

# ASSOCIATION FOR INFORMAL LOGIC AND CRITICAL THINKING (AILACT) *NEWSLETTER* August 2007

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**From the Editor** On Thursday, June 7, 2007, AILACT held a general meeting in connection with the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation Seventh Conference, *Dissensus and the Search for Common Ground*, at the University of Windsor in Windsor, Ontario. At that meeting, Derek Allen was elected President, Leo Groarke Vice-President, and Donald Hatcher Treasurer, each running unopposed. J. Anthony Blair, Trudy Govier, David Hitchcock, Michael Scriven, Tom Solon, Dale Turner, and yours truly were elected members of the AILACT Board. Maurice Finocchiaro continues as a member of the Board as Immediate Past President.

At that meeting, the membership referred the resolution Bob Ennis drafted concerning an AILACT response to the Spellings Commission call for nationwide outcomes assessment testing for critical thinking to the AILACT Board for further consideration and action. The Spellings Commission is calling for testing college students to determine in a quantitative and easily compared way the extent to which the education at a particular institution of higher learning has increased the ability of its students to think critically. This is one of several areas the Commission recommends for testing. Members of the AILACT Board met on Saturday, June 9 to discuss the resolution. The Board approved submitting the resolution, with one amendment, to all the members of the Board. The text of the revised resolution appears below. Several of the members could not be present at the meeting. As of this writing, all but one of the members of the Board have expressed their views on the resolution, and that person is away for the summer. Six of the 11 Board members voted for the resolution as amended at the June 11 meeting. One voted against, two voted for the resolution as originally worded by Bob Ennis, and one abstained. The suggested resolution having gained support of a majority of Board members, nine of the 11 Board members voted to send the suggested resolution forward to the AILACT membership for adoption as an AILACT resolution. Derek Allen has sent the membership an e-mail on this matter.

Let me remind you that it is not too late to submit papers for the 2007 AILACT Essay Prize. All the relevant information appears below. Finally, as with all our Newsletters, we end with our membership form. If you are already a member of AILACT, perhaps you know of someone who would be interested in joining. If you have not yet paid your dues for 2007, the form should be a convenient reminder.

Again, Should any of you have notices or other information you would like included in future issues, please e-mail me at [jfreeman@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:jfreeman@hunter.cuny.edu). Issues should be published close to April 1, August 1, and December 1 each year.

**James B. Freeman**

### **From the New President**

At the General Meeting of AILACT held on June 7<sup>th</sup> at the 2007 Conference of the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation (University of Windsor), warm thanks were expressed to Maurice Finocchiaro for his exemplary work as our President over the past two years, and to David Hitchcock for his six years of unflagging service as our webmaster. I would like to reiterate here our appreciation of the contributions Maurice and David have made to AILACT in these capacities.

Much of the June 7<sup>th</sup> meeting was devoted to discussion of Bob Ennis' proposed resolution on the Spellings Commission's call for the testing of critical thinking in higher education institutions in the United States. As James Freeman reported above, the resolution, as amended at the meeting, was later approved by a majority of the Board. It has now gone to the membership for discussion and a subsequent vote. If approved by a majority of the respondents, it will become a resolution of AILACT and will be distributed to selected audiences either in its present form or (as has been suggested by one of our members) in a paraphrased form.

The meeting also noted, but very briefly, some proposals for possible new AILACT initiatives. These included the suggestion to establish an AILACT accreditation body that would certify critical-thinking programs as AILACT approved. A further suggestion was for AILACT to promote the teaching of informal logic in upper-level undergraduate courses, and at the graduate level, in North American universities. The latter suggestion was motivated in part by the conviction that it would be desirable for more university instructors of informal logic to have a background of advanced study in the subject.

If you have comments on these suggestions, or if you have suggestions for other projects AILACT might undertake, please let me know.

I look forward to working with you over the next two years.

Derek Allen  
derekallen@trinity.utoronto.ca

### **Test of Suggested AILACT Resolution**

#### **Whereas:**

- 1) The Spellings Commission recommends testing for critical-thinking in higher education institutions in order to see the "value added" so that the public can tell whether it is getting its money's worth, and so that parents, students, and policy-makers can numerically compare institutions; using the transparent results of this testing, which are to be collected and made available by the United States Education Department;
- 2) Commission-inspired transparent critical thinking testing can be expected to produce:
  - a) attention to critical thinking in individual courses and in the total curriculum;
  - b) a check on whether critical thinking in the everyday sense (the epistemic sense) is being taught;

- c) a check on the effectiveness of critical thinking instruction; and
  - d) helpful information for prospective students and parents about an institution's effectiveness in promoting critical thinking;
- 3) Although the Commission did not explicitly recommend a single nationwide required critical thinking test, its insistence on numerical comparability of institutions exerts strong pressure in that direction;
  - 4) A single nationwide required critical thinking test would have overwhelming political and economic problems; and
  - 5) There are various other significant problems and dangers in the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

**Therefore, be it resolved that:**

- 1) The Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking (AILACT) recommends cooperation with the Commission's recommendations for the most part, but also recommends strong opposition to having one nationwide standardized critical-thinking test, although it realizes that a variety of assessment procedures will result in less comparability than is desired by the Commission;
- 2) AILACT recommends more transparency than the Commission requests, in the form of open availability of a) the critical-thinking conception employed, b) outdated or comparable forms of the test used, and c) the argument for the claimed extent of situational validity of the test; and
- 3) AILACT recommends that its members and other endorsers of critical thinking be vigilant in monitoring the extent to which various problems and dangers occur in testing for the "value added" by higher education institutions to students' critical thinking, and take appropriate action when they do occur; and
- 4) The above recommendation for cooperation holds only to the extent that the problems and dangers are well handled.

**Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation Seventh Conference Web Link**

By going to <http://www.uwindsor.ca/ossa>, members may find links not only to the conference program but to abstracts of the papers presented.

**Upcoming Meetings 2007-2008**

**Group Session at the Eastern Division American Philosophical Association Meetings, December 27-30, 2007, Baltimore, MD**

Session: Author Meets Critics: *Hot Thought* by Paul Thagard

Date, Time, Hotel, and Meeting Room to be announced.

Chair: Daniel N. Boone

Critic: Carole J. Lee

Critic: Christopher Viger

Author-Respondent: Paul Thagard

**Call for Papers for AILACT Group Session at the APA Pacific Division, American Philosophical Association, Spring, 2008** (Location and dates TBA).

We welcome papers on any topic in informal logic, critical thinking, or argumentation, including papers on teaching, research, or applications. Papers should be no longer than 12 pages or a 30-minute reading time.

We also seek commentators and/or possible panelists around a central topic. Deadline for submissions is September 19, and notification is by October 17, 2007. Commentators or panelists should indicate their interest by September 19. Send submissions as attachments in MS Word or a pdf file to [wteays@msmc.la.edu](mailto:wteays@msmc.la.edu). Or mail to: Wanda Teays, Chair, Philosophy Department, Mount St. Mary's College, 12001 Chalon Rd., Los Angeles, CA, 90049. Any questions, call: 310/954-4290.

**Preliminary Call for Papers and Ideas for AILACT Sessions at APA Central Division Group Meetings, April 2008**

Please begin thinking about any topics for papers, debates, and panel discussions you would like to see on the 2008 program, concerning informal logic, critical thinking, and argumentation, their natures, their instruction, and their relations with other disciplines. Ideas regarding joint sessions with other groups meeting at the APA are always welcome too. The formal Call for Papers and Suggestions will be posted in the next AILACT Newsletter, along with submission deadlines and instructions. But it's never too early to entertain some possibilities. Feel free to share them with the new Central Division Program Chair, Kevin Possin, Winona State University: [kpossin@winona.edu](mailto:kpossin@winona.edu).

## **2007 AILACT Essay Prize Announcement**

### **AILACT**

### **Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking AILACT ESSAY PRIZE 2007**

The **Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking** invites applications for its fourth annual **AILACT Essay Prize**.

The value of the AILACT Essay Prize is US\$500. The prize may, in extraordinary circumstances, be divided among entries judged to be of about equal merit. Additionally, AILACT intends to publish this winning essay in one of a continuing series of volumes containing the winning essays as well as some of the best essays from various years.

Essays related to the teaching or theory of informal logic or critical thinking will be considered for the prize. An essay may be unpublished, forthcoming or previously published. There are no restrictions on authorship. Published papers must have appeared on or after 1 January 2007. Essays should be in the neighborhood of 3500-6000 words.

The essays will be assessed on the basis of, in no particular order: their originality, their scholarship, if applicable (papers that ignore the relevant literature will tend to go to the bottom of the pile), their argument (needless to say?), their style (lucid, delightful-to-read papers will tend to rise to the top), and their importance to the field (measured by how high they register on the "Everyone should read this paper-and soon!" scale).

The jury members for the 2007 AILACT Essay Prize, approved by the AILACT Board of Directors, are Michael Scriven (chair), David Hitchcock, and Harvey Siegel. The verdict of the jury is final.

To submit a paper, attach an electronic file to an e-mail with AILACT ESSAY ENTRY on the "Subject" line, and send it to the chair at [edgepress@aol.com](mailto:edgepress@aol.com) . Please send the paper ready for blind-reviewing (the author not identified on the paper or file containing the paper, and self-identifying references removed from the text, notes and References). Be sure to include your name and a mailing address in your covering note.

The deadline for receipt of papers to be considered for the 2007 AILACT Essay Prize is 1 September 2007. The winner will be announced by 1 December 2007. AILACT will publicize the name of the winner.

For information about AILACT, see our Web site: <http://ailact.mcmaster.ca/>

## Membership Form The Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking

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The Association (AILACT) was formed in 1983 to promote research, 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.mcmaster.ca/> 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 offers an annual Essay Prize for the recent essay judged best in the field.

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### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL FOR 2007

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

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

(Make checks payable to AILACT)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional affiliation (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill in the following:

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Email: (Very important! Much of our business will July 24, 2007 be conducted primarily electronically -- but you will not be disenfranchised if you do not have an e-mail address.)**

**What would you like to see AILACT do, or do better?**

Mail with check to: Donald Hatcher, AILACT Treasurer, Center for Critical Thinking, Baker University, Baldwin City, KS 66006 USA Email: <dhatcher@bakeru.edu>

\*a check in the currency of the member, if the member so chooses