

President's Report

16th Annual CWCA/ACCR AGM (Virtual)

May 25, 2023

Presented by CWCA/ACCR outgoing President, Clare Bermingham, and incoming President, Stevie Bell.

The Canadian Writing Centres Association / association canadienne des centres de rédaction (CWCA/ACCR) acknowledges that the work of our association and our member centres takes place on the traditional lands of many Indigenous nations and communities across the geographical area now known as Canada. Our acknowledgement is a starting place for reconciliation and action, and we are committed, through our [Statement of Commitment to Antiracism](#), to actively countering the harms of racism and colonization in our work and in writing centre research, advocacy, and praxis.

1. Gratitude

Many people have contributed to the work of CWCA/ACCR over the past year, and I am grateful to each one for their time and energy.

To the Co-Chairs of the 2023 Conference, Julia Lane and Marci Prescott-Brown, I want to give my immense appreciation for your thoughtful and careful organizing work to make this conference possible. From drafting and finalizing the conference Call for Proposals to selecting this year's plenary speakers, and from organizing proposal reviews to creating the conference schedule, you have inspired all of us to think about the various stories, counterstories, narratives that compose our writing centres, the writers who write these (counter)stories, the perspectives and positions created and closed off, and larger narratives and (counter)stories that we participate in. I am excited to engage in the diverse panels, workshops, and sessions you have curated, and I look forward to being challenged and inspired by the keynotes, Dr. Gibson and Dr. Vay.

Due to the decision to stay virtual, CWCA/ACCR was again able to keep conference costs low and accessible for various members and offer no-cost access to expand participation for people from under-represented groups. In recognition of the benefits we derive from ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands and as an action towards CWCA/ACCR's commitment to decolonization, Julia and Marci requested that CWCA/ACCR donate \$700 from proceeds from the conference to [Raven Trust](#) to support Indigenous land defense efforts. The board approved this donation with thanks.

Alongside the Conference Co-Chairs, many people work hard to make CWCA/ACCR conferences possible. I want to extend my gratitude to the Conference Committee who gave input and helped with the many tasks of conference planning and execution: Amanda Marshall (Nova Scotia Community College), Vidya Natarajan (King's University College), and Stevie Bell (York University).

I also want to give a special thank you to Stevie Bell who, as CWCA/ACCR Vice-President, was the link between the CWCA/ACCR board and the Conference Co-Chairs and was often a sounding-board and advisor to the co-chairs. Thank you for making this a smooth process for everyone. I know that your support was invaluable at critical times.

I am proud to have served as President of the CWCA/ACCR board for the past two years, and I am immensely grateful to the colleagues and friends I have served beside. The board is a team of volunteers who serve the Canadian writing centre community because we believe in the importance of writing centres, and we are committed to supporting our colleagues as resources, advisors, and professionals. I want to acknowledge that, as our professional jobs seem to get larger each year and the resources thinner, the board members conduct our CWCA/ACCR work off the sides of our desks. Thank you to each board member for your time, commitment, energy, mutual support, and service: Sarah King (U. Toronto - Scarborough); Stevie Bell (York U.); Jenna Goddard (TMU); Mark Blaauw-Hara (U. Toronto - Mississauga); Lenore Latta (U. Guelph); Nadine Fladd (U. Waterloo); Sheila Batacharya (U. Toronto - Mississauga); Tessa Troughton (Ontario Tech U.); Majid Nikouee (U. Alberta); Mohsen Moghaddam (Simon Fraser U.), and Marci Prescott-Brown (U. Toronto).

The latter, Marci Prescott-Brown, served in an ex-officio capacity as a representative from the BIPOC Caucus to the CWCA/ACCR board, and I am grateful to her for representing the Caucus and facilitating communications. Thank you also to Sheila Batacharya, who coordinated the Caucus, and to the whole BIPOC Caucus for their work advising the board and providing input on important documents and processes. The role you play is helping to shape the future of CWCA/ACCR.

I would like to say a special and enormous thank you to those members departing from the board and not running for re-election. It has been an absolute pleasure and privilege to work with each of you. Thank you for your service to CWCA/ACCR.

- Sarah King, Past-President, President, Vice-President (University of Toronto – Scarborough)
- Nadine Fladd, Membership Chair (University of Waterloo)
- Lenore Latta, Digital Media Chair (University of Guelph)
- Sheila Batacharya, Member-At-Large (University of Toronto – Mississauga)
- Majid Nikouee, Member-At-Large (University of Alberta)

2. Caucuses and CWCA/ACCR

a. BIPOC Caucus:

The BIPOC Caucus grew out of a meeting led by Dr. Vidya Natarajan from King's College at Western University at the 2021 CWCA/ACCR conference. From this meeting the Caucus formed as a grassroots or informal group within the membership. The CWCA/ACCR Board was excited to work with the Caucus, and conversations between the two groups led to a majorly revised Statement of Commitment to Antiracism, authored primarily by members of the BIPOC Caucus. Since then, the board has consulted with the Caucus on key initiatives and documents, such as the critique of the IWCA CFP, the strategic planning working group, and conference CFPs. I am tremendously grateful to the whole BIPOC Caucus for their time, advice, feedback, and input to the Board, and also for being a place within CWCA/ACCR where Black and Indigenous people and people of colour can gather for community, connection, and advocacy.

Ahead of the 2022 AGM, the board discussed formalizing a representative from the BIPOC Caucus. The board asked the BIPOC Caucus to appoint an ex-officio representative, which is non-voting, for the 2022-23 year. Marci Prescott was appointed by the BIPOC Caucus to be its representative in 2022-2023. In 2022-2023, the board sought input from the BIPOC Caucus about whether it would be interested in a more formal role within CWCA/ACCR, what that could look like, and how representation to the board might be structured and defined.

b. Opportunities for new Caucus groups:

From these discussions, the CWCA/ACCR board has considered the potential for supporting the development of additional Caucus groups. Like regional affiliates and the BIPOC Caucus, such groups could provide broader representation for individuals in CWCA/ACCR and locations for affinity-based community, advocacy, and support. The board will be asking for individuals interested in considering matters of structure and process for the creation of such groups, including, for example:

- Developing a process for the formation of affinity caucuses. A process of formalization might mean defining terms and processes for transparency for participants of affinity caucuses or groups, such as Terms of Reference that define the purpose of the caucus and include processes for decision-making and for ensuring that the space is safe and equitable.
- Changing the CWCA/ACCR By-Laws to provide for representatives from affinity caucuses to have voting roles on the CWCA/ACCR board, or

changing the structure of the board more radically to a representative-based board rather than a role-based board.

- Formalizing commitments from CWCA/ACCR to affinity groups, such as processes for requesting funding, commitments to a meeting time or panel in the conference schedule, etc.

3. Chat GPT, AI, and new trends impacting Writing Centres

The increased attention to AI in academic and scholarly work, precipitated in large part by the awareness and evolution of ChatGPT capabilities, has emerged as a theme this year. CWCA/ACCR Editor, Brian Hotson led the development of a position statement on [Corporate, Automated, Online Tutoring Tools \(CAOTTs\)](#) with board members and other members of CWCA/ACCR. The statement was brought to the board in December, 2022, where it was approved for ratification by the general membership at the 2023 AGM.

As awareness about and interest in ChatGPT increased, the board discussed a position statement on the use of it and similar AI tools. With the release of ChatGPT-4 then forthcoming, and without precluding the writing of such a statement in the future, the board opted to hold a forum on ChatGPT and Writing Centres to hear from members and provide an opportunity for discussion about the opportunities and challenges presented by the platform. I organized the panel with volunteer facilitators, Brian Hotson (Dalhousie U.), Michael Cournoyea (U. Toronto), and Zoe Mukura (Saskatchewan Polytechnic), on May 8, 2023. I am very grateful to my co-organizers and to Julia Lane (Simon Fraser U.), who moderated the chat and helped with Zoom set-up, for making the forum a success. Thanks too to the 57 attendees from across Canada who participated in robust conversations on several topics in breakout rooms.

4. Strategic Planning

One of the goals for this year was to re-start strategic planning conversations for CWCA/ACCR that had been put on pause in 2020 when the pandemic hit. With participation from Stevie Bell (York U.), Sarah King (U. Toronto – Scarborough), Sheila Batacharya (U. Toronto – Mississauga) and Emilie Brancato (OCAD), we held a meeting in late 2022. I want to thank Sarah, Sheila, and Emilie for their energy and input; however, in the interest of sharing failures alongside successes, other needs and priorities simply took over in January, and I was not able to coordinate additional meetings and continue to lead this process. I hand the reins over to Stevie Bell as incoming President, but I also recognize that some other activities, such as the Caucus discussions and the ChatGPT forum, are providing some of the necessary groundwork for future discussions of CWCA/ACCR strategic priorities.

5. Special Issue of Discourse & Writing / Rédactologie: Selected Papers from CWCA/ACCR 2021 Conference

In November 2022, co-editors Vidya Natarajan and Lisa Kovac, both of King's University College, facilitated the publication of a Special Issue of DW/R that presented selected papers from the CWCA/ACCR 2021 conference. Vidya and Lisa overcame a number of challenges, including a change in editorship and the withdrawal of a number of papers. As we all know, the impacts of the pandemic extended into 2021 and 2022 (and beyond), and as Vidya wrote to me: "[I]t was such a hard year for people, and some of the peer-reviewed essays never got to the publishing stage because authors found it impossible to revise them." Thanks to both Vidya and Lisa for persevering and rising above many challenges to publish the special issue. If you have not seen it, please check it out here: <https://journals.sfu.ca/dwr/index.php/dwr/article/view/997>

6. Special Issue of SKRIB Journal: Selected Papers from CWCA/ACCR 2022 Conference

Thank you to Stevie Bell and Brian Hotson, co-editors of the special issue of SKRIB featuring selected papers from last year's conference. Articles are now in the peer-review stage of publication.

7. CWCR/RCCR Blog

Led by the seemingly inexhaustible Brian Hotson (Dalhousie U.), the [CWCR/RCCR blog](#) has been a crucial resource for writing centre professionals. Over the past years, the blog has published stories and perspectives from a range of people about always-timely issues and questions: ChatGPT, Studiosity, vigilantism as an IWCA conference theme, and writing centre spaces and identities. Brian is always looking for writers, materials, and help with the blog, so please connect with him if you have an idea or topic to write about.

8. Membership Communication Changes

Outgoing Membership Chair, Nadine Fladd, identified that there were significant issues with continuing with the old CWCA/ACCR listserv, housed by Athabasca University but no longer supported by their technical team. Recently, after a great deal of research, she recommended shifting to a low-cost alternative and, with the board's support, established a new communication and membership hub at cwcalist@groups.io. The groups.io platform has more functionality and is more transparent than a listserv. It can support many needs of our members and the organization. Members can create profiles to connect with each other and share resources. The platform allows for a calendar, subgroups, and other activities. We look forward to the next Membership Chair exploring its capabilities.

I am very grateful to Nadine for bringing this option forward and solving what had become a significant headache for our organization. Please note that the Athabasca listserv will be decommissioned following the conference.

9. Sponsorship for the IWCA Summer Institute

CWCA/ACCR donated \$650 towards a grant to support a member attending the IWCA Summer Institute in 2023.