

April 15, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to accept the honor of being selected as this year's recipient of the AIR Outstanding Service Award. It is truly humbling to be in the company of so many others who have inspired me through their service and commitment to AIR. My first mentors, Peggye Cohen and Jim Ferguson, introduced me to the field and to leadership. Dawn Terkla taught me that mentoring others strengthens us all. Mary Sapp helped me see myself as a leader, relentlessly encouraging me to serve – even when I didn't think I was enough.

And I frequently didn't think I was enough. While I was good at math and statistics, I wasn't as good at developing code – and it's still not a strength. To be honest, at times, I felt I wasn't in the right profession. I had more passion when working on assessment and student success projects. It was the people, the programs and the policies that I enjoyed; I did not see myself as a "data person."

But I said yes when I was asked to serve on various AIR committees and shocked as I was to be nominated, I said yes to AIR Board service. Data person or not, it was in service that I found my voice as an institutional researcher and as a leader. I embraced a belief that every single data point is connected to a human being. And it is the stories the data tells that matter. It is the people who are impacted by the data, the people who are erased by the data, and the people from whom the data is extracted that matter.

I learned that from Julie Carpenter Hubin and her open leadership style. I learned that from Laura Palucki Blake, who was so generous with her knowledge of assessment. I learned that from Bethany Miller, who took it seriously when I bemoaned the treatment of institutional researchers at another organization. I learned it from Michelle Appel, who knows and understands the data like the back of her hand but seems only to talk about caring for people. And I learned it from Shari Ellertson, who validated a decision I made that elevated humanity over the day's agenda.

This award should go to all the people who said a kind word after a presentation I gave or a paper I wrote or who asked my support for something they were working on or gave me support for a project I was working on (looking at you, Karen Weber). Without them I surely would not have said yes to any of it. I am grateful to the University of Puget Sound and the Council of Independent Colleges for their support of my service to AIR. It has been a highlight of my career, and I am honored to have had the opportunity.

Warmly,



C. Ellen Peters

Director of Strategic Research and Assessment