

Report of the ASHE Task Force on Organizational Structure:

Guidelines for New Affinity Groups and Councils

November 2014

Introduction

Since its founding in 1976, ASHE has expanded from a small group of higher education scholars into a growing organization that supports a journal through 2200+ members, a permanent office staff, and a large Board of Directors. The Board includes several elected officers (2 of whom are voting graduate student representatives), ex officio budget officer and legal counsel, and non-voting members from each of four existing councils (Council on Ethnic Participation, Council for the Advancement of Higher Education Programs, Council for International Higher Education, Council on Public Policy in Higher Education). The four councils were created at different times over the years when ASHE members identified unmet needs in the organization, vetted these issues among members, and experimented with structures that addressed the issues, eventually achieving status as continuing councils.

Recognizing the change that ASHE is experiencing, the Board is currently designing a strategic planning process to address the organization's growth. As a prelude to that work, the Board created a Task Force on Organizational Structure in July 2014 with eight members, listed below, who bring a variety of experiences in ASHE activities, Board service, councils, and informal groups. The task force charge from ASHE President Caroline S.V. Turner was to explore the role of ASHE councils, with a particular eye toward advising on criteria and processes for new groups petitioning for council status. (The full charge is included as an addendum to this document.)

Councils and Affinity Groups

Council status within ASHE carries large opportunities as well as responsibilities. Currently, each of the four councils operates through by-laws approved by the ASHE Board, holds a non-voting seat on the Board, supports a "pre-conference" in advance of the ASHE annual meeting, conducts other activities in support of its mission, and opens those activities to council members and non-members alike. As the councils' mission statements emphasize, they work to "promote," "facilitate," "advance," and "enrich" the intellectual and communal experience of ASHE membership by focusing on particular issues.

In addition to the four councils, other less-formal affinity groups have developed within ASHE, some of which are short-term (e.g., a group to explore a new research approach or policy proposal) and others which anticipate ongoing participation (e.g., a group of higher education

historians or researchers on community colleges). Not all of these groups are interested in seeking formal status within ASHE, and not all plan to exist in perpetuity. Informal groups may convene for a short duration and then disband; some may continue to meet, but shift interests and purposes. Informal groups are fluid with regard to structure and purpose, and they are likely not interested in becoming an ASHE council.

All groups that allow ASHE members to explore a common interest or affinity – whether gathered formally or informally – contribute positively to the mission and purpose of ASHE in many ways:

- increasing member participation
- allowing cross-pollination of ideas
- enhancing the relationship with ASHE as a whole
- offering new leadership opportunities
- creating links with external organizations

In addition, the councils represent issues that ASHE members have agreed are significant to the intellectual work of the organization.

At the same time, formal groups – now represented by the councils – require attention and support by the ASHE office staff, and represent commitments by ASHE to address the issues in their charges. For instance, the staff supports pre-conferences, the development of by-laws, websites, membership lists, and other structures that help the councils conduct their work. Generally, there are considerable human resource and budgetary implications to these efforts.

Because formal status represents ongoing obligations for the organization, in both budgetary and intellectual terms, ASHE should set a high bar for adding new formal groups. The membership should be alert to issues surrounding proliferation, including the possibility that adding new groups could negatively impact the cohesion of the organization, the annual meeting, and/or the operation of the Board.

Recommendations

The ASHE Task Force on Organizational Structure offers two recommendations for the Board's consideration:

- 1. All affinity groups, even if informal, should register with the ASHE office as a way to advertise their opportunities to all ASHE members and to facilitate Board and staff understanding of these efforts.**
- 2. ASHE should create a “developmental pathway” for an affinity group that would like to achieve status as a council. This pathway allows a group to demonstrate the unmet**

need within the current structure of ASHE and the members' commitment to sustaining the group.

Registration of Affinity Groups

Whether or not an affinity group anticipates becoming a formal council, all such groups – formal and informal – should register their existence with the ASHE office. Even if they seek no support from the central office, the ASHE membership nonetheless benefits by advertising affinity opportunities that exist for all members. Registration also allows the ASHE office to be better aware of groups that may need some degree of support, whether in time, space, or funding. **However, registration of an affinity group does NOT obligate ASHE to provide support, financial or otherwise, to that group.**

Registration will include sending the following to the ASHE Executive Director:

1. A description of the purpose of the group
2. Name of designated convener or leadership
3. Number of members
4. A description of the group's shared interest and activities.

Developmental Pathway to Becoming a Council

Some groups may wish to explore becoming councils. Because council status conveys significant prominence and obligation within ASHE, and because it involves commitment of considerable organizational resources, the decision to accept new councils should be seen as a major step, reserved for issues that cannot be handled via other ASHE mechanisms (for example, through a task force, a subcommittee of a current council, or an addition to the program, as just some possibilities). As such, groups seeking council status should undertake a process that demonstrates their mature work with members and issues over a significant period of time.

The process for petitioning to become an ASHE council is developmental over the course of at least three years. This timeframe allows groups to establish the need for the group, build viable membership, establish ongoing activities, develop leaders and engaged members, clarify their plans for the future, ensure their sustainability, and provide convincing evidence of their commitment and contribution to ASHE. It also recognizes the time that existing councils have taken to build their strength, and it assures ASHE of the likelihood of durability. All groups seeking council status must demonstrate that they are not duplicating the purposes and activities of existing councils, and that their work could not be handled through an existing mechanism. The ASHE Executive Director will serve as the point person for initial inquiries about council status. (Please note that, if an affinity group already in existence makes a new

decision to pursue council status, it should start at the beginning of this developmental process; this signifies the differences between council status and informal effort.)

The Developmental Process

Year 1

1. Demonstrate that the issue cannot be easily met through an existing ASHE mechanism; such demonstration includes **quantitative or qualitative** evidence that the conveners have met with chairs of current councils, and/or the ASHE President or Executive Director **to discuss efforts that have been undertaken to address the group's needs**
2. Register with ASHE as described above
3. Provide the ASHE office with a petition of persons interested in participating in the affinity group. Please note that the number of signatures is not a substitute, but rather a preliminary step, for an active and engaged membership
4. Begin to refine the group's purposes through discussions with members and, perhaps, with chairs of existing councils and ASHE Board members
5. Begin building an engaged membership
6. Define and implement activities
7. Begin building a governance structure
8. Submit a report of first year activities to the ASHE Board; the Board will provide feedback

Year 2

1. Continue to build an engaged membership, certified by charging a fee to defray the cost of activities and as a means of verifying the actual membership count¹
2. Continue exploring a governance structure
3. Begin drafting by-laws in consultation with the ASHE Legal Counsel
4. Elect officers
5. Expand activities
6. Develop a budget that uses the membership fee
7. Submit a report of year two activities to the ASHE Board; the Board will provide feedback to help the group assess its progress

Year 3

1. Continue activities, with the expectation that membership has increased or stabilized
2. Refine governance processes

¹ The Task Force recommends a fee of \$10 per member.

3. Make effective use of membership fees and any other sources of support
4. Begin a self-evaluation as preparation for petitioning for council status
5. Include a historical overview and strategic plan for the future in the year three report to the Board; the Board will assess whether the group is ready to apply for council status or whether it should take additional time to build its record

Year 4 and beyond

1. Make application for council status, if so directed by the Board
2. If not so directed, continue activities and follow recommendations offered by ASHE Board as preparation for council petition

Decision by ASHE Board

Upon application by a formal affinity group, the ASHE Board will determine whether the group has matured sufficiently to merit council status. The voting members of the Board will decide on the petition; in doing so, they will seek advice from the current non-voting Board and council members.

The ASHE Board will apply the following criteria in deciding on a petition for council status.

Does the affinity group demonstrate:

1. Intellectual coherence that suits the ASHE mission
2. Distinctiveness from current councils and other ASHE structures
3. Membership levels that signify widespread interest and, especially, engagement (demonstrated by fee-paying members)
4. Organizational stability (with committed officers and ongoing activities)
5. Financial stability (demonstrated by managing a budget without undue reliance on ASHE support, both fiscal and staff time)
6. Evidence of durability and sustainability
7. Draft of by-laws (to be finalized if the council is approved)

Submitted by Task Force members:

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Brendan Cantwell

Christopher Collins

Jennifer Delaney

Ralph Kidder

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ADDENDUM

CHARGE TO THE TASK FORCE ON ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

from Caroline S.V. Turner, ASHE President

July 2014

The Association for the Study of Higher Education Board of Directors has begun to deliberate the development of a new Strategic Plan to help guide the organization and the Board over the next few years. One element of this on-going strategic planning process is our organizational structure, including the various councils that are part of ASHE.

Recently, petitions proposing new councils have been submitted to the ASHE Board. While our bylaws state that a formal proposal needs to be submitted to the President to request a new council, the bylaws are silent on what criteria the ASHE Board should use to decide whether to grant status to a council. (See excerpt from the ASHE bylaws below).

As part of a process for proposing new councils, other questions need to be contemplated and addressed:

1. What is the role of the current ASHE councils?
2. What are the core issues of the current councils and how are they serving their constituencies?
3. What are the pros and cons of ASHE adding more councils?
4. If more are added, what criteria should guide the ASHE Board when it considers proposals for new councils? What elements should a formal proposal to the Board include?
5. If new councils are added, does it follow that new pre-conferences and awards will be added?

This Task Force is charged with addressing these questions. In addressing these questions the Task Force should consider the growth and mission of ASHE. The purpose of the task force is not to evaluate current councils.

The Task Force will prepare a report addressing the questions posed above. The Task Force report should be ready to be discussed and adopted by the Board at the November 2014 Conference. The Task Force Chair will have a preliminary discussion with the ASHE Board in September 2014.

MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE

Linda Eisenmann, Former ASHE President, Wheaton College, Chair

Brendan Cantwell, Michigan State University

Christopher Collins, Azusa Pacific University

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RELEVANT EXCERPTS FROM ASHE BY-LAWS

ARTICLE VI COMMITTEES OF THE ASSOCIATION (also called "Councils")

Section 1: ESTABLISHMENT AND ORGANIZATION Members of the association may propose the establishment of a council of the association to the board by submitting a formal proposal to the president no less than three months before a regularly scheduled meeting of the board. At its next meeting, the board may vote to grant status as a committee/council of the association pending board approval of its bylaws, decline to grant status, or refer the petition back to its authors with a request for clarifications before they resubmit the petition. A resubmitted petition is subject to the same procedure as above. Upon initial approval by the board, the council/committee shall work with the legal counsel to develop a set of bylaws for the council/committee. The board must also approve any subsequent substantive changes to the bylaws.

Note:

The Task Force met throughout the summer and fall of 2014 via conference calls, and presented an interim report to the Board in September. This final report incorporates feedback from that Board discussion.