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May 14, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

Since gathering virtually in January in connection with the annual meeting, the Executive Committee of the LSA (EC) has held two additional meetings at which the recommendations of the Task Forces and the discussions at the Town Hall were further considered. Reactions and responses to the open letter ([TOL](#)) written in response to statements by Steven Pinker were at the center of these considerations, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Professional Conduct Task Force ([PCTF](#)) report along with member reactions to those recommendations during the Town Hall, a [virtual meeting](#) that took place on January 14, 2021. Additionally, we reviewed other articles that were written in the aftermath of TOL, encouraging us to be responsive to member concerns and to consider actions to help alleviate various problems, especially regarding potential misconduct, that have been brought to the attention of the EC[1].

A working group (WG) was formed under the leadership of John Baugh, president-elect of the Society and member of the PCTF, to evaluate the next steps in this process.

Due to the contentious nature of the [controversies](#) arising in reaction to Steven Pinker's tweets about [policing and race](#), we also consulted with the LSA's legal counsel to determine whether our actions or inaction, as fiduciaries of the LSA, might incur legal liability in one form or another. Our legal counsel confirmed that EC revocation of honors awarded to a member is not free of potential legal jeopardy. This legal jeopardy is due in part to the fact that the [LSA constitution and bylaws](#) lack any provision for formal identification and adjudication of member misconduct. Since January, we have taken actions to determine how that deficiency might be rectified.

A working group composed of several senior LSA members including four

procedures, and proposals that we have initiated to overcome these limitations. The remainder of this memo serves to provide members with information regarding our deliberations and ongoing activities, with particular attention to:

- responding to PCTF recommendations and member reactions to those recommendations
- * implementing the recommendations of the [Media Resources Task Force](#)
- reviewing several issues raised by COZIL for consideration by the EC
- developing efforts to expand student representation on the EC
- considering changes regarding the length of service for the LSA Secretary-Treasurer
- seeking member suggestions and advice as we proceed with the work ahead

Working Group Phase I actions

1. The formation of an Ombuds Committee

This committee will fulfill an interim role of providing a mechanism by which members can report complaints and problems on a confidential basis, while the WG solicits member input for a formal Problem Resolution Process. The committee will consider the possibility of setting up a follow-up survey, community dialogue, or web-based comments page to improve transparency and responsiveness. The make-up of the committee is currently being determined; it will include members of the Executive Committee and members of the Society representing a diversity of specializations, degrees of seniority and administrative experience, races, genders, and orientations.

2. The creation of a mechanism for reporting complaints and problems

The WG will explore procedures for establishing a confidential online form that members can use to report an issue, including incidents that take place at LSA sponsored events, in connection with LSA sponsored publications, or in connection with the conduct of LSA business by staff, EC, committee or Special Interest Group leaders, editorial team members, Institute Directors, and others with a leadership or decision-making role within the Society. Still to be determined is who will receive these reports, who will be privy to them upon receipt, and what will be the range of potential responses to such reports.

3. The solicitation of member input for the development of a formal Problem Resolution Process following the interim steps above.

This will be implemented after the completion of the first two interim steps above. Provisional plans are to conduct a survey, hold a second community dialogue, and create a web-based comment page with a deadline for response. The staff will compile feedback for review by the WG.

4. Communication to the membership of actions undertaken

This includes the current communication, highlighting actions relating not only to the PCTF recommendations and WG work in progress, but also other

proposed COZIL guidelines against misgendering, increasing student representation on the EC, and the consideration of a change in term for the Secretary-Treasurer.

PCTF recommendations and member reactions to those recommendations

The PCTF report included seven recommendations:

1. Designate a Members' Advocate

The Executive Committee should designate a person knowledgeable about the LSA to be available throughout the year to respond to questions or concerns from members who need help navigating the organization. In cases where those concerns are not informational but involve some kind of misconduct, the Advocate will refer the member to the Safe Space Group.

There are good reasons to increase the transparency of the operation of the LSA to its members, and past officials and other veterans of the Society would be in a good position to provide this. One possible response under consideration is to incorporate this recommendation by provisionally designating one of the senior members of the interim Ombuds Committee as Members' Advocate for a one-year term. At the end of that year, we can revisit the position to determine whether it should be made permanent.

2. Create a "Safe Space Group."

The Executive Committee should constitute a group of senior linguists to serve as a resource for people who feel they have been the target of misconduct. We recommend that a certain number of members of this committee be selected on the basis of nominations from junior LSA members.

There was extensive pushback during the Town Hall against the concept of a "Safe Space Group" on several grounds, including resistance to the proposal that it be populated by senior LSA members. The WG is contemplating alternative configurations, ideally intended to benefit from engagement of a broader representation of LSA members seeking maximum inclusivity. Assuming the approval of the interim Ombuds Committee, we would defer moving forward on this suggestion for now based on feedback from the community dialogue about the name and composition of the proposed group, as well as potential overlap with the Ombuds Committee itself.

3. Enhance a constructive atmosphere at LSA events through new measures

Measures to maintain a constructive atmosphere at LSA events include: reminding people at the beginning of all LSA events to read, and abide by, the LSA code of conduct; designating a Safe Space representative; providing

questions in a constructive manner.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, the EC recognizes that the annual meeting is likely to change in ways that include and exceed face-to-face gatherings in one location. The spirit of this recommendation has been supported by the EC, and will surely extend to in-person or hybrid meetings. New challenges and considerations are being contemplated as we expand to include more virtual events. The adoption of specific measures will be considered by the Ombuds Committee.

4. Promote constructive, non-abusive reviews

Survey respondents of all ages complained of abusive, even ad hominem, reviews of journal submissions and grant applications. We recommend that: The editors of Language and possibly other LSA journals determine the role of editors in these cases and develop guidelines for guaranteeing constructive reviews; the LSA then reach out to the editors of other Linguistics journals to consider the same measures; the LSA organize workshops and/or webinars on how to write constructive reviews – not only of publication and grant submissions, but of routine student work as well.

The editor and associate editors of *Language* and other LSA publications are fully aware of the need to avoid personal and abusive reviews and are actively engaged to help monitor and alleviate any problems of this kind. The Program Committee is also mindful of these issues as they relate to reviews of meeting abstracts. Further practical moves along the recommended lines will be considered as needed.

5. Organize regular workshops, trainings, and webinars to promote inclusive and supportive conduct

Organize regular workshops, trainings, and webinars to promote conduct consistent with the values espoused by the LSA. Possible examples include: best practices on social media and departmental governance, writing constructive reviews and training in bystander intervention.

As with the above two recommendations, the EC is contemplating new ways to reinforce exemplary supportive and inclusive conduct by LSA members. We have already organized several activities along these lines, including:

- 2018 Annual Meeting [Special Panel: Our Linguistics Community Addressing Bias, Power Dynamics, and Harassment \(.pdf\)](#)
- 2019 Annual Meeting: Plenary panel on Fostering a Culture of Inclusion in Linguistics
- [Webinar: Peer Review](#) (2020)
- [Webinar: Being a Linguist on Social Media](#) (2020)

linguists. Linguistics departments can support students seeking academic jobs, but it is up to the LSA to provide support in the wider job market. We recommend that the Executive Committee, in consultation with the Linguistics Beyond Academia Special Interest Group, develop a range of activities to support linguists interested in non-academic jobs.

This is a worthy and important goal, one to which the WG and EC will seek to respond, soliciting suggestions from the Linguists Beyond Academic SIG. One such event is the [Linguistics Career Launch](#) planned for later this summer.

7. Launch a social media initiative

Younger members engage intensively with social media. It is essential that the LSA shift social media from the periphery, finding ways to use social media for a broader discussion of linguistic-related topics.

The LSA strongly supports this recommendation and has already responded to it through the formation of our new Social Media Committee which has been successfully populated under the leadership of Jennifer Nycz. This committee will be working in conjunction with the newly reorganized and revitalized Public Relations Committee. The rollout of the new procedures for publicizing responses by the EC to current national and international events can be illustrated by two recent examples. On March 19, the Officers of the LSA posted a strong [statement](#) in response to the recent wave of anti-Asian violence and xenophobia in the U.S.; we were among the first scholarly organizations to speak out on this issue. On May 2, the Public Relations Committee and Executive Committee approved the posting of a [statement](#) on behalf of the editors of DOXA who had been targeted by the Russian authorities for purportedly encouraging illegal student protests. More information about the role of the LSA in advocating for human and linguistic rights can be accessed [here](#).

Sincerely,

Larry Horn
President

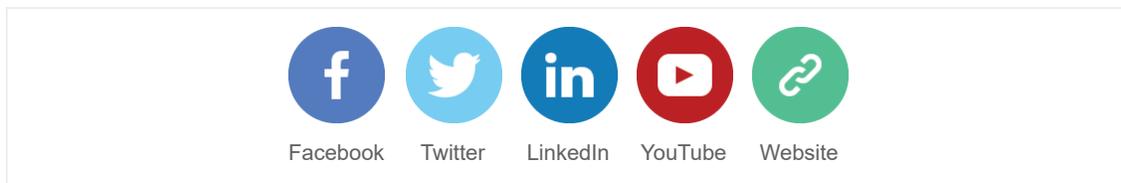
[1] In addition to the PCTF report and member reactions during the January 14, 2021 meeting. We also reviewed two articles by Professor Jessica Rett, titled "[Open letter regarding Steven Pinker & the LSA](#)" and "[The Code of Conduct Conundrum](#)." Additionally, we read a paper that appeared in LingBuzz titled, "[Who Speaks for Us?](#)"

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