Report on the Sigma Tau Delta 2014 International Convention
Compiled by Jamie Simpher, Paul Hossenlopp, and Alex Grapp
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I. Introduction

The theme of the Sigma Tau Delta 2014 International Convention was “river currents.” Rivers change; rivers quicken; rivers expand. Situated on the beautiful Savannah River, this convention was a catalyst to changing, quickening, and expanding our goals and experiences as Deltans at the University of Iowa. Rivers bring newness, freshness – just as the warm breezes in Georgia comforted us in the dead of a brutal Iowa winter. The convention gave so much to our chapter, and this report aims to outline its effects.

This report was prepared by the attendees of the convention: me; Jamie Simpher, chapter treasurer; and Paul Hossenlopp, distinguished member. All of us presented papers at the convention: Paul presented a piece of fascinating and original creative nonfiction, “Conner and Aaron”; I read a paper on Dickinson and Whitman called “‘Finished Faces’: Death as Conclusion”; and Jamie analyzed existentialism in Cormac McCarthy with “Carrying the Fire: Facing the absurd in The Road.” Our chapter brought a strong academic presence to the convention. All of our presentations brought comments of praise from our audiences, and we were all able to contribute meaningfully and skillfully to panel discussions. This should be a significant point of pride for not only our attendees, but also the chapter, English Department, and entire University.

I hope that this report gives its readers a better idea of what was so meaningful about this convention. To sum up a river’s-worth of fun and intellectual stimulation is difficult, but Savannah was a second home to us for the few days we were there. We felt surrounded by like-minded students, supportive faculty and mentors, and Savannah’s beautiful weather and atmosphere. I hope that this report can encourage future Sigma members, who may be considering going to the convention, to jump into this fun and important activity. Lastly, I hope that this report can serve as a thank-you to those from our Iowa chapter who supported us in the chapter’s first national Sigma convention: the generous and supportive English Department Chair, Jonathan Wilcox; Director of Undergraduate Studies, Doris Witt; our wonderful co-sponsors, Anne Stapleton and Miriam Thaggert, and all members of the Iowa chapter. Thank you all for your support and encouragement.

Sincerely,

Alex Grapp
President
University of Iowa Chapter, Sigma Tau Delta
II. Social Events
Compiled by Alex Grapp

Open Mic

Convention Booklet Description: Attendees are invited to share their short original creations at Open Mic. Bring your best poetry, flash fiction, and other short pieces to perform for the friendliest audience you will ever find.

Just like the description states, the Open Mic night is a chance for attendees to share their own original work in a casual, fun, supportive atmosphere. Pieces ranged in tone from serious political-revolutionary works to funny pieces about being distracted by handsome men on the street. To sign up to read, participants only needed to speak with the emcee just before or at any point during the event.

Bad Poetry Contest and “Dry T-Shirt” Merchandise Skit Competition

Convention Booklet Description: Get ready for some side-splitting fun as chapters with merchandise to present funny, English-related skits. Props and costumes are encouraged. Prizes will be awarded for the best skit and the best merchandise. Chapters with skits to present are encouraged to arrive 15 minutes to sign up. Afterward, convention attendees bring you the best and worst in bad poetry. Whether it’s a sincerely bad poem written in middle school, or a comedy poem lampooning annoying poetic trends, members present the worst original poetry they have ever written in this fiercely funny competition. Members take this competition very seriously, and there are more and better prizes this year than ever before, so come prepared to laugh until you cry.

This was a fun event and presents a great opportunity for future Iowa chapter attendees to get involved in the events of the convention. The Dry T-Shirt competition is a chance for groups to advertise their chapter’s merchandise (usually t-shirts) in funny, inventive ways. In the future, the Iowa chapter could produce an original t-shirt design to try to sell at the convention through the chapter sales tables at the convention and this skit competition. One outstanding skit involved Sherlock Holmes being choked by an insane criminal, attempting to call for Doctor Watson. Unfortunately, Holmes could only get out “Get Doctor -!” before being choked again. A different doctor would come each time: Dr. House, Doctor Who, Dr. Frankenstein, and Dr. Phil all came to help. At the end of the skit the shirt was revealed, reading, “Sherlock is my Holmes boy.”

The Bad Poetry Contest was also a lot of fun, and is a great chance to enhance the Iowa chapter’s visibility and prestige (or notoriety) at the convention. Poems read were often raunchy, sometimes ridiculous, and always funny. The audience would boo after every poem, in support of the theme of “Bad Poetry,” and would often yell things like, “Get those crab hands out of here,” at presenters. One of the best readings involved a man slowly undressing while repeating, “The rain / falls slowly,” and making rain noises. It’s a fun, informal time after a long day of presentations.
“Treasure Island” Pool Party

Convention Booklet Description: Get away from the frenzy of convention and come lounge by the pool while our Savannah host chapters show you what Southern hospitality is all about. Take a dip in the Marriott’s lovely indoor pool, get a snack from the lobby bar, and enjoy pirate-themed games and activities with your fellow Deltans.

Jamie, Paul, and I decided not to attend this event. While it looked it fun, we thought we would use our time to explore the fascinating city of Savannah, as we hadn’t been able to explore much of the city. While events are often fun and should be attended most of the time, I think that future attendees should feel free to enjoy themselves and the city. Some of the best times are had outside of planned events.

Red & Black Gala Dinner and Convention Awards

The traditional dinner on the last night of the convention, the Red & Black Gala Dinner is a time for all convention attendees to come together to celebrate the successes of the past few days at a semi-formal dinner and ceremony. There was a slight hiccup in our chapter’s attendance at the Gala, as I had not ordered a ticket to eat at the Gala. I asked one of the convention committee members if I could just sit in on the proceedings, but they insisted I take an extra ticket. I was surprised and humbled by their hospitality, and I enjoyed the rest of the night. Dinner was provided, and a short program ensued. Various presenters won awards for best convention presentations.
III. Regional and Society Business Meetings
Compiled by Alex Grapp

Student Leadership Workshop

The Student Leadership Workshop was conducted by the Student Representatives (SR) and Associate Student Representatives (ASR) from the various regions of the organization. The attendees were allowed to choose from four workshops: Fundraising, Training Future Leaders, Recruitment and Social Events, and National Leadership Opportunities and Alumni. The workshops were useful to gain a better idea of the inner workings of Sigma, and I got some useful tips for recruitment, event planning, and fundraising, as well.

Regional Networking

This was an informal precursor that served to invite regional members to attend the Regional Caucus the following day. Attendees were split into regional groups, and were introduced to the region’s SR’s and ASR’s. Attendees were then given the opportunity to network and meet other members from chapters in the region.

General Business Session and Regional Caucuses

The General Business Session operated much like a normal chapter meeting, just on a larger scale. Sigma Tau Delta Executive Director William C. Johnson, an alum of the University of Iowa himself, welcomed convention attendees and initiated the annual chapter roll call. Each chapter’s name would be read, and the chapter members present would stand up and say “Hello,” or some other funny team shout. For our chapter call, we stood up, and in barbershop-quartet style, said, “Hello” in different pitches. Director Johnson joined us with the fourth pitch of “hello.” The treasurer gave a speech about Buzzfeed quizzes, cleverly hiding the annual financial
statement within. A vote was taken to decide the national offices of Vice President and Historian.

For chapters attending this General Business Session, a $200 reimbursement could be claimed. Each chapter was given a form, asking to whom the reimbursement check should be made out to, and to where it should be sent. I asked that the check be made out to “Sigma Tau Delta - University of Iowa Chapter” and sent to our co-sponsor, Anne Stapleton. The issue of where to send the check is still one we are looking into, and we should be able to decide more definitively where to send the check in the future.

After the General Business Section, attendees split off into regional groups, where we voted on our new Regent, a faculty member in charge of the specific region. We also voted for a new SR and ASR. Each chapter got one vote in these matters, and both the candidate for SR and the candidate for ASR ran unopposed. Director Johnson spoke with us afterwards. He introduced himself, and told us that he was very excited that our Iowa chapter was there. Future convention attendees should make a point to introduce themselves to Director Johnson. He’s a very personable, supportive individual.
IV. Sessions
Compiled by Jamie Simpher

Our first evening in Savannah, we spent almost an hour poring over the conference itinerary, which included ten different sessions. During each session, there were eighteen different possible panels or roundtables that we could choose from. Needless to say, with titles like “Pop Culture Royals,” “Marketing: If a book is good, but no one knows, does it sell?” and “Language and Logic in Lewis B. Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland,” we were often torn about what we should attend. We decided, first and foremost, to attend each other’s panels, and from there we chose ones that were interesting to each of us. On occasion we ended up at the same panels, which I found more fun because then we could discuss what we had heard afterwards.

We noticed that in each panel of four, there was typically one paper that was really original and interesting, two that were solid, and one that could have used a little more development. While it was obviously more interesting to listen to the exceptional papers, we liked that the environment was accepting, and that you could still be developing as a student and a writer and find a place at the conference to present your work and get that experience. Roundtables, we were surprised to find, were essentially the same as the regular panels, and the sessions ranged in quality. Overall, however, most of the panelists had something interesting or thought-provoking to say, and we tried not to miss any of them.
V. Guest Speakers
Compiled by Paul Hossenlopp

Alison Bechdel, an acclaimed graphic novelist, gave the opening keynote for the conference. Her speech centered around her works and her life, and she talked a bit about where she wants to go with her future works (specifically, in her case, thinking about the intersection between private and public life). But she came across very informal and down to earth, and the talk was funny enough that it bordered on a comedy routine at times. In fact, one of the coolest things about all the speakers was how funny all their talks were, something that I didn’t expect. When Alex and I heard Justin Torres’ question and answer session (Torres’ debut novel, *We the Animals*, was recently published to much praise; he graduated from the Writer’s Workshop here at Iowa) we both were constantly laughing throughout (especially about his comments on Iowa City). Torres’ answers were consistently honest and very insightful, even if you’re not interested in creative writing. The last featured guest speaker we saw was Daniel Mendelsohn, a well-known critic and writer. His talk focused on classical literature—i.e. *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*—, but he framed it such that the whole audience felt constantly engaged.
We spent a lot of time wandering around historic downtown Savannah. We climbed historic steps at our own risk, ate wonderful seafood, and spent a lot of time wandering around along the riverbank. It’s an amazingly beautiful town with cobblestone streets and Spanish moss draping over the sidewalks like a canopy. One thing we regretted was that we didn’t get a chance to take the ferry down the river. But we were fortunate that everywhere we ate was amazing. To anyone considering a trip to Savannah, we especially recommend the Moon River Brewery.

Two of the highlights for us were the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, and Flannery O’Connor’s childhood home, where we went on a tour and learned all sorts of interesting facts and anecdotes about her. Apparently, by the age of six she called her parents Ed and Regina instead of Mommy and Daddy, and she attended the adult mass with them instead of the children’s mass. When the nuns at her kindergarten would ask why she had not been at the children’s mass, she would tell them that the Catholic church did not dictate what time she went to mass.

We had a thoroughly enjoyable experience in Georgia--and it didn’t hurt that it was seventy degrees the whole time!
VII. Team Bonding
Compiled by Alex Grapp

The convention provided the members from the Iowa chapter a unique opportunity to get to know each other, and I think it’s this opportunity that can allow future chapters to become a really tight-knit group. Sending more members, especially in their sophomore and junior years, into this bonding experience could go a long way to making the future a closer, more friendly society, and, by extension, English department community at Iowa.
VIII. Presenting
Compiled by Paul Hossenlopp

The night before presenting we all felt fairly nervous, of course. We each got to the room in which we had to present about ten to fifteen minutes early, and talked with our fellow panelists until the chair or the moderator introduced everyone. Each panelist would then get up in turn and read their papers, and after everyone finished, the audience would ask the panelists questions. If the audience didn’t have much to say, then the moderator would come up with questions, and that usually did a good job of breaking the ice. The question and answer sessions were always interesting, and the audience never got hostile, so don’t worry about that (like I did). Just do it, we all enjoyed sharing our papers and it was really cool to hear other presenters as well.
IX. Tips and Ideas for Future Conventions

- Everyone should try to schedule their flights together; we were on separate flights and it would have been easier and more fun if we could have travelled together. To make this happen, everyone attending the conference should book their flights as soon as possible.
- Try to book your flights so that you get to the hotel in time for the opening ceremonies and keynote speaker.
- Make sure to get out of the hotel and explore the area. Some of our favorite memories are of the times we were wandering around discovering Savannah. Especially try to go to local restaurants--try something that wouldn’t be available to you in Iowa City.
- Make friends! On our first day at the conference, we sat next to a girl named Courtney, and we hung out with her all week. Not to mention that the three of us hardly knew each other when we left Iowa, and we feel like we really bonded during the conference.
- At registration, they hand out itineraries, so you don’t need to print one out before you go (like Jamie did).
- Dress professionally for when you present and bring semiformal attire to wear to the gala dinner.
- Don’t forget to register for the gala dinner!
- Make the most of your trip; we got very little sleep because we were up talking, exploring, and having fun. We were tired, but we didn’t regret a minute of it.
Appendix A: Convention Schedule of Programs

Wednesday, February 26
3:00-8:00
Registration (Foyer, LL)

6:30-8:00
Opening Events, with Allison Bechdel (Savannah A-B, LL)

8:00-9:00
Allison Bechdel, Book Signing (Savannah A, LL)

8:30-9:30
The Rectangle Reading (Savannah B, LL)

9:30-10:30
Open Mic with emcee Micah Hicks (Savannah B, LL)

Thursday, February 27
7:00-6:00
Registration (Foyer, LL)

8:30-10:45
Student Leadership Workshops (Savannah A-B, LL)

9:00-9:45
Chapter Sponsor Workshop I (Savannah D-E, LL)

10:00-10:45
Chapter Sponsor Workshop II (Savannah D-E, LL)

Alumni Networking/Meet & Greet (Savannah C, LL)

11:00-12:00
Workshop: Transitioning Your Skills to Technical Communications (Savannah D-E, LL)

Workshop: Publishing 101 (Savannah D-E, LL)

12:00-9:00
Outstanding Chapter Displays (Foyer & Prefunction, LL)

12:00-1:30
Lunch (on your own)

1:30-2:30
Scholarships and Awards Ceremony (Savannah A-B, LL)
2:45-4:00
Concurrent Session A (Breakout Rooms)

4:00-5:30
Sigma Kappa Delta Meet & Greet (Marriott Riverfront Lobby)

4:15-5:30
Concurrent Session B (Breakout Rooms)

Justin Torres, Q&A (Savannah C, LL)

5:40-6:10
Regional Networking (Savannah A-B, LL)

6:10-7:30
Dinner (on your own)

7:30-8:30
Justin Torres, Featured Speaker (Savannah A-B, LL)

8:30-9:30
Justin Torres, Book Signing (Prefunction, LL)

9:00-10:30
Dry T-Shirt/Bad Poetry Contests (Savannah C, LL)

Friday, February 28

7:00-2:00
Registration (Foyer, LL)

7:30-12:00
Society History Exhibit (Prefunction, LL)

7:30-2:00
Chapter Merchandise Sales (Prefunction, LL)

8:00-9:15
Concurrent Session C (Breakout Rooms)

9:00-9:00
Outstanding Chapter Displays (Foyer & Prefunction, LL)

9:30-10:45
Concurrent Session D (Breakout Rooms)

Presentation: Novelist T.S. Stribling (Savannah A, LL)

11:00-12:15
General Business Session/Regional Caucuses *(Savannah A-B, LL)*

Eastern Caucus *(Savannah B, LL)*
Far Western Caucus *(General McIntosh, LL)*
High Plains Caucus *(Savannah D, LL)*
Midwestern Caucus *(Savannah C, LL)*
Southern Caucus *(Savannah A, LL)*
Southwestern Caucus *(Savannah E, LL)*

**11:15-1:00**
Sigma Kappa Delta Kraeger Awards Luncheon *(Marriott Riverfront Lobby)*

**12:30-2:00**
Lunch (on your own)

Regents and Sponsors Luncheon *(Atrium, LL)*

**1:15-2:00**
Sigma Kappa Delta Sponsor Meeting *(Oglethorpe A, 2nd Floor)*

Sigma Kappa Delta Student Meeting *(Oglethorpe B, 2nd Floor)*

**2:00-3:15**
Concurrent Session E *(Breakout Rooms)*

**3:30-4:45**
Concurrent Session F *(Breakout Rooms)*

**5:00-7:30**
Dinner (on your own)

**5:00-6:00**
President’s Reception for Faculty and Alumni *(Atrium, LL)*

**7:30-8:30**
Daniel Mendelsohn, Featured Speaker *(Savannah A-B, LL)*

**8:30-9:30**
Daniel Mendelsohn, Book Signing *(Savannah A-B, LL)*

**9:00-11:00**
"Treasure Island" Pool Party *(Indoor Pool, LL)*

**Saturday, March 1**

**7:30-12:00**
Registration *(Foyer, LL)*

**7:30-2:00**
Chapter Merchandise Sales *(Foyer, LL)*

**8:00-9:15**
Concurrent Session G *(Breakout Rooms)*

**9:00-12:00**
Outstanding Chapter Displays *(Foyer, LL)*

**9:30-10:45**
Concurrent Session H *(Breakout Rooms)*

Daniel Mendelsohn, Q&A *(Savannah C, LL)*

**11:00-12:15**
Concurrent Session I *(Breakout Rooms)*

**12:15-2:00**
Lunch (on your own)

Alumni Epsilon Chapter Meeting *(Marriott Riverfront Lobby)*

**2:00-3:15**
Concurrent Session J *(Breakout Rooms)*

**3:30-4:45**
Gin Phillips, NEHS Featured Speaker *(Savannah D-E, LL)*

**4:45-5:45**
Gin Phillips, Book Signing *(Prefunction, LL)*

**6:30-8:30**
Red & Black Gala Dinner and Convention Awards *(Savannah A-E, LL)*