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**Standards Project Update**

POWERING THE PROJECT

CAROL MILLER SCHAEFER’S WORK WITH CAS ENSURED THE STANDARDS CAME TO FRUITION.

In the landscape of collegiate retail, where textbooks, merchandise, and campus essentials converge, Carol Miller Schaefer has crafted a legacy that will continue to impact the industry for years to come. With a career spanning decades and a rich background in various sectors of retail, her career path developed an outlet for her passion of being a lifelong learner, culminating in her pivotal role as the NACS representative to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS).

While Carol started her professional career in the realm of traditional private retail before she ventured into college stores in 1992, she found her home in higher education and collegiate retail. She garnered experience across diverse retail landscapes, from working with major retailers like B. Dalton Booksellers and Best Buy to working with owners of small regional chains. She honed her skills and learned as she managed multiple stores, gaining valuable insights into merchandising and customer service, and continued to build her enduring passion for literature.

However, it was her transition to the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, that marked a significant turning point. Engaging with the NACS General Book Committee and collaborating with others in the industry, Carol found herself immersed in a world where the bookstore transcended its role as a mere retail space. The campus store became a hub for intellectual exchange, hosting author breakfasts and fostering a culture of academic engagement. That was one of the ways that she fell in love with this industry. Carol puts it best when she says, “I really liked being in a bookstore in a university setting. That was perfect, because, to me, that was the kind of retail where you’re actually doing some education. And I just really loved that and the opportunity to meet some really, really great authors and work with faculty on their books.”

Carol’s journey into CAS began organically, rooted in her tenure at North Dakota State University (NDSU), where she navigated a shift in administrative structures. As the bookstore transitioned their reporting structure to student affairs, she gained firsthand exposure to the pivotal role college stores play in campus life. This intersection of her professional trajectory with the ethos of student affairs laid the foundation for her engagement with CAS.

Tony Ellis, formerly the head of NACS education, recognized Carol’s unique perspective and institutional knowledge and extended an invitation for her to join CAS as a representative for NACS—a proposition she initially approached with curiosity and a hint of trepidation. Stepping into the CAS Council, Carol found herself in a diverse cohort of academic achievers, bringing her insights from the collegiate retail sector to a table filled with other aspects of higher education.

One thing that Carol has been passionate about is ensuring that campus stores are seen as assets and content experts on their campuses. She explains, “I’ve always thought that the bookstore was more than just a place to buy stuff, the fact that there were other important things that the store could be doing. ... I appreciated working in an environment where we could actually do things for students.”

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by Jaymee Skelly
Over the past decade, Carol’s contributions to CAS have been countless, bridging the gap between collegiate retail and academic standards. As a member-at-large, she used her financial acumen to enrich discussions on budgets and investment strategies—a perspective often overlooked in traditional academic circles. Her steadfast advocacy for the complexities of campus stores reshaped perceptions within CAS, shedding light on the multifaceted role these entities play in student life.

Carol’s involvement in the development of Campus Store Standards exemplifies her unwavering commitment to advancing the collegiate retail sector. As a past president of the NACS Foundation Board of Directors, Carol was an early supporter of adding industry standards to the NACS Foundation’s strategic plan. Playing an integral role in every step of the standards’ implementation, she has been a driving force behind this transformative initiative. Through her leadership and passion, Carol continues to champion the recognition and elevation of collegiate retail within the higher education landscape.

Carol has seen how the work of CAS can have effects on college campuses. She notes the importance of having industry representation on the CAS Council because the volunteers not only play a pivotal role in shaping the standards themselves but also advocate for greater recognition of campus stores’ integral role within the higher education landscape.

Volunteers for CAS embody dedication to the advancement of academic standards and student-centric policies. Central to this role is participation in various meetings, including an annual in-person gathering in Alexandria, VA, and virtual calls held throughout the year. These meetings serve as platforms for discussing updates to existing standards and digging into emerging issues within higher education.

Beyond meeting, CAS volunteers often serve on committees tasked with updating standards, requiring regular engagement through virtual calls and collaboration with experts in relevant fields. Carol insists that despite the initial learning curve, volunteers find themselves welcomed into a community of like-minded individuals passionate about addressing the evolving needs of students on college campuses.

Part of the CAS role that Carol finds most fulfilling involves actively advocating for student welfare and addressing contemporary challenges faced by educational institutions. Recent initiatives, such as the development of standards specifically addressing basic needs like food insecurity and housing, underscore CAS’s commitment to holistic student support. CAS volunteers gain insights into broader trends and challenges within higher education, thanks to interactions with experts and leaders in the field.

Despite the complexities and challenges inherent in the role, volunteering for CAS is deeply rewarding. Volunteers, like Carol, find fulfillment in contributing to meaningful initiatives that transcend financial considerations. By bridging the gap between campus stores and the broader educational mission of institutions, volunteers play a vital role in fostering student success and well-being. Moreover, the opportunity to mentor and inspire both colleagues and students adds another layer of gratification to the volunteer experience, reinforcing the notion that volunteering for CAS is not just a duty but a calling rooted in a commitment to educational excellence and student empowerment.

Carol’s passion for fostering continuous improvement within campus stores shines through. Her enthusiasm for the standards is evident as she discusses the transformative impact they can have on individual stores, as well as the broader industry. As she aptly states, “The standards are a big, huge deal. This is something that we’ve talked about for years. ... It’s going to have a long-lasting effect on how campus stores see themselves.”

Carol emphasizes the importance of education and advocacy within the industry. She encourages others to become involved with CAS, highlighting the opportunities for personal and professional growth that come with volunteering. Carol’s own journey serves as a testament to the value of lifelong learning and active participation in initiatives that shape the future of collegiate retail.

Carol’s vision extends beyond the immediate benefits of the standards themselves. She envisions a future where campus stores are recognized not only for their financial contributions but also for their broader impact on student success and campus community engagement. As she remarks, “I really want the standards to be part of store success that goes beyond the financial return to the institution because we have things to offer.”

In essence, Carol’s dedication to advancing the Campus Store Standards and her advocacy for the broader recognition of campus stores’ contributions are emblematic of a hopeful future for the industry. As the relationship between CAS and NACS strengthens through the Campus Store Standards, Carol Miller Schaefer remains at the forefront—a trailblazer reshaping the narrative of collegiate retail, one standard at a time.

Jayme Skelly is director of the NACS Foundation.