

NAACO 7th Annual Conference

Breakout Session Presenters

Gregory Albanis

Greg Albanis has served as Director of University Events at NYU since 1996. Prior to this position, Greg served as Director of Special Programs in Undergraduate Admissions where he coordinated the Student Ambassador Program, Summer Sessions, Alumni Admissions and all on/off campus events. This year marks his 25th year at NYU. He left the University for a year to serve as Director of Admissions at Pace University. In addition to his responsibilities at NYU, Greg has managed events for the William Jefferson Clinton Foundation most recently the opening of the Presidential Library in Little Rock; New York is Book Country; and the Annual Quill Awards. Greg received his B.A. from NYU's College of Arts and Science in 1978 and his master's degree from the Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service at NYU in 1980.

Renee Ballenger

Renee is the Director of News Services in the Marketing & Public Relations Office of Southern Utah University in Cedar City, Utah, just 2.5 hours north of Viva! Las Vegas! She is the primary writer for the University, whose tasks include executing news releases, copywriting, employee relations, and the bi-annual magazine for the University. For Commencement, she composes the written content for the 40-page commencement program via communication with a 30-person committee representing six colleges; sends out all of the publicity to the media on the event and the students graduating; conducts the procedures to choose the student graduation speaker; makes the preparations and organization for the dozen Commencement Committee meetings; is the main contact for info and questions for graduating students and the 18 college representatives on the Commencement Committee. Renee says she very much enjoys the opportunities she receives through her involvement with Commencement. Every year she forms new, great memories and learns something, but most of all, it has remained fun because of the people she gets to work with in order to bring this big event and accomplishment to successful completion. Commencement wouldn't happen without Renee.

Mindy Benson

Mindy currently serves as the Executive Director of Alumni Relations at Southern Utah University and has held this position for three whole weeks. Prior to that, she served as Director of Student Life and Leadership at SUU where she oversaw student activities on campus, and administered an Event Management internship through the Student Activities Office. This is a program where students learn how to produce activities, concerts, and major events and get the opportunity to work on Commencement. Mindy also works on events on a National Level, helping to plan and carry out such notable events as the 2004 Republican National Convention, the President's Inaugural Gala, the National Race for the Cure, and directing major concerts. She produces the Utah Summer Games Opening Ceremonies. She served as an event management volunteer at the 2002 Winter Olympics, and directed the Olympic Torch Run Celebration at Southern Utah University.

Jeffrey Block

Delivering top customer service has been the basis of Jeff Block's career since graduating from Michigan State University in 1988. After graduation, Mr. Block started out on his adventure into the service industry as a Foodservice Director for ARA Services, Inc. and managed at various accounts in Ohio and Indiana.

In 1994, to escape the lands of Hoosiers and Buckeyes, he accepted the position of General Manager of Foodservices with AVI FOODSYSTEMS, Inc. He spent 9 years with the company; arriving at the Wayne State University campus in 1999 as General Manager of Foodservices at Scott Hall School of Medicine. In 2001, he was named Director of Catering and Conference Services of the entire university for AVI. In 2003, Mr. Block joined Wayne State University as their Director of Special Events and Services and Director of Commencement.

Block manages a team of 6 professional event planners that are responsible for all presidential, development, university, alumni, and school/college events. In fiscal year 2005 – 2006, the Special Events and Services team managed over 300 events on and off campus.

Dianne Coleman

Dianne currently serves as commencement officer for Wichita State University. In this capacity she is responsible for all aspects of planning and executing six commencement ceremonies each year. In addition to the commencement responsibilities, she is also responsible for all budget and operations for the Division of Academic Affairs and Research. Prior to accepting this position she served for ten years as Assistant Dean of the Barton School of Business at Wichita State University. Dianne has been in higher education for 35 years, and a faculty member for 30 years. Helping students and faculty be successful has been her passion. Working with campus-wide staff to ensure memorable commencement ceremonies is a true joy and a responsibility that is not taken lightly. Dianne currently serves on the NAACO Conference Planning Committee and she looks forward to many more years of NAACO membership and contribution.

Michelle Curreri

I am a lifelong resident of Rhode Island. I have enjoyed working in a higher education environment over the past 15 years. While working here at the University of Rhode Island (URI), I was motivated to return to school to obtain my masters degree. Now I am thinking about enrolling in the doctoral program. I may wait until my 9-year-old son Anthony gets a little older before making such a commitment. In the meantime, I will continue to work at URI with hopes that my son will also become a URI alum.

John Fees

John Fees is an entrepreneur, strategic marketing executive and business leader who currently serves as Chief Executive and Managing Partner of Access Venture Group, LLC.

Fees also served as the co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Y2M: Youth Media and Marketing Networks. Y2M owned and operated College Publisher, the nation's largest online network of college newspapers serving more than 500 colleges and universities, over 2 million subscribers and 120 national advertisers. Fees led the successful media business thru August of 2006, when he completed the sale of Y2M to Viacom's MTV Networks. Fees also co-founded eGrad and published GradPak magazine, which from 2000 – 2006 aimed to be the greatest resource for graduating students and the colleges that serve them. eGrad provides its services to nearly 200 university alumni associations and national affinity groups. The company was sold in 2004 to Collegiate Funding Services and in December 2005 was acquired by JPMorganChase.

Fees is a graduate of Arizona State University, where he received a bachelors of science degree in History and also a graduate of Harvard Business School where he completed a Masters in Business Administration.

Lois Ferguson

Lois grew up in the panhandle of Texas, the daughter of a Baptist preacher and Baylor University grad. She attended Wayland Baptist College in Plainview for two years and transferred to Baylor as a senior. After graduation she went to work for Word, Inc., a Christian communications company, and was there almost 18 years. In 1988 she returned to Baylor where she has worked for more than 18 years. Lois started in Public Relations, moved to Student Life where she produced All-University Sing and completed her master's degree. She was office manager for the Dean's office, College of Arts and Sciences, then was named Assistant Provost, where she began working with Graduation. Since the summer of 2003, she has worked with facilities management, University Host office, and now Design and Construction, where she is Facilities Utilization Planner for Baylor and continues to manage commencement ceremonies three times a year.

Robyn L. Goldy

Robyn Goldy has served as the Associate Director of Alumni Relations and Special Events at Minnesota State University, Mankato since August 2001. She earned her masters in Educational Leadership from MSU in 2005 and her undergrad in English from Colorado College in 1999. Her major responsibilities include maintaining all electronic communications with alumni such as the monthly e-newsletter, the online community and the alumni website. Additionally, she helps plan and implement alumni events and programs. She also updates and maintains the graduation website and has been responsible for the online commencement registration system since its implementation in 2003.

Jacqueline Haeflinger (Jackie)

Jackie Haeflinger has served as associate director of University Events at New York University (NYU) since 1993. A division of the Office of the Senior Vice President for University Relations and Public Affairs, University Events is charged with developing and producing all major university events, annual and unique in time, locally and abroad. Jackie's expertise in event planning was preceded by 15 years of service in Human Resources and Office Management. She held the position of Budget and Human Resources Officer for the Office of University Relations at NYU from 1988 to 1993. Before joining NYU, Jackie began her career in the financial services industry holding the position of Manager of Administration at the CPA firm of Bernstein and Belsky and Supervisor of Administration Services at the bond house of John Nuveen & Co. Jackie received her A.A.S from New York University and is a Certified Life Coach.

Dean ODriscoll

As an assistant to the president, Dean is involved in many things including; supervising campus publications, photography, media relations, licensing, presidential events, inauguration, building dedications, advertising and public relations. Dean is in his 17th year in higher education after nearly nine years in various radio and TV jobs. He hosts a weekly radio show, does color commentary on the sports broadcasts and voices and produces all of the TV and radio commercials for SUU. This year will be Dean's 13th year as a Commencement Director.

Melissa Werner

Melissa Werner is Director of University Ceremonies at Arizona State University and co-founder of the North American Association of Commencement Officers (NAACO).

A native of Tempe, Arizona and a long-time employee of ASU, Melissa has held positions as an academic advisor, program coordinator, development officer and event planner. In 1999 Melissa and Carol Switzer, Director of ASU Summer Sessions, co-founded the North American Association of Commencement Officers, a professional association for commencement and graduation planners from across the United States and Canada. The need for such an association was confirmed by the tremendous response to the inaugural conference in 2000 and since that time NAACO has grown rapidly to include more than 180 institutions. Melissa served as the NAACO Charter President and was the lead coordinator of the inaugural NAACO conference in 2000, conference co-chair in 2001 Corporate Showcase chair in 2002 and chair of the 2007 conference.

Melissa holds a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Public Relations from the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communications at Arizona State University and a Masters degree in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University.