# **NABS Notes: May 2018**

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## **President’s Note**

First and foremost, congratulations to our 2018 scholarship finalist class. By simply reading their career aspirations, I am in awe at the diversity and ambition threaded throughout the finalists’ profiles. Join me in learning more about our finalists [here!](https://nfb.org/scholarships) It’s never too late to join us for our family reunion in Orlando, but if you want to save $$$, then [preregister](http://www.nfb.org/convention) by May 31 to take advantage of the discounts. If you are looking for roommates to cut back on costs or to have a buddy throughout the week, call or email me and I will do everything in my power to find you a compatible roomie. During the busy Convention week, NABS will have a networking event, trailblazing workshop, business meeting, NABS Olympics, walk-a-thon, and so much more! Specific details to come with times and locations, but be on the look-out for all things students at Convention. Particularly for those students looking for role models or those professionals or students who characterize themselves as mentors, please apply as a mentee or mentor for our 2018 National Convention [Mentoring Program](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdmRindqic4gnya1liJL2f0v7WqAMGu1Kc3Hl6fkDal6Njutw/viewform). You won’t want to miss out on the fun.

Rest assured, if you will not be at the Convention, we will have our annual business meeting streamed and recorded for convenience. NABS is always looking for creative ways to get our members more involved and to spread the word of the Federation. Beyond our National Convention planning efforts, work is underway and your opinions and suggestions are so appreciated and valued. Please reach out with ways in which we can improve the National Association of Blind Students. I love my role as president, but I love this role because of our members and the possibilities that come to fruition from being a part of such a powerful and fulfilling organization.

## Preregister for the 2018 National Convention by May 31

When: Tuesday, July 3—Sunday, July 8, 2018

Where: Rosen Shingle Creek Resort  
9939 Universal Boulevard  
Orlando, Florida 32819-9357

Preregistration is now open. When purchased online by May 31, the preregistration fee for convention is $25 ($30 on-site) and the cost of a banquet ticket is $65 ($70 on-site).

[Preregister online](https://convention.nfb.org/)

## 2018 NABS Mentoring Program

Are you interested in attending the national NFB convention in Orlando, Florida? Are you looking for guidance, tips and tricks on how to navigate the countless presentations and activities at the resort? Would you like to be introduced to leaders of the Federation family? If so, please consider applying to be a part of the 2018 NABS Mentoring Program. Alternatively, if you feel that your skillset could benefit prospective mentees, please consider applying to be a mentor. We need dynamic and compassionate leaders to promote growth in our membership, and to build upon the forward momentum of our organization as a whole. You can find the link to the form below:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdmRindqic4gnya1liJL2f0v7WqAMGu1Kc3Hl6fkDal6Njutw/viewform>

Applications close on June 15. Please contact Katy Olson (president.iabs@gmail.com) for more information.

## Accessibility User Research Collective

The Accessibility User Research Collective (AURC) is looking for people who are blind or have very low vision to take part in ongoing research projects that we conduct as a research partner for Microsoft. The goal of these studies is to use real feedback from real people to assist Microsoft in improving the usefulness and accessibility of their apps and products. The studies can include emailed surveys, in-person interviews or focus groups. Joining the AURC doesn’t mean you will be inundated with survey requests. Only when a study requires someone with a specific disability is that person contacted; and they are free to turn down the request if it comes at an inconvenient time for them. The privacy and anonymity of participant personal information, both in the database and during any studies they participate in, is protected by strict HIPPAA requirements as well as by special research security protocols that are required for studies involving human subjects.

The studies usually provide a modest monetary stipend as thanks for participating; and from conversations with study participants, they value the opportunity to help to improve the accessibility and usefulness of apps.

If you decide to join us, you can sign up to our database by filling out a survey at this link: <https://is.gd/AURCmemberform>

AURC web site: <https://accessibilityuserresearchcollective.org/>

## Newseum – Making Museums Accessible for the Blind

The National Federation of the Blind appreciates our partnership and the work of John Olson, Co-Founder of 3DPhotoworks LLC, for his efforts in creating tactile art with audio descriptions at the Museum, a world-renown museum in our nation’s capital. Please join us in viewing a video created about the undertaking of John Olson, featuring many of our Federationists.

<https://vimeo.com/264628086>

## Calling for National Convention Volunteers

Each Convention, the National Association of Blind Students hosts an array of meetings and activities throughout the week. The most essential element of making these events a success are our volunteers. From marshalling students to selling raffle tickets, to helping register students at our functions or manning the Exhibit Hall table, we need your help to ensure a seamless process takes place. To learn more about our volunteer opportunities and to sign up for a shift, please contact Shannon Cantan at [shannoncantan.nfb@gmail.com](mailto:shannoncantan.nfb@gmail.com) by June 15.

## 2018 Nominating Committee

In 2017, NABS appointed a Nominating Committee to thoughtfully recommend incoming leaders to our membership prior to the election. This year is no different, as we feel that a nominating committee brings cohesion, trust, and transparency to our membership, the most important element of our organization. The committee, appointed by NABS President, Kathryn Webster, is comprised of leaders across the country who are passionate about the progress and betterment of the National Association of Blind Students. This year, President Webster has appointed Michael Ausbun, the current 1st Vice President of NABS, to serve as Chair of this essential committee. As a democratic organization, we want to make sure your voice is heard throughout this process. This year, the five officer positions are up for election, all of which are 2-year terms. The five positions are President, 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary. If interested in running for one of our national leadership positions and hoping to be supported by our national nominating committee, please contact Michael Ausbun by June 15. If you feel strongly about a certain candidate, we want to hear from you, as well. Michael can be reached via email at [Michael.ausbun@gmail.com](mailto:Michael.ausbun@gmail.com). While pondering the possibility, do not hesitate to connect with anyone on the NABS Board, particularly Kathryn, as we are here to support your future endeavors and leadership potential. Feel free to reach out with any questions!

## 2018 Southeast Regional Student Seminar

### An opportunity to sharpen self-advocacy, confidence, and social networking abilities for blind students!

When: August 10-12, 2018

Where: National Federation of the Blind

The Jernigan Institute

200 East Wells St.

Baltimore, MD 21230

Eligibility: Blind High School and college students in the southeast states. Other interested students are welcomed to attend.

Activities Include: Engaging workshops with Federation mentors, interactive confidence-building opportunities, and chances to apply NFB philosophy to real world situations.

Registration opens on May 15, 2018 and closes on July 15, 2018. To register, please contact Robert Parsons, President, Virginia Association of Blind Students at 804-801-7674 or [rob.parso3389@gmail.com](mailto:rob.parso3389@gmail.com). For any questions about this event, please contact Robert Parsons at 804-801-7674.

**NABS Committee Updates**

### Get involved!

* Legislative Advocacy Committee

The Legislative Advocacy committee is gearing up for national convention, where we are partnering with our advocacy and policy team from the national office to host a self-advocacy/student advocate workshop. We hope to see you there! We welcome all feedback, and we hope you will consider joining us for our monthly calls which take place the second Sunday of the month at 8pm eastern standard time.

* Fundraising Committee

Keep a look out for the NABS Exhibit Hall table at Convention this year. We will be selling keychains with the NFB logo for $5, designed by the talented student artist Elizabeth Sheeler. Our cookbooks will be sold for $15 as well. Come grab a sample smoothie and learn more about NABS, while supporting our student division. If you are interested in joining the Fundraising Committee, please join us on our monthly conference calls every second Thursday of the month at 9 pm eastern on the NABS line.

* Outreach Committee

With convention coming up, the Outreach Committee is informing students on convention tips, tricks, do's and don'ts. This month our blog post was written by Cindy Bennett, a NABS member who traveled abroad to another convention. We had students share their experiences about the Southwest and Midwest seminars. We had a membership call on National Convention. Finally, in an effort to get our word out to all blind students, we've developed a letter to go to every state's rehab centers, rehab agencies, and affiliates, explaining the resources we have to offer. Our call is every second Tuesday of the month, 9PM Eastern, and we would love to have you join!

* National Convention Planning Committee

NABS is proud to announce a new ad hoc committee for all things Convention. We will be planning 4 student events in conjunction with the other committees in an effort to prepare us for fundraising, member engagement, and best of all fun! The events we are planning are NABS Olympics, NABS Mentoring Program, volunteer coordination for exhibit hall table, Student Networking event, and door prizes at our special events! Join us every other Monday at 8pm eastern on the NABS line!

## State Division Updates

Are you curious to see what your fellow students are up to? Please check out the following updates from several of our proud divisions.

Please note: All text was taken directly from our state student division leadership and not amended in any way.

* North Carolina

The North Carolina Association of Blind Students is hosting two summer student receptions—one in Charlotte (June 9th) and one in Raleigh (June 16). We hope you will consider coming out to learn more about us and the National Federation of the Blind of North Carolina. Please contact President Kenia Flores for more information at [kenia.flores@furman.edu](mailto:kenia.flores@furman.edu).

* Hawaii

The Hawaii Association of Blind Students has been actively participating in the legislative efforts of our local affiliate. During the 2018 state legislature, we passed House Resolution 138, Requesting the Hawaii State Judiciary and Department of Human Services to Not Use Blindness as a Basis for Denying Parental Rights. We had bills in the House and Senate for this initiative, as well as a Senate Resolution, all of which progressed somewhat but could not pass their entire chamber. We also had four bills to end the payment of subminimum wages to workers with disabilities, two of which received hearings and progressed all the way to their final standing committee. At that point, by custom, one bill received the final hearing and advanced to conference committee. A conference committee is a committee comprised of representatives of both chambers who negotiate the final language and iron out the differences between House and Senate versions. We pushed hard but saw the subminimum wage bill die in conference committee. We will try again next session. Additionally, some of our officers arranged a meeting with a member of the State House of Representatives and a representative from the administration of a large private university in Honolulu. In this meeting, we requested a letter supporting the creation of voluntary accessibility guidelines for instructional materials in higher education. Finally, as our affiliate is starting a newsletter, our student division has a representative on the committee to develop the newsletter. Every student division has the potential to be a powerful contributor to its state affiliate, and we are doing our best to contribute in Hawaii.

* California

Greetings from California! We hope everyone killed it on their finals and ended their semester on a strong note. The California Association of Blind Students is hard at working in building membership. This month, we created a brand-new membership flyer for our student division describing who we are and how we can be a resource to students. The flyer has been distributed to all chapter presidents, disability offices in universities, and rehab counselors. We have also started a new project in outreach where we will visit a different chapter or two each month to recruit new members to our division. On June 9, CABS are taking some students out on a beach trip to Mother’s Beach in Marina Del Rey and we will be having a picnic there. As national convention is just around the corner, we will be having two board members represent the California student division and they are very eager to attend our family reunion in Orlando. Our student division will be selling a gift bag of fidget spinners, skittles, and hand sanitizer for $10, so come find us to get your gift bag! Thank you and let’s go build the National Federation of the Blind!

* New Jersey

Happy May from NJABS to our favorite Federation family! NJABS is working hard at recruitment. We will be contacting disability departments at multiple colleges throughout the state. We are planning a big event in the fall that we hope will also pull in more students. The event will be further planned during our July meeting. There will be a good number of NJ students at National Convention and we can’t wait to see you there!

## May Blog Post

Cindy has been a member of NFB for 11 years and has held several offices for NABS, the Greater Seattle Chapter and the NFB of Washington. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Human Centered design at the University of Washington. This broadly means that she researches how people use technology. With academia comes a requirement to publish at scholarly venues, and in her field, scholars attend conferences to share their published work and network with colleagues. This essay was originally posted as an email to the AccessComputing list, to which disabled students studying stem who are involved in the associated grant program are subscribed. She shared her experience attending a large conference to thank AccessComputing for funding her travel. If you study a stem subject, learn about AccessComputing by visiting https://www.washington.edu/accesscomputing/ and you can visit Cindy’s website at <https://www.bennettc.com/>

I’ve just returned from Montreal, in Canada’s Quebec province, where I attended the 2018 CHI conference on Human-Computer Interaction generously sponsored by AccessComputing. I am emailing to share my experience.

This conference is the largest in my field with about 3,500 attendees annually. It was located at a giant convention center, and attendees stay at different hotels in the area and evening activities occur all around town. Accessibility is more of a niche research area than a concern at the conference, and there are several access-related challenges. As a blind person, I continue to learn the best way to manage this challenging environment with professionalism in mind.

In summary, I have become more grateful for people as with a busy schedule, so many crowds, and an unfamiliar area, I really rely on their kindness during conferences. However, the navigation challenge means that I plan ahead and set up networking meetings with loads of colleagues, so I use the collaborative assistance to my advantage.

I helped to organize a couple of conference activities and attended others. In summary, the conference activities include the following. Before the conference begins, attendees can apply for workshops which are one and two-day gatherings of researchers interested in a similar area. For the CHI conference, admission to the workshops is easier than getting a paper accepted, as long as you submit an abstract that is well written and relevant. A keynote speaker addresses the entire conference for each of the four main conference days following the workshop. They are carefully chosen by the organizing committee and are usually very well known. Paper presentations are 20-minute talks organized into longer sessions with 4 similar papers each where an author paper presents a summary of the project. These talks are a means to motivate people to read the paper. Papers are peer reviewed and about 25% of submissions are accepted at this conference. During breaks, the conference hosts a variety of conversational sessions like panels to foster a large conversation on one topic, and posters, technology demonstrations, and a job fair where attendees circulate and inquire at the stations they are interested in. Several universities and technology companies host evening socials at nearby restaurants.

I began the conference by participating as a co-organizer in a workshop on designing classroom technologies inclusive of students with and without visual impairments. As a co-organizer, I worked with a committee ahead of time to develop the call for participation, review submissions, and plan the program schedule. A variety of researchers from those researching young children to those interested in making online programming lessons more accessible for high school students attended. After introducing our research, we worked in small groups to identify challenges we have encountered and brainstorm solutions. My favorite breakouts focused on sharing the accessible methods we use to make design more inclusive for visually impaired people. For example, we made a list of tactile materials we could build prototypes out of. We also shared ideas for giving back to our researched communities such as offering to print 3d models for teachers of visually impaired students. Others shared strategies for engaging participants by incorporating multisensory activities to move away from traditional design activities that emphasize vision. One attendee recommended some children’s games for making people feel more relaxed and comfortable, and another researcher asked us to record our ideas in recordable birthday cards which forced us to listen and share in a way we had never thought of before as understanding the rudimentary recordings required active listening.

A good friend attended the workshop with me, and she offered to meet me at my hotel beforehand. In doing so, she showed me the shortest route to the convention center. There were several streets I could have taken and doors I could enter, but since we have worked together before, she knew what signs to look for to find the best path. We found an intersection across a busy street controlled by a traffic light, and a door to the convention center with a straight path to the registration area. She showed me a couple of landmarks, so I could meet someone. I purposely stay close to conference venues because I have found that minimizing navigation helps me to get more out of conferences, but coordinating this informal O&M really helped me to feel more confident and in more control of my schedule. I highly recommend that blind and visually impaired people do this. If you do not know anyone attending the conference, several conferences have volunteers. You can inquire the organizing committee ahead of time to learn whether a volunteer could meet you before the conference to help you scope out the area.

Throughout the week, I referenced a conference schedule I made for myself. The conference lists all presentations in a smartphone app, and you can add interesting sessions to a schedule. Of course, I overbooked myself and did not attend all sessions, but this app was incredibly helpful, so I can reference sessions I missed after the conference has finished and read the papers instead. I highly recommend calendaring events before a conference whether they are organized into a convenient app or whether you have to manually enter the appointments. It saves a lot of cognitive energy wondering what to do at any given time.

Since I have been doing research for almost six years, I have accumulated a bunch of colleagues who I like to meet with. At the beginning of the conference, I messaged several people and set up lunch and coffee break meetings. I would ask them beforehand if they wouldn’t mind meeting me somewhere. This was almost never an issue. In this way, I got to network with tons of colleagues, and most were happy to help me get from my previous location and to my next location. It was very important that I could navigate some places on my own but getting what I wanted to out of the conference meant sacrificing some autonomy, and I found that most people were more than happy to help me.

A lot of blind and visually impaired people are taught to learn skills to be independent, and these are incredibly important. But I have found that asking for help and setting clear boundaries has not sacrificed my professionalism or independence. For example, when I asked friends to meet, I would alert them ahead of time, asking if they could meet me somewhere. In the cases where the person was going to be far away or when they had to be somewhere very quickly, I had the landmarks in mind and could almost always find one of those with them, so I could then regroup on my own. The key was that I tried to set up expectations by asking ahead of time and having more than one place I could go to reorient myself when things changed last minute.

On the last day of the conference, I gave a presentation accompanying the paper on which I was the lead author. In summer, 2017, I interned at Microsoft Research and did a fun project interviewing visually impaired teens on their use of photo-centric social media like Instagram and Snapchat. We submitted the paper to CHI in September and it was reviewed and accepted for publication, which comes with an invitation to present at the conference. When creating the presentation, my co-authors and I agreed that showing videos would make the teens’ use patterns much clearer to the audience. I have experience presenting slides with videos which led me to decide to co-present with a co-author. In past experiences, I have configured my computer with a sound card to send my screen reader to my headphones and video media to the speakers. I have had both positive and negative experiences with this working, and I decided that since at least 45 people were presenting in the same room during the sessions before mine that week, I wouldn’t chance the setup going Arie. I didn’t think any planning ahead could prepare for potential technical difficulty, and I definitely did not want the audience to hear my screen reader or to control the presentation without one. My co-presenter and I practiced the talk a few times, and we easily learned to work together; she had a copy of my talk transcript in the presenter’s notes, so she knew when to advance the slide, and I revised the transcript several times, so I spoke to it rather than going off script onto tangents. I found this to be an effective method for presenting. I can present on my own, but it gave me accountability to practice and speak clearly, and I did not have to worry about the potential awkwardness of splitting my sound output in a heavily used, unfamiliar conference room.

Other conference highlights included the Diversity and Inclusion lunch where senior researchers with underrepresented identities shared short talks of their struggles and hopes which helped me to feel less alone. I also enjoyed attending a panel on fostering a more slow and sustainable academia. I got some great tips from colleagues. For example, I was challenged to make a list of recent accomplishments every time I tell someone ‘no’ to remind myself that my ‘no’ is being said thoughtfully and with everyone’s best interests in mind since I would not be able to give my time well if I do not have it. I suggested something that has been taught me, that people find a group for whom they direct their service, to help them to more easily say ‘no’ when people ask for their time. For example, I prioritize helping students with disabilities, and if someone contacts me who does not fit that demographic, I try to point them toward other resources instead of meeting with them.

Since I have been around this research community for a while, I am struggling to remember what it was liked to awkwardly amble around a networking event, though I remember the feelings well, and I still feel awkward and alone sometimes at conferences. If you are struggling to meet people, I recommend finding conversational events at conferences that are smaller than giant poster sessions or exhibit halls. For example, a part of the conference I forgot to mention are the special interest groups. People at conferences are generally interested in getting to know people researching similar things as them, so I have found that by attending those, I meet people who are usually open to set up a coffee with me, even if I end up tagging along with some of their other colleagues. You could also make a point to walk to the front after a session. The presenters usually stick around for questions, and from personal experience, I love it when someone comes to talk to me, so I am not standing at the front by myself.

I still have challenges navigating conferences. I have never attentively circulated through the poster sessions, demos, or job fairs at CHI. I often have other plans while they are going on and I get lost in conversation. But I know I miss some cool research, and I hate not having a reference point when interesting projects come up in conversation. I will be looking for a job in the next couple of years, so I probably need to get better about this. I try to be thoughtful about what I am asking of colleagues. If I could find one who was also looking for a job, it might be ok to ask them. But whereas I am comfortable to ask a colleague to direct me to a meeting room when they are walking to a nearby room, asking for someone’s time for an hour to describe projects seems to cross a line for me. Yet navigating some of these spaces in crowds on my own is inefficient. So, I look forward to brainstorming with my many blind friends, who always have great ideas! I bring this up to note that despite my experience, I still encounter challenges.

I have shared my very individual experience. What assistance may help me to get the most out of a conference may make someone else feel uncomfortable. The most important things that I try to keep in mind whenever embarking on any adventure are however applicable to anyone. Set yourself up with great skills so you can make choices about when you ask for assistance and what assistance you ask for. Always prepare for assistance to fall through by having a backup plan and reaching for those great blindness skills and recognize that you are continuously learning and be compassionate toward yourself when you don’t do something the way you would prefer.

I am very grateful to AccessComputing for providing funding to attend the CHI conference. I am happy to answer any questions about navigating conferences, being a Ph.D. student who has completed most milestones, or internships as a blind person, so feel free to be in touch!

## NABS Facebook Group

Join our Facebook group by visiting:

<https://m.facebook.com/groups/173482726798026>

The National Association of blind Students

A proud division of the National Federation of the Blind

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