

ASPA News - January 1998

Issue Theme: "ASPA - We're Wearing Well..."

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Ready? Set? Vote!

Plan now to attend and cast your vote for future leaders of ASPA on March 6, 1998. The ASPA Committee on Nominations is hard at work preparing a slate of candidates for elections to be held during the March meeting in Chicago. Many of you submitted nominees and others agreed to be nominated and will serve if elected. In an organization as small as ASPA, your willingness to participate in both roles is critically important. So here's a special **thank you** to you all.

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Looking Ahead to Chicago

The next ASPA meeting will be March 5-6-7, 1998 at the Hotel Intercontinental, 505 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL. Committees and Task Forces (TF) will meet on Thursday. A members-only session will be followed by a reception starting about 5:00 p.m. Friday will be filled with meetings of the Board and Membership and an update on the implications for accreditation of recommendations made by the TF on Accreditation of Health Professions Education.

Saturday will be devoted to professional development. You asked for it. And, yes, you're gonna get it. The ProD Committee has planned a day devoted to Validity and Reliability. Join us as we learn who's doing what and why!!

Non-members and guests may register for ASPA meetings. ASPA conducts most of its business in open sessions. The meetings on March 6 and 7 will be open.

To minimize repetition, members are especially encouraged to attend the Board of Directors meeting. The Board, with member input, will discuss the financial report and any other items of relevance to both the board and membership. These items will not be repeated in the membership meeting.

A limited number of rooms have been reserved for Thursday and Friday nights, March 5 and 6, 1998. The ASPA group room rate of \$119/night is available three days before and after the meeting, subject to availability. To reserve a room call: 1-800-628-2112 or (312) 944-4100 prior to the room release date of February 5, 1998.

Meeting registration forms are included with this mailing; for more information, please contact the ASPA office. All ASPA-member accreditors may take advantage of the **\$50.00 "early bird" discount** by sending the meeting registration form with a check made payable to ASPA to the office before February 5, 1998.

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Remarks from ASPA's Chair

*Carol L. Bobby, CACREP
ASPA Chair*

What follows is an edited version of remarks made to the membership at the ASPA meeting held in Tucson, AZ on Monday, September 8, 1997.

When I was on the plane flying here on Saturday, I was very tired and was going through the book of meeting materials. I'd been out of the office for three weeks and I was frantically trying to catch up on everything I needed to know for this meeting. It has been a busy year for me, but I want you to know that being your chair, while tiring, has been a lot of fun and has given me a tremendous amount of personal satisfaction and professional reward.

As I was wondering how the meeting would go, I realized that I was wearing a t-shirt that I had bought at the very first ASPA meeting in Phoenix when we voted [in 1993] to be a bona fide organization. It was my very own ASPA commemorative shirt.

Later in the day, when I pointed out the fact that my shirt had come from the Phoenix meeting to Cynthia Davenport, her comment was "and it certainly has worn well over the past few years!" I looked at it again, and she was right, it has worn well. Not only is that shirt still in good shape, but it is now soft and very comfortable after many washings. I like it better.

Well, guess what... I think the same thing applies to ASPA. Not only has ASPA "worn well," but

we have improved with time. We have survived the washings and our threads are still strong and woven together. We are getting better.

Why are we getting better. Well, I think it is because of some fundamental ways in which we, as an organization, have chosen to conduct ourselves. Think about the following statements of conduct for a minute. They may sound trite because you have heard them before, but slow down and consider what they really mean.

1. To get the right answer, ask the right question.

Remember the story of two priests who wanted to smoke while they prayed? The first one went to the bishop to ask for permission, but was denied. A little later he saw his friend enjoying a smoke and praying and asked why he was doing it when the bishop said no. "Well," the smoking priest replied, "you asked if you could smoke while you prayed, and I asked if I could pray while I smoked."

Worrying about what is right is always more important than worrying about who is right.

Consider our struggle with membership definitions and criteria. We have been struggling with what is the right way to approach membership rather than strictly who is right for membership.

2. The race is not always won by the fastest runner, but sometimes by those who just keep running.

This sounds like the old tortoise and the hare story to me, but it is important. On many issues, ASPA has chosen not to race into a decision, but to continue with thoughtful and deliberate discussion of the questions.

3. If someone says something unkind about you, live your life so that no one will believe it.

I love this one, because I think it embodies the strength of ASPA. Cynthia Davenport's report to the membership makes a comment about ASPA and church being the only two places where she hears people talk about integrity any more. We are an organization concerned with integrity and the right thing to do and we have chosen to behave in the manner worthy of respect despite years of criticism being hurled our way.

4. Always maintain a positive attitude.

Is the glass half empty or half full? At last night's board dinner, we talked about the ambiguity that accreditors may need to work under as economic and technological forces change the face of education as we have traditionally known it. How we manage to deal with that ambiguity could be an opportunity for managing or having an impact on positive change in education.

5. And finally, in the words of hockey player Wayne Gretzky, "You miss 100% of the shots

you don't take!"

I chose to end with this one, because I think that those of us that began ASPA and have remained committed to it have taken a risk, made the shots on goal and we have scored!

We have scored because we have taken risks, we have asked questions from a variety of perspectives, we have acted with integrity, and we have maintained a positive attitude. We have accomplished so many things since that first meeting in Phoenix four years ago when we outlined the dreams we held for this organization. We have been a proactive force in the higher education arena for the specialized and professional accrediting community.

As a reminder, here are just a few of the ways that we have turned the dream into a reality. We have:

- hired an executive director who is considered a knowledgeable resource and is respected by all who have interfaced with her. Her attendance, on our behalf, at CHEA meetings, triad meetings, the DoE advisory committee hearings, and others has provided ASPA members with a strong advocate. Her constant presence, on behalf of the ASPA membership, has not gone unnoticed.
- been specifically asked, as an organization, to provide representation at key meetings such as the AAHE conference, the CQAIE meeting, the CHEA Invitational Conference on Enhancing the Usefulness of Specialized Accreditation, and CLEAR.
- developed, endorsed and printed a *Code of Good Practice* that gets referenced and praised continually by our colleagues in the higher education arena.
- worked with several regional accrediting associations in developing a document for how best to conduct joint site visit reviews.
- continued to provide the only professional development workshops geared for specialized and professional accrediting agencies. And now, we are in the process of collecting data for future professional development workshops that could also be turned into useful resource documents.
- maintained a strong membership pool that has worked hard and worked well.

It is this last item, the maintenance of our membership, that has allowed us to accomplish as much as we have in such a short time. For those of you who have stuck with us, I express my deepest thanks. We have every right to be proud of ourselves. For any of our guests in the audience who are eligible for ASPA membership, I hope you'll see the benefit of being able to list yourself as a member, for our strength lies in the way we have woven our threads together. And together we can survive many, many more washings. Thank you.

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Financial Health Report

Kayem Dunn, FIDER
ASPA Treasurer

ASPA, though a young organization, has the good fortune of being in a solid financial position. For the first half of the current fiscal year (ending June 30), both income and expenses are within budget. This is a result of careful management of our funds by Cynthia Davenport (with advice and oversight from the finance committee) and the willingness of accreditors to support the work of ASPA by joining as dues-paying members. There are several noteworthy factors contributing to ASPA's sturdy financial position:

- Membership is constant at 39 agency members.
- A reserve equal to a half-year of operating expenses is maintained.
- Members are relatively equal in their financial stake in ASPA with 75% of dues generated by a "sustaining fee" and the rest based on size of agency (number of institutions that sponsor accredited units).
- Members are respectful of limited resources and contribute volunteer time, thus maximizing the use of funds.

Members present at the September ASPA meeting were asked to comment on future dues levels. Based on that input, draft ASPA action plans for the next few years, and preliminary budget numbers, the finance committee will consider modest dues increases beginning this year. The proposed increases reflect cost-of-living plus anticipated expenses related to specific projects being developed by committees of ASPA members.

It is important for ASPA members to know that concerns expressed regarding dues levels, a balanced budget, and expansion of services have been heard and taken into consideration. Not only have you been heard, but the individuals drafting work plans, budgets, and dues increases are also representatives of member agencies and face the same challenges you do. Your elected officers feel strongly about the need for member participation in decisions and providing information to members regarding financial matters.

One final reminder from your treasurer: **Dues for the new fiscal year are due on July 1!**

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Highlights from Tucson

The ASPA Board and Membership met on September 7, 1997 at Loew's Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson, Arizona. Here are a few meeting highlights not covered elsewhere in this newsletter. (The ASPA board and members will receive meeting minutes in a separate mailing; others may request a copy by contacting the ASPA office.)

- **Definition of Specialized and Professional**

A definition of specialized and professional was adopted with the understanding that it will need more work to be operationalized. In March, the ad hoc Recruitment Task Force and Membership Committee will propose further action. The definition states:

For purposes of membership in [ASPA], a "specialized" or "professional" accrediting body is defined as one with a national scope that accredits higher education programs or institutions that prepare individuals for entry into practice in a specialized discipline or a defined profession.

- **Task Force (TF) and Committee Reports:** ASPA's task forces and committees reported to the membership on their many activities.
- The Audiences TF is continued its work on a communications plan and will add resource implications for further discussion in March 1998.
- The HEA TF is currently in a "monitoring" mode and requested that items of interest be forwarded to the TF via the ASPA office.
- The Membership Committee reviewed two applications for membership. Recommendations were forwarded to the Board for action. The Committee, chaired by Elaine Cuklanz, JRCNMT, will continue to work on other issues related to membership. Note: Membership information is available from the ASPA office. Applications are due December 1 for review in March and July 1 for review in September.
- **Finances:** Treasurer Kayem Dunn, FIDER, reported that ASPA had a clean year-end audit. She led a discussion to obtain input so the Finance Committee can develop a multi-year financial plan. Members were alerted that the planned-deficit budgets will end with the new fiscal year.
- **TF on Cooperation between Regional and Specialized Accreditors** *Collaborative Evaluations by Regional and Specialized Accrediting Agencies: Guidelines and Procedures* was discussed and endorsed. This resource document was developed by a special TF which included three regional and three specialized accreditors. ASPA and Middle States Association spear-headed this project. The document was distributed to the ASPA membership. Contact the office if you need another copy.
- **Grouped Site Visits:** **Jim Rogers**, Executive Director, SACS, made a brief "structured sharing" presentation and facilitated a lively discussion on: "Grouped Accreditation Site Visits: A Proposed Model." This "grouped visits" model could join the Collaborative Guidelines document as another avenue for increased cooperation among accrediting groups. Both approaches stress flexibility and the ability to add value and respond to institutional requests.

- **Professional Development:** "Accreditation Problem Solving: Changing Wrongs into Rights" included thought-provoking issues within the context of skits and role-play discussions. The Professional Development Committee plans and presents a session on the final day of each ASPA meeting. Laura Messenger, APA, chairs this committee.

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When Structures Become Strictures

*Carol L. Bobby, CACREP
ASPA Chair*

The following fictitious interview took place at the Ambassador West Hotel in Chicago, IL following a mid-December 1997 ASPA planning meeting.

Interviewer: So, Dr. Bobby, I've heard that ASPA will be holding elections in the next couple of months. I've also heard that you will no longer be chair of ASPA. Is that right?

Dr. Bobby: That's right, I'm currently on the downhill slope of my term as ASPA chair. It's a two-year commitment and I'm not eligible for re-election.

Interviewer: Could you comment on some of your accomplishments as chair, since you will be turning over the gavel soon?

Dr. Bobby: Hmmm. I thought you might ask a question like that. I've heard that it's fairly typical for lame duck officers to be asked to tout their successes to reflect on the glorious past, so to speak. Rather than doing that, I'd really like to take this opportunity to think about the future of ASPA. Now, mind you, some of this thinking about the future is predicated on my past experiences as ASPA chair, and, believe me, it has been an enriching experience. But, it has also been a challenging one.

Interviewer: What do you mean by challenging? Are there specific challenges that you can speak to?

Dr. Bobby: Well, yes. There are a couple of areas that I believe have been challenging to me and to ASPA. The first area has to do with our decision-making structure. I have to tell you that after my first meeting--or really meetings--as chair, I literally fell asleep sitting up on my couch at the end of the day.

Interviewer: I noticed you corrected yourself to say your first "meetings," emphasizing the plural. Why is that?

Dr. Bobby: As I said, it has to do with our decision-making structure. Essentially, the chair must conduct three separate meetings every time ASPA holds a semi-annual gathering. We start with a board meeting, follow that with a member meeting, and then end the day with a combined

board/member meeting. It is a long day, and it gets very complicated trying to keep straight the items that only the board can vote on versus the items that must first go to the membership for endorsement. Managing the discussion is very tricky, because even when the board is meeting, the members often want to add their input. As chair, it has often felt very awkward to handle, although I think it has been done successfully.

Interviewer: Why was such a structure created in the first place?

Dr. Bobby: The structure, although complicated, is well thought out in terms of checks and balances. The reason for it has to do with some accreditation history and the political context in which ASPA was created. Discussing that would be a long story - too long!! I think we can skip that and simply say that the structure has served a very good purpose for this young and still very new organization.

Interviewer: If it has served a good purpose, then why do I get the sense that you are not wholly supportive of it?

Dr. Bobby: My, you should have been a counselor! You are very intuitive and direct in your questioning. Your sense that I have some problems with the structure is correct. But the concerns I have now are ones that developed over time and as ASPA has changed during that time.

Let me explain. When ASPA began, it faced a climate of mistrust that I alluded to earlier. We envisioned that we would have to become a recognition agency, along with being a member service organization that could provide mediation in accreditation disagreements and a strong voice for specialized accreditation. We built into our bylaws what we believed would be a credible structure that could support these important functions. And, these functions could still be implemented if we chose to support them at any given point in time.

But, the bottom line for me is that we have chosen not to implement the recognition or mediation functions. We have stated from the beginning that, if possible, we would prefer that these functions be carried out on behalf of all accreditors by an external agency. In fact, we have stated this strongly on behalf of the specialized accrediting community. Speaking on behalf of specialized accreditation is one function that we have chosen to implement, to support, and to do quite well. In fact, we have excelled at this in my opinion.

Interviewer: I think I'm getting the picture. You say you created a structure to accomplish broader purposes than what ASPA has actually chosen to do?

Dr. Bobby: Yes, that's basically right. But, it's more than that. I believe that because our financial and membership base is not broader than the specialized accrediting community, our structure has actually become an impediment to accomplishing our purpose in an efficient and economical way. Our structure has become our stricture!

The nominations and elections process is a good example of my concern. I have begun to realize that we have an over-complicated committee structure - one that has the nominations committee

gathering nominees from communities outside of the ASPA membership, from persons who probably have no strong interest in the tasks associated with the committee. Plus our committees are too large. I believe the bylaws mandate committee sizes that drain the volunteer resource pool. I do not see the benefit to ASPA in overworking and overusing our members in this way. In short, it is hard to get enough nominations from the membership, let alone from outside communities.

Interviewer: Do you have ideas for change?

Dr. Bobby: Of course. They are not fully developed and they may have some problems that I have not considered yet. Nevertheless, I would like the ASPA members to begin thinking about how we might change our bylaws so they are less cumbersome and constricting.

I plan to ask ASPA to consider how we can streamline ASPA's board/meeting/committee structure; thereby, increasing the efficiency of operations through 1) a smaller board with longer terms for the directors, and 2) smaller committees that are function driven. This might include:

- a smaller seven-member board and smaller three-member committees with three-year terms rather than two and with committees chaired for one year by the senior member,
- a streamlined committee structure where committees recommend action to the board for endorsement or referral back for further study,
- a designated board liaison to each committee, and
- one combined action meeting (rather than three).

I believe that any new structure must allow for significant membership input at every level, preserve the diversity of the board, and allow for interaction between the board and committee structures.

Interviewer: How do you see changes of this type being implemented?

Dr. Bobby: If we do reexamine our structure, I think it will be at least a year before we can implement the changes, so I would like us to begin our discussion in March. In fact, I intend to have a concept outline ready to present at that time.

Look, I really need to leave now in order to catch my plane. Perhaps I could share that outline with you when it is ready and we could continue our discussion after you've seen it.

Interviewer: Well, thank you for giving me so much of your time, Dr. Bobby. Your proposed changes are thought-provoking. I wish you good luck as ASPA deals with these important questions. The March meeting should be an important and interesting one.

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The Chicago Agenda

The March 6, 1998 meeting to be held in Chicago is ASPA's Annual Meeting. Election materials and the draft agenda will be sent to the ASPA board and members; others may contact the ASPA office to request the agenda. Some topics on the agenda for the upcoming meeting have been noted elsewhere in *ASPA News*; here are a few more. To suggest additional topics, please contact the office as quickly as possible.

- **Multi-year Financial Plan:** The Finance Committee will present a future oriented plan for review, discussion and Board action. This plan will help shape what ASPA can and will do for its members. Your input will help the Board set appropriate priorities.
- **CHEA Recognition Plans:** As *ASPA News* goes to press, we expect that, prior to the ASPA meeting, CHEA will have circulated its draft proposed recognition requirements for review and comment. On Thursday afternoon, ASPA members will have an opportunity to attend a preliminary discussion of the proposed draft. Discussion may also occur during the Friday meetings.
- **Projects and Reports:** Task Forces and Committees will report on their work and present recommendations for discussion. ASPA members will again receive activity updates and liaison reports from a wide range of groups with an interest in accreditation and education.
- **Professional Development:** The Professional Development Committee's topics for March are Validity and Reliability. Although assessment of V&R is mandated by the US Department of Education, it is also consistent with good accreditation practice. But accreditors face the very real challenge of being creative and cost effective in their assessment efforts.

ASPA's morning session will be devoted to validity. You will hear presentations from a statistician and from Karen Kershenstein of the US Department of Education. Some of your colleagues will do an "Accreditors in Action" panel. Come with questions and plan to leave with answers.

After a short lunch break, two afternoon panels will show how calibration activities and site visitor training fit into **the bigger picture of reliability**. During discussion, please plan to share what your group does to ensure reliability in your review process. Local accreditors may want to register more than one staff member for this important session.

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ASPA Goes to Meetings

- **CHEA-Council for Higher Education Accreditation:** At the September 29, 1997 meeting of the CHEA Board, Judith Eaton asked, ASPA Executive Director, Cynthia Davenport, to give the Board a brief report on the September 1997 ASPA meeting. The next CHEA

Board meeting will be February 1, 1998 in Phoenix, followed by a special session on distance education.

- Middle States Annual Conference: MSA held its 1997 Accreditation and Quality Assurance Conference in Philadelphia on December 8-9. Cynthia Davenport, was part of a panel, along with CHEA President, Judith Eaton, and Jean Avnet Morse, MSA Executive Director. The panel's topic was: "Transcending Our Limits: National Cooperation and Regional Accreditation." Following her presentation, "Accreditation is Not a Lighthouse," Cynthia received several requests for copies of the ASPA-member *Code of Good Practice*.
- Department of Education's NACIQI Meeting: NACIQI met on November 19-21, 1997 and will meet again on June 8-10, 1998. ASPA monitors these meetings for the membership.

Note: The winner of the Name the Newsletter contest asked to remain anonymous. Thanks to all who entered.

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