**IMPACT CONFERENCE**

**History of the Conference**

Founded in 1984, the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) was one of the first national organizations to promote and support college student involvement in thoughtful community service and civic engagement. Wayne Meisel, a recent Harvard graduate at the time, was bothered by characterizations of students as apathetic, lazy, and uncaring. This was not his experience having successfully created a number of community service initiatives at Harvard. Wayne’s insight was that there is a distinction between personal apathy and structural apathy. Personal apathy is when individuals do not care and are unwilling to be involved. Structural apathy occurs because individuals are unaware of meaningful opportunities and are not asked to serve. Wayne felt that there was a need for an organization that could help campuses to better develop the structures and opportunities that would entice and engage students to become involved. In 1984, Meisel started the COOL initiative with a “Walk for Action” in which he walked from Maine to Washington D.C. visiting over 70 college campuses. Meisel saw a need and a potential for a national student movement.

**COOL CONFERENCE**

As the service and civic engagement movement continued to grow, various campuses began investing in the growth of community service and service-learning. Nationwide, the movement saw the creation of organizations such as Campus Compact (started in 1985) and Youth Service America (started in 1986). By 1987, COOL was working with over 450 institutions of higher education. Early on, COOL developed model programs, resources, curriculum, and strategies to encourage service on campus. The largest undertaking of COOL was to organize a conference each year that would bring together students from across the country who were involved in their communities and who wanted to network with other students. The COOL Conference started with just a few hundred students at Harvard, and grew to bring together over 1,000 students each year.

For 20 years, COOL brought together student leaders, campus staff, and nonprofit professionals committed to imagining a better world and actively bringing about positive change within their campuses and communities. This history has played a significant role in the landscape of higher education and social justice in the United States.

**IDEALIST CAMPUS CONFERENCE**

In 2003, Action Without Borders/Idealist.org acquired COOL and continued its programs as the Idealist On Campus program. From 2003-2007, the staff of Idealist On Campus organized an annual student conference, the COOL Idealist National Conference (and, subsequently, the Idealist Campus Conference), building on the COOL legacy by providing meaningful and often life-changing experiences for conference attendees.

**Past Conference Hosts:**

1985 Harvard University

1986 Brown University

1987 Georgetown University

1988 Stanford University

1989 Fordham University

1990 University of California, Los Angeles

1991 Dillard University, Tulane University, Xavier University, SUNO, & others

1992 Rollins College, University of Central Florida, Valencia Community College

1993 University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

1994 University of Massachusetts, Boston

1995 Arizona State University

1996 George Washington University

1997 Case Western Reserve University

1998 University of South Carolina

1999 University of Utah

2000 Saint Anselm College

2001 Harvard University

2002 Morehouse College

2003 Cleveland State University

2004 University of Pennsylvania

2005 University of California, Berkeley

2006 Vanderbilt University

2007 DePaul University

2008 Northeastern University

2009 University of Maryland, College Park

2010 University of Arkansas at Little Rock & Clinton School of Public Service

2011 Stetson University

2012 Stetson University

2013 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque

The conference program included 150 workshops, affinity groups, panels, poster sessions, and forums covering a diverse array of topics in service-learning, student service, leadership, and civic engagement and drawing upon the vast expertise of conference attendees.

**IMPACT CONFERENCE**

After the 2007 Idealist Campus Conference, Action Without Borders announced that it was interested in passing the conference on to another group of organizers. After a good deal of consideration, a group of colleagues working in higher education and the nonprofit sector gathered together a Planning Committee to organize the conference collaboratively and on an entirely volunteer basis. This group of organizers included undergraduate and graduate students, nonprofit professionals, and campus staff interested in continuing to build and support a national student movement to effect social change. Youth Service America, a national youth service organization and original partner of COOL, agreed to serve as the fiscal sponsor for the conference.

Northeastern University served as the host campus for the first conference reconstituted as the IMPACT National Student Conference on Service, Advocacy, and Social Action in 2008. Although under a new name and with a different planning method, the conference continued the tradition and drew over 900 participants. The conference also generated enough net revenue to provide a small stipend for the lead conference organizer. With the continued volunteer efforts of a national planning committee, the conference was hosted in 2009 by the University of Maryland, College Park, and in 2010 by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the Clinton School of Public Service. The 2011 and 2012 conferences were hosted by Stetson.