MASFAP MONITOR

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

masfap.org

MASFAP
MISSOURI ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID PERSONNEL

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Kimberly Meeker
MASFAP President
Director of Financial Aid, North Central Missouri College

Kimberly's Korner: Fueling Change with Positive Energy



FISAP, FVT/GE, and FWS earnings reporting—OH MY!

This profession certainly has its peaks and valleys, and while we've just climbed out of another valley, there's a peak on the horizon: the MASFAP Conference, "Fueling Change with Positive Energy: Inspiration, Intention, Impact."

Our conference program committee has put together an incredible lineup of learning opportunities, fresh perspectives, and opportunities to engage, including:

- NASFAA general and interest sessions to help make sense of how financial aid intersects with the federal budget process, along with updates on everything happening in Washington, D.C.
- A keynote address from Dr. Tim Crowley, a nationally recognized speaker, leadership and culture expert, and relentless optimist who helps leaders and teams rise strong, beat burnout, and choose better every day.
- A pre-conference session with Dr. Jack Green exploring financial aid, belonging, and the student experience.
- And, of course, a dive into OB3 changes!

There will be plenty to learn, but this conference is about more than what we can fit into a session. It's also about the people who understand our work, the experiences we share, and the relationships that make this profession a little less overwhelming and a lot more rewarding.

Kimberly's Korner Continued

So, if you haven't registered yet, consider this your nudge! Make plans to join us at the Lake, step outside your usual circle, and be open to new experiences. Sit next to someone you haven't met, strike up a conversation, and come ready to share a challenge, celebrate a win, or simply enjoy time with people who understand the unique world of financial aid. You never know what idea, perspective, or encouragement might come from an unexpected conversation.

And if you're like me—an introvert who sometimes has to intentionally channel her inner extrovert—we've got you covered! This year, we're introducing Conference Connectors, friendly faces who will help make it easier to feel welcome, included, and part of the MASFAP community. Because meeting new people shouldn't feel like just one more thing on our to-do list!

Whether this is your first MASFAP conference or you've been part of this community for years, I hope you'll lean into the experience. Come ready to learn something new, share what you know, laugh with colleagues, and build relationships that carry beyond the conference.

SO EXCITED to see you at the Lake!

With gratitude and forward momentum,

Kimberly



Commitee Updates

With less than a month until the 2026 MASFAP Annual Conference, the Program Committee has been hard at work finalizing an incredible lineup of sessions and planning exciting evening events! We are also thrilled to partner with the DEI Committee to offer a special hybrid session featuring Dr. Anthony Abraham Jack, which will be open to both conference attendees and those unable to attend in person. Between the outstanding educational opportunities, fun evening activities, and chances to connect with colleagues, this is a conference you won't want to miss!

REGISTER TODAY!

FUELING CHANGE WITH
POSITIVE ENERGY
INSPIRATION, INTENTION, IMPACT
MASFAP Conference | November 9–11, 2026

– Keri Gilbert, Stephens College



Newcomer Commitee

The Newcomer Committee has been working on opportunities to help new members connect with MASFAP and get to know others within the organization. We look forward to welcoming our newest members and helping them feel at home in the MASFAP community!





– Charissa Davis and Sarah Williamson

Committee Updates

Corporate Support Committee: With less than a month until the 2026 MASFAP Annual Conference, the Program Committee has been hard at work finalizing an incredible lineup of sessions and planning exciting evening events!



If you register as an exhibitor you will receive: one conference exhibit space, which will consist of a 6' table, your organizations logo on streaming video during our video presentation, and acknowledgement of your sponsorship by the MASFAP President during lunch.
You also have the option to advertise in the MASFAP Program, which includes a ¼ page advertisement in the conference program. You can also choose this option without being an exhibitor and you do not need to be a MASFAP member to advertise!

– Ginny Burns

Legislative Committee

The Legislative Committee has spent much of its time this year compiling a spreadsheet of all Missouri institutions and listing their federal and state Congressional districts to further support our mission of meeting our Legislators here in Missouri. This spreadsheet will help us in future years by selecting representatives from specific constituencies/schools when scheduling local visits. This task was compounded by the federal redistricting and subsequent court challenge(s). For example, the University of Central Missouri was (or is) in District 4, or is it 5 now? Many other institutions have also been affected by these changes. Also, we are facing further challenges in scheduling visits with our representatives as many of them are facing re-election, so getting in to see them (or even their aides) this year has been a struggle. In addition, we will be offering a session on Advocacy at the Conference for any interested parties who would like to know more about advancing specific issues that will help our students succeed. We are continuing to build upon our work so that we can present a strong, united front when advocating for our students in the future.





–Tony Lubbers and Will Shaffner

Committee Updates

MASFAP Awards Committee

Now is the time to recognize Missouri's best and brightest! I know it is an unbelievably busy time for all of us, but please don't let this opportunity pass you by!
MASFAP is now accepting nominations for this year's awards, and we really need you!
Deadline to nominate: September 17th.

The nomination process is easy and only requires a short email! Please email kwilliams@kansascity.edu with the name of who you'd like to nominate, the award you are nominating them for, and a short reason why they should be nominated for the award. Below is a list of awards and criteria:

- Missouri Award – MASFAP's highest honor and recognizes and individual who has demonstrated outstanding leadership and service throughout their financial aid-related career.

List of former recipients

- Bob Berger Newcomer Award – This award recognizes the outstanding contributions of individuals who are new to the financial aid profession (less than 5 years) and have made outstanding contributions at the institutional, regional, state, and/or national levels.

List of former recipients

- Lifetime Membership Award – Recognizes an individual whose career reflects sustained, exemplary service to the financial aid profession, significant leadership within the association, and a lasting impact on students, colleagues, and the broader higher education community.

List of former recipients

- Student Success Story Award – Intended to focus on individuals while symbolizing the real purpose of financial aid, whish is to provide the means to pursue and realize a postsecondary education. The nominee for this award must meet the following qualifications:
  a. The nominee must hold a degree or certificate of completion from a post-secondary educational institution within the state of Missouri, which is an eligible institution for U.S. Department of Education Title IV student assistance programs.
  b. The nominee must have received financial assistance while enrolled at the institution.
  c. The nominee currently either must be engaged in vocational or professional activity, or be enrolled in a graduate or professional school. Preference will be given to nominees who are not practicing aid administrators.

Don't delay, send your nominations in today! Good luck to all of you in the trenches of disbursement right now, keep your head up and know you are truly making the magic happen!



-Kaley Williams

Committee Updates

Early Awareness Committee Update

The Early Awareness Committee is wrapping up the last of their 12 in person high school counselor workshops for fall. Over 350 counselors and advisors attended our in-person workshops to learn about FAFSA and policy updates, as well as discuss common college affordability challenges. Virtual workshop registration is now open! Please feel free to share the registration with counselors in your area! We are very grateful to our committee members who helped develop the presentation and who supported these workshops. We are also grateful to our host institutions and partners - you make these workshops possible!

Virtual Workshop:
Friday, October 23 10:30 am – 12 pm

-Kaitlyn Venta, Hannah (Smith) Zenishek, and Taylor Grimm



Water Cooler Talk

I recently transitioned from the Director of Student Financial Services at William Woods University to the Senior Coordinator of Compliance, Athletics and State Aid Programs at Mizzou. I'm missing the team at WWU, but I'm excited for this new adventure!

– AJ Miller, University of Missouri, Columbia



We officially have a kindergartner! (Still very much in denial)

– Liz Case, University of Missouri Kansas City



Julie Burns, Assistant Director of Financial Aid, is retiring effective October 30, 2026. We thank her for her dedication, priceless knowledge and tireless efforts throughout the years!

Megan England (pictured left) is joining us as the Assistant Director of Financial Aid. Alyssa Shafter is joining us as the Foundation Scholarship Coordinator.

– Marla Fernandez, Truman State University

Fueling Change with Positive Energy: From One Student’s Challenge to a Movement of Possibility

As financial aid professionals, we spend our days helping students navigate the path to higher education. We work to remove barriers, connect students with resources, and create opportunities for them to pursue their dreams. But sometimes, the barriers we encounter aren't ones we can solve through our everyday work. Sometimes, they require us to look beyond the systems we know and ask a different question: **What if, instead of accepting the way things are, we became part of changing them?**

For me, that question started with my daughter, Ellie.

Ellie is neurodivergent, and like many students, she has dreams, abilities, and potential that deserve the opportunity to grow. As she began exploring opportunities to continue her post-secondary education, we also explored scholarships to help make that journey possible. What we found was a process that often didn't reflect the strengths of students like her. Traditional scholarship applications frequently rely on essays, academic achievements, and the ability to communicate potential in a very specific way.

I could have accepted that reality. I could have decided the process wasn't designed for her and moved on.

Instead, I started asking myself: *What if we could create something different?*

Before I tell you what came from that question, let me tell you a little more about Ellie.

Ellie found her path to college through North Central Missouri College's SAIL program, which stands for Students Accessing Individualized Learning. SAIL is a two-year program designed for students with neurodevelopmental disorders, combining academic support with opportunities to develop skills for future employment. It offers students a supportive environment in which they can pursue their education and build on their individual strengths.

Today, Ellie is in her second year of college, pursuing an Early Childhood Certificate. She has maintained straight A's and a 4.0 GPA and has been inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa international honor society for community college students. Watching her thrive has been a reminder of what is possible when students have access to an environment that recognizes their potential and provides the support they need to succeed.

Her journey has reinforced something I believe deeply: students don't have to follow a conventional path to achieve meaningful success. Sometimes, they simply need a path that works for them.

That belief became the inspiration for The UP Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization I founded in 2025 to empower neurodivergent students through scholarships, resources, and advocacy that honor nontraditional educational journeys and unlock lifelong potential.

UP stands for Unbound Potential. It represents movement and growth, and the belief that a student's future should not be limited by the barriers they encounter or by whether their path looks different from someone else's. Different is not a disadvantage. It is a strength!

Our scholarship, the Unbound Potential Scholarship, was created to support neurodivergent students pursuing college, trade school, or certificate programs. We wanted to create an opportunity that recognizes students beyond traditional measures of achievement and offers a more accessible application process, without requiring the conventional essay that can be a barrier for some students.

What began with one family's experience has grown into something bigger. In our first year, the generosity of people who believed in this mission helped us award scholarships to two students pursuing their own educational journeys. As of today, the scholarship fund stands at $15,200, with a goal of reaching $25,000 to establish an endowed fund that can help sustain this opportunity for future generations of students.

Every donation, every conversation, and every person who chose to believe in this vision has helped turn an idea into tangible opportunity. What started as a response to a challenge in my own family's life is becoming a way to help other families navigate their own educational journeys.

And that is what fueling change with positive energy looks like to me.

It doesn't mean ignoring challenges or pretending barriers don't exist. It means refusing to let frustration be the end of the story. It means taking something that doesn't work and asking how it could work better. It means channeling what matters to us into something that can make a difference for someone else.

As financial aid professionals, we see firsthand how policies, processes, and expectations shape a student's experience. We know that access isn't always as simple as making an opportunity available. Sometimes, we have to reconsider how that opportunity is presented, who can realistically access it, and whose potential might be overlooked along the way.

We may not always have the ability to change an entire system. But we can challenge assumptions. We can advocate for students whose needs aren't being met. We can make our processes more accessible. We can create new opportunities when existing ones fall short. And we can encourage others to see possibility where they might have seen limitations.

The UP Foundation is one small example of what can happen when inspiration leads to intention and intention leads to impact. I didn't start it because I had all the answers. I started because I saw a need and believed I could do something about it.

We often talk about the change we want to see in the world. But change doesn't always begin with a grand plan, a large organization, or an abundance of resources. Sometimes, it begins with a challenge close to home, a willingness to think differently, and the decision to take the first step.

So, as we continue fueling change with positive energy, I encourage each of us to consider: What frustration could become an opportunity? What barrier could inspire a better way? What small action could make a lasting difference in someone's life?

We don't have to wait for someone else to make things better. We can be the ones who begin.

For me, that change began with a daughter who deserved the opportunity to pursue her dreams. Her journey continues to inspire me, and I hope the work of The UP Foundation will help other students discover what is possible when someone believes in their potential.

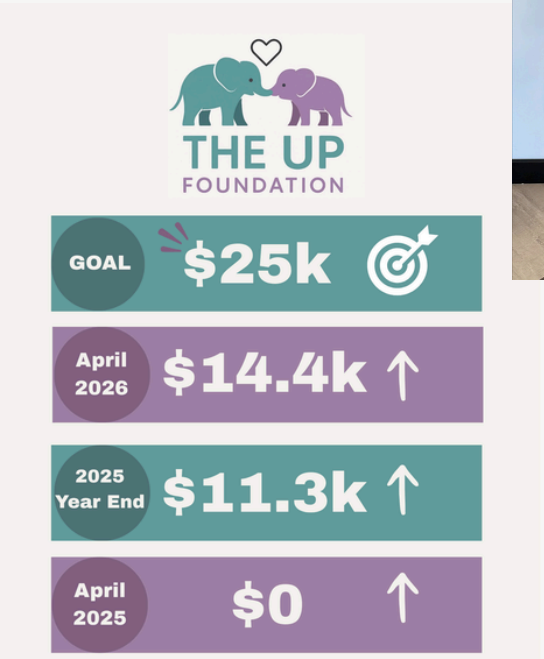


Removing barriers. Reimagining paths.

Let's be the change we want to see.

- Kimberly Meeker
Founder, The UP Foundation





Getting to know MASFAP!

What is your favorite fall food or drink?





"A PSL! I don't let myself have one until I feel that first crisp in the air."

– Taylor Grimm, Missouri Scholarship & Loan Foundation

"Favorite drinks: Pumpkin spice lattes and apple cider. YUM!!"

--Cassandra Hicks, Southeast Health College of Nursing & Health Sciences

"Who doesn't love soup weather, but Walmart bakery does these seasonal Pistachio Walnut Muffins that I NEVER get tired of!"

- AJ Miller, University of Missouri, Columbia

" I look forward to picking apples with my kids and making a fresh apple crisp with them!"

– Kaley Williams, Kansas City University

"Nothing like a crisp breeze and a peppermint and chocolate drink!"

– Keri Gilbert, Stephens College

"White Chicken Chili is my favorite fall food. I like the idea of pumpkin spice coffee but then don't actually like flavored coffee! lol"

—Sarah E. Williamson, North Central Missouri College

My favorite fall food/drink I look forward to is literally pumpkin ANYTHING!

– Kimberly Meeker, North Central Missouri College

"Love hot mulled cider. My mum would use the large coffee urn (the kind you see at church functions) and fill it with cider and packets of cinnamon sticks, cloves and nutmeg. The whole house would smell like fall and then to sit and sip it with the fire crackling. Happy Happy Memory."

– Michele R Logue University of Missouri – Kansas City

"Pumpkin beer, homemade chili, and Sunday football... mostly because I'm keeping an eye on my MOHELA fantasy football team."

—Melissa Findley, Missouri Scholarship & Loan Foundation

I enjoy a wide variety of soups and love trying different flavors and combinations!

– Charissa Davis University of Central Missouri

At this time of year, I look forward to all of the fresh pecans! I come from a small town that has an area called pecan grove, and the amount of paper bags that we fill are crazy! The worst part is cracking them all, but nothing beats them!"

– Liz Case, University of Missouri Kansas City

Reminders & Upcoming Events

Not attending the MASFAP Annual Conference? You can still join us! MASFAP invites all financial aid professionals to a free virtual Fireside Chat with Dr. Anthony Abraham Jack on Monday, November 9, from 1:00–2:00 p.m.

Dr. Jack, author of The Privileged Poor and Class Dismissed, will discuss the financial and institutional challenges students face after they enroll and the important role financial aid professionals can play in student belonging, persistence, and success.

Not attending the conference? Register for free to participate virtually.

REGISTER HERE!

Attending the conference? No additional registration is needed. You can attend the session in person.



We are so grateful for you!



Monitor Submission Policy

Articles may be submitted by any person, company or organization for consideration by the MASFAP Monitor staff and are subject to approval prior to publishing in the newsletter. In general, submissions are made by members of the organization. The author's name should be included in the submission. The editor reserves the right to reject or edit the content of any article or information submitted.
Articles will be edited for accurary, quality and appropriate length. Submissions may be limited to one article to Monitor, per person, company, or organization, depending on space.

Articles are intended to be informational and for the benefit of MASFAP members, not for company promotion or advertising.
If the author is unavailable or a resolution can't be reached, the editor will refer it to the committee chairperson and President for a decision about publication.
The MASFAP Monitor is brought to you by the Communications Committee.

Submissions for the next MASFAP Monitor are due January 8th, 2026.

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