

**2019 AWP Indigenous-Aboriginal American Writers Caucus**

**March 28, 2019**

**6:00 pm to 7:15 pm**

**Room E146, First Floor**

**Oregon Convention Center**

**Allison HedgeCoke** Chair, **Elizabeth Woody** Distinguished Regional Representative, **Celeste Adame** Panelist, and **Kristiana Kahakauwila** Panelist — **Shauna Osborn & Erika Wurth** Organizers, **Shari Crane Fox** Minutes

## **MINUTES**

### **Call to Order**

Alison Hedge Coke opened the meeting with a call to order. She noted that this is our 10th caucus meeting at AWP. She was behind the mic, which she'd never been before. She thanked everyone for coming and attending, and for doing all the work everyone in attendance did. She hoped the meeting can be of assistance to all. She noted that Elizabeth Woody may be coming in. She will be delivering a poem of hers at the AWP welcome keynote event. She also introduced the other panelists.

It was mentioned that caucus leadership arranged ahead of time for a closed captioner who is typing minute notes so those who are hearing impaired could follow discussions within the meeting better. This is the first time AWP has provided this service and we are grateful.

### **New & Recurring Business**

1. Nominations for Native writers to be featured at AWP 2020. Suggested list will be sent to AWP 2020 conference committee/sponsoring organizations for consideration.
  - Stephen Graham Jones
  - Crisostos Apache
  - Maria Dosa
  - Andrew Joliett
  - Tim Tingle
  - Margo Tamaz
2. Suggestions for Tributes. Tributes can be created for any influential Indigenous-Aboriginal author
  - Adrian C Louis
  - Elizabeth Woody
  - Sherwin Bitsui
  - LeAnne Howe

- Luci Tapahonso
  - Joy Harjo
3. Caucus of Caucuses Report:
    - While there has been recent progress in regards to caucus treatment this year, many issues still remain problematic. Caucuses are still being scheduled in the same time frame in the conference schedule (always evening, always conflicting with other caucus meetings) despite annual requests for this to change.
    - Policies and processes for Caucuses are subject to change abruptly without Caucus representation in negotiations.
    - Caucus leadership is not contacted when changes that will effect our caucus members directly are made by AWP staff and/or board (for example, the ADA Report and subsequent new policies did not include the Disabled & Deaf Writers Caucus in its creation.)
    - Two new representatives volunteered to help collaborate within Caucus leadership discussions—Rasha Abdulhadi and Shari Crane Fox.
  4. Reports on negative job/employee treatment issues for Indigenous writers: Issues can be brought to caucus attention via verbal reporting or through email.
    - One member mentioned that when you stand up to authority, sometimes you end up on a chopping block at work or wherever you're hosted. This member has had situations occur that had nothing to do with her that caused work conflicts with an endow chair. The board quickly wrote letters on her behalf and demanded some things to happen.
    - Everyone was reminded that AWP can threaten a program's accreditation. Schools don't respond well to threatening accreditation, so things can move quickly once they know other people are watching them, scrutinizing their faculty members. Or in this case, if they wanted to get rid of the endowed chair.
    - It was also offered that if members did not want to say anything in the room, feel free to let us know there's an issue where you work so we can help you as a caucus to navigate AWP's power nationally with creative writing programs.
  5. Recommendations/models of Indigenous faculty and student support: Issues and ideas can be brought to caucus attention via verbal reporting or through email.
    - Jennifer Forester was asked if she had an entire Indigenous faculty currently at IAIA [IAIA faculty are not currently all Indigenous]. She was also asked how many returning alumni are on faculty [Answer was not recorded].
    - Another member noted that the different universities here in the US and in Canada have notable differences between collegiate settings for native faculty. Those differences are an important issue in the retention of Indigenous faculty members.
  6. Handling microaggressions at work and writer environments: While the changes in AWP staff and board have made a significant improvement in regards to our interactions and the reception of our requests, there are still ways our communications could be better. This year our interactions with representatives of AWP have included instances of

microaggressions such as the use of disrespectful language in event titles/descriptions and insensitive/offensive requests of tribal representatives. How should the caucus respond as a group? What are some successful ways to manage microaggressions that occur in critique groups, classrooms, and organizations both as an individual and as an organization?

- Someone mentioned there are microaggressions that happen daily during the conference. Members were at a dinner the prior night and couldn't tell you how many times the keynote speaker said "our tribe, our tribe." This was mentioned and was then changed to "our nation." These things have been spoken about for years, things that need to get the ear of not only of the board, but of the conference director. We need to let people know (who are doing these keynotes) that they need to think inclusively, and think respectfully, of everyone who attends, to be aware of these types of microaggressions so people aren't sitting around the same table cringing when they're invited.
- A member asked if there was a way the caucus could suggest there be a Native representative on the conference committee? It was answered that there was one representative this year--Joan Kane. Heidi Erdrich was asked if she had been on it before and she said no. It was suggested that there should be at least two Indigenous representatives on the conference committee each year.
- Shari related two recent microaggression situations in poetry workshops. Stated she feels put on the spot as far as explaining for everyone and we're not a homogeneous group. Hoping for words of wisdom. How people deal with that?
- One member said that this this is something she sometimes has the energy for, sometimes she doesn't. As an editor who has worked with a lot of different folks and who has taught writing, she has encountered appropriation in language and images and people appropriating from a lot of different experiences that they don't have a connection to. Mentioned it's sometimes less exhausting to take a different approach. Instead of trying to explain to them and educate them, try to really push them as a writer to defend their writing. he continued with noting that she asks them to go deeper, to see if their character is deep enough. Maybe sometimes it feels like they're trying to get away with something, or cheat and have a depth of meaning by taking someone else's culture. Alternatively, especially if it's another person of color, she may feel a little more curious. She may ask, "Is there something you're reaching for and because of your internalized Colonialism you haven't given yourself permission to reach for what is really there versus what's perceived appropriation?"
- Another member said, "When I give feedback I focus on naming the impact of it and not focusing on any other part of it by like when you use this language, it perpetuates this idea, or it's part of this thing that happens and this is how it materially impacts me or other people. Because I think a lot of times when folks are doing that, that idea hasn't occurred to them at all. This could have an impact or participates in a bigger story. I focus on pointing that out. If they choose to use that, they know they're choosing that even knowing the harm it's causing."
- Another member said, "I'm a director and faculty of Indigenous program at a state college. When we have non-Indigenous students who have a microaggression or

- whatever it is, the two options I've discussed with faculty are number one, calling in instead of calling out. The way do I that is to give a space, a pause, and then eventually bring up within a couple minutes that we all know what we know. And give an example of something they said. I would say nine and a half times out of ten that student will end up coming up afterward and be like, I never thought of this. But it basically take away the defensiveness, which is exhausting, yes, but if you're an educator, that's what you do. The other approach is to ask the person, tell me more. And pretty much everybody who knows me if I say tell me more, it means I think you're bullshit. Once you start using terminology, people are like, I just did something that wasn't good. Those are the two tricks, tools, that I can give to you.”
- Another member asked, “Can I add on to that one? I think addressing it one-on-one is often very helpful because I think a lot of times when addressing microaggressions goes poorly is because people get defensive. Unless it's something that feels like it has to be addressed in a big group, talking one-on-one. Sometimes when I've done that, the person afterwards made a public apology.”
  - Another member stated that humor helps, “I was teaching at UCLA. They said I got the job because I was another minority. Somebody reported all this to me from the hiring meeting because I was just another minority crawling my way up the ladder. So that was all there, but I had a guy in one of my classes and he would do this aggressively a few times. He was a tall white guy. He would get up in the middle of my class and walk out and come back in. I can't remember what I told him but it was right to the point. It made him laugh and everybody else. He never did it again.”

7. Any other requested items that time permits

- One member said they were a journalist and write about environmental issues. There were no panels on the schedule about that subject. Nothing about climate change. Nothing about the environment. That was noted as an odd and obvious deficiency to much applause. The journalist member said ignoring the environment and climate change was odd, because it's impacting our community, it's a real thing. It was mentioned that we have to write about this so it is no longer ignored or unacknowledged.
- Elise Paschen and Sherwin Bitsui discussed that the Indigenous writer community is small, so it's difficult to recuse yourself from making nominations if you know everybody. It was suggested that you don't have to recuse yourself if you know the person, but if you published with them and they published with you, or if you work with them, that could be the point where you recuse yourself. One member noted that on the Denver conference committee, there was one individual that later it came out had not been using the best ethics. It was noted that you ask people to follow these guidelines, but sometimes they just don't. It was again mentioned that we're a small community. There are a lot of areas that have been affected in writing and literature because of the notion that people have to recuse, which is slightly artificial given the size of our community and how well we know each other.
- Celeste next brought up Sherwin's question and said she was one of the folks on the panel for this year's AWP reading panel. AWP gives a list of things that need to

happen for the panel. Those “to do” items translate into a checklist. She noticed there are a handful of great panels where not everyone on the panel had filled out their bio. So then the panel lost points. In a competitive field, it could make/break if it gets accepted. She had an experience where she was very appreciative because someone double checked the bios, made sure they were all done and her panel made it in. She felt like it was that level of all these double checks that happened and gave credit to “a fabulous panel chair.” One of the things she’s happy to do, and she’ll loop Shauna in on it, is to make a checklist. Go through, if you propose a panel saying, did I do all these things? So it doesn’t slip through the cracks for a silly reason. It doesn’t mean there’s not still structural change that’s needed but it will help. Another thing she heard on a panel is that a panel on displacement and gentrification that was rooted in Portland got turned down. One of the head AWP people was e-mailed, and an argument was made for why it was a mistake that that panel was turned down for this location. There was an e-mail back in a couple hours saying you are right, and the panel was included. She mentioned we should think to do that. To press back. It may not be bad to have a couple names to e-mail if you feel like your panel wasn’t fairly looked at. The other thing she wanted to bring up is how we re-imagine the academic structure and think of a structure that’s not so tied to policing but is one of structural tenderness. If you would like to join in the conversation, there are some great folks in the group. And she would love to include you and chat over coffee or something.

- Someone added that if you have a panel that did get accepted, if you can share it with the people who have never written a panel proposal, I think a model is usually very helpful. Also, don’t forget to try to get the reading proposal in. It helps to have a publisher submit it rather than the organizer of panel.
- Another person mentioned: The Tulsa artist fellowship will start accepting applications time this spring. The deadline is spring or early summer. It provides free housing, free studio space, stipend, healthcare, free membership a lot of arts facilities. If you know of Oklahoma writers, writers in the region, other native writers. visual artists, native artists of all types. It’s a renewable fellowship. The Tulsa artist fellowship is relatively new and they doubled the size. They’re committed to bringing in native artists and probably bringing in 30 new people next year in all different kinds of mediums.
- Alison added that UC Riverside has post-doctoral fellowships, she thinks they’re in between \$40-50,000. She believes the fellows teach one class. It gives them a year to work with mentor faculty and to take advantage of the UC system. There is a favorable view of Native applicants and it has been in that structure for a long time. So the likelihood of being taken seriously, if you are from the community, is much higher. And they’ve been really fortunate bringing in super talent. And PhDs are usually the qualifier for the post-doctoral, but she’s been asking lately about MFA. It’s a terminal degree. The response was nobody with an MFA ever applied. If you have an MFA, I don’t think it should stop you from making those applications. If they favor you as a candidate, they’ll bring you and post-doctorals have given that waiver

before and accepted as a terminal degree. It's a good gig. It's interdisciplinary so any area.

- Rasha is the new Executive Director of Split This Rock. "If there are panels or readings you proposed for AWP that didn't get accepted this year or previous years, I would be thrilled to see those submitted for the 2020 split this rock festival in March." Opening calls for proposals in May and June. You can find them online.
- There is brief discussion about a panel for farm workers. Miguel submitted it annually for years to AWP and it finally got picked up this year. Split This Rock picked it up the first year it was proposed. In 2015, we had a panel on Split This Rock with Trevino and Deborah. We were told it was the first Indigenous panel at Split This Rock.
- This evening's welcoming, it's the first time they've opened that space for an Indigenous welcoming/land recognition for AWP ever. There has never been an Indigenous person in the welcoming night of AWP prior to today.
- Mention that there are a lot of people on caucus that have also been involved with other caucuses, One of the caucuses is the Disabled and Deaf Caucus as well. A few things I want to talk about that have never happened before. They're (AWP) providing the shuttles from hotels now. It's the first time to really do it but every 40 minutes shuttles are stopping at the hotels. For whatever reason somebody needs transportation, they have a cane, walker or invisible disability and need to be driven for those people who the shuttles are not working for, they're also providing a Lyft token of \$50 for the conference. So there's \$50 free.
- Question about northwest Native writers and groups? Seattle area, Sarah Ortiz is doing a lot of work for the south King County area working with the Hugo House to get a northwest Native writers thing going.
- Question about new Native work? Cedar Sigo, Jake Skeets whose book will be out later this year. Craig Santos and Melody McDougal are publishing retrospective of Joe Balaz living in Ohio. It's a collection of his work put out later this year. Craig, Randy, and Allison have edited new anthology of Pacific Islander poetry. Mentions also of Laura Da and Rena Priest.
- Joy Harjo mentioned she thinks it is nice to see all these younger generations of Native writers coming up.

Additional notes from this year's agenda:

- Fundraising/Organizing for caucus events and Indigenous writer resources: Puha Hubiya, a 501c3 nonprofit organization started and lead by caucus members, serves Indigenous writers, students, and educators. Fundraising and donations to support offsite readings during conferences, assistance with travel funding/conference fees, etc. can be handled through this organization. More info available at our website: [puhahubiya.com](http://puhahubiya.com)
- Volunteers interested in helping organize events for AWP20 in San Antonio would be greatly appreciated, especially those authors living in the region, from tribes located in the area, or with connections to potential collaborating groups. Please contact caucus leaders if interested or email the caucus at [nativeawp@gmail.com](mailto:nativeawp@gmail.com).

- Positions available within caucus leadership include the following:
  - A) Indigenous Bibliographies Coordinator—someone to help organize the annual updates needed to our bibliography lists available on caucus website
  
  - B) Indigenous Wikipedia Coordinator—someone interested in organizing the creation and update needs for Indigenous author/literature page representation
  
  - C) Administrative Representative—someone with experience as a Chair or Director of an AWP affiliated writing department/program interested in helping us navigate our caucus interests in those structures of AWP that fall outside of organizing the annual conference

## **Adjournment**