Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

Minutes of the 2019 Triennial General Meeting of the Membership

Held over two lunchtimes during ACLALS 15-19 July, 2019

Wednesday 17 July, 2019

1. After a welcome from the Chair, Chris Prentice, to the general membership, the meeting opened with tributes to past Chairs and longstanding members of ACLALS, Geoff Davis and Michael Wessels
   1. Heart-felt tributes to Geoff Davis were presented by Chris Prentice (Chair, ACLALS 2016–2019), Russell McDougall (SPACLALS), and Laura Moss (CACLALS); tributes were read on behalf of Gareth Griffiths (SPACLALS), Ganesh Devy (Independent scholar and activist), and Christa Stevens (Brill). Spoken tributes were accompanied by powerpoint slides and a slide show of photographs of Geoff, indicating the breadth and depth of his activities, collaborations and friendships over many years across the many branches of ACLALS. Many written tributes had preceded the meeting among members from across the organization who were shocked and saddened by his passing in late 2018.
   2. Cheryl Stobie presented a very moving tribute to immediate past Chair of ACLALS, Michael Wessels (SAACLALS), who also suddenly and tragically passed away in 2018. Cheryl spoke as a colleague and a friend of Michaels, and members of ACLALS from across the organization shared the sense of loss of a respected scholar and a truly genial and generous host of the 2016 ACLALS conference held in Stellenbosch.
2. Chris Prentice summarized the remaining issues for discussion at the meeting:
   1. Branch reports
   2. The name of the organization (on which branches had been invited to send submissions in advance ready for discussion)
   3. Chair and triennial conference succession
3. Following the tributes Branch reports were presented in absentia from India (IACLALS) and West Africa (WAACLALS).

As the lunch hour had passed, it was agreed to suspend the meeting and reconvene the following lunchtime.

Thursday 18 July, 2019

1. The meeting reconvened and reports were presented by Branch Chairs of CACLALS (Canada), EACLALS (Europe), WIACLALS (West Indies), SPACLALS (South Pacific), SAACLALS (South Africa), EAACLALS (East Africa), and SLLACLALS (Sri Lanka).
2. ACLALS Name change: a wide range of views were presented, both on behalf of branch membership ascertained through polls prior to the conference/meeting, and in the AGM itself.

In favour of the name change:

* 1. View that the term ‘Commonwealth’ is increasingly dated or obsolete (CACLALS, EACLALS, WIACLALS)
  2. The name no longer ‘speaks to’ – thus attracts – the younger scholars/members needed to ensure the continuation of the organization
  3. Although only one response was received from Southern African membership, Iri, as SAACLALS Chair suggested that in the context of South Africa’s larger decolonization processes, a new name may be called for.
  4. Observation that ACLALS no longer receives funding from the Commonwealth, so what merit to retaining the name (WIACLALS)?

Arguments against name change (or concerns raised about it):

* 1. What alternative name would be better?
     1. Question raised in IACLALS’s report presented in absentia
     2. Postcolonial (CACLALS, EACLALS), but ‘postcolonial’ may be offensive to some (eg. Indigenous people in Australia, SPACLALS)
  2. Prefer to stay with ACLALS to retain relationships among member countries (EAACLALS)
  3. Preference for ‘Commonwealth’ as widely recognized name (WAACLALS branch supports keeping ACLALS)
     1. Other expressions of negative consequences of name changes
  4. ACLALS was never founded with the idea of Commonwealth funding; the membership and meaning of Commonwealth has already expanded, and there are other advantages and opportunities gained through the Commonwealth affiliation (SLLACLALS).

Some branches (eg. CACLALS) have it in their constitutions that they have the right to change their names. The ACLALS organization cannot refuse the right of a branch to change its name.

* 1. Suggestion that branches that wish to do so may change their names, leaving ACLALS as it stands at present (Michael Bucknor, WIACLALS; Selina Tusitala Marsh, SPACLALS)
  2. Question of whether ACLALS will be required to continue affiliation of such branches (Russell McDougall, SPACLALS)

The discussion concluded with an agreement that ACLALS will remain the name of the overarching organization, but that branches may choose to change their names.

Elleke Boehmer raised the need for the organization to refresh for the next generation of 21st century scholars. Melissa Kennedy, Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Joe (?) advocated a more dynamic use of social media for communication between scheduled conference events.

1. No offers to host the next triennial were received prior to the AGM, so with the question of succession and the location of the 2022 triennial still unresolved — though East Africa indicated the possibility of hosting in 2025 — Chris Prentice would continue discussions with branches following the conference.
2. The meeting concluded.