# NABS Notes: September 2019

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## President’s Note:

September is one of my favorite months. Although spring is my absolute favorite season, September brings a special shift from flip flops to boots, peach to pumpkin, and the shift from a desire to go to the beach to a desire to cuddle up with hot chocolate. We are knee-deep in convention support across the nation, with nearly all board members traveling for the weekends of October and November. There are a few things on the horizon where I would like to direct your attention:

1. NABS Notes Updates: NABS Notes is gradually revamping, so please send suggestions to Johna Wright (johnawright98@gmail.com) if you have creative ways to enhance our monthly newsletter!
2. NABS Washington Seminar Funding Program: Stay tuned for the application launch in November but start penciling in the 2020 Washington Seminar week from February 10-12 in Washington, DC.
3. 2020 Midwest Regional Student Seminar: In the early spring of 2020, we plan to convene in windy Chicago for the 2020 regional student seminar. Please plan on joining us; and more information to come in the coming weeks!
4. NABS Notes Game: Please read through the below interactive activity and participate throughout the upcoming months to be featured in the next month’s edition of NABS Notes!
5. NFB Open House Calls: Direct perspective members to join our national membership committee leadership (Jeannie Massay and Kathryn Webster) on one of our upcoming monthly open house calls. They take place on the third Sunday at 4pm of even-numbered months; and the third Wednesday at 8pm eastern on the odd-numbered months. Email membership@nfb.org with any questions!

Please let me know if there is anything you’d like to discuss! The virtual door is always open!

Love,

Kathryn

## **NEW! NABS Notes Game:**

It’s time for some friendly competition! We have been working on something very exciting over the last few months, and we are finally ready to share it with you all. Starting in October, NABS is introducing an interactive component to the NABS Notes. Each month, at a randomized location within the NABS Notes, you will find a trivia question, puzzle, riddle, or another fun game. Once you figure out the answer to the month’s game, send an email to game organizer Johna Wright (johnawright98@gmail.com) . The first person to respond with the correct answer will get a feature in the next edition of the NABS Notes! Also, a special surprise will be given to one lucky person who gets all the correct answers between October 2019 and June 2020, so don’t worry if you aren’t super quick each time. Questions? Contact our game organizer.

## Education Technology Survey:

The NFB is gathering information regarding the accessibility of education technology used in our nation’s schools (kindergarten through graduate level). If you use screen access software or other accommodations to participate nonvisually in educational programs or services, please complete our [education technology survey](https://www.nfb.org/programs-services/legal-program/education-technology-survey) once a semester and contribute to this important research: <https://www.nfb.org/programs-services/legal-program/education-technology-survey>

## NABS Now Podcast:

The NABS Now Podcast committee has been hard at work crafting new, exciting content for you all. After months of preparation, we are very excited to announce the official launch date for the podcast. The first episode will go live in October 2019! If you would like to be a part of a future podcast episode, please fill out the following Google form: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1mNuIH7DfzpwnMSrOoejaZ9KE8h7HyZEhWG5L-7Hl_dg/viewform?edit_requested=true>

## September Blog Post:

### **The Magic of Student Seminars in the National Federation of the Blind**

By: Justin Salisbury

In mid-August, I had the honor of attending the 2019 NABS Pacific Regional Student Seminar. We partnered with the Enchanted Hills Camp, owned and operated by the Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco. I was tasked with leading the committee of students who planned the seminar, and we brought students from all over the west coast and some landlocked western states. We were joined by NFB of California President Tim Elder, Lighthouse CEO Bryan Bashin, Martin Becerra-Miranda and Jen Spears from the Colorado Center for the Blind, and many other great mentors and role models. We planned it months in advance, advertised, found financial support, and built many connections for a long time to come. We had dozens of students in attendance, and it was appropriately powerful for the name of the Enchanted Hills Camp. We had speakers, role-playing, and spatially interactive activities. We went hiking, had bonfires, an did a ropes course. It was a wonderful time, and I heard great reviews from students who attended. This is something that we should be proud of as a movement, but it didn’t start there. It was grown over the years, and I am blessed to have been able to grow with it.

My first student seminar with the National Federation of the Blind was in 2010 in North Carolina. I participated because it was expected of me as an officer in the North Carolina Association of Blind Students, but I did not know what to expect at a seminar. The leaders ahead of me did most of the work in planning the seminar, and I was asked to co-lead three discussion groups: one on orientation and mobility on high school and college campuses, one on testing and academic accommodations and access, and one on getting involved on a high school or college campus. Working with my fellow student division leaders, I had the opportunity to facilitate discussions about blindness, to empower people to tell their stories, and to learn through the experiences and solutions of others. It was the first time I remember doing that, and I now do it almost every day.

The following year, I approached the same seminar as the President of the North Carolina Association of Blind Students. One of the goals I brought to that seminar was to expand our home-cooked technology fair, which had been operated by generous volunteers from the NFB of North Carolina, to a full-blown exhibit hall. We had about 30 vendors as I remember it, and we hosted close to 100 students. We had the understanding of the importance of building something big, but we were still learning about what it was that we were building. We brought blind students together, and, like the year before, we had unwavering support from our affiliate president, Gary Ray. These two ingredients are critical. We had teams for advertising, fundraising, and other tasks related to the seminar.

We built a full directory of all disability-related contacts at every institution of higher education in our state, which we continued to use afterward. The state vocational rehabilitation agency rented vans before dawn and literally brought students to our seminar. When it came to lunch time, our vice president and his team had a beautiful spread of wraps, cookies, etc. I felt like it would be most appropriate for me to wait for everyone else and then go to the back of the line, so I did. Someone else came up behind me. It was George Wurtzel, who was attending the seminar as a representative of BLIND, Inc., a training center run by the National Federation of the Blind in Minneapolis. He noted to me that, if I ever came to visit, I should come when one of the students was serving a meal for 40 people. That stopped me dead in my tracks. He explained that students at BLIND, Inc., as a type of capstone project for the home management class, would cook and serve a multi-course meal for 40 people. Until that point, my experiences at training centers were about being fed by others, not preparing food for others. It was a completely different way of thinking about training, as well as thinking about blindness. I could not have articulated this at the time, but what I was realizing was that we were not only the passive recipients of the generosity of others; we could be the producers and contributors who could influence the world around us in everyday ways like serving food to a large group. Jim Omvig famously called this “giving back.” It is a necessary part of being a first-class member of society.

As the years have passed since that seminar, I cannot remember how many seminars I have attended. Some have been single-state, and others have been multi-state. It has been an honor to bear witness to the transformative experiences in many blind students’ lives across the country. When we bring blind people together, the magic is automatic. We need to have a strong connection to our national movement to help students feel that connection at the individual level. Sometimes, the primary role of a seminar in a student’s life is the opportunity to be around other blind students. If I did not have that already, it could be that for me. There have been times, even within the past month, where I have been down about something and needed to talk to a friend who would understand.

A half hour spent talking to a fellow NABS board member did not necessarily create a solution, but it did help me truly understand that I was not alone. Sometimes, that makes all the difference in the world. Other times, this can be helpful because then it allows us to explore other parts of our identities because we are no longer finding our identities consumed with the blindness part of it. When we are around other blind people, then I can be the American Indian and Ashkenazi Jew. Then, I can be the guy who ran scored points in a conference championship track meet in high school. Then, I can be the guy who pledged a fraternity. I want the opportunity to celebrate those other parts of who I am, and being around other blind people helps me do that.

The skills that are useful in planning a state convention are similar to planning a student seminar. We still need a venue, food, attendees, advertising, sponsorships and other forms of revenue, an agenda, and the list continues. Years later, when I had the privilege of planning a state convention with my state president there to mentor me, I was already familiar with every part of what I needed to do. When I head into a student seminar, I don’t know what every student will gain from it. I try to make sure it is as multi-dimensional as possible so that students can gain from it in every possible way. The list is literally infinite. Some students need to learn about resources, some need to make friends, some need to learn a skill, and some need to learn about what is possible for blind people.

Every time we do student seminars, we get better at them. We know more about how to help empower blind people. I no longer think about our velocity as a movement; I think about our acceleration. It is not our job to maintain velocity; it is our job to maintain acceleration. In the future, someone will likely say that we must maintain the next derivative, which mathematicians call the “jerk." A student seminar is a microcosm of the magic that is the National Federation of the Blind. Every seminar is an opportunity for students to learn and grow, whatever their current level. Every task that must be executed is training for us to put together other programs within the Federation. Every situation is a learning opportunity. I encourage all students to make every effort to attend student seminars and discover what magic will happen for you.

## **NABS Committee Updates:**

### **Fundraising: (Chair, Elizabeth Rouse)**

The Fundraising Committee is entering our busy season. We are looking forward to Giving Tuesday, restaurant fundraisers across the nation, and an exciting event at Washington Seminar 2020. Recently, we released materials that any student can take into their community to obtain a business sponsorship, which means helping raise the funds that allow more students to attend our exciting NABS events. With all this excitement on the horizon, we are always looking for more students to help make projects happen. Join us the second Sunday of the month at 9 o’clock EST but only if you’re ready to be up to your eyeballs in money making!

### **Legislative Advocacy: (Chair, Justin Salisbury)**

The Legislative Advocacy Committee has been working to energize student divisions to be active on the legislative priorities of the National Federation of the Blind. We have been planning legislative activities for state conventions at the student division meetings so that students have a carved-out space to engage in our legislative work across the nation. Currently, the Federation is in the middle of a series of 3 one-week legislative blitzes, and our student divisions have been pushing student involvement in those blitzes. We continue the campaign to publish articles about legislative priorities in college and local newspapers to help bring the message of the Federation into the student space.

### **Communications: (Chair, Mausam Mehta)**

The communications team has been hard at work rolling out some exciting initiatives! We are revamping our NABS Notes, adding a splash of fun and making them even better than before. We are also making waves on our social media pages. Keep an eye out for these changes, and let your voice be heard on our dynamic membership and committee calls, on the fourth and second Sundays of the month at 8pm, respectively.

## **NABS Social Media:**

Follow us on Twitter: @nabslink

Follow us on Instagram: @nabslink

Like our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Nabspage/>

Join our Facebook group: <https://facebook.com/groups/173482726798026>

Kathryn Webster, President

National Association of Blind Students

A proud division of the National Federation of the Blind

[www.nabslink.org](http://www.nabslink.org)