

ASSOCIATION FOR INFORMAL LOGIC AND CRITICAL THINKING (AILACT) *NEWSLETTER*

April 2020

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From the Editor

Greetings, dear readers!

I hope this Newsletter finds everyone managing well in these trying times. The coronavirus pandemic has of course imposed personal and professional challenges on us all, but take heart: like all evils, this too shall pass. If nothing else, we can take comfort in the obvious and ever increasing public relevance of the theory, and especially the practice, of argumentation and critical thinking today.

Below, you will find a statement from James Freeman regarding the current AILACT Board of Directors election; information about the previous and upcoming AILACT @ APA sessions; and the flyer for this year's Essay Prize competition.

As always, there is a Membership Form at the end of this document. Dues, which continue to be \$10.00, may be paid by check or credit card or PayPal; the form should be completed and sent (with a check if payment is by check) to our treasurer, Don Hatcher. Please note that new members are now required to register on AILACT's online Member Area.

If you have any news, events, or calls for papers that would be of interest to the AILACT readership, please send me details by August 1st for potential inclusion in the next Newsletter.

Best,
Pat Bondy
patrick.bondy@wichita.edu

Board of Directors Election

As many of you know already, the election process for the 2020-21 AILACT Board of Directors is now underway. For this two year period, the Board will consist of ten members: President, Vice President, Treasurer, and seven Directors-at-Large. The Nominating Committee has prepared a slate and as of this time, there has been an additional nomination “from the floor.” The Nominating Committee consists of Derek Allen, Sharon Bailin, and myself. The nominees are:

Lilian Bermejo Luque for President
Kevin Possin for Vice-President
Donald Hatcher for Treasurer
For Members at Large of the Board of Directors:
John Casey
Frank Fair
Maurice Finocchiaro
Gabrijela Kisceck
Dima Mohammed
Dona Warren
Mark Weinstein
Yun Xie

The candidates for President, Vice President, and Treasurer are unopposed, and will be elected by acclamation. Since we have eight candidates for seven Director at Large positions, that election will be contested. Ballots have gone out on April 15 and the voting period continues through May 15. To be eligible to vote, an AILACT member must have paid dues, \$10, at least once in the past five years. Ballots will go out only to paid up members. Members who have not paid up and wish to vote my send payment of dues to our Treasurer. A membership renewal form appears at the end of this Newsletter. Results of the election will be sent via e-mail to the members, once the votes are tabulated. There should also be an announcement in the next Newsletter.

James Freeman
Chair, Nominating Committee
Immediate Past President, AILACT

AILACT @ APA

Eastern Division

The topic of the AILACT Group Session at the Eastern APA on January 10, 2020 in Philadelphia was: “Argument diagrams: what are they and how should they be taught?” The format was a panel of four speakers—Nuhu Osman Attah (University of Pittsburgh), Nathan Otey (Harvard University and ThinkerAnalytix), Allison Cohen (Langley High School, McLean, VA.) and Jeff Buechner (Rutgers University-Newark and The Saul Kripke Center, CUNY GC) and the chair—Lloyd Carr (Rivier University). The discussion was lively and interesting. The ThinkerAnalytix software package for creating argument diagrams was the highlight of the session. Rutgers

University-Newark provided a \$150 stipend for the use of A/V equipment (which the APA no longer provides free for group sessions).

Proposed topic for AILACT group meeting, 2021 Eastern APA

On-line courses in critical thinking: how should they be designed?

In response to COVID-19, faculty at universities throughout the world converted their face-to-face courses to on-line courses. This will certainly happen again with the next pandemic. This past spring (2020), faculty in philosophy who taught face-to-face critical thinking courses had to design on-line critical thinking courses. How should this best be done? What design principles should be employed in doing this? Should teleconferencing be used as a primary teaching tool, as a secondary teaching tool, or not at all? Should the course be synchronous or asynchronous? Should there be required due dates for course work—such as exams, homework, and special projects? Are there important on-line tools—such as tools for creating argument diagrams—and should they be incorporated into the course? If so, how? Should faculty keep in touch with their students using personal e-mails, group e-mails, or not at all?

Format: a panel discussion consisting of 4 or 5 speakers. If you are interested in being a panelist, please e-mail Jeff Buechner, buechner@newark.rutgers.edu

Central Division

The Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking met during the APA Central Division meeting in Chicago on February 28th from 7-10 PM. Aside from the late hour—and our session conflicting with those eager to eat dinner prior to the “smoker”—we were able to attract a small, but enthusiastic crowd; and this ultimately led to a very thorough discussion of the ideas in each of the papers. A special thanks goes to my friend and colleague Frank Fair for organizing the session, and assembling an outstanding collection of thoughtful scholars.

The evening kicked off with Jonathan Haber (Independent Scholar), whose paper “Critical Thinking – A Genealogy” explored the very idea of what it is to think critically. It’s worth observing that the term is used by scholars and educators all the time, often providing quite varying connotations to it. But rather than to try to explain the concept through a diverse collection of skills, or a more vague notion of something like a perspective or orientation, Haber argues that the term should be understood in terms of its origin—which he argues is articulated in the American Pragmatists. Exploring the views of Peirce, James and Dewey, he presented an exploration in terms of its origin in their respective thought.

Haber also spent some time in discussion talking about his new project: logiccheck.net. Designed to be complementary to popular “fact checking” websites like Politifact or Snopes (whose focus is to investigate the empirical truth of claims made by politicians and in the media), this site intends to provide the public with a reliable source for determining the relative strength of arguments made in varying information sources. Haber also came bearing sample copies of his forthcoming new book, *Critical Thinking Essentials* (MIT Press). On a personal note, I was able to procure a copy and it is currently slated for quarantine reading.

Our second speaker was Thomas Herrnstein, (Northwest Arkansas CC), who investigated the warrant for a common logical fallacy in his “A laborious, yet helpful philosophical

investigation on the Burden of Proof.” Herrnstein draws on Nicholas Rescher’s observation that the burden of proof is usually relative to the ‘cognitive *status quo*’—that is, the assertion of a widely-held belief seems not to require the same justification as those more narrowly-held beliefs, or beliefs which might challenge existing orthodoxy. Herrnstein rejects this suggestion, arguing that we ground all beliefs with positive claims irrespective of the cognitive *status quo* at the time. This conception of justification has specific application to the warrant for unfalsifiable beliefs (e.g., Russell’s teapot), appeals to ignorance, as well as probative standards for dismissing unjustified beliefs, such as Hitchen’s Razor. It is also worth noting that Herrnstein taught us the (game-changing) fact that slides can be posted on the APA phone app—so those in attendance were able to follow along on our electronic devices during the talk.

Our third speaker was Amanda Hiner (Winthrop University) who presented a paper entitled “Meeting the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century Classroom: How Critical Thinking Instruction Equips College Students for Success.” The main focus of the paper was discussing the results of her proposal to transform the core curriculum at Winthrop University, a selective public liberal arts school in South Carolina. Dr. Heiner explained the project of re-orienting the core curriculum to emphasize critical reading and thinking skills. They established a “Critical Reading, Thinking and Writing” course required of students across all disciplines, rooted in principles outlined by Paul, Elder, and Nosich. Dr. Heiner presented qualitative and quantitative evidence of the success of the program, which demonstrated the pedagogic benefits of exposing students to critical reading and thinking skills early in the undergraduate curriculum. Her model was inspiring, and educators and administrators should pay close attention to the successes of the program.

I thank the contributors and those in attendance for a lively discussion!

Thomas Brommage

Managing Director, *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines*

Sam Houston State University

**Check back in the August Newsletter for information about the 2021 Central session!

Pacific Division

Given the cancellation of 2020 Pacific APA, the AILACT group panel (see below) has been rescheduled for the 2021 Pacific APA meeting in Portland. The focus will be on generalizations. If anyone wishes to submit an additional possible paper for the session, or suggestions for future meetings, contact Carolyn Cusick at ccusick@csufresno.edu

The cancelled 2020 Pacific session, that is now intended to be rescheduled for 2021, includes:

- (1) Jacqueline Alvarez (Fresno City College), “The Strengths of Induction in Everyday Life”
- (2) Vadim Keyser (California State University, Fresno), “Uncertainty: Tradeoffs Between Accuracy and Generalization”
- (3) Carolyn Cusick (California State University, Fresno), “When Stereotypes are Good Generalizations”

Essay Prize in Informal Logic/Critical Thinking/Argumentation Theory

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking (AILACT) invites submissions for the 2020 AILACT Essay Prize. This will be the 16th year in which the prize has been offered.

- Value: \$700 U.S.
- The prize-winning paper, and any “honourable mention” paper, will be considered for publication in *Informal Logic* upon the conditions listed below.*
- Papers related to the teaching or theory of informal logic or critical thinking, and papers on argumentation theory, will be considered for the prize.
- There are no restrictions on authorship. Authors need not be members of AILACT.
- Previously unpublished papers, and papers published or accepted for publication between January 1, 2017 and September 1, 2020 are eligible. Maximum length: 6,000 words (exclusive of footnotes and references). Authors may not submit the same paper, or a similar paper, more than once following the first submission.
- Entries will be assessed on the basis of their argument, scholarship, style, and importance to the field. There is a limit of one entry per author.
- The jury members for the 2020 AILACT essay prize, approved by the AILACT Board of Directors, are Jean Goodwin, Distinguished Professor, Department of Communication, North Carolina State University; Hans Hansen, Professor of Philosophy, University of Windsor; David Sherry, Professor of Philosophy, Northern Arizona University. The jury's decision is final.
- To submit a paper, attach a PDF or MS Word or RTF document to an email with AILACT ESSAY ENTRY on the “subject” line and send it to Derek Allen (derekallen@trinity.utoronto.ca) with a covering note giving your name, a mailing address, and the word-length of your paper exclusive of footnotes and references. Please send the paper ready for blind-reviewing (the author not identified on the paper or file containing the paper or in the description of the document's properties that is part of the file, and self-identifying references removed from the text, notes and references). Each page should be numbered.
- ***The deadline for receipt of submissions is September 1, 2020.*** The winner will be announced by December 15, 2020. AILACT will publicize the name of the winner on its web site and at AILACT sessions held at American Philosophical Association divisional meetings in 2021.
- For further information about the essay prize, contact Gilbert Plumer (plumerge@gmail.com). For information about AILACT, visit our web site: <https://ailact.wordpress.com/>.

* The prize-winning paper, and any "honourable mention" paper, will be eligible for consideration for publication in *Informal Logic* if it has not already been published or accepted or committed for publication elsewhere and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, and if the author consents to its consideration for publication in *Informal Logic*. The editors of *Informal Logic* will arrange for blind review of the paper if these conditions are met. The author will be expected to revise the paper in light of the reviewers' suggestions, or to justify not doing so.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR INFORMAL LOGIC & CRITICAL THINKING

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL FOR 2020

AILACT was formed in 1983 to promote research on, and teaching and testing of, informal logic and critical thinking at all levels; to increase the extent and quality of such research, teaching, and testing; and to facilitate discussion among its members. AILACT sponsors sessions at each APA divisional meeting and other meetings; has a Web site, <http://ailact.wordpress.com/> that provides a wide variety of information about AILACT, informal logic, and critical thinking, and posts papers and other members' materials; has an e-mail discussion list for discussion of topics of interest to members; and holds an annual essay prize competition.

I would like to become a member of AILACT (US\$10 or equivalent)

I would like to renew my membership (US\$10 or equivalent)

I am a student and would like to become a member of AILACT (Fees waived)

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Institutional affiliation (if any): _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Payment Options:

Check: Make checks (US or Canadian only) payable to AILACT

Credit Card Payment: Please deduct US \$10 from

Credit Card: Visa MasterCard

Account Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____ CVC code _____

PayPal: log in to your account and send the payment to Don Hatcher's email address (dhatcher@bakeru.edu). PayPal will indicate that your payment is to AILACT.

New members: To complete the process of becoming a member of AILACT, you will need to register on AILACT's password-protected Member Area website: <https://forum.ailact.org>. Click on "Register" and complete the listed fields. (These include "User name" and "Password." Make up a user name and a password.) Click on "Register." When your registration has been validated, you will receive an email saying that this has been done and explaining how to enter a profile for yourself on the site.

Mail to: Donald Hatcher, AILACT Treasurer, Department of Philosophy, Baker University, Baldwin City, KS 66006 USA. Email: <dhatcher@bakeru.edu>