Report to CUCRA on the 2014 AROHE Conference

On August 10-12, I had the privilege of attending the Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education (AROHE) conference as a representative of both CUCRA and UC Santa Cruz. I was also a participant in a pre-conference workshop, “AROHE Academy: Starting a Retiree Organization” with Janette Brown (from USC and also AROHE Executive Director). I was struck by the positive attitude of attendees, their willingness to learn and share information, the number of times I heard offers of mentorship and support, and the over all energized feeling of the conference. People came to learn and to share, and they believe in what they are doing.

Equally as much energy has been put into conference follow-up including webinars, conference report templates, discussion forums and personal emails. AROHE is an organization whose time has come. It is quickly moving to consensus on best practices and to the forefront of a movement that helps higher education retirees to both find meaning in the last third of their lives as well as to contribute/give back to their colleges, universities and communities.

Overall I gained more information/ideas for our campus association and new center than for CUCRA. However, there were many themes/sayings, most of which can be attributed to Sue Barnes, floating around the conference that can be used to guide our work and keep CUCRA and our associations and centers thriving. Those that I found most useful were:

**Wiggle your Way In** —This has to do with visibility and with reaching out to connect with others to make yourself, your program, and your association/center indispensible. It’s not a new idea, but one that warrants revisiting. I remember making a note when I attended the CUCRA workshop in Riverside on how to establish a campus retiree center that said, “Who can we reach out to, who are our allies?” The answers to these questions turned out to be critical in our process of obtaining funding for our center.

- For CUCRA, new “wiggle” possibilities include volunteering for system-wide committees or task forces and reaching out to other UC wide groups such as the Council of UC Staff Assemblies (CUCSA) and the Alumni Associations of the University of California (AAUC). There are also other system-wide groups in the state university and community college systems that we could reach out to. Some of this is happening in groups like NORCal ROCS. There is much to be gained in defining common issues, in learning from each other, in having a seat at the table, and in establishing a larger presence from which to advocate for our needs.

- For UCSC, in addition to our current connection with the Staff Advisory Board (SAB), building a stronger relationship with Osher Life Long Learners (OLLI), Smith Renaissance Society (a mentoring program for foster youth), Dream Weavers (a support program for undocumented students) and Veteran Services would strengthen our presence on campus. After attending the conference, I’m convinced that working more closely with the Alumni Association would benefit our Retirees Association and our new Center. This idea came from Carl Huether, University of Cincinnati, who pointed out that both are membership-based entities that are affiliated with but separate from the campus. There are many parallels in reaching out to constituencies and in membership development, and there is untapped potential for collaboration in event planning—alumni like to see their favorite staff and faculty.
We All Listen to the Same Ratio Station, WIIFM (What’s in It for Me?)—This one is self explanatory, but so important to keep in mind when asking for support. Thanks, Sue!!

Document Everything in Numbers—Administrators and budget folks use numbers to make decisions. Again, this is not a new idea, but critical when making reports to either campus or system-wide administrators and/or when asking for funding.

• For CUCRA: Do any of the UC campuses keep track of how many people connected with the university are volunteering in the community? This would include: retirees, service learning and internship students, current staff, etc. Might CUCRA and our campus centers take the lead on this, both in terms of numbers of folks volunteering, as well as getting a handle on where they are doing good work?

• For UCSC, the Retirees Association successfully used numbers in writing our proposal and obtaining funding for the new center. Now, we need to be keeping track of everything the center does as a way to support further funding requests in two years. This was covered in my presentation at the pre-conference workshop.

New Ideas for me/UCSC:
- Emeriti Colleges—Emery, Clemson, ASU and USC have them.
- Invite folks to bring their grandkids to events like the fall picnic.
- Arrange for Road Scholar, the educational travel organization and a sponsor of the AROHE conference to do a presentation for the Emeriti and Retirees Associations.
- Membership increases with Pre- and Post-retirement workshops.
- Have the new Center focus on disseminating information for volunteer opportunities on campus.
- Create a Center website.
- Associations and Centers need an MOU for who does what (already got a example from Davis).
- Have more board and association members volunteer to be on campus committees.

The UC Presence—When I walked into the closing session, it looked like a CUCRA meeting. Those up front leading the show were: Sue Barnes (AROHE President, Davis), Patrick Cullinane (AROHE President-elect, Berkeley) Jeri Frederick (Communications Chair, Irvine) and Diane Mundy (Treasurer, Davis)—one quarter of the board members were from UC. I was sitting with three others from UC, Sandra Norberg (San Francisco), Dorla Cantu (San Francisco) and Iola James (Berkeley, who had been honored earlier in the day for her contributions to AROHE). UC representatives constituted almost one sixth of the conference attendees, and I must say that our “Member Showcase” was pretty impressive. We were clearly having way more fun than others—most of us were in goofy costumes!

The Closing Session—I found this to be one of the most interesting/invigorating sessions. AROHE is thriving and evolving and struggling with funding issues and the need for a paid executive director. What I loved about this session is what permeated the entire conference—everyone’s voice mattered, not just the voices of experienced members. It was described and run as a “Town Hall.” We were not told what was going to happen for AROHE in the next year, we were asked to participate in answering nitty gritty questions and shaping the future of this organization and we did. Kudos to the conference organizers and to AROHE and I hope CUCRA will make this opportunity available for someone else to attend the 2015 conference in Seattle! There is so much to be learned and I am grateful to CUCRA that I was able to attend.