

## Spring Board Meeting Minutes – DRAFT

[Informational note: Motions and recommendations to be acted on are highlighted. If motions are amended or withdrawn, they or relevant parts of them are struck through either in part or in full.]

Meeting convenes at 11:04 a.m. EDT, 30 March 2022

**Present:** Lexey Bartlett, Diane Steinberg, Shannin Schroeder, Tim Helwig, Glen Brewster, Katie Mudd, Jeannine Szostak, Kayla Ashbrooks, Felicia Steele, Dave Wendelin, Kaine Ezell, William Johnson, Terry Phelps, Elfrida Gabriel, Brett Iarrobino, Kassia Krone, Leigh Dillard, AmiJo Comeford, Dana Berkowitz, Albi Hayes (E), Breanna Dittert (HP), Joshua Stinson (MW), Matthew Karshna (S), Morgan Jackson (SW), Carie King

### I. Welcome

Steinberg begins the meeting with Patricia Frolander’s “Awakening.” She is a rancher from Wyoming. The poem is about a second wind after a loss, so appropriate for our return to in-person meetings.

**(Re)Introductions:** As per tradition, all participants introduce themselves and mention a book they are currently reading.

### Robert’s Rules of Order & Special Rules

The “Online Board Meeting Guidelines” file are posted to the Board website (link shared in chat).

Discussion: Phelps will act as parliamentarian.

### Approval of Minutes

Discussion: Steinberg suggests two minor edits, which are made.

**Schroeder moves to accept the minutes; Dillard seconds.**

**Motion passes.**

### II. Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items (also a chance to propose emendations to the agenda)

Discussion: None.

**Old Business** – All reports were submitted in writing and were to have been read by all members before the meeting. Board members (1) will be asked for any updates to their written reports on activities completed since the reports were submitted and (2) will themselves ask if others have any questions. Questions are welcomed from voting and non-voting board members.

### III. Central Office Reports & Updates, Part I

Director of Society Operations: Szostak has nothing to add. The Board commends her for hitting the ground running and getting up to speed so quickly.

Director of Marketing & Technology Report: Gabriel notes that we will be reviewing contracts with our technology companies for the Convention items, with an aim to consolidating their functions into one system. She has been working with the DPIL intern. Steinberg asks about the awards that are not yet in AwardSpring; Gabriel answers that we are trying to get away from applications submitted by email.

Director of Social Media Report: Mudd has nothing to add. Comeford asks about the miscommunication with the DPIL about the Student Leadership video project. Mudd notes that there was a lack of information from them about what DPIL wanted the videos to be, despite the proposal that was given to them. They have been slow in communicating, so this part of the project will likely not continue. Student Leaders will do other kinds of video projects for us instead, including starting a TikTok project. Gabriel adds that we might develop guidelines/a style guide for videos that we can share with partners in advance to help facilitate this kind of communication. Steinberg adds that she enjoys the alumni career blogs; Mudd encourages us to have alumni contribute. Berkowitz mentions that Alumni Epsilon has a newsletter that only goes to members, which includes such profiles. Mudd notes that some of those profiles do get shared with the CO to spread further.

#### **IV. Student Advisors, Alumni Representative, Editor of Society Publication Reports**

Senior Student Advisor: Ashbrooks expresses her appreciation for being in person as she concludes her term. She thanks Mudd and Iarrobino in particular. Schroeder commends her leadership on the Board.

Junior Student Advisor: Iarrobino has nothing to add but thanks the Student Leaders for all of their hard work. Johnson applauds this group of Student Leaders and their work this year.

Alumni Representative: Berkowitz offers an update on the Alumni Epsilon chapter leadership, with two positions up for election, VP (for which current VP Nikolle is currently running unopposed) and Director of Communications (with candidates Theresa Holzapfel and Lindsay Gibson). Membership increased from 226 to 235. Berkowitz notes that she is not running again for AR because she will be chapter Treasurer. She also recognizes the passing of Janine Brooks, who served as a Student Leader and was an active alumni member.

Editor of Society Publications: King notes she received 148 applications for the internships, with two late inquiries. She narrowed the field to 14 candidates for interviews and selected Ollie Otty senior/rising MA candidate; Sunshine Williams, PhD candidate; and Emma Downer, junior at Drew University. They will be meeting for the first time during the convention to plan for the next edition. Steinberg mentions that King can recruit volunteers to help review applications. King mentions that this year helped her learn about the chapters through the applicants. Steinberg reiterates that volunteers will be available. King adds that her university has supported her through media support and the creation of an email address for the journals (sigmatdjournals@utdallas.edu).

#### **V. Regents and Student Representative Reports** (student leaders write separate reports in the spring but present with their Regents)

Eastern: Steele and Hayes have nothing to add. Steinberg notes that she enjoyed participating in the Eastern Symposium as a participant. Steele adds that they plan to continue it next year and hope to expand participation. The event is important because it goes beyond sharing work to help people position themselves in the profession.

Far West: Comeford has no additions. Steinberg says that she loves the idea of the Poetry Pharmacy, and Comeford says they got some donations to build the booth, which was constructed by chapter members. They would like to take their project out into the community as well. They will be sharing the plans for the stand so others can build them. Comeford adds that they can also share their poetry “prescription” files as well. Comeford is helping to create a medical humanities program on her campus, which she will also share on request. Schroeder comments that these resources would be useful to share with our members. Johnson also expresses appreciation for the poetry pharmacy project.

[The CO staff departs at 12:07 p.m. for other duties—Mudd, Gabriel, and Szostak.]

High Plains: Krone notes that six schools participated in the High Plains Regional Online Conference that ran a full day, and there was also a keynote from the author of *The Nix*, Nathan Hill. Dittert moderated sessions and hosted an open mic as part of the events as well. Steinberg mentions that people can participate from any region. Krone adds that they had an alumni career panel as well. Dittert affirms that the virtual format works very well to help people participate.

Midwestern: Helwig mentions a second Common Reader award for WIU, which Stinson organized, and that he recommends Amy Gates highly, the candidate for MW Regent, from Missouri Southern State University. She has hosted the last two MW online conferences. Stinson has nothing to add. Steinberg asks how the timing of the February conference worked, and Helwig said it was a smaller one but still worked well. He expressed his appreciation for serving on the Board as he leaves at the end of this term.

Southern: Dillard and Karshna have nothing to add. Steinberg asks if the timing of the Southern regional conference is to help people go from there to submit to the Convention, and Dillard says that they aim for mid-October so that students are encouraged to submit work afterward. Dillard gives kudos to Karshna for his participation, even before he was a Student Leader, and he and the ASR were a big help this year. Johnson mentions that the increase in virtual events has been a benefit of the pandemic, letting more chapters participate.

Southwestern: Ezell and Jackson have no updates. He says that he and King have discussed working together on a regional conference, maybe as a hybrid online and in-person event. King thanks Ezell for his support in helping her chapter get off the ground.

**PLANNED NEW BUSINESS** (what we are all up to right now and going forward)

## **VI. Committee Reports and Budget Review and Approval**

### **Communications Committee**

Report: Phelps says there are no updates to their report.

Discussion: Johnson asks what he meant by the proposal to add class and age as categories to the community standards against bullying or discriminatory speech; Phelps explains. The Board generally agrees that these categories will be good to add to the standards.

### **Convention Committee**

Report: Dillard notes that the committee worked on immediate tasks at their most recent meeting and asks for the Board's help in reinforcing the mask requirement except when students are actively presenting. Dillard offers to support anyone who feels uncomfortable with enforcement. She reminds us of our role as ambassadors for the event to support attendees who have questions and so on. Jayne Higgins is collecting a list of backup moderators and chairs as well, if we have people who can volunteer.

Dillard mentions that we should carry over new ideas, like electronic chapter displays. She proposes that we offer more monetary support for travel to events to promote more diversity of participation. Dillard notes that anyone who would like to chair a future convention should alert Schroeder so that they can be or stay on the Convention Committee and that they should attend a convention with that future role in mind.

Steinberg as Denver Convention Chair is observing how adjustments made to this year's event might carry forward to the 2023 Convention. Event evaluations will also help with this process. Steinberg and Stemmler are working together on a Common Reader selection, and the tentative theme is "Colorful Colorado," inspired by a vintage postcard that may also influence the logo design. A new idea is the Common Author, which will be Toni Morrison for Denver, which will allow us to highlight authors that cannot be selected for the Common Reader for various reasons. They are working with the authors of *The Toni Morrison Book Club* as potential convention participants/speakers.

Schroeder adds that the structure of having an assistant to the chair is useful both for reducing the burden of the work and providing some training for the position of Convention Chair. Steinberg seconds this idea. Dillard mentions that some computer issues because of the two different software systems were a problem, but they are hoping that will resolve for next year.

**Discussion:** Comeford asks about the suggestion that we consider not having a convention every year that came up after the 2020 Convention was canceled. Schroeder mentions that the issue came up in other meetings, and those ideas will be raised later. Comeford asks if the Common Reader will be from a regional writer, and the response is that we have to be careful because that would eliminate many writers as options because we won't be able to host a convention in many places. King asks if we consider Sigma Tau Delta alumni for speakers; the answer is yes, and that we also include alumni authors in the bookstore order for the convention.

Steinberg calls a break for lunch from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. The meeting resumes at 2:09 p.m.

Ashbrooks moves to move the Student Leadership report earlier. Dillard seconds. Motion passes.

### **Student Leadership Committee**

Report: Ashbrooks reports that the committee met last night to refine their activities and their expectations for their group this week. Dillard thanks the Student Leadership for all their work and the joy they bring to the process. Steinberg commends their internal committee structure. Karshna thanks the TikTok subcommittee for getting their plans ready to implement quickly.

### **Executive Committee**

**Report:** Steinberg adds that the plans for the Business Meeting have been finalized and that the donation match for the Land Acknowledgment project was approved. The committee is postponing the online Board pages/handbook for completion until the summer. The high cost of mailing for international chapters outside the US and Canada was raised to the committee, and a proposal was made to limit mailings to twice a year for those chapters. Dillard suggests that those chapters might print temporary certificates if they need them before the mailing. Wendelin mentions that NEHS has limited distribution of logos, etc., because some schools have set up “chapters” that are not officially affiliated. Dillard mentions that she prints temporary certificates only because it extends the window for her members to join without adding pressure to the CO for printing official certificates by a deadline. Ashbrooks asks about the process of interviewing for the Junior SA position and whether the rising Senior SA could participate in the interviews in an advisory capacity. Steinberg and the Board agree with this proposal.

**Motion: Applications for paid internships for Society publications should be called for by and sent to the Central Office, which shall verify membership status and forward all verified applications to the Editor of Society Publications. The Editor of Society Publications shall submit the list of selected interns to the Chair of the Communications Committee.**

Motion discussion: None.

**Vote: The motion passes.**

**Motion: The Editor of Society Publications shall submit the plan for hiring readers and judges for student publication awards to the Society President and the Executive Director.**

Motion discussion: King says she appreciates bringing transparency into the process and adds that Gabriel has offered a list of evaluators.

**Vote: The motion passes.**

**Motion: The Central Office shall hire a full-time staff member to work as an Event Coordinator with a negotiated medical benefits package.**

Motion discussion: Steinberg clarifies that this would allow us to hire for this position without going through the NIU process, which has been delayed due to their staffing issues. Schroeder adds that we may try to have NIU bring the person into their benefits system later and that such positions may not be tied to the location of the CO anymore.

**Vote: The motion passes.**

**Motion: The Society shall create the title of Director Emeritus for the retired NEHS Director and the retired Sigma Tau Delta Director. The Sigma Tau Delta Director Emeritus shall be able to attend annual conventions under the same terms as past presidents and Delta Award Winners.**

Motion discussion: None.

**Vote: The motion passes.**

[The Student Leaders leave to work on convention tasks, with the Student Advisors planning to return for the remainder of the meeting after coordinating the Student Representatives work.]

Steinberg calls a short recess at 2:47 p.m. The meeting resumes at 2:54.

[The Student Advisors return.]

### **Regents Committee**

Report: Krone reports that the committee discussed creating a mentorship program but is concerned about adding a service burden. Gatherings at regional conferences for other organizations might provide an opportunity for mentoring Chapter Advisors. They are also concerned about email from Regents not being delivered in a timely way. The committee also suggests that chapter annual reports be shared with Regents so that they can suggest partners for chapter projects. They propose that alumni participate in evaluating for NEHS contests and mentoring. Berkowitz adds that Alumni leadership would also like to create sendoff materials for graduating members so that they know how to get involved after graduation. They also propose creating an “air table” that would allow people to connect for various mentorship opportunities. They propose the possibility of having a parallel Convention with separate Convention activities. The question is also raised of how alumni are assigned to committees and whether they might have more opportunities to participate in committees.

**Motion: The Executive Committee should establish a task force that updates the models for induction ceremonies in anticipation of our 100-year anniversary and that includes an updated history of the society. The task force should also address an update of our motto and provide a set of illustrative quotations that better reflects our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice.**

Motion discussion: Steinberg notes that any committee can create their own subcommittee within the committee. **Krone withdraws the motion** because the Regents Committee will take on this project.

**Motion: The Regents Committee recommends that the Society budget for a website redesign and IT help for the Central Office.**

Motion discussion: Bartlett asks for clarification and whether the new Event Coordinator position will help reduce the burden so CO members can work on the process. They respond that they were thinking of contracting a web designer to help with the project. Ezell says the communication problem through WriteAway is also part of the problem. Wendelin mentions that NEHS has the same problem and asks if they can be included in the project. Steele wants to clarify that this is not a request for new staff but to contract help for the redesign. Comeford mentions that there are grants that we might apply for to support this project. Berkowitz suggests framing this as providing a resource to the CO. King suggests having someone do a usability test for the website, which might provide data for problem areas on the website that may have developed because of its growth. Johnson supports the idea for the 2023 budget. Schroeder mentions that the timeframe will allow for research on the project, and King notes she has contacts who could do usability testing at no cost. Dillard says that a redesign for the centennial is an opportunity. Schroeder proposes a friendly amendment to include the research and a number for the budget. After some discussion, the motion is amended to read as follows:

**Motion: The Regents Committee recommends that, after completion of usability testing in the summer of 2022, the Society hire a contractor to redesign the websites for Sigma Tau Delta and NEHS.**

**Vote: The motion passes.**

**Discussion:** The issue of email access through WriteAway still needs to be addressed, so an investigation of what is required to address that issue is recommended.

**Motion: The Regents Committee recommends that the Executive Committee Central Office consult legal counsel regarding the Society's legal obligations regarding Title IX and the Clery Act.**

Motion discussion: The concern is how to address issues that arise and where responsibility would lie—with Sigma Tau Delta, NIU, or elsewhere. The suggestion is to consult legal counsel at NIU or in Illinois because of the location of the institution. The Board discusses the untidiness of events when members from different institutions are present. A friendly amendment is made that the Central Office instead of the Executive Committee make the consultation.

**Vote: The motion passes.**

**Discussion: A recommendation is made that a Convention misconduct reporting process be instituted and an anti-harassment policy/guidelines for Society activities be created in addition to a Title IX statement. The legal counsel can help us to craft these items.**

**Discussion: A recommendation is made to streamline the At-a-Glance flyer on the website and make it more accessible to users.**

### **Scholarships and Academic Awards Committee**

Report: The committee has a few motions to make coming out of their recent meeting, including requesting additional funds for short-term study abroad.

**Motion: The Scholarship and Academic Awards Committee moves to add \$6000 for Study Abroad Scholarships.**

Motion discussion: Bartlett asks if they are creating a new scholarship for short-term study abroad, and some discussion ensues about having the process include both types of study-abroad scholarships to be applied for together. Bartlett recommends separating the two streams of applications to make judging easier because the expenses and programs for the two different kinds of applicants cannot really be compared.

**Vote: The motion passes.**

**Discussion: The committee proposes the creation of a Regents supplemental scholarship on the model of NEHS, in order to expand access for students.** This issue will be taken up for the Fall Board Meeting.

### **Service and Partnerships Committee**

Report: Helwig says that they are extending the due date for the internship stipend applications to later in April or early May, with decisions coming June 3. That might increase the number of applicants because of the timing of summer internships.

### **Strategic Planning Committee**

Report: Schroeder notes our continuing commitment to streamlining committee assignments and Board service loads. Fundraising campaigns will be tied to priorities in line with the strategic plan. One area related to fundraising involves a change to the alumni relationship to the Society, partly in order to bring the alumni relationship to the Society in alignment with other honor societies and academic institutions. Schroeder explains a structure for donations and perks for donors that would reflect some of the ways alumni want to participate.

**Motion: The Strategic Planning committee moves to transition the alumni model from a chapter structure to a philanthropic model. To increase inclusivity, this move would also make any Sigma Tau Delta alumni member eligible to serve as Alumni Representative.**

Motion discussion: Berkowitz thanks Schroeder for discussing the proposal with her and appreciates the ways it might open more opportunities for alumni engagement and support for activities that will be more effective for alumni and the Society.

**Vote: The motion passes.**

Break at 4:07; meeting resumes at 4:32.

### **Budget Review and Approval**

Report: A few highlights from the budget: with the exception of a few areas, we had higher income and lower expenses than budgeted for 2021, putting us ahead of the game. We saved on travel and convention costs, while we had higher membership numbers than expected (coupled with increased dues from NEHS) and help in the form of two rounds of Payroll Protection Program loans that were later forgiven. We also saved some funds by being cautious with scholarship awards (and some were not awarded because of the pandemic, notably the Study-Aboard Scholarship).

The expenses for the 2022 Convention have not yet rolled into the actual budget, and it is early in the year for membership numbers, so the 2022 YTD budget presents an incomplete picture. However, we have plenty of funds to cover any shortfalls from the income on investments, despite the recent volatility in the markets. Bartlett reiterates the philosophy of her predecessor, Schroeder, because we are trained by society at large to produce profit: we must remember that our aim as a non-profit is not to increase our wealth, but rather to ensure a sustainable balance between our income and the funding of our mission. Sometimes worthwhile things are expensive.

**Discussion:** Some discussion ensues regarding the meaning of parentheses in the budget, which indicate an item that is “over budget.” When we are over budget with expenses, that is bad, but when we are over budget with income, that is good.

**Motion: Schroeder moves to approve the budget as presented; Phelps seconds.**

**Vote: The motion passes.**

## **VII. Task Force, Ad-Hoc Committees, and Council Reports**

### **Ad-Hoc Hiring Committee: Glen Brewster**

Report: Brewster reports that we are still waiting on process approvals for the executive director positions from the NIU Human Resources office. Candidates for interim positions don't need to be limited to the current advisory council, but they would be good candidates. They may also be considered for transition to a permanent position. If it becomes necessary to have an interim for Sigma Tau Delta ED, the Executive Committee would select that person.

A call for letters of interest due by May 16 would allow for some overlap before Johnson retires. (A similar process for the NEHS interim would be followed, but earlier.) Candidates for the Sigma Tau Delta interim would preferably be people familiar with the organization.

**Discussion:** Steele asks if the candidates have to be people affiliated with NIU, and Brewster says that they don't, and it might even be possible for candidates to live outside the area. Comeford asks how the CO staff feels about having the ED be outside of the area, and Szostak explains that much of the CO is already working remotely. Comeford asks if the contract for the 2024 Convention is already contracted, and the answer is yes.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force: Lexey Bartlett**

**Report:** Bartlett adds to the report that the DEI Task Force met on March 10 to plan the details for the Land Acknowledgment interactive display for the convention and the inclusion of the Land Acknowledgment in the convention materials. One of those details was the inclusion of an opportunity for attendees to donate funds to benefit the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Scholarship Foundation. We made a motion to the Executive Committee to match donations up to \$500, and it was approved. We also developed a plan for the placement and structure of the DEI Statement for the website, which we will work on with the Central Office. We plan to complete the statement by early summer. The meeting this week focused on ideas for writing the DEI Statement.

**Discussion:** Dillard notes that the pronoun pins are at the registration desk. Extras were ordered for next year.

### **Professional Development Task Force: AmiJo Comeford**

**Report:** Comeford explains that the committee discussed charges related to advocacy for the humanities and English and fundraising. There is a plan to create a map of the chapters of our three sister organizations so that we can see possible partners more easily. The NEHS chapter brochure can be downloaded to give to English education graduates. As part of the advocacy program, we discussed joining the National Humanities Alliance and sending one CO person and a Board member to their annual conference. They plan to develop targeted fundraising ideas and to get information about who is donating and for what purposes. An idea for increasing donations would be to create the option for recurring donations so that donors do not have to repeat the process to give more. The task force recommends setting up a recurring donation option and recommends creating an estate planning process with the CO, perhaps with assistance from NIU. They also recommend thinking how the website can be used to advocate for English and the humanities during the redesign process.

### **Motion: The Professional Development Task Force moves that Sigma Tau Delta join the National Humanities Alliance (annual dues approximately \$1,000).**

**Motion discussion:** Helwig asks if the dues are annual ones; they are. Ezell and Comeford expand on the resources the NHA provides, like webinars and other materials for advocacy that we could use. Brewster notes that a colleague has worked with them. Bartlett proposes a friendly amendment to include the word *annual* before dues in the motion; the task force agrees. Schroeder asks about including funds in the budget for attending the NHA conference. The decision is made not to add that to the motion at this time.

**Vote: The motion passes.**

Discussion: Phelps mentions the AmazonSmile program, which Sigma Tau Delta is already set up for. Some discussion ensues about how to promote that program with our members. Steele mentions that IndieBound also has an affiliate program that we could sign up with.

**Past President's Advisory Council: Glen Brewster**

**Report:** Brewster has nothing to add to the report.

Return to OLD BUSINESS

**VIII. Officer Reports**

President: Steinberg has nothing to add.

Vice President: Schroeder has nothing to add.

Immediate Past President: Brewster has nothing to add.

Secretary/Treasurer: Bartlett has nothing to add.

Officer at Large: Phelps notes that he might have shared the wrong version of his report. He highlights activities like judging literary journal awards, revising language in bylaws, and so on.

**IX. Central Office Reports and Updates, Part Two**

National English Honor Society (NEHS) Director's Report: Wendelin notes that they have a New Far Western council member, Tara Carter of Providence HS in Burbank, CA. On Friday at the General Business Meeting, they will make a donation of \$3000 to Books for Keeps based in Athens, GA, which the group is very excited to accept during Friday's Business Meeting. He has been working with an NEHS advisor in Mexico to work with some networks of high schools there to expand chapters. NEHS has added 22 chapters and 7000 more students in the last few months. There are several middle schools on the cusp of setting up chapters.

Wendelin thanks Johnson and the Board for the opportunity he was given twenty years ago to help create NEHS. The Board recognizes his service to NEHS and his 53 years of service in education.

Executive Director's Report: Johnson thanks Steinberg for the opportunity to have the last word. He is immensely proud and grateful over the past 40 years to have had the chance to shape and direct Sigma Tau Delta and create SKD, and then NEHS with the help of Wendelin. We are a community that becomes the voice of English to share our joy in it. He notes that literature is full of famous goodbyes, but he will end with A. A. Milne's words from *Winnie-the-Pooh*: "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard." The Board gives him a standing ovation.

**X. UNPLANNED NEW BUSINESS**

Discussion: No unplanned new business.

**XI. Announcements**

- Brewster reminds us of the Past Presidents' reception in the bi-level suite, which is intended to thank evaluators and recruit new Board members.
- Steinberg reminds us that Brewster, Helwig, and Berkowitz are also ending their terms on the Board. We will have some formal opportunities to say goodbye in coming Convention events.

## **XII. Reminders/Closing Thoughts/Formal Adjournment**

Steinberg thanks us for following the practices that keep our meetings running in a timely fashion. Committee minutes should be sent to Szostak in the Central Office as soon as possible after the Board meeting, if they have not already been submitted.

**Dillard moves to adjourn; Ezell seconds. Motion carries.**

Meeting adjourned at 5:34 p.m. EDT.