



April 2, 2019

Dear AIR Colleagues:

I am delighted and grateful to be named the 2019 Sidney Suslow Scholar by the Association for Institutional Research. To be included among the ranks of past Suslow honorees and their many contributions to higher education is to breathe rare air. In accepting this award, I'm mindful of the foundations that Sidney Suslow laid for all of us to engage in meaningful and impactful scholarship.

In a career spanning tribal colleges, research universities, national policy organizations, regional 4-year universities, community colleges in urban and rural settings, as well as establishing a consultancy directed at improving institutional performance, I've met and worked with many of higher education's luminaries. Foremost was the late Charles F. Elton, founding editor of *Research in Higher Education*, for whom the AIR Best Paper Award was named. His support was pivotal to me as a brand-new Ph.D. seeking to break into the publishing world. Chuck had a wary eye for quality and a celebrated brilliance that was exemplified by his wry sense of humor. I always was amused by his admonishment to me to send him "more stuff" for publication. I also recall meeting Patrick Terenzini at my first Forum and, slightly agog, telling him that I had read all of his publications. He replied that he was glad someone was actually reading what he wrote. That knocked me back a bit for I'd assumed that everyone in the Association had surely read his every word!

I'm grateful to AIR for many outlets for meaningful creative and human interaction. Service on the publications committee, elections committee, forum evaluation committee, and, later, on the executive committee provided me a chance to grow as a leader, to support and be supported in personal and professional pursuits, and to see opportunities to be of service to higher education through scholarship. For four decades I rubbed elbows and learned from astute colleagues with outsized hearts including Jean Endo, Larry Litten, Oscar Lenning, Robert Fenske, Richard C. Richardson, Jr., Jan Botha, Rob Toutkoushian, Sam Peng, John Muffo, Richard Howard, John Milam, Mardy Eimers, Dawn Terkla, Christine Johnson and Kay and Byron McClenney. I'm sure that I've neglected someone and, if so, please forgive me.

I made a conscious decision early on to spend my career in the vineyards of higher education practice. This choice meant moving away from my early writing focused on the theoretical toward creating scholarship intended to be used by practitioners. The setting for much of my scholarship was the community college where I perceived fewer barriers to innovative practice but where the formal payoffs for publishing were intrinsic only. The reward system for

publishing favors university-based scholars, so it's especially moving to be the first Suslow Scholar with deep roots in community colleges.

Every scholar should try to avoid boring her or his readers with mediocre writing. Precise diction has its rewards, especially if one can convince oneself and others that the quality of one's work is at least one standard deviation above the mean for mediocrity! On a more serious note, I am pleased to have authored a number of peer-reviewed articles, national policy briefs, and three volumes of *New Directions for Institutional Research* as well as having been awarded the Best Paper award for the first paper I presented at AIR way back in 1984!

I'm equally pleased to have attempted to advance scholarship and practice through direct work with colleges and universities. In my career as a private consultant I have had the opportunity to engage with more than thirty institutions in the area of strategic planning and initiatives to increase student success. These experiences on the ground, in turn, informed my writing and thinking about how institutions could best approach change and transformation. Being squarely in the rough and tumble also was the impetus to create open source tools for institutions wanting to journey toward improving practice.

I'm also grateful for the support of my family as I pursued a life of writing and engagement. Beside the aforementioned weekends, there the vagaries of travel to (sometimes) exotic locations and long spells of writing at home. The counterweight was the collaborative scholarship with my spouse and occasional co-author, Dr. Alice Bedard-Voorhees, a recognized scholar in her own right. Our children, Danielle and Bennet also grew to be excellent collaborators whose cultivated appetites for thinking and producing good work often exceed those of their father.

My advice to young and old authors whether they be aspiring to publish or are wizened veterans of the sometimes cruel publishing process is to keep yourself purposefully uncomfortable, to share your writing with colleagues early on, and to constantly hone your prose! Calibrate where one standard deviation above mediocrity lies and hang above that line! The changes coming to higher education are daunting and if you can use your research skills to improve practice and share that experience via the written word, we should all be better served.

Thank you once again to my life colleagues in the Association for Institutional Research for this recognition. I close by saying that a distinct joy in life is to be well thought of by people of whom you think well.

Sincerely,



Richard A. Voorhees