

REPORT TO COUNCIL

DATE: 29 August 2019

REPORT TO: TWS Council

FROM: Emily Williams, Chair, Early Career Professional Working Group

SUBJECT: Fall Report of the Early Career Professional Working Group

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

(See details below)

- 1) To provide more opportunities to the most financially strained demographics of The Wildlife Society, the Early Career Professional Working Group echoes recommendations provided by the Student Development Working Group in asking for reduced fees for students and early career professionals for annual meeting registration, reduced journal fees for publishing in the Journal of Wildlife Management (JWM) and the Wildlife Society Bulletin (WSB), and to accept unofficial transcripts for the Associate Wildlife Biologist (AWB) certification.
- 2) To facilitate consistent progress and success with professional development programs offered to early career members, the Early Career Professional Working Group asks that the Council work with the ECPWG along with the LI subcommittee of Council to rejuvenate and enhance the Leadership Institute program. (Request from Spring Report to Council which has not been responded to)
- 3) Adopt the Mentorship for Life Sub-committee's Strategic Plan and create a formal mentorship program within TWS. See the MFL Sub-committee's Report to Council for further details.

REPORT

Membership

The Early Career Professional Working Group has a membership structure that is different from most other working groups. All New Professional members of TWS become automatic members of the working group as opposed to having annual dues; thus, as of 2019, we have 1416 members, up from 1330 in 2018. Other TWS members may still join the working group for \$5 if they wish. We would like to reiterate our thanks to Ed Thompson and Mariah Simmons for facilitating this membership structure, as we think it will be a huge benefit to TWS, and particularly to new professional members.

2019 Conference Professional Development Opportunities

This coming September, the ECPWG is organizing a professional development opportunity in the form of a science communication workshop at the joint annual conference of The American Fisheries Society and The Wildlife Society in Reno, NV. The workshop, “Communicating your science: active communication skills for the future of fish and wildlife conservation,” is organized by ECPWG Chair Emily Williams and past-chair Krysten Zummo-Strong. The workshop is also supported by the Student Development Working Group.

Session Abstract: The field of wildlife conservation relies on sound science to effectively manage natural resources for future generations. As biologists, we spend years honing our knowledge on the relationship between wildlife and their respective habitats. Although we widely recognize the importance of effective communication between scientists and the lay public, training in communication within the field focuses primarily on the peer review process and formal science presentations. In recent years, the need for improving our communication skills with those outside of the scientific realm has become a serious topic of discussion but has yet to move past discussions to take a more active role in training. This workshop will provide attendees an opportunity to practice and obtain critical feedback on communicating their science with the lay public through exercises in communicating through story.

Session Purpose: This workshop will focus on active communication skills in order to provide attendees with hands-on experience in communicating with the lay public. Attendees will be introduced to basic aspects of effective communication: knowing your audience, group decision making and its effects on communication, and professional advocacy with considerations of opinions and objectivity. The second portion of the workshop will introduce attendees to the communication of science through story. More specifically, participants will take part in pre-workshop activities that will serve as a baseline in their communication skills and will be the foundation for critique and practice in person. This workshop is being organized for students, early career professionals, or any level of wildlife professional who wants to gain critical communication skills.

Communications

This year, the ECPWG has focused on improving open communication with our members. We have created a newly elected position (Communications Coordinator) and associated ECPWG subcommittee to focus on our social media and communications. Our board has been working hard on increasing our social media presence. Over the past year, our outreach on Facebook has increased from occasional posts to daily offerings on jobs, tips, grants and scholarships, training opportunities, member highlights, and more. We also launched a twitter account, @TWSEarlyCareer, that cross-posts similar content as our facebook account..

Additionally, the ECPWG launched its first newsletter in March 2019 that was released and shared on the eWildlifer, across state and regional chapters, and the working group’s

social media pages. We initially plan to provide a newsletter biannually, but may release issues more often depending upon board time constraints.

BACKGROUND FOR REQUESTS TO COUNCIL

1) Request for Council Action – reduced fees for students and early career professionals

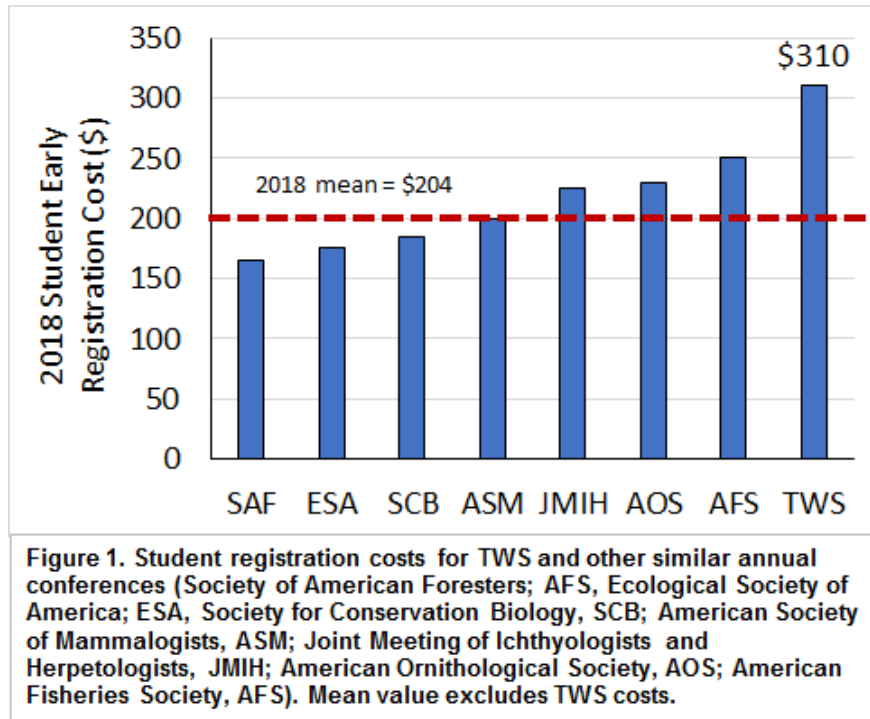
1. REDUCED FEES FOR STUDENTS AND EARLY CAREER PROFESSIONALS

The most frequently cited barrier to increased participation among students and early career members in TWS is cost. The Working Group has identified three potential areas of cost reduction to benefit students and early career professionals:

- A. Reduced meeting registration costs for students and early career professionals
- B. Reduced fees for students and early career professionals publishing in JWM/WSB
- C. Accept unofficial transcripts for AWB certification

A. Reduced meeting registration costs for students and early career professionals

Student conference registration costs (\$320) and early professional costs (\$380) for the TWS annual meeting are significantly higher than student and early career member registration for other professional society annual meetings. For example, registration costs (2018 early rate) for students members are 1.5 times more expensive than the average cost for similar conferences (Figure 1).



We are concerned about the recent trend of increasing conference registration rates. Students and early career members are forced to rely more on finding funding elsewhere – such as travel grants and external funding, while simultaneously negatively impacting our ability to provide travel grants to early professional members. Applications to the SDWG travel grant more than doubled in 2019 compared to previous years. In the SDWG Spring 2019 report to council, they recommended that the price for students to attend the 2019 meeting be reduced from the 2018 rate of \$310. Unfortunately, rather than decreasing, the registration cost for 2019 actually *increased* to \$320, which is \$120 more expensive than the retiree rate. While we understand that meetings are expensive, we feel it is imperative that student and early career rates be competitive with other meetings.

Therefore, we recommend that the price for students to attend the 2020 Annual Meeting be reduced from \$320 to \$275, and for early career professional rates to reduce from \$380 to \$325 and that ongoing efforts are made to reduce costs in future years.

Further, we believe that the TWS should be working to maximize diversity and inclusion within chapters, sections, TWS, and the profession as a whole. We feel that TWS is making great strides in this regard, and we thank the council for its continuing support in this regard. However, we noticed that AFS offers a “Low and Middle Income Country Member” discount for the 2019 Joint Meeting, but TWS does not. If this is an oversight or typo on the registration page, we hope this can be corrected. If not, we hope that TWS can implement a change in this policy.

Therefore, we also recommend that TWS consider a reduced rate for members of

low and middle-income countries, as does the American Fisheries Society, for all upcoming annual conferences, including 2019.

B. Reduced fees for students and early career members publishing in JWM/WSB

As a professional society that aims to empower the next generation of wildlife professionals, TWS should strive to reduce barriers for students and early career professionals to contribute to the scientific knowledge base. The Journal of Wildlife Management and Wildlife Society Bulletin are very expensive to publish in relative to similar journals. For example, based on average page length, publishing an article in JWM would cost \$1,670, *while an article of the same length would only cost \$870 to publish in Wildlife Biology*. This is despite the fact that Wildlife Biology is now higher ranked than JWM (IF = 2.1 vs 1.8; ISI = 31 vs 37). In addition, Wildlife Biology is open access by default, while open access for JWM costs \$3,000. Further, Wildlife Biology offers a waiver for articles published by student first-authors at universities without open-access funds, but JWM does not. This is just one example. *As a result, for many students and early career professionals attempting to publish wildlife research, JWM is not among the first choice of journals.*

Therefore, we suggest that TWS institute a student and early career waiver or explore other discounts to reduce the high article processing charges required to publish in JWM/WSB.

C. Accept unofficial transcripts for AWB certification

Official transcripts can be expensive for students and early career professionals, particularly those who have attended multiple universities. The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) conducted a survey of its membership to characterize transcript offerings by universities. AACRAO estimates that only 15% of colleges and universities provide transcripts free of charge. The great majority of institutions (73%) charge a per-transcript fee regardless if the transcript is delivered electronically or printed.

About half (54%) of institutions charge between \$5 and \$9.99 per transcript, but almost an additional third (32%) charge between \$10-\$14.99 per transcript. While the AACRAO report did not specifically investigate them, students and early career professionals may also have to pay postage, rush, or online transaction or processing fees per transcript. In some instances (particularly for those who have transferred or taken credits through multiple universities), the process of obtaining all official transcripts can cost well over \$50. In addition, if a student, or recent graduate, has any holds on their account, transcripts will not be released.

It is commonly thought that all students are given physical copies of their official transcripts upon graduation, but this is often *not* the case. AACRAO estimates that only 7% of institutions follow this model, and then still charge a per-transcript fee beyond the initial transcript.

Further, university policies on what is considered an official transcript may differ. In many cases, a copy or scan of an official transcript, which is accepted for certification applications, is no longer official by the university and can be falsified just as easily as an unofficial transcript. In fact, some universities will not release official transcripts to students, only external parties. Therefore, the act of students and early career professionals providing their own transcripts as part of an application process may, in fact, violate a university's assurance that the transcript is "official" depending on university policy.

Unofficial transcripts or advising reports that can be generated on-demand from student online portals offer the same information (e.g., records of courses taken and grades) as official transcripts. Some employers, including state agencies, will accept unofficial transcripts to verify educational status or coursework. Unless their additional value is added to the AWB certification, we feel that official transcripts are an unnecessary financial burden to students and early career professionals.

Therefore, we recommend that unofficial transcripts be accepted in lieu of official transcripts when applying for AWB certification in order to reduce the financial burden to applicants.

Source: AACRAO (2018). *Official Transcripts Types, Costs, and Volumes: Results of the AACRAO May 2018 60-Second Survey*.

2) Request for Council Action – renewed efforts to improve the Leadership Institute program

To provide continued progress and success with professional development opportunities such as the Leadership Institute for early career members, we suggest several action items to achieve this goal:

1. Modernization and rejuvenation of the entire LI curriculum to meet the current needs of ECPs.
2. Make better use of the LI in-person meetings during the conference, with different discussion activities from the pre-conference assignments, hands-on activities, focus on the world beyond TWS, and greater focus on putting leadership skills into practice.
3. Revitalize the LI Subcommittee of Council to work quickly to restructure the LI program and engage with members of the ECPWG and LI alums for advice and feedback.
4. Identify members of Council (past or present) and TWS Staff to actively work with/on the LI Subcommittee of Council to ensure ample communication

between interested parties (including the ECPWG) and to ensure progress towards the goal.

5. Ensure that a consistent amount of funds are reserved each year to provide an LI alumna/current participant networking event with refreshments provided to attendees. Ensure that this is a staple event at annual meetings and a required activity on the LI agenda of events during the conference.