

SIETAR-USA

Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research

SIETAR USA (SUSA) NEWS

Electronic Newsletter

Volume 4 Issue 1

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1. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we start the New Year, it is clear that there are many challenges in the world that call for intercultural skills. However, the solution that first comes to the minds of people in positions of power, influence or even managerial responsibility is rarely intercultural communication skills.

A recent survey of Foreign Service employees indicated that generic cross-cultural skills were not considered as important as leadership skills, influence skills, or teambuilding skills for effectiveness as the head of a diplomatic mission. However, the need for cross-cultural skill is critical to leadership, influence and teambuilding in an international arena and, quite honestly, even at home. Bill Weech, a member of the team that conducted the research, notes that employees were asked to think about what was needed to function well in an Ambassadorial role. It was specific and perhaps a more general question would have elicited a different response. Nonetheless, it is rare that the inherent connection between intercultural and other skills is recognized.

What does this say to those of us in the field? I think the implication is that we need to start talking in language that others can understand and talking about the field of intercultural communication in the "client's" terms. So, let's start thinking of how we would explain our field to the foreign service officer but also to bank managers, teachers, medics, and anyone else that with whom you come in contact.

Other people in the field have mentioned this from time to time, suggesting that we are so busy talking to each other, in jargon, that we are making it difficult for anyone else to comprehend or appreciate the approach we are advocating — or, certainly, to see the value of an intercultural perspective and preparation to take that approach.

So my New Year's resolution is to find ways to explain our field to those who do not see its value.....yet.

Margaret Pusch
President, SIETAR USA

2. SIETAR USA Conference Report

The evaluations and final financial data for the conference in Portland, Oregon are still being processed but by all accounts, this conference was quite a success. The most frequent complaint was that there were too many good sessions to choose from and that made choice a difficult thing. We consider that a compliment and hope to continue that tradition.

From the opening reception where everyone greeted each other like old friends and continued to talk until we sent the musicians home to the closing reception at the Classical Chinese Garden (which many told us was "magical"), it was a busy four days, packed with activity, discussion, and networking that was rich indeed.

Three plenary sessions were significant markers during the conference. Stella Ting-Toomey gave an opening plenary that connected theory to practice and demonstrated her Chinese heritage. You will note in a future SUSA Slate how the closing plenary with Thomas Pettigrew reviewed years of research on contact theory and how contact between culturally different people impacts prejudice. The experiment with theater during the third plenary moved people to look at intercultural relations from a far less academic, conceptual perspective. Hopefully, we will always see an intercultural message in much of theater — and film.

Those who presented in the sessions and provided pre-conference workshops made this a memorable time and we can only express our great appreciation for their contributions. Without them, there really would have been no conference. It is the sharing of our learning, our knowledge, and our skill that makes SIETAR a strong professional organization

We are equally grateful to those who worked so hard on the local arrangements committee. They were tireless in their efforts to make this a memorable conference and they succeeded. In addition, we raised — thanks to many people who worked with Judee Blohm — approximately \$2,300 for scholarships to next year's conference in Austin, TX. We appreciate all those who bid on items and especially those who donated them.

The Austin committee has had one retreat and is meeting again within the week. It looks like another winner is coming up so next year, we'll see you in Austin, TX.

3. SUSA Society News

During the SIETAR USA Conference, two important meetings took place....meetings of the Global Management Team and the SUSA Board. Minutes of those meetings are available on request but are not included in this newsletter because of their length.

We are very pleased that the SUSA conference provided an environment in which meetings to discuss the creation SIETAR Latin America and SIETAR Canada could occur. We look forward to further reports on the development of these new societies.

Within a month, the Nominations and Elections Committee of SUSA will issue a call for nominations for officers and board members for SUSA. Begin thinking about who might serve the society in these capacities and consider nominating yourself (it really is all right to do so).

Other decisions that were taken during SUSA board meetings are reflected in the reports below.

4. SUSA SIG News

SUSA has some Special Interest Groups (SIGs) that met at the conference. Here is the report from one of these meetings.

SIETAR Sexual Orientation Network and Associates (SISON(A)) Special Interest Group Update

1) SISON(A) Luncheon: We had our traditional Special Interest Group lunch on Thursday, the first full day of the conference. Meeting everyone early in the conference helped us connect better throughout the conference - something we should repeat next time. Altogether, we had 13 new members (!) join the group during the conference. These include GLBT and straight members.

2) GLBT-Related Conference Presentations: As always, we tried to have at least one GLBT-related presentation on the program - this year there were three! Let's keep up the good work and submit proposals again next year. While SIETAR is definitely a place that is very open to hearing our voices, it is up to us, to continue to educate people about the GLBT culture - in the widest sense! Anyway, we had...

- *"The Bathroom and Beyond - Transgender College Students' Perspectives on Gender Identity and Body within US culture "* (Rob Pusch) focused on his research of transgendered college students.
- *"My Way or the Highway - The Ethics of Exporting Cultural Values"* (Stacy McCaskill, Roger Shaff, Rita Wuebbeler) focused on three different scenarios (not all GLBT related) discussing the 'exportability' of cultural values.
- *"Using Silence to Make a Point"* (John Knight) - using a teaching technique based on the "National Day of Silence", a day to show support for GLBT students on college campuses.

3) SIETAR USA GLBT Scholarship: SISON(A) group members came up with the idea of offering a scholarship to someone who is going to give a GLBT-related presentation at next year's conference. We presented this idea to the SIETAR board during the conference, and the board approved to designate one of their scholarships as a "GLBT scholarship." The board also discussed supporting other groups in this way. Details will be announced later.

If you would like to be added to the **SISON(A)** list, please e-mail **Rita Wuebbeler** at **rwuebbeler@aol.com**

5. Chapter News

SIETAR USA CONFERENCE: LOCAL CHAPTERS ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION REVIEW

Among the events at the SIETAR USA conference was a Local Chapters Roundtable Discussion led by Andrea Brooks, Local Chapters Liaison, SIETAR USA, with assistance from Jan O'Brien, President of SIETAR Houston. The following article is excerpted from Andrea's summary of the meeting. The purpose of the session was to strengthen communication and build relationships among the local SIETAR chapters, to provide support to newly established chapters, and to hold an open discussion about defining the relationship between the local SIETAR chapters and SIETAR USA.

Participants included Officers and Board Members from SIETAR DC, SIETAR New York, SIETAR Houston, SIETAR Austin, SIETAR Rocky Mountain and SIETAR BC, as well as others who were interested in starting up new chapters. One representative from each chapter shared a success and a challenge experienced by each chapter this year. There was also an open discussion about the relationship between the Local SIETAR Chapters in the USA and SIETAR USA. All participants were asked to express their thoughts on local chapters' affiliation with SIETAR USA.

Background Information

For many years prior to 2000 when SIETAR International existed, all chapters local and national affiliated directly with SIETAR International by means of an affiliate contract and were required to pay annual dues of about \$125.00. The three local SIETAR Chapters in the USA (and others that existed prior to 1999) - DC, New York and Houston - were able to affiliate with SIETAR International directly.

Some chapters paid the SIETAR International affiliates dues regularly and others did not as perhaps from experience, the benefits of doing so were not apparent. Enforcing the payment of the dues was difficult. With the newly created SIETAR Global Network structure, Local Chapters are asked to affiliate with the national chapter of their country (see below). Whether a formal affiliation agreement with SIETAR USA was necessary and in what form this affiliation should exist was the subject of our discussion.

The SIETAR Global Network

In 2000, a new SIETAR Global Structure was created. Two groups were formed as SIETAR's new organizational structure - the Management Team and the Information Sharing Group/Information Processing Assembly.

The Management Team (MT) is composed of the President of every established SIETAR group willing to take financial &/or task responsibility for the management of the network (at present: Europa, Japan, USA, Young SIETAR); a representative of all the SIETAR Groups not directly connected to one of these latter four groups (at the moment: SIETAR Indonesia, Vancouver and Calgary); a representative of the Members-at-Large (individual members with no existing direct connection with any existing SIETAR group); a Treasurer and an Assistant Treasurer; a Website Coordinator; and a Publications Representative. The Information Sharing Group/Information Processing Assembly (ISG/IPA) includes members from every SIETAR group in the world. It includes all local, national, regional or international SIETAR groups, as well as Special Interest Groups (SIGs). There are plans for the members of the ISG/IPA to have an e-group for communication according to their specific interests and concerns and to meet at SIETAR conferences whenever possible. The ISG/IPA is referred to as "The Assembly".

The benefits of Local Chapter's affiliation with SUSA were discussed and include: establishing guidelines for new chapters; local chapters and SUSA can remain independent entities, and remain legally and financially autonomous; local chapters promote membership to SUSA; SUSA promotes membership to local chapters; local chapters' websites provide links to SUSA; SUSA website provides links to local chapters' websites; possible discounts for workshops, conferences, etc.; sharing of mailing lists; sharing of newsletter space; and shared mandate and shared mission. Additional benefits include: possible use of 501(c)3 status for those chapters that do not already have it; local chapters use of SUSA Special Interest Groups; local chapters liaison on the SUSA Board; use of "SIETAR" name; recognition; benefits of being part of the Global SIETAR Network*; benefits of being on the ISG/IPA, which includes members from every SIETAR group in the world.*

*(These two benefits were not listed during actual Roundtable discussion - they were added later).

Concerns about affiliation were discussed as well and included: lack of transparency of the SIETAR USA Board; communication with the SIETAR USA Board and the Global Network and how it can be improved; how to set dues fairly and consistently; and how discounts could be offered for conferences.

It was agreed by all present that an affiliate agreement should be drafted, distributed and discussed. The process of drafting an agreement, gathering responses and making modifications may take several months, but it will get the local chapters on the road to being affiliated with SIETAR USA on paper. On-going input and discussion is always welcome from all chapters. Those present agreed to ensure that the PR from their chapters circulates to the other chapters so that we can continue to grow and to learn from each other.

Andrea Brooks is an intercultural consultant based in Houston, Texas. A long-time member of SIETAR, she has served as President of the SIETAR Houston Chapter and is currently the Program Chair and Web Site Manager for SIETAR Houston as well as the Local Chapters Liaison for SUSA.

For further information on **Local SIETAR Chapters in the USA**, please contact **Andrea Brooks** at andreabrooks@earthlink.net

Houston Chapter

The January meeting on Saturday January 11th, addresses:

“It's 2003 - Do you know where your profession is? Who is saying what about culture? What are thinkers outside the intercultural field saying about culture and what is our response as interculturalists?”

Dr. Carrie Cameron of Culture and Communication will present the ideas of two of the more influential schools of thought on culture and societal development - Jared Diamond (Guns, Germs and Steel), and Lawrence Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (Culture Matters) - then open the discussion to the participants. Questions to be raised include:

- What do these ideas mean and why are they important to us as practitioners of intercultural communication?
- How can we more adequately respond to the questions of those we teach and train?
- What are the implications for our field as a whole, and how can we grow and develop in response?

6. Reminders

**** We would like to remind you that the **International Journal of Intercultural Relations (IJIR)** is available to SIETAR USA members at a special SIETAR member price. The discounted price is currently \$32.00.

IJIR is the premier journal for the intercultural field. Since we believe in practice based on science, it is important to keep up with research findings. Some highlights from 2002:

- The July issue of IJIR included an article by SIETAR USA member Nan Sussman, regarding testing the cultural identity model of the cultural transition cycle: sojourners return home.
- The April issue contained 7 articles on Jewish-Arab relations such as the one by A. Hareven: Towards the year 2030: Can a civil society shared by Jews and Arabs evolve in Israel?
- The September issue includes articles by two long time SIETAR members. Mitch Hammer with Randall Gage Rogan wrote about Latino and Indochinese interpretive frames in negotiating conflict with law enforcement: a focus group analysis. Mika Oguri and Bill Gudykunst wrote about the influence of self construals and communication styles on sojourners' psychological and sociocultural adjustment.
- The November issue includes an article that introduces the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire and another by Navara and James on sojourner adjustment: does missionary status affect acculturation?

If you don't already subscribe to this journal, you really don't want to miss such solid articles and exciting research.

**** **Watch your email for the SUSA Slate.** This new e-magazine for SIETAR USA is welcoming articles. The issue in preparation contains the presentation by Leslie Flum Uljee from the SUSA conference in Portland, OR, and an article on the United Nations.

7. Contact Information

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