**Meeting Minutes**

**American Forensics Association Business Meeting**

**Thursday, November 16, 2017, 3:30 – 4:45 pm**

**Marriott, Plaza Ballroom C**

**Dallas, TX**

Gordon Stables: We will get started. It is because of the ongoing transition of affiliate organizations and the arrangements between the AFA and the NCA that we are here today. Let’s call the meeting to order

[3:34: Call meeting to order]

GS: We will begin with the affiliate committees:

Peter Pober: Today we had the NIET meeting - only 4 hours and 3 minutes. Last year’s NIET consisted of 1,395 slots and included 73 schools. Bradley University did a stunning job hosting. We had two new coach awards: Professors Sade Barfield of the University of Northern Iowa and Allison Ronnau Bonander of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; 2 outstanding awards to 2 outstanding individuals.

We will go to Colorado College this April. The 2019 NIET will return to the University Alabama after a 70-year hiatus. Kellie Robertson has been masochistic herself to host 3 times.

The [NIET] organization is healthy and wonderful and driven but we are shocked by the parent organization. No funds have been transferred into the NIET treasury. We do not know what happened to that money. We have several members who have asked for stronger communication; we have seen less communication. We are concerned at the lack of dissemination of programs. Lifetime members are expressing concern. We also encountered issues with the placement of meeting and programs at certain times.

GS: I want to thank you for your candid expression. We are certainly open, and we want to have honest communication about many of the issues you raised. We intend to be completely transparent at this meeting.

Dave Cram Helwich: The NDT will be held in Wichita, Kansas – we couldn’t find an alternative to change the host site [for schools who are excluded by the state travel ban]. The NDT will be hosted at the University of Minnesota in 2019. Other than that, Ron Green wants to know where *Argument & Advocacy* is.

GS: Standing committees: Research committee

Jim Dimock: There are multiple nominations for all the awards; [Larry] Schnoor Award has multiple applications, but we don’t have people on committee to process it; couple people have volunteered to help assign the awards. Same for the Brockreide awards.

GS: We reinforce that we are attempting to collect information on past awards [and their recipients]. Cate Palczewski has been working on collecting history about the awards and the Rohrer Awards. If you won an organizational award and are not included in our records, I encourage you to get in touch with us with that information. I encourage your support in attaining this information for the website.

Other committees?

Jeannie Hunt for NPDA: We had Nationals at Colorado College; 217 teams. There is a perception that parliamentary debate is not dying. That is not the case, the attendance shows stable numbers. We are working on a verification policy – verified 700 people on a free online program. We will have nationals at Lewis and Clark College in March. We have similar concerns [as those expressed by the NIET]. We tabled 5 agenda items; have not received funds. We are all about increasing the communication.

Mike Janas [Past President]: We are working on some interesting collaborations. The treasurer of DKR TPA at Colorado College has approached me. They have $40,000 in a bank. The proposal is that AFA pick up the investment and that it becomes part of the AFA. We’ve been talking about it this and it can happen. They are down to 2 officers and we think this will happen. Next year there will be a DSR-TKA award.

GS: Let’s transition to the President’s report. We’ve had a long-term conversation about NCA – starting 2 years ago – that we will not be part of Wed. and we do not have a guaranteed right for space. The organization was on board for retaining the historical Wed. and we paid it. It was a substantial cost. When I spoke to smaller groups, we didn't think that was sustainable. Not paying was a bureaucratic problem on my end. For the compromise, we asked each organization to let us know if they wanted a Wed. slot. For anyone else in the program – other days result in: 1. Advantage is in the program; downside. The disadvantage is that there are limited slots and especially for paper/panel submissions. We only have 10 slots – we requested an 11th 2. Another component is that every time we move a slot to a business meeting, we take away form competitive panels. NDT board of trustee was perplexed [by the change/alternative options].

Star Muir is willingness to work with us but the reality is that there is not any leverage. So with 11-12 slots, the question, how to allocate the slots, is significant.

Also for your reference between Thursday through Sunday, we encounter constraint regarding when there is a reception – NCA prohibits with receptions with the other programming. These are the constraints that we are in.

Some of you are here representing other groups. Unlike in the past, NCA did not verify your participation in the program if they were doing other meetings on Wed.

We need feedback on what worked or hasn’t worked this year.

PP: Question: Could we consider finding a local institution depending on the location of the conference?

GS: We are willing to consider this on a case-by-case basis, especially if the membership shows willingness on this. I’ve had conversations with folks; we are willing to do it but it is largely at the discretion of the institution, no program and managing the issue of transportation.

Other suggestions are that we need the right names tagged so you don’t have conflicts. Folks have given me different names. I’ve also heard that most people are here Thurs.- Fri. which makes it difficult to schedule a business meeting on Saturday.

What do people think about the meeting taking place later in the weekend?

Question/Comment: are we able to schedule the last session on Friday?

HH: A lot of business meetings scheduled on Friday – it will preclude us from attending other business meetings since they are highly popular to be scheduled then.

MJ: are competitive panels sacrificed to a business meeting? If so, aren’t Thursdays easier for times – Wed. model for Thursday – maybe we shouldn’t be in the competitive panel “business.” Is there interest to seek space at the University of Utah?

Comment: I would like that; maybe we could have the business meeting and reception at one place.

GS: You are right that it is part of the goal. For the affiliates, what time can we start? Fewer folks might be able to drive to that location. For many of us we are used to arriving on the traditional Tuesday night.

Question/Comment: [NCA has determined] If you schedule business meeting at 7 am it does not count against your slots. It is an option.

JH: 7 am business meetings are well attended.

GS: That’s the thought process. The idea is move back to Wed. meetings. I would encourage that representatives bring the ideas/suggestions of coming back to Wednesdays and moving off-sight to us. We need an advance discussion for travel planning. Other things on NCA?

GS: The broader component of this discussion is on figuring out what has been a pretty difficult transition. I own some of it and also intend to resolve this in the remainder of my term. There was a tragic mistake on my behalf – there was not an immediate and easy way to deal with our groups and plan. The reality is that we have relied on the benevolence of one person – we are trying to fix it so that there can be a continuation without placing so much on one person. The reality is that it was only 1 person who could produce payments; write checks; send emails; [etc. etc.]. I thought we could clean this up without putting it all back on one person – we have done a few things: admittedly some of those things have not worked:

1. We have alleviated some financial liability. We have discontinued with a traditional web designer. USC could subsidize the website. You do not need to go to USC for website management – the domain was a registered party – the website has moved domains. We also removed the directory. It was not updated and there is no good reason why it was so complicated. It was a massive price tag, and it is saving us some money, not having the web designer. We are trying to remove the financial exigency form the organization.
2. We tried to resolve who might be the next executive secretary. This is the last year using the current financial organization. We need to make it a national branch, and have multiple people put on signature accounts (and make it changeable). I work for a larger private organization with access to many institutions in Southern CA, but I need to go to Wisconsin to deal with this. We need to determine who is doing this in real time so leadership can transition/change.
3. We don’t know if an affiliate organization has changer their membership dues. The AFA website did not reflect it, so there needs to be a protocol in place so that [if we collect dues] we need to know.
4. We would like the executive secretary be redefined in the position description. We do not want it to be work that requires all of our reliance on one academic colleague. We want to price out the new potential changes and have the organization change the term of the position – to make it not part of the 2 year cycle. Heidi is our next President and we do not have a smooth means to transfer the organization’s document collection, financial records, etc. Most of us didn’t have access to these things.
5. My hope is that after the meeting with the accounting firm we can resolve many of these. We need to update the payments and without the forms Exertive Secretary we could not move our funds in the Paypal accounts
6. So question, complaints, stones?

Karla Leeper:Gordon, we realize that all of this must have been incredibly difficult to address. I also understand how much we relied on the Executive Secretary. Is there a current description for the job of executive secretary?

GS: [The challenge is revising . . . same basic needs as a HS chess club.]

Currently the E.S. was serving in some capacity as webmaster, treasurer, contractor, loan signature account – they provided everything. In my mind, the role we want as the liaison to the outside firm. My conversations with the accountant have shown that we have no concern with impropriety. [Example] Peter Reese [the webmaster] went 6 months without us paying him. When I reached him, I had to ask tell me how much we owe you, [etc.] The good news is that the quality of people [Jim] surrounded the organization around meant that we had some perspective on their honesty/transparency.

KL: What are the most important functions that E.S. should have? So we know what to invest/expect in that person’s role; A list to say, this is what an exec secretary should do.

GS: [Agreement]. At the moment we do not have a contact system. We do not have a system to do it. But the financial is a core piece even more than a communication piece.

Question: Do we even have the right list of officers?

GS: Convention planning was the other part of this. We need someone with continuity of how that process works so that it can continue.

PP: Should we address the politicization issue with Paypal? To me; it is not the most revenue responsible platform. We identified it to draw revenue of other organizations but there are E-transaction methods.

Maybe we should consider a different bank model? Paypal has limits on transferring money out . They argue it is anti-laundering, but because of it it is harder to send money out. Other models serve the model better. As long as someone can pay with a credit card – Paypal might serve the goal and the features are designed for that security,[ but maybe there are other options?:] I just wanted to bring it to the table.

GS: We could consider another website/platform.

Dale Herbeck: what steps should occur moving forward?

GS: First would be coming up with a list of nominations or people to badger about taking on the role [E.S.], especially the financial part. Then we need documentation on the nature of how the document is determined. I am concerned with my non-transparent process. We can ask membership to give some feedback on this.

KL: We could consider a parallel model to the one we created for the journal – do interviews and pick the position.

GS: That [the idea] is phenomenal. Our process was built around Jim’s character. Yes, I think a world where the financial committee made a recommendation would be great.

KL: The journal process works well.

GS: That would be great. Interviewing and also finding a current accounting firm [to work with]. We should strive for a geographically neutral organization plan. We want a system where we can be anywhere.

I heard in this a meeting a need for a communication protocol. The nature of the newsletter has served different needs/had different features. We have some reports and minutes – we don’t have advice on what to communicate about. I want to thank Peter about the statement of ethics. It is importnant to consider what the organization should be doing in moments like that. What the university responds to and engaging with it [ethics]. This job is worth it if you think I should – is there a sense about more of discussion of leadership. Do you feel that your institutions handle situations appropriately?

Robert Stockton: We need to communicate with all of them, especially communicating with people not here – Do we inform the retired folks? We need different sense of who was on the [membership] list.

GS: It is smart to maintain those contacts. We kept some of you on it unless they were opting out. But we allowed people even if they did not send the renewals/documents. As the organization changes, we need to know who is who and more engagement will assist.

MJ: So how to generate the job description? The financial liaison to the organization and institutions? May not necessarily be the job to organize all of these concerns [some can become the role of] the president.

JK: It seems that two big pieces, treasury and communication, have been identified. That may be a logical ways to divide up roles.

GS: I like that, too. The finances [for executive secretary].

JK: might be easier to find someone.

GS: I want them to be part of the process; we need someone with a history of the organization.

Erika Thomas [recording secretary]: I would be happy to do some emailing of membership – I am not sure where we would draw the line with website maintenance, but a certain level of communication could be taken up by the recording secretary. I do not know how the membership feels about that.

GS: We can consider the reorganization of the various roles. We want a coder [for the website] – we need someone to make the changes. Even Peter to the credit, has noted the importance of redesign. For that, a web maintenance person is needed and that is why we move to a more common role. Soliciting feedback for other responsibilities of a new executive secretary?

Jim [Pratt] has been incredibly gracious. I am getting the accounting settled to give you a sense of it. The AFA payment for NCA was billed to my Mastercard because Paypal would not take it. This is something I wanted – we were only just finding out about Jim then. There is no perfect solution. If we can do a full Wed. on campus that is fine so long as we do not have people complaining: why are we going off-site?

We need oversight of finances and separating jobs. We should separate the jobs just for transparency. Even the payment schedule was unclear. We raised it with organizations should it be a quarterly transference of payment or otherwise? It can bundle all of the individual items, and it is easier to run reports.

PP: I agree with all of it and I suggest we can also add the additional officers. We [NIET] added another one for social media coordinator. It’s easier for more people to be more active if they didn’t have quite as big responsibility.

GS: We need things like an operations manager; if you know of anyone –

PP: Dave Worth from Rice University, Vice President, and would be happy to talk to you.

GS: One of the benefits of [DOFs] is that the Director’s expertise helps us learn anything.

KL: Is the Paypal business as usual – is that money still going there?

GS: I want to share the vision – we are in a bottle neck. The money comes in but it sits there. When people ask if we can confirm to pay, I can do that but I cannot take that money out [without Jim].

Questions: Should we still pay that way?

GS: Affiliates have and have not made decisions to use it. I don't feel like I can tell them where to pay – I’m not going to be dramatic. We intend to fully resolve the funds.

Until we have a new executive secretary – I need a little more help, a little longer. But I don’t feel comfortable telling members what they should do [where they should pay]. The organizational dues [AFA dues] are less of an issue.

Question: when is the transfer likely to happen – in April? When will we get to it?

GS: He [Jim Pratt] has resigned. He is the only person with fiscal authority [to access the funds.] I am confident it will happen; he is in a better place to do it [soon].

Comment: Financial committee – have all the other terms have expired?

GS Members should have confidence that we will fill those positions.

Comment: Can you talk through the timeframe more. We meet once a year . . . I’m newish, can you run us through what we should expect.

GS: My term ends in the spring, and I need to put it [the AFA] in a better position than I found it. The executive secretary vacancy slows it down, but I will appoint anyone by the end of the year and place them in it and then clear the pieces up. This is the thing – I wanted to intentionally go through with the discussion – the organization [at this meeting] – we've been in crisis mode for the last year. Mike had one of the few progressive agenda items. We need to rebuild something before the term ends.

Question/Comment: Should new members of the finance committee be appointed?

GS: One thing needs to happen before the other thing. I have been spending time doing things that the Presidency wouldn't normally do. If you leave here with unease, that's healthy. I could lie and say everything is fine. But we need to rely on the trust of the organization – we need to be sure that the organization is held accountable financially and it is my concern that it is okay.

Question: Can you send a timeline?

GS: We need nominations – the committee can happen ASAP. I would propose sending nominations by the Monday after Thanksgiving [any day after Thanksgiving] to Dale. Separate, to my hope, if you have other checks, I need to know where your membership dues are. Then we need to trace back your finances.

The First Chair Report:

Heidi Hamilton: We had 10 slots [this year’s NCA] – 4 slots went to business and other meetings. At next year’s convention we, again, have10 slots. The Wednesday off-sight location will allow for 10 slots of panels and discussion – please submit to AFA for next year. Good quality panels and discussions are occurring. Because we could not send the email list, but it [the AFA program] is posted to the website. If you want to be a reviewer, please give me a name and contact information.

Catherine Langford: Subscriptions are lower; I believe I over estimated with my numbers – it’s down. We have 4 issues. I haven’t been receiving book review submissions. Instead of 4 essays, we published 5. We have had 9 acceptances not yet in because of order of acceptance. Acceptance rate is 7.1% a little higher; the rejection rate is 43%. The trends of current reviewers is reject more than revise and resubmit. By the end of the calendar year, we will have a special issue about the 2016 Presidential Debates. Justin Eckstein will edit a special issue on sound and argument. Please be responsive – we are trying to expand [subject material]. Taylor & Francis has automatic settings, one of them is “reject and revise.” Does anyone want that? Otherwise, we’ll just drop it. One of our essays received 300 views – Justin Eckstein’s [“Sound arguments”] had roughly 126 views and “The sublime rhetoric of Pascal's wager”[Calum Matheson] has 124 views.

GS: The first check of royalties is coming. We are meeting with Taylor &Francis tomorrow. Any other questions?

Meeting adjourned at 4:41 pm.