

Special Edition

A Newsletter for Specialist Council Executive Members

Volume 5:2 April 2016

Conventions and Councils: Working Together to Support Professional Learning for Teachers, By Teachers

Gaylene Schreiber

Dan Grassick

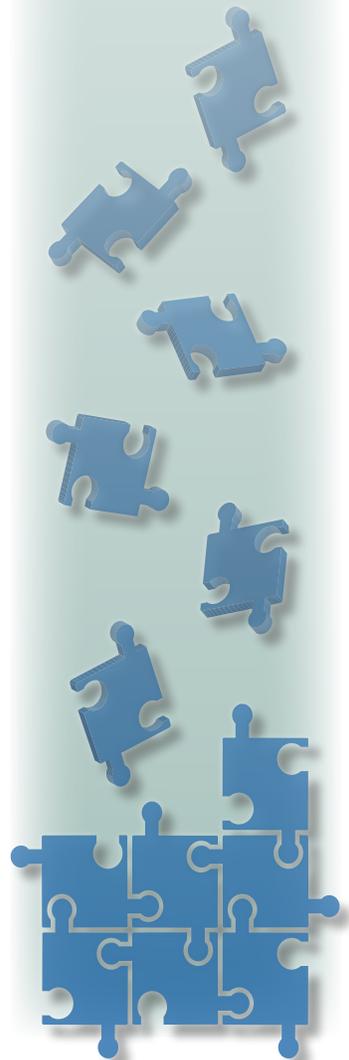
Executive Staff Officers, Professional Development

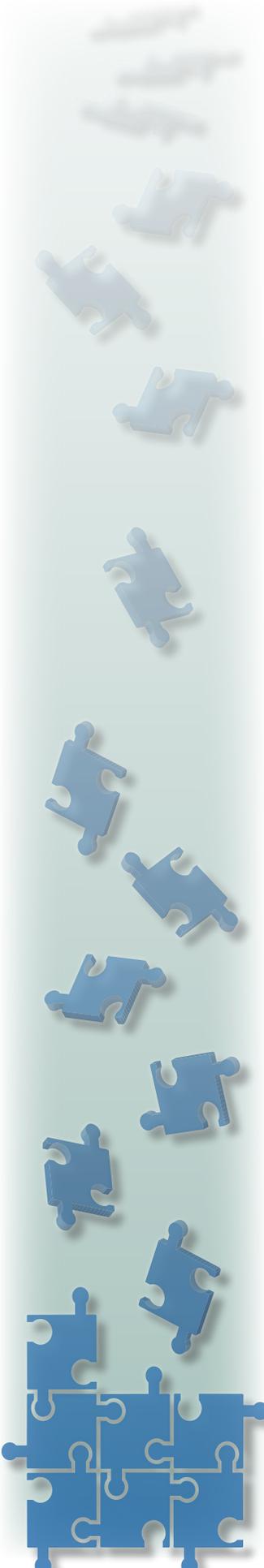


Dan Grassick joined the Association staff on 2016 01 07. Dan and Gaylene serve as the staff officers responsible for administering programs of support for convention associations and specialist councils, respectively.

Specialist councils and convention associations are two groups of dedicated teachers who strive tirelessly to develop rigorous and motivating professional learning events on behalf of the profession. For the past several years, these two groups have met annually at the ATA Summer Conference to dialogue on common issues and develop ways of collaborating to enhance their common work. These conversations have yielded some exciting connections. Many councils sent speakers to conventions across the province to provide sessions in 2015, and the Calgary City Teachers' Convention Association arranged for Bill "Dr Skateboard" Robertson to present at the fall Science Council Conference in Banff at no charge to that specialist council or its members. The 2016 convention season saw the second year of a successful partnership between le Conseil français and the North Central Teachers' Convention Association where a specialist council conference was hosted within the convention. Conventions and councils continue to actively share lists of suggested speakers and promote each other's events on social media.

Specialist Council FAQ.....	3
Bargaining for Effective PD.....	5
Upcoming Events	6
Social Studies in Alberta— A Strategic Research Project.....	8
SCC Connect Preservice Teachers with Specialist Councils	10





Looking back on notes from recent meetings when convention and specialist council presidents swapped ideas on promising new approaches, we thought you may wish to consider some of their ideas in your upcoming conference and professional development event plans. Specialist council executives should ask, “How can we share our successes and benefit from convention associations’ strengths in a model of collaborative PD planning?”

- Consider cost-sharing opportunities. Would a usually-expensive speaker agree to speak at two separate events for less money but a greater total audience? Could separate specialist councils or a council and convention team up?
- A specialist council could organize a roundtable, world café, edcamp or symposium within a convention. This could be especially effective for providing support for niche audiences such as administrators and music specialists or for such cross-curricular needs as supporting English language and Indigenous learners.
- A convention association could provide time and space for a specialist council’s regional group to get together to discuss emergent matters or carry on discussions from previous specialist council conferences or events.
- A specialist council could host a social event for its members at a convention. (This would require some communication coordination and a venue.)
- A convention association could host a make-and-take or

makerspace event facilitated by various specialist councils who help curate, staff and program the space.

- Convention associations could provide information and links to specialist council websites and conferences on their websites to encourage new members.
- Specialist councils could provide speaker proposal information for various conventions to their members through their regular communiqués, publications and on their websites.
- Specialist council regional executive members could promote convention sessions of interest to their membership through Facebook and Twitter.

We encourage you to build on each other’s successes by adding to our joint database on recommended speakers and exhibitors. For further information on these databases, please see page 15 of the *Handbook for ATA Specialist Councils 2015*.

The possibilities are endless. Convention associations and specialist councils are powerful professional development planning groups with great reach and even greater potential. Connect with teachers’ convention associations to enhance teacher professional development for teachers, by teachers. Our classrooms and educational landscape have shifted drastically. Given what we know now about adult learning, pedagogy and curriculum, how have you shifted your professional development planning to meet the needs of 21st-century teachers and learners? This year, plan to prototype one new idea or approach and see how it goes.

Specialist Council FAQ

Gaylene Schreiber

Executive Staff Officer,
Professional Development

Question:

We are selecting a venue for our future event. What kinds of things should we consider?

There are some significant considerations to contemplate prior to deciding on a venue.

Venue costs are determined by a set contract. Staff advisors are the only people who can sign a venue contract on behalf of the council, and they must obtain the approval of the ATA Table Officers Committee should the aggregate liability of a venue contract exceed \$30,000. (The Association is liable for the incurred debt of its subgroups.)

- Carefully plan a budget and tentative schedule for the event planner to help you choose the best location and design a program within your means. Decide on the number of keynotes and breakout sessions, and when to schedule them. Will you have displays and exhibitors? What is the most cost-effective way of scheduling your room space to avoid unnecessary meeting room costs? Can you use less room space just by switching a keynote time, allowing the main room to be used for meals?
- A venue contract should be considered carefully for fiscal liability: councils should seek maximum flexibility and minimum liability. Be prepared to negotiate firmly for reduced meeting room rates, low mandatory minimum food and beverage costs, and bedroom attrition dates that reflect the expected attendance of the event.
- Try to avoid committing to costs over which you have no control. For example, it may be better to pay for a few meeting rooms rather than committing to filling and paying for unused bedrooms in exchange for a few complimentary meeting rooms. Nothing is free, so choose where to push for extra services and provisions.
- Attempt to remove clauses that restrict your abilities to bring in an outside service provider, such as an AV company. This can save you money and frustration later.
- Document attrition dates (both bedroom and cancellation dates) on a planning calendar to ensure that council members stay aware of cancellation dates and the associated penalties. Ensure that they are reasonable: many conference registrations come in the three weeks prior to the conference. Ensure that the attrition dates reflect what you know about your delegates: teachers can't always plan months in advance.
- Ask questions about the what ifs and ensure that the promises are written into the contract: only that which is on paper is enforceable. For example, are wireless Internet access or projection screens included in the meeting room cost? Insist that those aspects are in the contract.
- Remember, you get what you pay for, but you don't want to end up



paying for services you don't get, don't need or can't use. You are encouraged to use the services of Jeffery Loke, business and facilities manager of the ATA, or HelmsBriscoe. These skilled event planners can lobby on your behalf to ensure that you understand the contract and that it meets your needs.

- Finally, ensure that your venue is within your budget. Your council executive committee must approve your budget and location. Remember, a conference is a council event; your executive committee should be kept informed of all significant matters, including the venue contract parameters.

Specialist council conference directors would be well advised to get a copy of the Handbook for Conference Directors of Specialist Councils 2015, which is chock full of handy tips and tidbits. From a timeline of planning considerations to sample contract templates, to consent for photography at events forms, this resource can be your conference planning best friend. Contact your staff advisor or me at gaylene.schreiber@ata.ab.ca for a paper or electronic copy. Better yet, attend the "Conference Director's Seminar" at ATA Summer Conference 2016 from August 14 to 18 and learn more about conference planning. See your council president for more information.



Bargaining for Effective PD

Sandra Johnston

Coordinator,
Teacher Welfare



The goals for professional development (PD) in the upcoming round of bargaining are twofold and roughly stated as time and control. Teachers want the time, free of employer direction, to work on PD of their choosing.

It is long past time that the profession took back professional development. The language in the Modified Framework Agreement regarding time for teacher-directed PD and collaboration was largely ignored by school jurisdictions and has resulted in a number of grievances. Moreover the benefits of teaching and learning from excessive jurisdiction-directed inservices have not been proven. Teachers mandated to attend 20 or more full-day inservices attend enough hours to complete two university courses each year.

The issues of time for PD can best be solved through a calendar that enumerates jurisdiction and school inservice days, and days for

teacher-directed PD and collaboration. Issues around calendar and the number and use of noninstructional days will be a main focus for these negotiations.

Specifically on PD, examples of traditional collective bargaining follow:

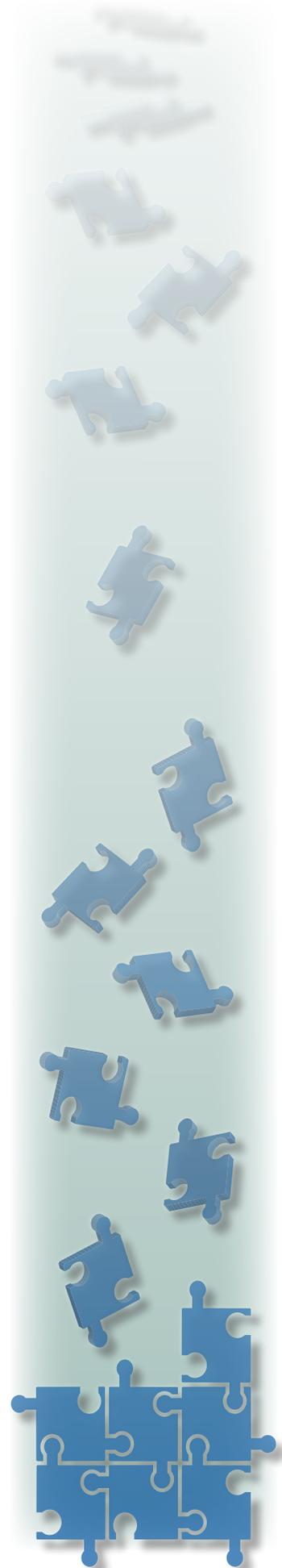
- Individual PD accounts for teachers with separate funding for school and jurisdiction PD
- Local control over a PD fund
- Sabbaticals
- Tuition reimbursement

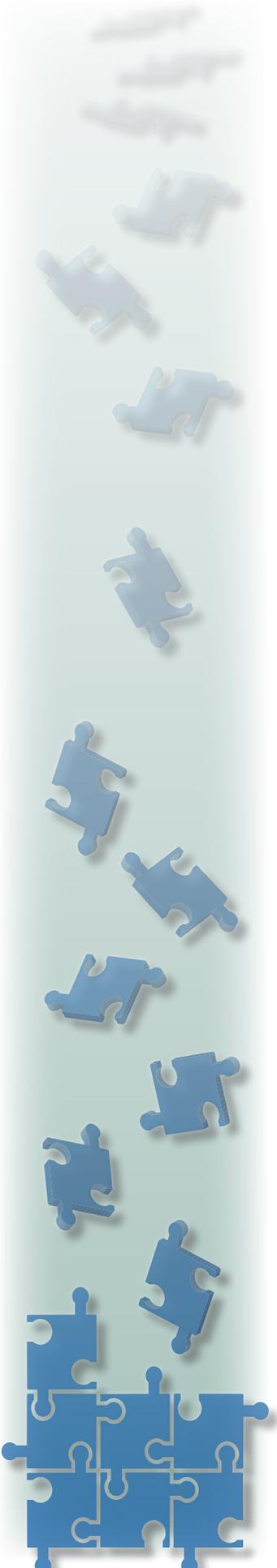
Bargaining units are guided by Association policy 5.A.15:

Collective agreements negotiated by the Association should include clauses as follows:

70. funding for teacher-directed professional development within the school day; and will also consider bargaining clauses as follows:

- Statements about teachers' right to direct their own PD
- Provisions for individual teacher-directed PD and collaboration time
- Statement of Alberta Education requirements in that teachers will fulfill statutory requirements using a Teachers' Professional Growth Plan template created by the Association
- Language that forbids mandated goals from jurisdiction or school
- Privileging of Association specialist council conferences through mandatory (shall grant) leaves
- Entitlement to attend at no cost of substitute the Association's Beginning Teachers' Conference for each new teacher to the profession or province



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- Entitlement to attend the Association's Leadership Essentials for Administrators conference at no cost of sub for each administrator once in their first two years of designation

EPCs will also consider appropriate compensation for teachers who must travel to a central location for jurisdiction-directed inservice days or teacher-directed PD or collaboration where there is a requirement to travel. Those teachers should also have varied

start and end times to allow for travel during the normal workday.

The challenge within bargaining units will be that a number of teachers who now equate PD with jurisdiction-directed inservicing have negative attitudes toward professional development which will make formulating mandate for the negotiation of PD clauses difficult. Teacher leaders will need to clarify the difference between inservicing and true professional development.

Upcoming Events

Please note the following important upcoming activities and deadlines:

2016 04 29–30 Spring Regional Professional Development

Area Conference (PDAC), Edmonton. Specialist council presidents or designates are invited to attend. Extra delegates may attend at the council's expense. For registration information, contact Mardi Veinot at 1-800-232-7208.

2016 04 30 \$2,000 Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Project Grant deadline.

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) offers grants of up to \$2,000 to help fund innovative projects designed to build inclusive learning communities. An inclusive learning community is based on the principles of respect for diversity, equity and human rights. Go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click on For Members>Grants, Awards and Scholarships for application forms. You may wish to advertise these grants to your members in an upcoming publication.

2016 05 01 \$700 Continuing Education Bursaries deadline.

Each year, the ATA Educational Trust awards a number of bursaries to certificated Alberta teachers wishing to take courses related to their teaching responsibilities. To qualify for a bursary, applicants must plan to take a course in the upcoming summer or school year. Go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click on For Members>Grants, Awards and Scholarships for application forms. You may wish to advertise these grants to your members in an upcoming publication.

2016 05 01 Educational Trust Project Grants deadline. Each year, the ATA Educational Trust awards a number of project grants of up to \$3,000 to help individuals and groups (including specialist

councils) conduct research or develop practical classroom materials for Alberta teachers. The materials and resources produced through these grants are placed in the ATA library where they can be borrowed by interested teachers. Go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click on For Members>Grants, Awards and Scholarships for more information.

2016 05 21–23 Annual Representative Assembly (ARA) (Edmonton). Each council is invited to send an observer to ARA. Please consult the memo sent to councils dated 2016 02 03 for more information.

2016 08 15–19 Summer Conference, Banff Centre. Specialist council presidents and conference directors are invited to attend. See ATA website for more information. Please contact Marianne Moffat at marianne.moffat@ata.ab.ca for questions regarding registration.

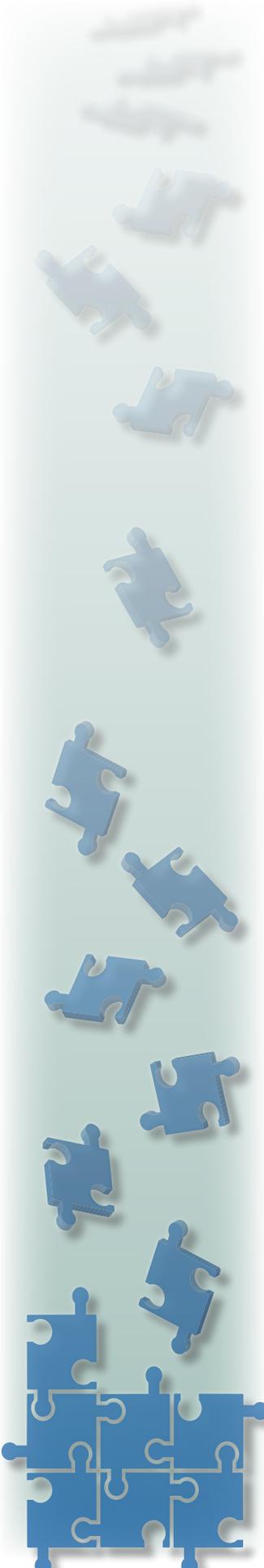
2016 08 31 Specialist Council Annual Reports due to the ATA, including audited financial statement for July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016. Please submit to Cheryl O'Brien at cheryl.obrien@ata.ab.ca.

2016 09 29–10 01 and 10 13–15 Beginning Teachers' Conferences. Each year, the ATA hosts conferences in Edmonton and Calgary. Specialist councils are encouraged to offer sessions, host a council booth and donate prizes for draws. This event is an excellent opportunity to sign up new members. For more information, contact Cheryl O'Brien at cheryl.obrien@ata.ab.ca.

2016 09 30 and 11 13 Strategic Planning Grant deadline. Each year, the Association offers its subgroups—locals, specialist councils and convention associations—matching grants of up to \$2,000 each to offset the costs of organizing strategic planning retreats to discuss their plans and set long-term goals. Applications will be considered in two rounds. The first deadline is September 30, following which five applications will be chosen to receive grants. The second deadline is November 13, following which five additional applications will be selected. Go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click on For Members>Grants, Awards and Scholarships for more information.

2016 09 30 \$500 Educational Trust Conference Grants deadline. Each year, the ATA Educational Trust awards a number of grants to help defray the costs associated with attending an ATA specialist council conference. Eligible expenses include registration, accommodation, fuel, food and (if applicable) the cost of a substitute teacher. Go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click on For Members>Grants, Awards, Scholarships for application forms. You may wish to advertise these grants to your members in an upcoming publication.





Social Studies in Alberta— A Strategic Research Project

The Social Studies Council (SSC) continues to take a leadership role in advancing the views of its members on the future of social studies in the province. To this end, the executive met on March 21, 2015, to re-examine the council's long-term priorities and current service to members. The meeting began with a brief review of the Alberta Teachers' Association's strategic plan and the critical influences shaping the current context for social studies teachers in Alberta. Included in this discussion was a review of the Association's 2012 roadmap for developing the education system, *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta*. With the assistance of Association staff, the executive then produced a four-point strategic plan that will inform the council's work in the coming years.

In the short term and to leverage support for the strategic plan, the Council initiated a major research study, in collaboration with the provincial Association, aimed at determining the state of social studies programming and instruction in Alberta schools. A research team led by Larry Booi and Hans Smits developed and administered a survey of social studies teachers across the province. The response to the

survey was very promising (496 respondents) that represented a broad cross-section of teachers.

In developing the final report, the Council cosponsored an invitational symposium to help provide insights to the research team on Friday, November 6, at the Black Knight Inn, in Red Deer, from 9 AM to 3 PM. The day began with a brief review of the aspirations of various iterations of the Social Studies Programs of Study since 1971 and its groundbreaking commitment to citizenship development through an inquiry and values-based curriculum. An invited panel of experts offered their insights and initial impressions of the study's findings. Panel members included Robert Twerdoclib, (PEC liaison to the council), David Scott (University of Calgary) and Carla Peck (University of Alberta).

This symposium was not only designed to inform the final report including key implications and recommendations but also to offer council members to consider a broader strategic view of the future of social studies in the province. To help this work along, a public lecture by Joel Westheimer "What Kind of Citizen in the Next Alberta?" was cosponsored by the Red Deer public and Catholic ATA locals that featured the launch of his latest book, *What Kind of Citizen? Educating Our Children for the Common Good*.

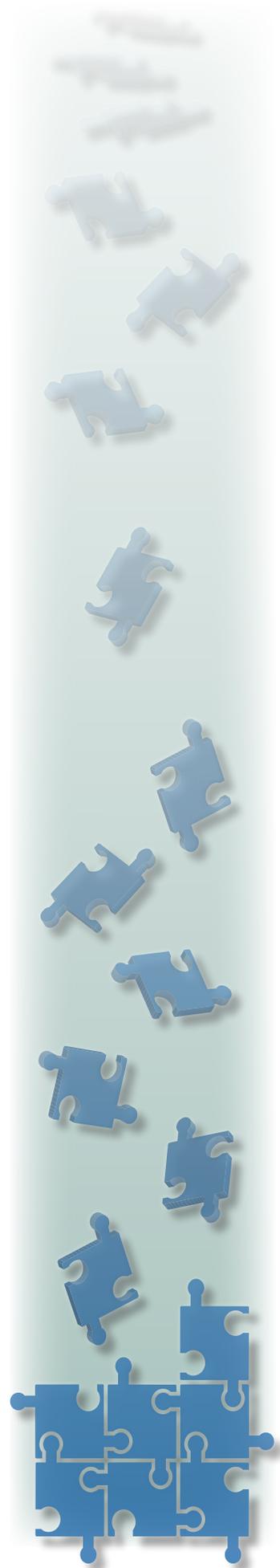
Following further analysis of the survey and focus groups, the research team, composed of Hans Smits, Larry Booi, Association staff and with assistance from Joel Westheimer from the University of Ottawa, will complete the final report by March 30. An accompanying research review and response from

David Scott (University of Calgary) and Carla Peck (University of Alberta) will also inform the work of the council.

The SSC plans on consulting with the membership and the provincial Association to attend to the long-term implications of the study by undertaking an action plan that will consider Association efforts to advocate for a responsive approach to curriculum renewal in Alberta.

The council sees collaborative research partnerships such as the one I have outlined as key to achieving the goals of our strategic plan.

Adapted from Roland Zimmermann's President's Message in the Focus Newsletter, a publication of the Social Studies Council of the ATA, Volume 43, Number 3.



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SCC Connect Preservice Teachers with Specialist Councils

Don McLaughlin
GEOEC President

Specialist Council Carousels (SCC), which were organized to encourage preservice teachers to join the specialist council of their choice, were held in Calgary, at Mount Royal University, and in Edmonton, at the University of Alberta, on January 16 and 23. The carousels attracted 285 delegates and generated over 1,400 new memberships in specialist councils. Seventeen specialist councils set up displays at each of the carousels to share news about the important work of their council and to encourage preservice teachers to join and learn about their area of expertise.

The idea for a Specialist Council Carousel began in June 2015 with the Association's initiative to offer preservice teachers a free membership in the specialist council of their choice. Potential host universities were contacted, site visits were made, a framework for the carousel was established and a critical path was identified for organizers.

Gaylene Schreiber, an executive staff officer in Professional Development, coordinated communication between universities, specialist councils and key staff at Barnett House. The Professional Development program area supported the initiative by providing three speakers for each carousel on assessment, classroom management and differentiated instruction. Online registration for delegates was established and communication of the registration link sent to student locals who then passed on the details to their membership. Each student local host team took responsibility for booking rooms, providing signage, and organizing snacks and refreshments.

The 2016/17 school year will provide another opportunity for specialist councils to host another preservice teacher carousel. Student locals at Concordia University, in Edmonton, and Mount Royal University, in Calgary, have expressed interest in hosting the event. Running the Specialist Council Carousel is truly a turnkey operation with a firm framework in place and solid support from staff at Barnett House. We're looking for councils that might be interested in helping out with the carousels in January 2017, with the intention of taking over the leadership role for this initiative in 2018. If your council would like further information about this unique opportunity, please contact either Gaylene Schreiber at Barnett House (gaylene.schreiber@ata.ab.ca) or Don McLaughlin at GEOEC (president@geoec.org).

