benefits and challenges for all involved. We did so hoping that at least the two distinct perspectives would provide some useful insights.

For our purposes, an ASA is any group of OCASA members active at a single college to advance the OCASA goals of professionalism. Whereas OCASA does this provincially, the local ASA is active at the college level.

In this article, we share the responses from five colleges: Algonquin, Cambrian, Confederation, Fanshawe, and Georgian.

Linda Trott, OCASA College Representative for Georgian, sees the key element to be clarity of communication. “Stakeholder consultation is very important. If there are issues that impact either all employees or just administrators, there needs to be a vehicle for administrators to provide input. It is risky to not have a voice on important issues.”

Not surprisingly, Brian Tamblin, President of Georgian College, has similar views: “Our local president of OCASA sits on our College Council, which meets eight times a year. This committee focuses on the college’s budget, college procedures, supports the board of governors in strategic planning, and raises any issues of concern around the college’s operation. I have an open door policy for any of the OCASA executive.”

At the heart of the relations effectiveness of the ASA is regular meetings with the college president, where information and ideas flow both ways.

Brian Tamblin says: “The local OCASA chapter provides me with input on issues affecting job satisfaction for administrators, and administrators’ views of more general college issues. It is also a great forum where I can convey information and address any questions or concerns.”

Howard Rundle, President of Fanshawe College, says it is important to him that administrators at all levels be involved in the ASA. The staff association is “a ‘somewhat’ independent source of information and advice for junior management and a chance to have anonymous input and expression of concerns. This relies on senior management being members a well.”

Algonquin College President Robert C. Gillett agrees: “Having an active ASA gives the college a strong voice from administrative staff similar to the voices of our unionized personnel and allows the president the opportunity to share system challenges and explore local solutions.”

At Confederation, the meetings vary

Benefits of an ASA

To senior management

1. Improves information exchange
2. Provides admin perspective on committees
3. Helps with employee retention, satisfaction.
4. Develops leadership capacity
5. Networking minimizes silos

To administrative staff

1. More PD opportunities
2. Improves information flow
3. Networking minimizes silos
4. Adds leadership opportunities
5. Provides a credible college voice

Complete guidelines can be found at the OCASA website: www.ocasa.on.ca/asa

from formal meetings with the president and the board twice a year but include a policy of informal openness.

What do such meetings accomplish?

Patricia Lang, President of Confederation, says the benefits to her include "Receiving honest and direct feedback from Confederation OCASA members. The OCASA President sits on the College Planning Committee that offers advice and support to the President on college-wide policy issues, strategic planning and the budget. The College Planning Committee also includes the presidents of our faculty and

support staff unions, presidents of our student associations (SUCCI and OASA) as well as the senior team." OCASA college representative Sheryl Furlonger says, "In one word the relationship is excellent!"

Donna Gates, OCASA representative at Fanshawe, says: "A college benefits when its administrative staff works constructively together – when they (administrators) feel that they have a voice and that the president is listening to what they have to say; when they feel that they have more in common than disparate. Having a strong ASA

only benefits a college and brings no disadvantage." Howard Rundle agrees that the ASA helps "promote a climate of openness and fairness" for all administrative staff.

The most important part of the local ASA will likely be this relationship formed with the president and/or a committee of the board. Collegiality is essential in this relationship.

Some have seen the administrative representative on the board of governors as serving a similar function. This is of course not true. The administrative representative to a board serves



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How OCASA members can start an ASA

1. Form leadership team (3-5 people)
2. Gain support from the college president
3. Communicate with all administrative staff
4. Plan an initial meeting of admin staff
5. Develop a constitution (OCASA has samples)
6. Elect officers, including OCASA board rep
7. Establish a business plan
8. Set up an account to manage fees, costs

the college as a whole, and votes accordingly.

The relationship between the ASA and the board, on the other hand, fosters dialogue as Linda Trott at Georgian says, to “work pro-actively and constructively with the President to address any issues before they can become problems.”

At Cambrian, College Representative Celina Cacciotti says, the ASA meets regularly with the president. “Prior to each meeting with the president we meet with local OCASA members and develop an agenda of topics we would like to discuss with the president. At our monthly meeting, the president will inform the group of topics so that we can pass that information on to our local OCASA group.” In other words, communication is a two-way street.

While local ASAs have existed at various forms at many colleges, “When the New Charter (2003) came into existence,” says Ms. Trott, “we actively ramped up to pull together a local ASA executive. The activity level and visibility of the ASA has varied over the years, but there has always been a local OCASA presence thanks to a small group of dedicated administrator volunteers.”

Each college ASA has its own challenge. At Fanshawe, says Ms. Gates, “The biggest ongoing struggle, I think,

is to overcome the notion that we are a ‘pseudo-union’ for administrators. Our members understand that we are something completely different. However, there are still some administrative staff who have not joined the ASA because they carry this belief. It can be difficult to communicate the differences sometimes.” Ms. Gates said she joined when she became an administrator after 15 years at the college “because I was impressed with they way the group seemed to come together on issues and projects that make our college a better place to work. The president seemed to be supportive of the ASA and he seemed genuinely interested in what we had to say.”

At Confederation, says Sheryl Furlonger, the issue is one common to the northern colleges: “Our local ASA ensures that all members, including those from our regional offices, are involved, and provides a venue for all Confederation OCASA members to mingle, meet and express their views.”

And then she adds one more challenge: “Finding the time, over and above the workload on all administrators’ desks, is always a challenge.” That challenge is likely echoed by administrators at all levels in all colleges, and that busy people with challenging

jobs make time to develop and cultivate an active ASA underscores its value. Confederation College President Patricia Lang agrees on the workload issue, along with the perennial issue of funding.

Algonquin College President Robert C. Gillett agrees the biggest challenge is “under-funding by government of the college system in terms of operational and capital grants as well as tuition fees.”

Sylvia Bernard, President of Cambrian College, adds that low funding pressure has never been felt more than at present. “Especially when we need to respond to the increased demand for more flexible access to college programs in an economic downturn.”

Identifying under-funding is one thing. But what is the role of an ASA in dealing with this?

Mr. Gillett: “ASA members need to speak out about all of the ramifications brought about by under-funding and how challenging it is to remain competitive against systems which are far better funded.” Tamblын agrees: “ASA can help by expressing their concerns to government through the provincial executive (OCASA).”

One perhaps surprising result of an active ASA – or not surprising, if you think about it – is the culture of professionalism that can be engendered whenever any group of administrators get together for any reason. From the foundation of networking, to the facilitation of professional development, individual careers can be built with such mortar. And, of course, the college as a whole benefits.

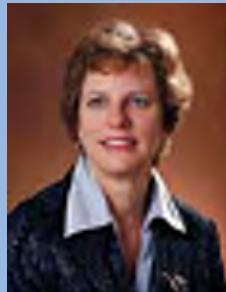
Benefits of an active local ASA to members, says Ms. Furlonger at Confederation, are “Regular communication and opportunities to meet; a very supportive President who invites OCASA representatives to self select for representation on college committees, hiring and interview panels, member of the board of governors and more. This is powerful and a great



Robert C. Gillett, Algonquin



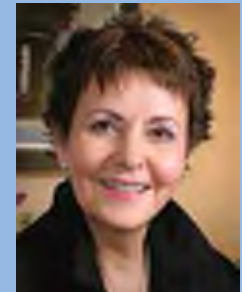
Brian Tamblын, Georgian



Sylvia Barnard, Cambrian



Howard Rundle, Fanshawe



Pat Lang, Confederation

resource for not only our local ASA, but for our president and senior team too.” Pat Lang agrees. “(The local ASA) is an opportunity for administrators to connect with provincial colleagues on a regular basis. (It) gives administrators the opportunity to provide feedback – which can be helpful in sharing responses or giving direction to their local ASA executive on matters affecting administrators across the college.”

Sylvia Barnard: “An active ASA provides networking and leadership development for administrators, thereby helping them be more effective in their roles.”

Brian Tamblin also sees additional untapped potential in professional development. “Masters and doctoral research that members do could be coordinated with Colleges Ontario’s and individual college’s priorities,” he said. Howard Rundle at Fanshawe suggests that the local ASA (and OCASA) could “co-sponsor with college HR-appropriate PD activities that members appreciate and that assists them develop.” (The PD factor fits well with OCASA’s provincial efforts in PD, through the annual PD Conference each June, and local

presentations.)

The need to communicate with new members of administration is, of course, practical, for often the new administrators replace retiring ASA and OCASA members. And while OCASA provides regular communication to members provincially, communicating to members locally takes time and effort. In particular “communicating to non-members the numerous benefits in becoming an OCASA member,” is both essential and difficult, according to Ms. Trott.

At Cambrian, Ms. Cacciotti sees the challenge as more personal: “taking the time to focus on issues that affect our careers and participate in professional development opportunities.”

But often both presidents and members appreciate the networking opportunities that ASA membership provides. At Cambrian, Sylvia Barnard, sees the chief advantage as “networking to share best practices for more efficient productivity, advocacy.” As an OCASA college representative, Donna Gates at Fanshawe agrees. “We are a large institution and the ASA has given me an opportunity to work with administrators

from areas that I would never get to work with otherwise. I really appreciate that. It brings us together in ways that allow us to see how similar our goals and objectives are even when our roles are so different.”

It is this focus on professionalism, stressed by OCASA provincially and emphasized by the local ASA, that can provide the most benefit to the college. Dr. Rundle at Fanshawe defines the main problem of colleges as “managing change” – and sees potential of the local ASA working with college human resources to develop “appropriate PD activities that members appreciate and that assist them to develop.”

Provincially, OCASA stresses professionalism and individual growth of members. Locally, the ASA seems to be the vehicle for applying that professionalism on a day-to-day basis, and for sharing the challenges. Or, as Patricia Lang says, the ASA provides an opportunity to “work together with the president and senior team to drive the vision and the values through the college.” [c|A](#)



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