

The Text and Academic Authors Association: A Gem of an Organization

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Academics tend to associate mostly with other academics in their fields, occasionally interacting with those from other disciplines in university committees but having their chief networking with others from their discipline in their departments and in professional societies. However, there are a few tertiary organizations that bring academics together for the purpose of exchanging ideas about the craft of academic and textbook writing. The only organization devoted solely to serving academic and textbook authors from all disciplines is the Text and Academic Authors Association or TAA.

Brief History of TAA

Originally established as the Textbook Authors Association, TAA was formed in 1986 by Purdue University Professor of Mathematics Emeritus Mike Keedy. He served as the organization's executive director and ran the organization from his home in Orange Springs, Florida. TAA grew quickly to near 1,000 textbook authors with its three principal objectives of improving contracts for authors, reducing the sale of used textbooks, and preventing the selling of complementary copies. Its first national convention was held in 1986 and has continued to hold conferences every year since.

As originally constituted, TAA was governed by three senior members who selected officers and directors for the organization. The Textbook Authors Association was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation in the State of Florida in 1990. In 1992, Mike Keedy stepped down as executive director, having met his goal of establishing the organization and seeing it grow and mature. Ms. Norma Hood was appointed his replacement as executive director.

The year 1993 proved to be a seminal year for the organization. First, the senior member governance board was abolished in favor of membership-elected officers and a Board of Directors. At the same time, the bylaws were being revised to reflect the changed governance structure, the name, and priorities of the organization also changed. The Textbook Authors Association became the TAA, reflecting the broader base of membership and concern for all forms of academic and educational authorship. The year 1993 also saw the establishment of awards for excellence in textbook publishing. The Texty Awards were created to recognize and honor the best new textbooks each year in a variety of genre categories. Also established then were

McGuffey Awards to honor longevity in textbooks in those same genre categories. These awards have grown in popularity and acceptance and have become recognized by publishing houses as marks of publishing excellence.

Another important development in 1993 was TAA involvement in international reprographic rights. TAA learned that international funds were being collected and returned on U.S. copyrighted material. TAA visited the U.S. reprographic rights organization, the Copyright Clearance Center, to talk about authors' share of nontitle-specific funds being returned to authors. TAA also visited the meeting of the International Federation of Reproductive Rights Organizations to press the claim of U.S. authors for their fair share of international funds collected on U.S. copyrighted material. The result of these actions produced negotiations between TAA, the Authors Guild, the Copyright Clearance Center, and Kopinar, the Norwegian reprographic organization.

By 1994, the negotiations over international reprography funds led to TAA being instrumental in helping create the Authors Coalition in the United States. The Authors Coalition is a coalition of U.S. author groups (now 21 in number) to receive and distribute international reprographic funds collected on U.S. copyrighted publications. That money now rightfully goes to author groups.

The year 1994 was also the year that TAA established workshops for authors and prospective authors. Using a model developed by TAA member Franklin Silverman of Marquette University, TAA workshops proved a popular way for TAA to achieve the objectives of promoting authoring and assisting new authors become established. That same year saw the expansion of the TAA newsletter, known as the Academic Author, to a monthly publication and the creation of a TAA web site. John Vivian served as a News Director for TAA.

The year 1995 witnessed the death of TAA Executive Director Norma Hood and the moving of TAA offices out of Orange Springs, Florida. Ronald Pynn was named executive director,

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and the offices were moved on a temporary basis to his offices at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, North Dakota. By 1996, a permanent home was secured on the campus of the University of South Florida in St. Petersburg, Florida. With the relocation to the University of South Florida in St. Petersburg, staff was required and a full-time office manager was employed, Natalie Nichols.

In 1998, the organization had become financially sound enough to permit making the executive director's position a half-time paid position. That year Janet Tucker became the office manager to replace Natalie Nichols. The year 1998 also witnessed the creation of a Council of Fellows within the organization to honor prolific and widely adopted authors in any field of textbook writing. John Vivian resigned in 2002 as a News Director, causing TAA to rethink its news format and web design. As a result, a new web site was designed, the Academic Author was expanded, including the solicitation of advertising, and electronic news briefs were added by news staff hired to keep authors abreast of developments in publishing.

Current Services

A search for a new executive director in 2005 resulted in the appointment of retired philosophy professor Richard Hull (the author of this editorial) to that post. Within a year, Hull promoted Kim Pawlak from her part-time position as reporter for the academic author to associate executive director, and charged her with developing a set of services to increase membership retention. In the succeeding years and under her guidance, TAA has added teleconferences, podcasts, and webinars on topics of interest to academic and textbook authors, transformed its newsletter to a well-designed four-color publication with an electronic version, added Listservs to encourage interaction by academic and textbook authors on matters of common interest, and redesigned the organization's website to make it a better communication medium.

TAA has increased its workshops by adding seasoned presenters. Workshops are now available on writing theses and dissertations, the processes of academic authoring, getting monographs published by university presses, writing textbooks, grant writing, structuring a supportive and efficient writing space, preparing a tenure case, and most recently, digital publishing. Because of the budget strictures on campuses during the present economic downturn, TAA has agreed to absorb all

costs and fees for its choice of a workshop for institutions that will advertise it across the entire campus and provide US\$1,250 for memberships in TAA to be offered to workshop attendees. TAA also supports workshops given at meetings of professional societies and organizations.

TAA also encourages campuses and other organizations to develop TAA chapters that both offer individuals membership benefits in TAA and conduct chapter activities, such as writers' collectives, workshops, boot camps, grant writing seminars, and other academic services; it provides chapters with grants, suggestions for chapter activities, and reduced dues. It has also partnered with the Sisters of the Academy (SOTA) as a chapter to further enhance the benefits that SOTA offers to its members. Currently, TAA has six additional chapters: California State University San Bernardino Chapter, Haywood Community College Chapter, Lone Star College Chapter, Molloy College Chapter, Portland State University Chapter, and Texas A&M University Chapter. Several other campus chapters are under development.

In 2012, TAA partnered with The National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity to provide an institutional membership that allows 50 TAA members to enjoy the benefits of both organizations. An annual conference usually held in June provides opportunities for networking, peer mentoring, short workshops, and updating on issues of the publishing professions. These opportunities are extended by the organization throughout the following months with webinars, free to members.

Academic authoring grants by TAA to members of up to US\$1,000, and to nonmembers of up to US\$250, provide funds to individuals that incur publishing costs for legal fees, publishers' per page costs, preparation of graphic materials, photograph fees, editing expenses, and other out-of-pocket expenses. TAA is able to maintain a very low-cost dues structure because it receives funding from the Authors Coalition of America that distributes repatriated reprographic moneys from other countries. Information about the organization, its dues structure, its chapters program, and its management is available on its website: www.taaonline.net.

Author's Note

In August 2013, Richard Hull stepped down as executive director and Michael Spinella, formerly of the JSTOR project, assumed the position of Executive Director and CEO.