

Professional Development Task Force Meeting
September 17, 2021

Attendance: Ami Comeford, Felicia Steele, Kaine Ezell, Lexey Barlett, Dave Wendelin (scribe)

Notes:

- Ami: Agenda review; meeting is being recorded
- Charges for the task force include four topics suggested by the Strategic Planning Committee.
- Opportunity to strategize; we understand constraints about CO staffing issues, an important consideration. However, our charge is to make recommendations, so we should think big and put those ideas before the Board.
- Felicia: We should map out how to make internal connections at universities for advisors. We also need to think universally as well.
- Lexey: Students think they must be English majors to apply to Sigma Tau Delta. I have students taking English survey class, including English minors, who have this perception. Lexey is on the writing-across-the-curriculum committee that has others from other disciplines who value literacy. These committees may be a good reference point for advisors. Lexey has been trying to get students in other disciplines like marketing/social media to be interested in Sigma Tau Delta. Further, there may be people in industry interested in English majors/minors because of their communication skills. Maybe we could find people who have used their English skills in their careers.
- Felicia: “The Map of the Tin Cup”—names of individuals who have financially supported causes in the past who might be “tapped” again. Having a “map” of how to make connections outside the English department, to “break down the silos” that exist across the faculty, would be helpful.
- Lexey: a developed checklist, particularly for new advisors, would be valuable.
- The recently developed NEHS checklists may be good examples to use for Sigma Tau Delta; they may be useful for new advisor workshops.
- Lexey: Develop an online workshop for new advisors, with a following practicum workshop in a few months asking about how things are going. The convention workshops have such a diverse range of experience it’s a challenge to focus on the specific needs of all the attendees. Maybe in light of the CO workload, Regents may host some Zoom meetings that are informal and let new advisors pop in, while others might be valuable for veterans.
- Kaine: at his university, Sigma Tau Delta can recruit outside the major; chapter stays about 20-25 with a few theatre majors, computer science, even nursing major! His campus is small that isn’t “siloesd” as much, which makes it easier to recruit.
- Felicia: we have two alums who published novels, one of which won the National Jewish Book Award. She was a math major and a creative writing minor who came to the convention and won a poetry award. Perhaps on a checklist, encourage inviting alumni

to come back to give a speech or to do a recorded interview to inspire others. We don't do enough blogging at the local level.

- Ami: 1) On local level and national level, start to focus on the non-English major population and encourage and help advisors. 2) Target alumni who would be useful contacts for current students who have been successful using English talents
- #1: How might we use the NEHS growth as a pipeline for STD. How might we think about an associate level of STD for college/university freshmen and sophomores. NEHS had a webinar in the spring about the existence of honor societies at the university level. NEHS is also moving into the middle school level this year.
- Kaine: move into middle school as NEHS is starting is a good idea, nurturing the love of reading early to try to keep their interest, ultimately leading to the valuing of the English major. Many don't see that the major is important—we need to work toward changing that perception.
- Ami: this is the heart of the issue—the English major is “falling off” and we need to address it vigorously.
- Lexey: we often lose students even before they get into courses for the English major. We require students to take Comp 2 before other courses; we do know students need time to hone their reading and writing skills before getting them into English major courses. Often some students entering college are less prepared than others, so they need time to develop their skills before the major courses. Some discussion to allow students to take Gen Ed courses that could apply to the major to hold students' interest and participation in the major.
- Ami: is there a way for Sigma Tau Delta advisors to reach down into the NEHS ranks?
RECOMMENDATION: It may be possible to create a merged list of Sigma Tau Delta, Sigma Kappa Delta, and NEHS chapter lists, a visible directory for advisors at all levels to use. This could allow an advisor to see a pathway for recruitment. Sending Sigma Tau Delta student ambassadors to NEHS chapters might be helpful.
- Felicia: Giving English student teachers a brochure from NEHS on how to start a chapter at their new high schools as they launch their careers is a good practice.
- Ami: worth a conversation to promote associate memberships and providing a structure for how to do that: “How to Create Associate Memberships” and a list of who have successful programs.
- #2 and #3: Connecting the society to other like-minded organizations:
- Ami: might identify a list of those organizations, what they do, and which would be good to connect. Might lead to additional internship opportunities. Also would be possible to share data on trends. Might also develop new recruitment paths. Have the Executive Director and a Board member attend conventions: for example, National Humanities Conference, state Humanities Councils (have board members reach out to those individuals). The NCTE connection with Sigma Tau Delta may be a model for other organizations.
- Felicia: we could connect with MLA, but that hasn't been a good model for active participation for our students or for some advisors. Perhaps we need to seek the

advisors who are actively involved in other humanities organizations and use those people as inroads to those groups.

- Ami: We need to find organizations that fit with STD; MLA may not be the right environment for our students. A place to start would be to think about our own Board connections; encourage attendance at conventions and work to develop relationships that may lead to connections.
- Lexey: Have been thinking about connections, including some regional MLAs, which may be more welcoming of graduate students. The smaller groups are less formal than the larger MLA organization. Encourage advisors and Regents to look for regional connection opportunities, like state organizations (humanities councils).
- Ami: Some smaller groups are tied to larger groups. RECOMMENDATION: All board members investigate their state Humanities Councils, find out about their programming, investigate potential board positions. NEH money is distributed through the humanities councils, which connects states to the Federation. This move would benefit advisors and their students with professional experience while allowing STD to network “out.” All Humanities Councils are, as we speak, holding state book festivals that we should know about. RECOMMENDATION: Adding links to affiliated organizations on the website would be a valuable resource; these organizations have a wealth of resources that would be beneficial to members.
- Ami: adding name to listservs would be an easy way to get information from other organizations.
- Kaine: information from our own English graduates would be helpful to share, but it is often met with disinterest by some, including administrators. The current issues around critical race theory, for example, and assumptions about indoctrination, particularly in English courses where reading is key, is a major challenge.
- Felicia: Wrestling with “what are the humanities for” to make it valuable not only to ourselves and others. Dodge Poetry Foundation in New Jersey is more receptive to literature than is the New Jersey Humanities Foundation.
- Ami: How do we get more involved and make a case for our discipline. Another connection we should think about is the state English teacher organizations (NCTE affiliates). STEM influence is significant.
- #4: Fundraising: Felicia: One of our tools might be in a budget line for projects like special project funding. The “donate” button issue is frustrating in the time it has taken to get it done.
- Ami: good strategy to put a budget line for a specific thing like “professional development and consultation”; encourage donations from Board members. Would members be willing to make donations to pay for things like an additional scholarship, for example?
- Lexey: If I wanted to make a donation, is it now possible?
- Kaine: It sounds to me that the resistance for the CO is logistical, linking accounts to a donate button. It seems more complicated than it needs to be. Is it actually?

- Lexey: As treasurer, I'll push on this idea. RECOMMENDATION: To establish an internship at Sigma Tau Delta, a position that would research non-profits that might be connections for the Society.
- Ami: We must nurture a fund for development. We might need to establish non-restricted funds and restricted funds categories for the donations, allowing members to donate to specific cause or a general fund for use as needed.
- Lexey: There may be some individuals who want to donate to specific things like scholarships, membership fees, etc. Maybe the money donated goes to our investment partner, asking them to manage these funds.
- Ami: Fundraising is a standard practice for non-profits.
- Ami: RECOMMENDATION: As treasurer, Lexey is charged with investigating this topic and as a committee we recommend hiring a consultant to get this donation feature in place. Development opportunities would include things like having an intern to research grants, funds for alumni, remembering Sigma Tau Delta in Wills, cultivating Board members to support the organization, etc.