

Minutes  
WSSA Informational Meeting  
Executive Council  
Zoom, August 14, 2020

1. Welcome/Introductions – MC missed this do to connection issues. MC joins at 9:08 am.
2. Overview of new paper submission/registration software and why we are going to it.
  - a. Rewrite Section Coordinators Handbook to match new software (Kate)
  - b. Why we need a new submission portal (Larry)
  - c. What does it do for us (Kate) – new program can be listed in Spanish and two other languages; student workers have protected usage at the front desk – they can only access certain information. System broke down last year. There will be much more functionality with new software. New platform backs up automatically, so we won't lose data like last year.
  - Bill S: Are there any downsides?
  - K: downsides for Kate - these are technical. Can only pay through PayPal. Does submissions and fees.
  - L: problem with PayPal, while we get money quickly, refunds are much more work...
  - Debra: Paypal has had problems with hacking.
  - L: even AmEx has had exposure.
  - Tony: Do we want to include a note to users to be aware of PayPal account?
  - K: we can add a statement but most people pay by credit card
  - Chris E: how do we export from a portal into a format into scheduling a session?
  - K: new program does have scheduling assistance – checks for overlaps etc. NOTHING allows you to export to perfectly match what we do. Kate can't do it for this year, but will look at it for next year.
  - Bill S – K, how much of your load is increased by this?
  - K: setting up takes the time, but once it's up, it won't be any more of a workload.
  - L: check with OmniPress to see if they have any ideas about changing platforms (responds to Chris E).
  - K: MJF & TA normally the president and president elect update the handbook. Kate will do it this year as part of getting the systems up and running.

Motion: No motion needed, administrative decision

3. Contract negotiations with hotel and our inability to contact anybody with the hotel. (Larry)
  - a. We will not know much about this until September when the hotel opens (hopefully)
  - b. Reduce the expected guest room pickup (hard to predict)
  - c. Minimum Catering is \$40,000 plus 22 percent service fee for a total of about \$48,800. This does not get you much in the way of catering
  - Hyatt is closed – there is no one there to talk to. Corporate just sent it back and said to get in touch with the ABQ hotel.
  - We always go way over on the catering. Our issue will be the room pick up. We have a lot of rooms hanging out there. Can't tell us much about contract negotiations, but Holmes/Brisco (our rep is Debbie) will help with the negotiations.

#### 4. Conference Fees (Action Item):

- fees that we charge are not paying for the conference.
- conferences since 2016 – Reno and San Diego are lopsided. Catering in Reno was really cheap; catering in SD was really high.
- For SF = around \$250; SA = 300; SD = over 300 for conference to pay for themselves. This is a relationship between # of registrants, when they register, and net costs.
- K: \$170 for reg discount , standard is \$210.
- L: For SD, we averaged \$153 for each registered attended. Needed amount was \$373 per person.
- We would lose our base if we charge too much. But we need to get it up to cover catering costs.
- Average net per person needs to go up.
- K: 25 – 30% of our registrations are students; student reg fees are \$60 less on average
- Chris E: survey closest comparable competitors. Do we want to be at 25<sup>th</sup> percentile above or below? Where do we want to be in relation to others? Slightly below average for cost. We have a high quality conference!
- Chris B – can we do a quick poll?
- CB: AAG – \$315 member, student = \$165,
- L: SW Social Science: conference fee for hotel (165) vs. not (355). Costs 200 more if you are not staying at conference hotel.
- Is this a scare tactic? Would this push people off? Do we have people not staying at the hotel?
- CB: Structure of hotel vs non hotel is good, but not this year. Too many moving parts.
- L: cost of going to the conference – we’ve always been student-oriented but these fees need to go up too
- CE: can we raise 10% across the board for all categories. We haven’t raised the prices for a few years. Can do that for 3 consecutive years?
- L: onsite fee vs. virtual fee? How are we doing this? Discount prices: 170 reg (rename professional); 105 (students); 130 retirees, etc.
- If we go up 10% it’s about \$20. That would be 10k for 500 people. That won’t get us there.
- CE: We need to be competitive with comparable conferences. It is better to raise prices each year – as soon as practical, we should jump 10% a year for 3 years, then 3% per year after.
- TA: agree that we need to go up and be ruthless about our expenses. We have runaway costs.
- L: early bird = \$187 for this year for a f2f conference.
- CB: we should dig into our endowment... if we lost attendance, we lose the heart of the organization.

Vote raising conference fee 10% this year: yes = 11/11

No = 0

Abstain = 0

Full Virtual conference or hybrid virtual part to a f2f conference = how do we figure out the fees for this?

CE: what are the fixed costs vs. marginal costs?

L: people may not come if they have an option so we may lose their fees? Negotiating with hotel

CB: AAG = 315; virtual = 125

L: we need to double our \$50 at least. We were trying to break even.

MC = 125?

Does anyone disagree? No.

Tonia = can we send out a survey asking about attendance?

MJF = no funding no travel. We don't know if this will change for spring.

L: how did people receive the virtual conference?

K: We put lots of time and effort into building the conference. People had trouble with the idea of, which shouldn't be the case now. Big complaint was the moving dates. We could fix that now. Only a few people had problems with prices. There were some minor issues with technology. One thing she is unsure of is how much participation occurred once papers were online. LAS made lots of comments, but few others did.

L: Kudos to LAS - they had great leadership!

L: K – please confirm our costs to be sure this is reasonable.

5. Talk about a hybrid model similar to the AAG conference (Comments from Chris Brown) -

- a. Pricing
  - b. Time zone issues – people on different continents
  - c. Virtual
  - d. Online
  - e. ZOOM
- L: We still can't know if we will have a face to face conference. University travel restrictions, plus personal fears, plus people can't come here. Latin American Studies and ABS take a big hit too with border issues.
  - L: How do we make sure that scholars have a place to put out their research. We really need to discuss in September, differential pricing for those in person vs. virtually. Each virtual is a guest room we don't get. We have to charge accordingly. How we set up panels?
  - L: This summer went well, but didn't have the same "flavor" as a face to face.
  - Tonia: Fully virtual conference next spring for many her organizations. Would one possible approach to be a fully virtual conference, but more synchronous or this is not on the table?
  - L: everything is on the table. L is anxious because he can't talk to the hotel. He has to time the impossibility clause just right if he invokes it.
  - Debra: We should make the decision as soon as we can. Can use a combo of Sync Remote and Async Remote.
  - L: We don't see this changing – we need to plan accordingly.
  - K: we normally open the conference reg Sept. 15. We can push back opening until after September meeting.
  -

6. Finances (Larry)

- a. Journal – universities aren't spending money, so our sales are low. Journal supported the organization.
  - b. Conference comparison - spreadsheet
  - c. Conference cost versus revenue – catering costs have shot up especially for coffee. Larry doesn't have a good idea of price saturation model – how much can we ask people to pay? We are on the very low side. Is this biting us in the rear?
- Elsevier paid us \$72000 annually around Jan 30<sup>th</sup>, they also paid for our editors' stipends. This year was last year of contract, so E didn't pay \$72000.
  - We could have pulled it off without COVID-19.

7. Conference Expenses (see documents forwarded via email) (Larry)

- a. Catering
- b. Student workers
- c. A/V
- d. Staff
- e. Conference Program Development Costs
- f. Awards
- g. Guest rooms

- L: we need to let some things go

- L: catering is our most expensive items. Catering costs varies significantly from one place to another. Where can we cut some of this?

- We need to look at student worker costs. Can we hire from a local agency (don't know what you will get and if they will show up). Student workers cost a lot – comp their costs. We could cut 8 – 10K here.

-AV? We have our own projectors so can't do much here. With our own projectors it is still 15K labor to get set up.

- L, K, Dianne are paid staff, plus the editors. Can Kate take on more and drop Dianne? But then we put it back into K so no savings.

- publishing the program? 3K per year to publish + 3K on app + 5K for Dianne (our current app sets up the program for us so we may save there)

- awards are 12 – 22K : we have to suspend them this year. There are hidden costs for plaques and travel, etc.

- Tonia: if we move to online, would we be able to add awards back?

- L: in cash we give out around 14K. We could reduce the prize money or certain awards. Given the very low return, we cut undergrad student awards. They'd never come again. We need to get this category down under 5K.

- K: send out list of awards and indirect and direct costs

- L: we comp a lot of guest rooms. We comp invited speaker for ABS. We get some rooms comped to us. We use those on student worker rooms. Comped rooms have to go away this year. Travel and meal expenses and all the incidentals add up.

8. Brief discussion of events to eliminate or significantly reduce in catering – easy to cut back or eliminate some of these. When we don't put enough food out, people are angry

- No more free booze. This is an insurance issue, but helps our bottom line

-

h. Welcoming Reception

i. Breakfast on Friday – 15 -20K. Can we cut this? You now have to buy a food package

j. President's Luncheon (Maybe charge full freight and no free meals, but then if we suspend awards for this year, we may not need this event) – comped to section coordinators, partially funded by ticket fees. Charge everyone? Comp award winners, but no one else. We are buying plates that are going uneaten.

k. Support for ABS Reception – they pay 2500 to us but we pay 12K for their reception. We can't do this.

- I. Presidents' Reception – Saturday night to encourage people to stay. We can scale this back a bit. Cutting alcohol to spend on food. Cut receptions to an hour. Stage food so it doesn't all come out a one time.
- K: many come in too late to get to opening reception and those who come are often late are the ones who fill their plates.
  - L: attend is greater at opening then closing reception. Can we change the time and scale it back. 7 pm rather than 6 pm? An hour?
  - MC: AACCS does 7 pm for an hour and it works well.

## 9. Miscellaneous Issues

Chris B: AAG – going virtual and f2f. Doesn't know how AAG is balancing it, but they are very very big.  
L: can you do some research and share it with us?

Bill P = where do we want to take this in the future? If we are going virtual now, will people expect it in the future. This is a paradigm shift and we need to think about this.

William = costs need to be under control. For student prizes, it is the prize that is important not the amount. Students like the recognition.

Fernando: prefers lower prices

Steve = people are motivated to be f2f after this year. Pay for conferences out of pocket. Conferences are wise investment for the future.

CB = agree with Bill P that this is the new normal. Can we do some combo in the future of f2f and virtual? Reduce outstanding award \$\$ and glass globes

Kate: doing a 2 person job now!!

MC: holding off on spotlight org and food bank stuff.

L: - not happy with Omni

K: me either. They weren't super responsive.

## 10. Adjourn