

**Position: President-Elect**

**Natalie Bitton**  
**Director of College Counseling & Guidance**  
**Lycee Francais de San Francisco (LFSF)**  
**United States**  
**Member Type: College/University**

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## **Background & Experience**

Years of experience in college admissions counseling or related fields: 10+ years

### Previous professional or volunteer experience:

Over the last 13 years, I have contributed in various roles in my local, regional, national, and international college admissions organizations. A sample of my relevant work is: --IACAC: presenter, professional development committee member, pre-conference faculty, co-chair pre-conference planning--CIS: presenter--NACAC: presenter (10 years), special interest group (SIG) leader, --ACCIS (Association of College Counselors in Independent Schools): presenter, bus tour event planner--WACAC: presenter--BAISCC (Bay Areas Independent School College Counselors): host of biannual meetingAt my current school, the relevant experience I have had that make me ready to serve on the International ACAC Board is:--team member of school leadership and operational team: we meet weekly to discuss operations and plan school-wide programs and practices. Some examples are in the areas of 1) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, 2) Social Emotional Learning, and 3) Innovation and Entrepreneurship. The team consists of HOS, DHOS, COO, Advancement, Admissions, Communications, HR, Finance, and Athletics.--CAIS: served twice on the CAIS recertification team to write documents, coordinate info among departmentsACAC is a volunteer org (aside from 3 full time staff), and we could not make it without them.As an entirely volunteer organization like IACAC (except for 3 staff members), it is important for the leadership team to be mission-driven, to lobby and conduct advocacy with peer organizations and other countries, and to mobilize the membership. These are areas that I can give voice and leadership to as part of the executive team.

### International community engagement:

I have written about my committee experience in question #1 and #3, as well as in my resume. I will focus this question on a few other point projects to elaborate further.The French schools outside of France are part of a larger network connected through agency called AEFÉ and we engage in a lot of conversations, collaboration, and organizing each year to standardize pedagogical practices. In the last decade, I have helped plan and host North American orientation meetings, presented and moderated, and discussed the differences between US and French educational systems, which lead to the creation of the NACAC SIG (see question #3). I also led in the creation of course credit standards given by universities in North America for the French Baccalaureate (similar to IB or AP credit)Many French schools in the AEFÉ network do not have college counselors, in particular for students who want postbac study outside of

France. I have served as a consultant with French bacc schools in Australia, Cambodia, Vietnam, France, Spain, USA, and Canada supporting their staff and students via resources, trainings, and presentations. I have also started to share resources to other international schools - this past December for example, I presented at Bali Green School, Indonesia and shared resources with the counselor, students, and parents. Last year, I planned a bus tour for ACCIS, and that was a time--filled and energetic task. This year, I knew I wanted to deepen my engagement in International ACAC beyond being part of a committee and asked to be part of the preconference planning. Planning an event and especially a conference is challenging.....and fun! The collaboration, details, and conversations that need to be had to make an idea into an event is a great act of creation and certainly worth doing. Conferences create community, and that is important to organizations and to membership. I have always chosen to work in cross-cultural and international settings, because that is who I am, and it is the environment in which I can best serve. I am a child of North African immigrant parents who grew up in Canada in a French and English environment, entered the US as an international student, lived in Nepal and in Indonesia, and then became an immigrant-American. I am of and in the international community.

#### NACAC affiliation:

I have been a member of NACAC since 2007. Pretty early on, I knew I wanted to be more of a giver and not just a consumer of what NACAC had to offer. I have participated in a variety of ways most notable as a session leader, moderator and presenter in preconference and conference workshops for 10 years (please see resume for details). It has been a personal and professional pleasure to work with colleagues on both sides of the desk in the diverse training areas of the teenage brain, mindfulness, self-care, and French Baccalaureate. In some circles, I've earned the nickname "the mindfulness lady"! In a leadership capacity, I started the special interest group for the French Baccalaureate in 2015-2016 to address the need for increased collaboration and communication with French Baccalaureate prospective applicants and colleges. The group serves to unite the college counselors who work in French Bac schools with university reps, as well as to create best standards of practices and resources among the schools. I participated in the France review of the guide to international university admission when it was first being developed (in 2016 or so).

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## **President-Elect Specific Questions**

Please describe your previous role(s) on the International ACAC Board and/or within International ACAC and how you see this as relevant for serving as President-Elect.

I have been in the field of college counseling and education for 25 years, in several capacities. As I enter my second quarter century of work in this field, my main objectives are to contribute to the field as a leader and mentor and to give back to students. I am looking for opportunities beyond the borders of the school I currently work to share my knowledge, my expertise, and my time. For the past few years, I have taken on several leadership roles in complement with

those at my school in International ACAC (preconference co-chair), NACAC (special interest group leader), ACCIS (bus tour coordinator). My roles and responsibilities have been listed in my resume as well as the general executive board questions #1,2,3. Working with international students for the past 15 years, and consulting with other international schools has given me extensive knowledge in non-U.S. curriculum programs such as the French Bacalaureate, the IB, the German Abitur, and the Canadian high school diploma to name a few. International students bring their unique experiences to college admissions, and my keen experience would be helpful in reading their applications. I myself entered the United States 2 decades ago as an international student, and I understand the process, the path, and the challenges related to international applicants. As President-Elect, I am prepared to dedicate the time, effort, and experience. I have attended NACAC and IACAC conferences every year for the past decade. In my weekly work, I allot 8-12 hours in addition to my school duties for other projects. I enjoy putting teams together and working on a common goal. For all these reasons, I see my professional and personal experience as contributing to my readiness for serving as President-Elect.

Please share your philosophy on leadership and what makes an effective leader. Please provide examples from your previous experience.

It is a beautiful coincidence that I write this paragraph on MLK day. I share my vision of leadership with that of MLK's vision: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?" Here is my philosophy: A leader is the vehicle to move an organization's mission forward. In the word "leadership" is leader and ship. A leader is not effective in her goals and mission without the support of the "ship", the fellowship. A leader's role is first to listen to the fellowship, and then to respond, in alignment with the mission of the organization. In my work, I use the diamond approach to leadership model which focuses on 4 aspects of the diamond: Vision, courage, reality and ethics. My natural leadership abilities are in the areas of vision and courage, and that is how my professional community mainly sees me (so I am told!). More than a decade ago, I saw a vision to unite the North American Lycee counselors, and create a working group who would advocate for French Bac students to universities. That group led to a circulating document of French Bac credits to universities, which led to the NACAC SIG French Bac group, which led to a growing network of French Bac professionals across 4 continents communicating, discussing, and networking. My second example would be in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion. It takes courage to address issues of privilege (whether it be white privilege or other types of privilege), to implement DEI and SEL programs that open up spaces where underrepresented voices are heard. It can be messy, and scary. But it must be done. My third example is based on my belief that leaders inspire the best in others by being their authentic selves. Just like we counsel our students to express themselves authentically in their college applications - leaders express themselves authentically and genuinely want to contribute - this is felt at the heart level by the "ship". So essentially it is the "ship" that creates the leader, and not the other way around. 10 years ago, I created an intern program at our school so that college counselor graduated from UC Berkeley could do their intern hours at our school and be trained in international college counseling. Last week, I received an email from one of these past interns who is now a successful school counselor at an international school - she was relaying a message for a possible new intern. And the cycle

continues - that is leadership. When Aaron Andersen emailed me a few weeks ago, encouraging me to follow up with my desire to serve as President-Elect, that was leadership. And so we are here for each other, contributing to each other, and to the greater mission. thank you.

Please describe any event planning or organizing experience you have had. Please list the year and your specific role.

Please see resume for a list of details. Below are some additional experiences that are not found in my resume.--Organize and plan San Francisco Bay area annual college fairs hosted on our campus: UK Fair (Oct. 2019), Salon France (Dec. 2019), Canada Fair (Jan 2020)--organized and planned itinerary for ACCIS bus tour for 40 counselors to 4 universities (June 2019)-- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: 1)created a student diversity leader program at school and lead this team in school initiatives to promote DEI. (2018 - present) 2) Created a Girls in STEM promote to keep girls engaged and inspired in their STEM interests. (12 years). I am a STEM mentor, Technovation Girls competition program organizer, Technovation AI Judge. I also organize collaborations with community organizations so that our girls can have mentors in Silicon Valley (e.g. Dropbox, Startup Grind, Holberton School, etc...)--Service Learning: pitched, developed, and implemented school civic engagement program and created service learning trips that students earn upon completion of service hours. Plan, organize, and lead 2-week homestay service trips (India, Peru, Tanzania, Vietnam, Morocco) 2016-present--Innovation lab: pitched idea for innovation lab, and assisted in the school plan to fundraise for \$300,000 (2016-2017)--Entrepreneurship: was on the founding team of Startup Lycee competition to train students for a 2-day competition. Created collaboration with Hult Business School to host our competitions on an annual basis - our students get to attend the Hult Prize in NYC in September and meet President Clinton. --Crohns and Colitis Foundation: helped plan and organize fundraising walks for the organization that our family is a part of. (2018-present) --COO of my family: plan and organize education and events for our 2 children (enrichment, extracurriculars, daily calendar, birthdays, b'nai mitzvahs, playdates) and run the 4-person household as well as managing the care of a child with a chronic illness. 15 years

Part of this position is managing people, committees, and projects. What is your experience in this area? Describe your management style.

My management style varies depending on the employee. I've found that people are different so a one-size fits all style doesn't work. Some people respond to aggressive goals; others don't thrive on pressure. Some people prefer frequent check-ins; others prefer clear direction up front and then giving them space to get their work done. Generally, though, on my best days, my style runs along a self-defined personal vision of the 5E's: empathy, efficiency, effectiveness, expectant, and encouraging. I manage a team in the college counseling office of 3 people. I have also led projects, in and out of work, where I was the lead manager. I like to give clear directions and then let people do their jobs. At the same time, I want to make sure that my team knows that I am ready and available to offer guidance, expertise, and assistance when needed. I have a reputation for keeping agreements and commitments made to others. My current school team describes me as trustworthy, dependable, visionary, and creative. I see myself as a leader, mentor, and coach - I go out of my way to make sure that the work is

meaningful to everyone, however they define it. Work purpose is important to me - I want people (including myself) to learn and during the process. An example I can give or project management is our annual Winter Fair. It is something I took one outside of my work duties, because I loved making a fun event with the holiday crafts. In this project, I supervised 5 staff members, 25 parent volunteers and 25 student volunteers. Instead of scheduling plenty of meetings, we worked on an online platform (in this case it was Trello although I prefer slack or asana) for organizing, planning, and implementing. I made sure that no one waited too long without goals, production, or a sounding board. Managing teams of volunteers is different than managing employees, simply because they are not being paid, and choose to be there. Similarly to employees though, we all have a job to get done, and it's important to set up a system to ensure volunteers finish the project they have set out to do. I have found that communication needs to be more finessed, and that a good sense of humor goes a long way.

How would you advance the conversation around diversity and inclusion within International ACAC? How do you believe the Executive Board should function in this capacity?

I love that International ACAC has committed to Diversity initiatives through its new standing committee on Diversity as well as its diversity statement and trainings - it is a good start. Areas to advance the conversation around DEI are:--conversations about DEI can be challenging - implementing initiatives and programs even more so. Acknowledge that International acac's current diversity initiatives are only a beginning, and that we have a lot to learn, and a lot of conversations to have--examine the organization's unconscious bias in its structure and representation. What practices, habits, etc...do we need to "unlearn" in order to be more inclusive--work towards diverse representation on the executive board (along various definitions of diversity and inclusion, not just race or geography)--conference proposals on DEI must be accepted and present--it takes deliberate practice to master a skill: are we committed for the long term to DEI? What skills do we ask our membership to practice? Can we ask our membership as a "directive" to practice the skills of DEI? These are complicated questions that are never fully answered and completed, but continued as a commitment of the organization. -- Work on DEI is about dialogue and consensus - how can we as an executive board teach ourselves to be able to listen profoundly, and to have constructive and difficult conversations?-- International students: once they are recruited, admitted, and matriculated at universities, how can the admissions office interact with the international student office (if there is one) to TRULY welcome them, help them acculturate, and thrive?--Finally, DEI is vital to ANY organization, as it strengthens it. Diversity is defined by the person (i.e. each member) not by an organization, country or culture. Recognize that the notion of diversity and inclusion can be different from a member in Indonesia, Morocco, or Canada.

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## General Statement

**What would you like members to know about you that is not otherwise shared in your responses?**

I live and breath international. My parents left northern Africa in 1968 to escape religious and ethnic persecution and chose the “new world” to raise and educate their children. I don’t know how, but they did it - my 5 siblings and I are all first generation college graduates, and first generation North Americans. I was educated in both French and in English as a cross-cultural Moroccan kid in Canada and later entered the United States as an international student. I am an immigrant-American. I work at an international school. It is my family's legacy and personal story that has placed the importance of international education in my vocational DNA. This legacy fuels me to give back to International ACAC. It is my duty to provide any student anywhere in the world the opportunity for higher education, and to support those who want to assist in those students’ dreams. In the past decade at IACAC, I have felt aligned with the organization’s mission and how I want to serve in it. In the past decade at IACAC, I have grown and been nurtured from conference participant to presenter to faculty to committee member to preconference co-chair. I now want to add a fresh voice to the Executive Board as President-Elect. There is much to do. In this new decade, I am especially committed to how we can become even more of an inclusive space for the underrepresented voices from our organization. How can we work together to ensure that all of our membership feels supported and represented? What does it take for everyone to experience belonging? I am ready to listen and to respond.