# NABS Notes: March 2018

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## President’s Note

As spring is quickly upon us, my energy level immediately increases, as this is my favorite time of year! Not only is the warm weather impossible to resist (and my birthday month of April!) but milestones are met for blind students as graduations come and difficult semesters conclude. This month, I especially am thankful for our leaders without titles. We all see the NABS Board and the talent and drive that vibrantly shines, but we sometimes miss out on recognizing our new leaders and those without formal titles. This month, I can’t proceed without mentioning the work from Melissa Carney, who worked tirelessly to compile this month’s edition of our NABS Notes; Janae Bergmeier who stepped up to the plate by ambitiously and confidently serving as chair of our Convention Planning Committee; and Dustin Cather whose successes are so vast, given the brief amount of time he’s been with us in NABS. These are just three of the leaders whose contributions support the progress and overwhelming success we see every day.

With technology reshaping the way in which we communicate, I am thrilled to announce that NABS has launched a Facebook group with the sole purpose of catering to our members. While our email list is here to stay, the Facebook group gives yet another outlet of communication so that we are serving as a resource to blind students in the most optimal fashion. Read down to learn more about how you can join us within the world of Facebook!

Finally, we are gearing up for our family reunion, taking place in just over three months in Orlando, FL. Hotel reservations are open, as well as our pre-registration form! While you are deciding on internships or opting to take classes for the summer, there is always a way to make our family a priority this summer. Throughout my undergraduate studies, I did not let internships interfere with my Convention plans. Similarly, I did not let my Convention plans interfere with my internships. For some, it’s a conversation with your professor or supervisor, explaining the importance of our great gathering and your role in such events. To others, it’s a formal request off work or away from class. Either way, I am here to ensure your presence is warranted and your experience is one you will never want to miss. Please reach out, as I am eager to justify your attendance at our 2018 National Convention in any way I can. Stay tuned on all of the engaging opportunities we have for you this year in Orlando!

## 2018 Mid-West Regional Student Seminar

### What’s next for you?

This year’s Midwest regional student seminar will be a weekend of fun, engagement, and information! It’s all about the next step in your life, whatever that may look like: taking a step back, learning about options, and paving the path for your future. We will have experts from blindness training centers, working professionals, career guidance, college preparation, health & wellness, and so much more. This seminar gives students an invaluable tool: the power of networking. Both Friday and Saturday night, we will engage in activities and social events. With students traveling from neighboring states, the interactions you’ll experience will be unlike anything else!

Who: blind and low vision students (high school and up)

When: 6PM, Friday, April 20 – 12PM, Sunday, April 22, 2018

Where: Holiday Inn O’Hare, 5615 N. Cumberland Avenue, Chicago, IL 60631

Cost: $50 for meals and registration, $109 plus tax per night

To reserve a room, call 773-693-5800. Mention NFB of Illinois to get our special group rate!

Want roommates to cut down costs? Email Kathryn Webster

WHY WAIT? Event and hotel registration is open from February 1 – March 31, 2018

[REGISTER](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdDvp87a-j_Yv6mpfEDmYU7dWNmg0CVDRpGbftGwIj7goYVDg/viewform)

Direct questions and special requests to Kathryn Webster

For financial assistance, contact your affiliate president by March 20.

## 2018 NFB National Scholarship Program

### APPLY NOW

Are you legally blind? Do you reside in the United States, the District of Columbia, or Puerto Rico? Are you pursuing or planning to pursue a full-time, postsecondary course of study at a U.S. institution in the 2018-2019 scholastic year? Are you available to attend the entire NFB National Convention in Orlando, Florida from July 3-July 8, 2018? Are you eager to meet Federation leaders and network with some of the brightest, most passionate mentors out there?

If you said yes to all of these questions, then we strongly encourage you to apply to our 2018 National Scholarship Program! Each year, the National Federation of the Blind gives college students the opportunity to win one of thirty merit-based, national-level scholarships ranging in value from $3,000 to $12,000 in order to recognize the outstanding achievements of blind scholars. All scholarships awarded are based on academic excellence, community service, and leadership. Please visit the official website at <https://nfb.org/scholarships> for more information or to begin your application!

Remember: applications, along with all necessary documents, must be submitted no later than March 31, 2018. There is still time to apply.

Here are a few words from the scholarship class of 2017:

Sophie Trist

I was proud and honored to win an NFB scholarship in 2017. This program is worth so much more than the money you get out of it. The ability to be mentored by and network with successful blind people is priceless. I always believed in my ability to turn my dreams into reality, but getting the chance to interact with so many people who have done just that inspired me and gave me a boost of confidence. I keep in touch with a couple of my scholarship mentors. This is an amazing opportunity, and I would encourage everyone to apply.

Heather Simmons

Before attending the national convention, I had no idea just how generous and helpful the NFB could be. They set up all of my travel arrangements, covered convention costs, and paired me with professional mentors. Although I knew that I would receive excellent networking opportunities, I did not expect to be met with such kindness, warmth, and love. In the NFB, I found a group of people who tirelessly use their individual talents and gifts to improve the lives of others. I left Florida with some fancy gadgets, money for school, new insights about issues affecting the blind community, and new friends. The most important thing I gained, however, was confidence. My trip to the NFB convention marked the first time I had traveled by plane on my own. I was nervous, but I made it to the convention and back home without encountering any disasters. I had proven to myself that I could do it, and now I’m excited to learn what else I can do on my own as I begin to live the life I want!

Melissa Carney

I was honored to win a national NFB scholarship in 2017. At that point in my life, I had no idea what to expect in Orlando. I had only been a member of the NFB for a few months. However, it didn’t take to long for the true value of this opportunity to reveal itself. From the moment, I entered the Rosen Shingle Creek Hotel, and passed by hundreds of successful blind individuals on my first adventure through the crowded halls, I knew that my life would be forever changed. The NFB sparked my desire to become a more disciplined leader and disability advocate. The scholarship program introduced me to both friends and mentors who empowered me to step out of my comfort zone, expand my horizons, and truly live the life I want. I am now a much more courageous, independent, and confident individual. The scholarship committee believed that I was ready to take on the challenge of navigating the convention, rise above the expectations I set for myself, and conquer my fears, and I will always be grateful for that push in the right direction.

## The Kenneth Jernigan Convention Scholarship Fund

Have you always wanted to attend an NFB annual convention but have not done so due to the lack of funds? Would you like to stay at the lovely Rosen Shingle Creek Hotel in Orlando, Florida, take advantage of unique learning opportunities, and network with thousands of successful blind individuals?

If yes, then we strongly encourage you to apply for a scholarship grant. The round-trip transportation, a week of hotel lodging, and food can be a bit of a burden on your wallet. While a grant from the Kenneth Jernigan Fund typically ranges from $400 to $500, and cannot cover all of your convention expenses, it can significantly defray the total cost. In addition, we suggest that you identify an NFB member who can serve as your mentor. This individual can provide helpful tips and tricks on how to spend your money wisely, sort through the convention agenda, and navigate the hotel.

Eligibility Requirements:

Applicants must be active NFB members, blind or sighted, who have not yet attended a national convention due to lack of funds.

How to apply:

1. Write a letter that includes your contact information, local NFB information, the specific amount of money requested, and an explanation of why this is a good investment for the NFB.

What to include:

* Your full name and all phone numbers labeled accordingly (home, cell, office, etc.)
* Mailing address and email address
* State affiliate and state president, local chapter and chapter president (if applicable)
* Personal convention mentor and their phone number
* Specific monetary request and explanation, consult with other NFB members to get a rough estimate of your necessary budget
* How do you currently participate in the Federation?
* Why do you want to attend a national convention?
* What would you receive; what can you share or give?
* Any special circumstances you hope the committee will take into consideration

2. Contact your NFB state president in person or by phone to request his or her help in obtaining funding. Be sure to tell the president when to expect your email containing the request letter, and mention the application deadline.

3. You, or a friend, must send your request letter to the state president. He or she must add a president’s recommendation and then email both letters directly to the Kenneth Jernigan Convention Scholarship Fund Committee no later than April 15. Make sure to give your state president enough time to write your recommendation letter.

For more information about the Kenneth Jernigan Convention Scholarship Fund, or to learn about the application decision details and timeline, please visit <https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/bm/bm17/bm1711/bm171119.htm>

## 2018 Southeast Regional Student Seminar

### More information to come!

The NFB Southeast Regional Student Seminar will take place from Friday, August 10 to Sunday, August 12 at the Jernigan Institute. At this seminar, students from the southeast states will sharpen their skills in advocacy, network with fellow blind students, and gain insight and encouragement from student and national leaders in the Federation.

## NFB Engineering Quotient Program

Who: 30 blind and low-vision students currently enrolled in grades 9 through 12 in the United States

When: Sunday, July 29 to Saturday, August 4, 2018

Where: The National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute in Baltimore, Maryland

Cost: No registration fees! The NFB will cover travel expenses, room, and board for the week.

Do you have a passion for engineering? Are you interested in the field, but are not quite sure how to navigate the logistics as a blind individual?

If so, then the NFB EQ program is a perfect fit for you. NFB EQ is a week-long summer engineering program for blind and low-vision teenagers from around the United States. 30 participants have the opportunity to enhance their engineering knowledge, engage with new problem-solving skills, build friendships, and enjoy recreational activities along the way. Blind students will work with researchers from Utah State University and educators from the Science Museum of Minnesota, who will facilitate hands-on activities and connect students with highly qualified blind adult mentors. Students will learn the spatial skills and mental mapping techniques that are all too often left out of their education. Spatial reasoning is one of the most significant components of engineering. As such, the blind youth who attend NFB EQ will be able to develop and hone their skills in STEM fields, strengthen their ability to travel independently with a white cane or guide dog, and achieve greater overall success. “A combination of lack of knowledge about nonvisual techniques and society’s low expectations for the blind prevents far too many blind children from developing spatial reasoning skills and, if they desire, participating in engineering or other fields that use these skills,” said Mark A. Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “We have dedicated significant resources to changing this unacceptable status quo, and we thank the National Science Foundation and our partners at Utah State and the Science Museum of Minnesota for helping us accelerate our progress and broaden our reach.” NFB EQ aims to create ways to conceptualize spatial thinking by implementing nonvisual techniques to facilitate, motivate, and open pathways towards engineering and educational goals. It goes without saying that students will gain greater self-confidence and independence. If you are ready to embrace adventure, then this is the program for you!

The deadline to apply is Tuesday, May 1, 2018. For more information, please visit <http://www.blindscience.org/nfbeq>

To apply, please visit <https://nfb.org/eq-application>

## NABS Committee Updates

### Get involved!

* Legislative Committee

The NABS Legislative Advocacy Committee is taking on two initiatives. The first is the implementation of the NABS Legislative Toolkit, a comprehensive document which explains the legislative process, the importance of Aim High, how to obtain personal testimonies and letters of support from institutions, and so much more, in our affiliates and student divisions. The second initiative is the update and revision of the Self-Advocacy in Higher Education toolkit. This toolkit explains how to receive reasonable accommodations, what to do if your school fails to comply with the law, how to file a complaint with the Department of Education, etc. If you are interested in helping, please contact Chair, Kenia Flores at kenia.flores@furman.edu.

* Fundraising Committee

Dustin Cather will be hosting a comedy showcase in Pekin, Illinois on May 12th with proceeds going towards NABS. He has 8 comedians lined up so far and the word is buzzing in the community! The fundraising committee is looking forward to future fundraising efforts at the national convention. These include the walkathon, NABS Olympics, and many more! The fundraising committee chairs will be experimenting with selling access codes for the digital coupon app called Entertainment. We are excited about this partnership going forward and we are considering selling these access codes at convention as well. Finally, the 3rd annual cookbook is ready to be ordered! Go to the NABS website at [www.nabslink.org](http://www.nabslink.org) and order yours today! You can choose your format in braille, E text, or large print. Get yours today for $15.

* Outreach Committee

-        The Outreach Committee is reaching out to all student divisions through the NABS State Liaison program to build membership outreach contact lists. Each division is asked to collect the email addresses of all disability services offices in their state, the email address of previous scholarship applicants to both state and national scholarships, contacts of rehab agencies, both government and private. Using these lists, we can better advertise our programs and services, ultimately bringing more students into the organization. A final reminder to switch from our Facebook profile to follow our Facebook page, as the profile will be discontinued come National Convention.

## 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.

* Hawaii

The Hawaii Association of Blind Students and Recent Graduates has been hard at work as a proud and active division of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii. As part of our state affiliate, we have been working to pass some critical legislation at the state and federal levels, as well as opposing the ADA Education and Reform Act. We have state-level bills to end the payment of subminimum wages to workers with disabilities, establish a right to parent for blind persons, and ensure that the state’s movement toward exclusively mail-in elections does not reduce access to voting for blind voters. At the federal level, we have all of our members of the House of Representatives cosponsoring AIM HIGH, the TIME Act, and the Access Technology Affordability Act. We have also received some cosponsors in the Senate. Our student division members and leaders have participated in all of the legislative hearings and decision making, and we are building relationships with our elected officials that will last for years to come. Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard even issued a press release on her opposition to the ADA Education and Reform Act, which focused on our affiliate’s advocacy efforts. Our student division knows that we are a vital part of our state affiliate, and we are proud to build the Federation in Hawaii.

* Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Association of Blind Students had a very successful business meeting during our annual Massachusetts State Convention. We had a packed agenda, which included elections. Congratulations to new board, President- Precious Perez, Vice President- Mohammed Elshafie, Secretary- Melissa Carney, and board member- George Kamara. There were Representatives from all three NFB training centers to speak about their various programs, a NABS update, feedback on social events, and a screening of Do You Dream in Color followed by a discussion. We look forward to continuing to build our division and working with everyone to make this year even stronger.

* Oklahoma

The Oklahoma Association of Blind Students at this current time has 8 members. We meet via conference call on the second Saturday of every month at 5PM. The president Cammie Loehr can be contacted at cammieloehr767@gmail.com for more information about meetings. The Oklahoma student division was able to have two members present at NFBOK Day at the Capital in February. We spent the day speaking to our senators and representatives about important blindness related issues. The Oklahoma student division is gearing up for our upcoming state convention in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In conjunction with our state convention, we are hosting our 2nd annual regional student seminar. We are extending invitations for students from Kansas, Arkansas and Missouri to join us. We are very excited that we have been able to continue putting on a student seminar. We are focusing on bringing down barriers for blind students in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. We were lucky enough to get Cary Supalo, a blind chemist and college professor, to speak at our student seminar. Along with STEM sessions we will be hosting sessions on student life, work experience, disability law, and blindness skills training. Student seminar promises to be a blast!

* Texas

The Texas Association of Blind students has launched two inaugural cells located at the University of North Texas lead by Johnathan Stewart and one at the University of Texas Austin co-lead by Syed Rizvi and Kassandra Cardenas. The Texas Association of Blind Students is pleased to partner with the NFB of Texas CAREER Mentoring Program, and NFB NEWSLINE Texas to bring you the 2018 NFB of Texas Youth Conference.

Topics for this event include:

* How to navigate various conversation topics that you might encounter at a business or networking event.
* The ins and outs of communicating about your blindness through hands-on, interactive activities.
* Networking with other blind and low-vision students from around the state with whom you can ask questions all year long
* Conversations about dating, intimacy, parenting, the intersection of minority sexual/gender identities with blindness, appropriate social norms, harassment, and how to “fit in” in a non-judgmental setting.
* How to recognize the nuances of nonverbal communication using alternative, nonvisual techniques.
* How to prepare yourself for your job search and interview process to land your dream job.
* How to work with your university’s disability services office in a new, productive way such as requesting accommodations, communicating with professors, obtaining accessible materials, and respectfully denying unnecessary accommodations.
* What it means to dress for success, develop your personal brand, and fashionable style using non-visual techniques.
* Assistive technology through engaging lessons from expert users.

When: April 13 – 15, 2018

Where: San Antonio, TX

Holiday Inn Market Square

For registration and more information please go to the following website:

<https://www.nfbtx.org/events.php?id=48>

* California

Hello fellow Federationists from the sunny golden state of California! The California Association of Blind Students is hard at work in building membership since that is a huge part of the Federation. We are proud to announce that we will be hosting our first annual spring reception in beautiful Los Angeles! The reception will take place on Saturday, April 28 from 12:00 to 3:00 pm at Shakey’s Pizza, located at 935 West Arbor Vitae Street, Inglewood, California 90301. Come enjoy a day of delicious food, meet other blind students, and learn more about our student division. Also, bring a fellow blind friend to our event; whoever brings a friend will have their name thrown into a raffle and the winner will win a grand prize! Thank you all and let’s go build the Federation!

* Arizona

Often as students we spend our days in classes, and nights until early mornings studying for that next exam, midterm, or final exam. For a typical student, the stress of passing the class, receiving the accommodation, or trying to develop a work around to complete an assignment never goes away. I am here to tell you it is that ability to stand up for yourself, advocate for yourself, and fight for success that makes you a Federationist. This is the message we want to deliver to students around the world. In Arizona, we are searching for new ways to bring this fight to students and let them know that we are not going away and we will succeed in our educational career, professional career, and in life. In addition, we are bringing our passion and fight to those students who will follow behind us by engaging them in the work we do through a mentorship program. Alone we move rocks, together we move mountains. Let’s continue to build this federation together.

## March Blog Post

### Taking Life by the Reins

By Melissa Carney

When you think of sports, you think of soccer, football, basketball, and baseball. You would love to participate in these sports, but you often dwell on the accompanying accessibility issues. It can be difficult at times to conceptualize, let alone overcome, the barriers in your path. However, there are certain sports that automatically place you on the same playing field as your sighted peers. Horseback riding is often portrayed as a leisurely activity, but it requires just as much skill and athleticism as any other sport. The only difference is that horseback riding is naturally accessible.

I began horseback riding when I was four years old. The one thing I remember from that time of my life is the joy that consumed me every time I sat on a horse’s back. I didn’t know exactly what that joy meant at the time, but it didn’t take me long to dissect its meaning. That joy was the epiphany of freedom, the gratification of equality. As I grew older, I was told “no” or “you can’t” more times than I can count. Horseback riding was the one area of my life where I felt that I could excel without the fear of being yanked backwards. No one equated my visual impairment to fragility or an inability to thrive in the saddle. For once, limitations were not imposed upon me. My disability was an advantage; my keen sense of touch provided me with a greater awareness of the horse’s movements and my own balance. I was free to take reasonable risks, free to fail and try again until I succeeded. I was given the same opportunities as my sighted peers.

For the first few years, an assistant helped me guide my horse around the arena while I learned how to balance my weight, settle into the proper position, execute turns, ask the horse for different gaits, and all of the other skills that were necessary to acquire. Soon enough, the assistant stepped back upon my instructor’s request. The reins, and ultimately the control of the horse, were firmly placed in my hands. In turn, my instructor placed her complete faith into my abilities. She had the upmost confidence that I could be an independent rider. As such, she continued to challenge me. She encouraged me to create and pursue my greatest aspirations.

When I was 8 years old, I began to utilize echolocation in order to navigate indoor arenas. I no longer had to depend solely on the verbal cues of others; I could utilize unique parts of my own skill set. I was able to sense the area of the arena, each wall and opening, and so forth, so that I could travel around the perimeter of the arena. Directions became a secondary focus. My instructor was able to teach me more intensive balance exercises and maneuvers now that I could manage the navigational aspects of horseback riding. Blindness enhanced my mobility, rather than inhibiting it.

When I was ten years old, I ventured out on my first cross-country ride. At first, I rode alongside my instructor through the woods. She gave me verbal cues to take the proper turns and change the horse’s gait. The footing and terrain was much more diverse; therefore, my skills were efficiently tested. Before too long, I began to ride with a group of other students. My instructor focused equal amounts of attention on each of us; I was never treated as the weak link. My friends often forgot that I was blind, and quickly shouted last-minute warnings about low-hanging branches. I wasn’t offended by their forgetfulness; I was flattered. I was not treated like a liability or lesser of a human being. I was treated as their equal in equestrianism.

 My instructor taught me to jump while she taught the other students. Everyone worked as a team to show me the correct jumping position, problem-solve tricky situations, and cheer me on over every fence, much like they had supported me over every metaphorical hurdle. My instructor counted down for the jumps while my friends gave me verbal directions for steering purposes. There were times when I made mistakes, times when I almost fell off the horse, but I was not phased. Every false start or jolting landing was a learning experience, a reminder of what I could improve upon in the future.

 For the next several years, I competed in horse shows, learned dressage, and jumped cross-country. I helped a non-profit, therapeutic horseback riding center for students with disabilities with their fundraising efforts by giving demonstrations and speeches about my experiences as a blind horseback rider. I did everything in my power to show the disabled community that exercise, teamwork, and self-satisfaction are possible, despite the hardships they face daily. I do not agree that people with disabilities should be sheltered or discouraged from pursuing sports. Everyone deserves a chance to take meaningful risks, explore different avenues of their passion, and discover the beauty of true equality.

People have told me that I am brave because I horseback ride. I don’t view my passion as an instance of bravery. My visual impairment is simply an occasional obstacle that pushes me to work harder. I ride for the whistle of wind in my hair, laughter with genuine friends, and exhilaration of completing complex tasks. I ride for the companionship between horse and rider. I cannot drive a car or chase a silent soccer ball, but I can participate in one of few accessible sports, which just so happens to be one of the most rigorous forms of exercise. Life has never been easy or predictable, between a cancer diagnosis at 2 years old, discrimination in the classroom, and the countless obstacles that have appeared in my path. That is why I capture every opportunity to take the reins into my own hands whenever possible. Horseback riding enables me to find a greater sense of freedom and peace. It takes away so many of the societal barriers that work against me. In this space, there are no fights for equal access, condescending tones, and low expectations. There is me, a horse, and people who look at me as a horseback rider, not a blind person. There is nothing more empowering than being looked at for your ability rather than your disability. The only barriers I encounter here are literal jumps.

## Launch of the Brand-New NABS Facebook Group

NABS is always seeking alternative methods of serving as a resource to our students and providing outlets that ensure our members are building a strong and vast network. After discussing this fabulous idea with the NABS Board, your wish is our command. We certainly look forward to building our organization even further through the world of Facebook!

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