

Introduction
5th Annual Forum Meeting
May 25, 2006, 6:00-7:15, Montreal
Kathleen Sideli

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the fifth annual Forum business meeting. As you know, our bylaws require that we hold a business meeting once a year. Although it isn't everyone's idea of the most exciting way to spend an hour, it is the time of the year when we let the membership know what we've been doing on your behalf. We have appreciated your ongoing support and patience as we've continued to grow and develop as an organization. We may not have it down perfect yet but we're all doing the best we can to meet the needs of our diverse membership.

This year's meeting is one that is characterized by many 'transitions.' In some cases, the transitions are bitter, others are bittersweet while some are purely sweet.

You will note on your agenda that we have dedicated this meeting to the memory of Peter A. Wollitzer, the first chair of the Forum's Advisory Council, who died this past February. There is nothing as bitter or sad as losing a dear colleague in the prime of life. I will talk more about Peter later in the meeting but I wanted us to keep him present throughout our discussions today, just as he had been present for all Forum activities up until his death. Members of our field develop personal and collegial relationships that are binding. It is hard enough to let such friendships go when retirement beckons. It is particularly difficult to say farewell when death comes unexpectedly, leaving one's life work unfinished. It then becomes our joint duty to carry on the legacy that has been left behind.

Other transitions we recognize today are bittersweet. After a successful stint at Smith College, the Forum's growth has been so successful that our headquarters are headed to Dickinson College where we will have more space and resources to sustain and promote our progress. Let's have a round of applause to show our appreciation to Smith College, and Adrian Beaulieu, who brought us to our first home.

The bittersweet transition continues as we bid adieu to Geoff Bannister who thought he'd take a respite from college presidencies by getting the Forum afloat. I don't think he had any idea about how much effort this ragtag group would require but we're fortunate that he lent us his unique skill set to put us on the map of international education. We've kept him churning for almost four years but now he's going to relocate his fishing pole and get some really serious work done with, Jerri Ross, his partner in and out of the Forum office. Geoff, we're glad you got us this far and wish you the best as you take on other kinds of fish that also insist on swimming upstream!

We would be more upset about leaving Geoff behind if we didn't have the talents of Brian Whalen, our new president and executive director waiting in the wings. Most of you know Brian's work through the Advisory Council. He has had an intense six months of transition already, working with the Forum staff to move things from Northampton to Carlisle. It is a very sweet moment to put the Forum's future in Brian's hands since he has been so successful to date with a number of key Forum projects. Brian, we welcome you to the helm.

Of course, I couldn't kick off the meeting without pointing out that this will be the last annual meeting over which I will preside. While some may consider that bittersweet, I consider it a very sweet moment. And that isn't because I'm anxious to push the Forum off onto my able successor, Mary Dwyer, the President of IES, but because I am very proud of how successful the Forum has been to date. I rotate off the Executive Committee knowing that the Forum is thriving and nothing could feel more satisfying. There will be more time to officially pass the gavel later in the meeting.

Later this evening we will recognize other transitions as leaders rotate in and out of Board and Council positions. There is no greater sign of the vitality of an organization than its continuing success under a series of different leaders.

So, without further delay, it is my pleasure to welcome to the podium our outgoing executive director and president, Geoffrey Bannister.

Expression of gratitude to retiring Board Member, James Langridge:

Jim Langridge has been a stalwart supporter of the Forum since its inception so we were delighted to have him serve a term on the Board. He was indefatigable in urging us to be bold in our endeavors (not to mention terse and decisive!). He traveled the farthest to our meetings and carried the torch for our overseas partners. And who can ever forget his debating role in Santa Fe as a quixotic defender of direct enrollment programs?!

Expression of gratitude to outgoing Secretary of the Board, Al Balkcum:

Although we don't give plaques to outgoing officers of the Board, I wanted to recognize Al Balkcum for his three and half years as the first secretary of the Board of Directors. He thought he was agreeing to just a brief stint as a signer of documents but ended up having a much lengthier sentence with heftier requirements. He handled it with great aplomb and good humor. (Well, at least most of the time....!).

Special Award Announcement

It is a privilege for me to stand before you today to honor our friend and colleague, Peter A. Wollitzer. For many of you he may have only been a name on a page or someone you saw at conferences. For others he was a colleague you saw frequently. And for some of us he was a dear friend. We each hold a piece of Peter in our memory and it is impossible to do his lifetime justice in a few sentences. We've prepared a brief statement about his career and contributions that we will distribute to you before we adjourn but I wanted to share a few personal thoughts about him.

As an undergraduate, Peter studied abroad in France with EAP on a program that gave him the transformative experience we all know so well. We celebrate the fact that his year overseas resulted in his dedicating his entire career to education abroad. He focused on the totality of the student experience, emphasizing the re-entry phase as much as the orientation stage. He was deeply interested in ethics and diplomacy as well as standards. While being the consummate professional he was also a gentle person with a deeply reflective nature. He loved music of all kinds, appreciated excellent cuisine and enjoyed nature. He brought a witty sense of humor to all of his interactions while his keen liberal stance kept him sassy and outspoken about politics up until the end. I also understand he made fantastic chocolate chip raisin oatmeal cookies!

Although Peter was not part of the initial group who founded the Forum, the minute he heard what we were up to, he chomped at the bit to join us in our efforts. He wanted to be sure that he and his West Coast colleagues got involved at the onset in what he saw as an exciting new era in education abroad. He was thrilled that the Forum sought to concentrate on issues related to pedagogy, curriculum, program design, standards and research—all topics that Peter championed. These evoked a level of excitement in Peter that was infectious when we were in his presence. He never tired of reminding us about the need to get faculty and administrators abroad engaged in Forum activities. The true test of his dedicated determination was his commitment to stay engaged in the Forum's efforts throughout his two surgeries and relentless cancer treatments. He never abandoned his responsibilities and he cherished contact with his colleagues around the world throughout his ordeal. I received a humorous message from Peter last summer where he looked forward to getting together with some of us. With his wry wit he said, "You all can join my good cells in slapping around the bad ones." Around the same time he also wrote reflectively and appreciatively to his fellow Board and Council members that "With your love and support, I'll get through this and go on to cause lots more trouble for us all in the years ahead."

We'd much rather Peter be here today to cause some trouble but the next best thing would be to ensure in a concrete way that his name and his legacy endure in the years ahead.

In July of 2004 the Board voted on a business plan that included a series of awards to recognize best practices in the field. As you know, we are already conducting the third round of the annual student research competition. One of the other awards we approved but had not yet launched was an advocacy award, understanding that advocacy encompasses a wide-ranging set of activities that promote education abroad among diverse constituencies. The Board has decided to name this the Peter A. Wollitzer Advocacy Award in order to honor his exemplary role in the field and to make Peter the first recipient.

At this moment I would like to welcome to the podium Peter's colleagues and friends from EAP to accept this posthumous award on Peter's behalf.

Closing Remarks and Passing of the Gavel

As I said earlier, I am delighted that Mary Dwyer will succeed me as chair. For those of you who have followed the Forum's progress, you'll know that Mary has had a major role in its success. As the vice-chair for the past five years, she has been tireless in her contributions in many different areas, including the important role of chair of the Nominating Committee. Due to her efforts, we now have depth and breadth of experience on our Board that will ensure the Forum's ongoing fiscal and strategic success. Mary brings great administrative and leadership skills to our Board and I know you will all join me in welcoming her (and she also has a great set of power suits!).