

IWCA Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, December 10
Hosted by Harry Denny at St. John's via WIMBA.

Members Present:

Beth Burmester, Frankie Condon, Harry Denny, Diane Dowdey, Michele Eodice, Chris Ervin, Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, Kerri Jordan, Roberta Kjesrud, Teresa Kramer, Dan Melzer, John Nordlof, Karen Rowan, Steve Sherwood, Nathalie Singh-Corcoran, Barb Toth, Sam Van Horn, and Sherri Winans

I. Agenda

Via email prior to the meeting, IWCA President Roberta Kjesrud established the agenda as an informal one, with the goal of determining “what we collectively identify as IWCA priorities for a new decade.” Those priorities, she suggested, would guide our spring agenda. Board members were asked to consider these two questions in preparation for the meeting:

1. As we draw this decade to a close, what do you see as the main contributions or successes of the IWCA?
2. As we look to the next decade, what would you nominate as the main challenge or priority for the IWCA?

After introductions by new board members Nathalie Singh-Corcoran (Vice President) and Kerri Jordan (Secretary), the questions above guided the meeting discussion, which proceeded as follows.

II. Discussion of IWCA Successes/Accomplishments of the Last Decade and of Potential Priorities and Challenges

The discussion of successes/accomplishments and potential priorities and challenges emphasized conferences; professional development; resources and support for writing centers; the IWCA web presence; accreditation, program assessment, and advocacy; and IWCA policy on multi-literacies.

A. Conferences

1. Regional Conferences

Multiple board members praised IWCA for supporting excellent regional conferences. While outsiders might expect regional conferences to be less professional or less rigorous with research, that has not been the case. Undergrads' outstanding performances at regional conferences, as well as friendly and inclusive atmospheres, were cited as strengths. Members of one region were particularly appreciative of the IWCA board presence at their regional conference. Finding ways to continue and improve support for regional conferences is a potential priority.

2. European Writing Center Association

A vibrant writing center movement has been developing in Europe over the last decade, and the European WCA conference has been a success.

3. IWCA Collaborative

The IWCA Collaborative at Cs has been a useful forum for promoting connections and professional development.

4. IWCA and NCPTW

More organized and ongoing collaboration between IWCA and NCPTW has been a strength. Jon Olson's liaison role should be an asset to the IWCA-NCPTW relationship, and other conference planning committee members have the background and potential to help strengthen that relationship as well.

Although NCPTW is very much a part of the IWCA 2010 conference, a continuing challenge is negotiating IWCA-NCPTW joint conference partnerships. Complications include issues related to organizational identity and to conference logistics, including finances and locations. The following key points were made:

- Because the essence of NCPTW is its conference identity, NCPTW's ethos risks being lost when it becomes absorbed by the IWCA conference.
- Because IWCA is a hotel-based conference and NCPTW is a college-based conference when it does not partner with IWCA, the joint conference becomes more expensive for NCPTW. In addition, a large tutor presence at a joint conference means higher fees must be charged of professionals attending the conference. Conference locations appropriate for IWCA are not always as convenient for NCPTW. (Accordingly, NCPTW has opted not to partner with IWCA for the 2012 conference in San Diego.)

To help promote the IWCA-NCPTW relationship, IWCA could communicate more effectively their interest in tutor participation at conferences.

A formal update on the upcoming IWCA conference had not occurred by the time of this meeting, and the board awaits an update from Jon Olson regarding the 2010 Baltimore conference.

B. Professional Development

IWCA's support of professional development for members through scholarships, grants, and Summer Institutes is a substantial achievement. Suggestions related to potential improvements were also made.

1. Scholarships and Grants

Submission dates (January and July) for grant proposals will remain the same and that relevant information is posted on the IWCA website. IWCA receives around 8-12 good proposals each year. Roberta is constructing committees for review panels.

The board was encouraged to consider where we want to “go” as a field and to promote scholarship more broadly.

2. Summer Institutes

Nathalie Singh-Corcoran’s position as Chair of the Conferences and Institutes Committee was confirmed. She and Roberta will both be involved in the 2010 Summer Institute.

The board’s desire to enhance the IWCA connection to the Summer Institute was expressed, and two possible ways to expand and/or improve the Summer Institute were mentioned: (1) Summer Institutes might develop a split track, so that less experienced and more experienced writing center directors have substantially different Summer Institute experiences, or (2) the Summer Institute might become a forum for equipping regional leaders to offer professional development in their regions.

The Board articulated an interest in including the Summer Institute as an agenda item for a later meeting.

C. Resources and Support for Writing Centers

IWCA provides good resources for those starting writing centers. Given the current budget climate, however, IWCA could provide more resources for existing writing centers potentially faced with losing institutional support. Three main strategies were mentioned:

1. Website Resources.

IWCA could post on the website materials such as research supporting writing centers, strategies for advocacy, and explanations of how IWCA can help their members.

2. Letters of Support.

The Leadership Team rarely receives requests for letters of support, although the Immediate Past President composed many such letters. The web information suggested above could help members and potential members find appropriate contacts for letters of support.

3. Two-year College Outreach.

Again in response to the financial climate, eliciting more IWCA involvement from two-year-colleges—beyond subscribing to <wcenter>—would be appropriate.

D. Web Presence

Strengths and weaknesses of the IWCA web presence were discussed and an informal update of recent improvements was offered.

The IWCA website was praised as having been well-designed and as including a

substantial amount of helpful material. However, the question of what type discussion forum would best suit IWCA members' needs was raised, and WCJ archive problems were noted. The WCJ archive has not been an IWCA project, and our free Bedford St. Martin's-sponsored server space has sometimes been unreliable.

A new Web Editorial Board (including Chris Ervin, Dennis Bennett, Rob Koch, and Stephanie Leahry) has been formed. The group is currently addressing the need for a new server, reliable tech support, and the ability to update the site efficiently. In addition, collaborations are currently on going to make certain that WCJ is available in more than one place.

E. Accreditation, Program Assessment, and Advocacy

The possibility of IWCA involvement in writing center accreditation and/or program assessment, including offering models of best practices for benchmarking/comparison, was suggested.

Program assessment by IWCA evaluators working on behalf of IWCA (rather than in collaboration with WPA) could be useful. IWCA already has a partnership with WPA related to program evaluation: IWCA has paid WPA to be listed among program evaluation consultants. Two IWCA members serve as external evaluators and are contacted if a writing center is included in a program seeking evaluation. The evaluators are compensated; IWCA is not.

Having IWCA promote our own program evaluators could help professionalize the organization. IWCA evaluators could, for instance, go on-site and create a rich document of recommendations for provosts and deans.

Offering IWCA evaluators could also help promote writing centers politically. In the current economy, writing centers may face a kind of cannibalization, where various other tutoring initiatives may draw resources away from writing centers. IWCA evaluators could be brought in at the director's request, rather than the provost's, to help the provost understand the importance and usefulness of the writing center.

Finally, a reminder was offered about the importance of considering how we understand "professionalism." Within the wide variety of contexts, professionalism means different things. A concern was raised about potentially defining professionalism in a way that marginalizes some contexts.

F. Policy on Multi-Literacies

Some IWCA members are particularly interested in the role of the writing center as demographics of American college and university students change—and especially as they include more Hispanic students and ESL students. Writing centers might function as apologists to students, or writing centers might be involved in explaining to faculty the need for respecting students' languages.

IWCA could provide resources to help writing centers advocate for students. IWCA

might create a statement similar to Cs “Students Right to Their Own Language.” Frankie Condon expressed interest in working on such a statement.

III. Additional Topics

The conference concluded with brief discussion of a pending agenda item, general plans for subcommittee designation, and a call for last comments.

A. Pending Item

Discussion of the Muriel Harris Service Award had been tabled. As a pending item, that issue will automatically be added to the agenda for the first formal business meeting.

B. Subcommittees

Roberta emphasized her desire to determine which board members are interested in various topics and to mobilize the board (and other members) via subcommittee assignments. The board informally affirmed their endorsement of those plans

C. Last Comments

After a call for last comments, Chris Ervin was applauded for his work related to the IWCA web presence.

IV. Adjournment

The motion to adjourn was made and seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Kerri Jordan, IWCA Secretary