

REPORT OF THE 1998 COFAS MEETING
Sheraton Hotel, Fredericton, New Brunswick
May 28 - 31, 1998

Friday, May 29, 1998

Welcome and Announcements

Joseph Varga (MAUT), agenda coordinator and Sonja Breau, (AUNBT), site coordinator welcomed the members of COFAS to the 1998 meeting.

It was announced that four members of COFAS had or would be leaving their positions - Donna Ede (QUFA), Marian Clark (UWOFA) and Marion Perrin (OCUFA).

Welcome to Participants - Dr. Lloyd Waugh, President, AUNBT

Dr. Waugh said that in his experience as being President of AUNBT, his job would be much harder without the invaluable help of Sonja Breau. He said that he appreciated that the staff that worked in faculty association offices were on the front line and that staff members provided the continuity that is necessary in voluntary run associations. Dr. Waugh said that without the dedication of staff that the institutional memory of an Association would be lost and he considered the work of the staff invaluable to an association.

Dr. Waugh said that COFAS provides staff members the ability to learn ways of improving the way they work, and considers the interaction between members of COFAS as being just as important as interaction between the members at CAUT Council.

Sonja Breau thanked Dr. Waugh for participating at the conference.

Media/Communications - Duncan Matheson, Bissett Matheson Communications Limited

Mr. Matheson worked in journalism in radio and television for over 20 years, until leaving in January of 1992 to establish his own media relations company.

Mr. Matheson said that journalism consists of one side pitted against the other. He said that if you cannot tell a story effectively you lose the ability to get your side to the public across.

Mr. Matheson led the members through a mock problem in a fictional university in which a professor was being charged with sexism and harassment. The members then went through a series of exercises to determine what they and the Association should do if approached to respond to such a situation at their own university by the press.

Some rules that should be followed and things to remember when dealing with the press.

1. Be prepared to answer the questions from the media.
2. Never say "no comment." This is possibly one of the worst things you can say. It is tantamount to an admission of guilt or incompetence. The term is interpreted as a negative.
3. Remember -- the media live by deadlines. If a reporter calls for a comment, always remember that the media only has so long to write a story and often cannot wait for you to call back to tell you side of the story.

4. Most often the reporter is not there to be on your side nor are they necessarily against you. They are there to get a story and how the story turns out does not bother them.

Mr. Matheson then led us through a TV reporters day. The synopsis of the information provided is that:

1. With cutbacks there are now too few reporters and who have too many stories to cover.
2. If a reporter has pictures to go with a story he/she will have a better chance for it to go on the air.
3. A reporters job for a story are to do the research, get the facts, write the story and get somebody or something to put on the air.
4. For most stories reporters have an "A" and a "B" list of people they use as resources for certain stories.
5. An important fact to remember is that it is always in a person's best interest to be part of the story. You are able to get your views across instead of the reporter only giving somebody else's view.
6. One must remember that just because the information provided to a reporter is not used either completely or not at all, it is usually because the information may not fit in with the way the final version of the story line.
7. Often people believe that their comments were taken out of context, however, what has usually happened is that the reporter has only used what part of the information provided which is relevant to the story.
8. It is not in a person's best interest not to be part of the story. What will happen is that the reporter will get his information elsewhere and because you did not participate, your views were never put out.
9. Before an interview, if a person wishes to know more about how a story may be presented, one can ask the reporter what the nature of the interview is and also can ask who else the reporter will be or has talked to.

When an Interview is Requested

1. Don't automatically agree to do an interview.
2. Determine if you are the right person to do the interview.
3. Make sure you are prepared.
4. Return media calls on time. Remember the reporters deadlines.

Remember, the difference between the terms "not available for comment" and "no comment" is not much.

If a story never seems to go away it is usually because not enough information is provided at the beginning of the story and this lack of information leads to speculation which is sometimes worse than the original story.

How to Prepare for an Interview

1. If you are not prepared ask for some time to prepare.
2. Determine who is the spokesperson.
3. Research the facts.
4. Develop the main message.
5. Anticipate the questions and develop responses. Think what the toughest question would be.
6. Research responses including bridging.

Keys to A Successful Interview

1. Determine what the main message is. Decide what the one thing is that you want the public to remember. Keep it simple and to the point. Remain focused.
2. Speak in 20 second sound bites.
3. If you speak longer then the reporter will have to paraphrase what you said.
4. Maintain as much control as you can over your media encounter.
5. Use bridging as often as possible to return to the main message you wish to get across. Bridging is using a segway between two thoughts. Know what the main message is that you want to say.
6. There is no such thing as a bad question, only a bad answer.
7. Take control. Take the question asked, by acknowledging the question, and then use a bridge to get back to the answer or point you want to give.
8. Repeat the message using bridging. This gives you control over the interview process.
9. If you want to get the media to do a story, provide them with as much information as possible.
10. If you cannot answer a question then at the very least give a reason why.
11. It is not always necessary to give an answer but you must give a reason why you do not have an answer.
12. If asked by a reporter what you "personally" think about an issue you are being interviewed about you she never give your personal opinion. You can always reply with "my personal feelings have nothing to do with the issue, " or "it would be irresponsible of me to give my personal opinion."
13. Try to stay away from negative terms or words -- this is what the media may focus on.
14. When you get a question you do not want to anser, try and use a bridge to go back to what you want to say.

10 (Actually more) Commandments for Dealing With the Media

1. Understand how the media works.
2. Return calls quickly and be as accommodating as possible. Build a rapport with the media.
3. Remember your main message bridge back to it.
4. Remember the 20 second rule and be quotable.
5. Never lie. This ruins credibility.
6. Be polite. Don't argue. "Never argue with anybody who buys ink by the barrel." You can challenge the reporter, but be polite about it.
7. Don't stonewall or say "no comment."
8. Do not repeat negatives.
9. Be careful about "off the record." If a microphone is in the room, assume that it is on.
10. Don't be suckered by leading, false-premised or hypothetical questions.
11. Be positive, even in a negative situation (look at the opportunity side.)
12. Don't take cheap shots. (Usually done because you get support from your own group but the group in the middle will not be impressed.)
13. Beware of lawyers (lawyers often have a narrow vision when it comes to a communication issue. They will keep you out of trouble if you say no comment. Advice from lawyers if often to narrow. You may win in court but loose public opinion. Make sure what you want to say is weighed in with what a lawyer would say.

Remember: "Reporters are like alligators, you don't have to love them, but you do have to feed them."

INTEREST-BASED BARGAINING - Alan Sharp, AUNBT

Professor Alan Sharp, who for many years, has been the Chief Negotiator for the Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers, explained how interest-based bargaining has worked at AUNBT. He explained how the relationship between the Association and the administration is a collegial one, based on trust and a common understanding of the goals of the institution and the steps necessary to achieving them. An understanding of each other's roles and open and frank communications between the bodies have been important to diffusing explosive situations at the University and to ensuring the smooth relations between the parties.

Faculty Association Web Sites

Lori Morinville from the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations chaired a round table discussion about web sites -- what works, what doesn't work, the benefits, the drawbacks, and why some faculty associations do not have web sites. Improvements in communicating with members, the community and the general public resulting from association's web-site technology were some of the benefits derived from having an effective web-site. The problem most found with having an effective web-site was the great amount of work involved and this creates an overload situation for the person who must add this responsibility to their already heavy workload. It was found that the importance of the role a web site can serve for the association is one that most association's have not yet fully realized. However, those association's who have used their web site to disseminate information during a crisis more clearly recognize the efficiency and power of the technology. In addition to distributing information, another important use for the technology is in the gathering of information.

Saturday, May 30, 1998

Tech B.C.

The difficulties combating the attempt to establish the "Technical University of British Columbia" without proper safeguards for academic freedom were outlined by Robert Clift, Executive Director of the Confederation of University Faculty Associations in British Columbia (CUFA/BC). Robert's role in coordinating the effort to ensure protections for academic freedom at the Technical University was significant. In his presentation he outline the difficulties confronting a small association faced with such a struggle and the important role effective communications played in ensuring CAUT, local associations in the province and the general public were kept informed of the situation.

Lobbying by Faculty Associations

The importance Lobbying by Faculty Associations was a topic that generated a lot of interest among the participants. As each session of the conference demonstrated, individual faculty association's cannot accomplish their goals in isolation. Educating the membership and the community to the issues concerning association's is key to achieving these goals. A panel of communication experts from among the staff of Canadian faculty associations participated on a panel to discuss this topic. Panel members included: Robert Clift (CUFA/BC, Executive Director), Henry Mandelbaum (OCUFA, Acting Executive Director), Robert Leger (CAUT, Relations with Government Officer) and Mark Rosenfeld (OCUFA, Community and Government Relations).

Humor in the Workplace

A thoroughly enjoyable session was presented by Ellen Gelinas of Ellen B. Gelinas & Associates. Working in small offices, generally with a heavy workload and an incredible amount of stress, we sometimes forget how to relax and how to relieve some of this stress. We may not be able to reduce our workloads but the sessions led by Ellen encouraged the participants to keep matters in perspective and to use humor whenever possible to alleviate our stress. When in doubt, begin: Ha, Ha (now faster) Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha..... Repeat as necessary.

Group Dinner

The group dinner was held at the historic Kings Head Inn/Kings Landing. The setting was interesting, the food was great, the entertainment rousing and the company, as usual, was beyond compare. This event provided an opportunity for staff from across the country to meet, put a face to the voice on the other end of the telephone or name at the end of an e-mailed message and to get to know one another better. The strong relationships established at COFAS among the members from across Canada was clearly demonstrated by the emotional recognition of the regiment of two long-serving faculty association staff members. Donna Ede of Queens University Faculty Association, and Marion Clark of the University of Western Ontario Faculty Association. A token of the group's respect was presented to both Donna and Marion in recognition of the support they have provided staff at other associations as they respond to requests for information and through their participation in COFAS throughout its history, as well as the contributions they have made to the work of faculty associations in Canada.

Sunday, May 31, 1999

The coffee mug's that participants brought from their institutions were displayed and names were drawn from a hat for each mug. It was decided that in future years that any item with the University logo should be brought and the cost should not exceed the cost of a coffee mug.

Following the mug exchange, Brigitte Schotch, Administrative Officer for the Dalhousie Faculty Association, summarized the results of the informal survey of faculty association staff she undertook over the past year. Participation in the survey was voluntary and copies of the findings were distributed only to those who had completed the survey. In the survey Brigitte provided information based on both the job categories developed by Gordon Unger, former Executive Director of the Association of the Academic Staff at the University of Alberta, and the revised categories Donna Gray, Researcher for OCUFA, and Frank Madden developed in 1992. What continues to be clear among faculty associations in Canada is that most have a small number of staff members executing a wide range of responsibilities. As a result, few staff positions encompass identical responsibilities which makes salary comparison difficult. That, coupled with the less than complete participation of all members of faculty association staff, make the data useful only as a guide for members to gauge their particular situation.

The majority of the business that took place on the final day of the conference was devoted to tying up the business of the organization and planning for the future. A Guide for Meeting Planning prepared by the ITT Sheraton Corporation was made available to the members as well as a checklist for conference site coordinators. Also available was a document prepared by Gordon Unger entitled "A COFAS Chronicle" in which he outlined the history of the organization since its inception in 1984. The members agreed upon a Statement of Institutional Purpose.

The Treasurer, Ann Feilden (Association of Academic Staff: University of Alberta) presented the COFAS financial statement after the 1997 meeting. The balance as of December 31, 1997 was \$1,779.79. Special thanks was given to the Association of the University of New Brunswick Teachers (AUNBT) who gave a donation of \$1,000 to the 1998 meeting. Special thanks also went out to Federation of New Brunswick Teachers Association (FNBFA/FAPPUNB) who gave a donation of \$500.00. It was decided that a \$100.00 honorarium would be sent to Mr. Todd Kelly from the University of New Brunswick department of Physics for donating his time.

Pat Finn said that she would prepare letters and send them to the people who helped with the presentations and the conference. Ann Fielding said that she would send Mr. Kelly a letter along with a cheque.

Roseanne Hood said that she spoke with Mr. Jim Turk, the new Executive Director of CAUT and invited him to participate in COFAS, as he is a staff member. He said that he would consider attending the next COFAS conference.

COFAS conferences are rotated among the regions in Canada in order to equalize costs over several years. The next COFAS will be held June 3-6, 1999, in Victoria, British Columbia. The site coordinator will be UBCFA and the agenda coordinator is Bruce Curtis and Carol Riveria from BCIT. COFAS 2000 will take place in Quebec City on dates to be announced. The site coordinators will be Liza Duhaime (CAUT), Jill Diamond-Strong and Kim O'Reilly (MUNFA) and the agenda coordinator would be David Bell (Simon Fraser).

Robert Clift (CUFA/BC) said that he would attempt to put all agendas, minutes and salary settlements on the COFAS website.

Lori Morinville (CAFA) said that a newsletter has not gone out because nobody provided her with any content.

The members decided it would be nice to have a group photo taken, and for this to happen in future years, sometime in the conference before everybody leaves.

The members of COFAS thanked Joseph Varga (MAUT), Sonja Breau (AUNBT), Jill Diamond-Strong and Kim O'Reilly (MUNFA) for organizing the meeting site, dinner and coordinating the agenda.

Chris Penn and Frank Madden
UTFA