

A Very Brief History of CRLA

CRLA's founders—reading specialists in colleges of the western United States— created the Western College Reading Association to meet the needs of college reading specialists, reading centers, and reading programs. This was in 1966, when colleges and universities were struggling to find space for all the “new” students, achieve equal access, and meet academia's higher responsibilities.

Western College Reading Association (WCRA): 1966-1983

Gene Kerstiens describes the birth: "At 1:30 A.M., the Saturday before Thanksgiving 1966, in room 202 of the then Holiday Inn, San Bernardino, California, about 20 of those remaining at a 5 ½-hour meeting signed the blood oath" to create a college-level reading association. Within two years the active and dedicated drafted a constitution, elected officers (President Robert Griffin, President-Elect Frank Christ, Secretary Loretta Newman of Los Angeles Harbor College, and Treasurer Gil Williams of San Bernardino Valley College), started a quarterly newsletter (edited by Frank Christ) and placement clearinghouse for college reading teachers, and set annual dues at \$5.00.

WCRA held its first conference in April 1968 in Phoenix, where Dr. Robert Shafer, an Arizona State University reading professor, gave the keynote address, “The Practical Critic, the Rhetorician, and a Developing Model of Reading Comprehension.” At that time the organization numbered 144 members representing 12 western states and provinces, with over half of the membership from California. In 1969, the treasurer was bonded, associate memberships were offered to administrators and librarians, and state directors were appointed by the president. Finally, a directory project was initiated to identify college reading teachers, their backgrounds, and their job descriptions to determine a potential standard for the field.

Conference traditions developed early. In 1968 began the tradition of an evening hospitality suite for all members to meet with association officers and fellow members. Later this “informal discussion of vital issues” became known as the Friday Night Literary Society and sometimes Poetry Night.

WCRA grew fast in the 1970's, a period of enormous change in higher education that stimulated rapid growth of learning centers, reading programs, and developmental studies across North America in response to new imperatives. The young WCRA organization incorporated in 1972 and filed its constitution and bylaws with the Corporation Commission of New Mexico. In 1975 the Executive Board established WCRA's unofficial motto: "the Blue Chip organization for college reading professionals."

Student memberships were initiated at \$2.50, the president-elect was made conference program chair, and on-site chairs handled local arrangements. Conference proceedings were edited by Frank Christ, with the first issue featuring papers and addresses from the first three conferences. The position of archivist was created in 1976, and a scholarship fund of \$1,000 was set up in 1977 to award a yearly scholarship to graduate students

pursuing degrees relevant to the interests of WCRA members. In 1979 the Board instituted an annual service award, too.

In 1977 members voted to hold all WCRA conferences in the western region of the United States, but eventually the W in the name was expanded to mean the Western Hemisphere. WCRA voted in 1978 to hold conferences only in states that had ratified the ERA, a decision that eventually became moot. In 1978, dues took a big leap to \$15.

Western College Reading and Learning Association (WCRLA): 1983-1989

In 1983, after years of deliberation and discussion, the membership voted to expand its name to Western College Reading **and Learning** Association to welcome the many professionals in writing, learning assistance, tutorial programs, mathematics, developmental studies, counseling, and other fields who were finding WCRA conferences and publications beneficial to their professional experience.

WCRLA expanded member services with bigger and more diverse conferences, Special Interest Groups, and elections by mail ballot. In 1983, WCRLA replaced the annual conference *Proceedings* with the double-blind-juried *Journal of College Reading and Learning*. To provide continuity, the offices of treasurer and secretary became two-year positions elected in alternate years. A formal liaison relationship was established with the young sister organization of NARDSPE, which later became NADE.

New WCRLA conference features included dinner on the town, newcomers' welcome sessions, and a designated computer room. The first WCRLA conference was held at the Portland (Oregon) Marriott and keynoted by A. Garr Cranney of Brigham Young University. The next five WCRLA conferences (1984-1988) met in San Jose, Denver, Los Angeles, Albuquerque, and Sacramento, continuing the tradition of meeting every other year in California, alternating northern and southern locations.

College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA): 1989 to the present

The organization's name was changed in 1989 to College Reading and Learning Association. Although there was sentimental angst about dropping "Western" from the name, the new name acknowledged a membership stretching across the United States, Canada, and overseas.

To better define the training needed by peer tutors, the now-recognized International Tutor Program Certification (ITPC), was created in 1989, followed later by International Mentor Program Certification (IMPC) in 1998.

The 1990's. The organization truly matured in the '90's, creating an election process that allows new officers adequate time to prepare for new duties; new Board positions of Membership Coordinator and Executive Assistant; contracts with commercial mailing services; more scholarships and awards; a strategic plan; an International Symposium on Teaching and Learning; and the Professional Association Liaison Committee. Annual

conferences moved from spring to fall to avoid conflict with spring holy days and NARDSPE/NADE's spring conference.

Martha Maxwell served as CRLA's first director on the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, and CRLA helped develop CAS standards for learning assistance programs. In 1996, CRLA was a founding member of the American Council of Developmental Education Associations (ACDEA) to improve communication and facilitate action among associations. Also in the 1990's, a Past Officers' Council was created to advise the Board, and dues rose from \$25 to \$40, still the best bargain in professional development.

The 2000's. Despite campus funding cuts and travel restrictions in 2001 and another dues increase to \$50 in 2003, both CRLA membership and attendance at CRLA conferences increased. The Call to Conference was delivered to members' electronic mailboxes, and the Association continued to meet professional development needs of its members by means of the *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, the now-electronic *NewsNotes* newsletter, e-bulletins, and expanded website resources.

The Board and membership adopted a *Position Statement on the Rights of Adult Readers and Learners* (2002) and *Guidelines for Professional Ethics* (2003). Eight Guiding Principles were adopted to replace the strategic plan. The number and value of scholarship and travel awards increased, and projects initiated by Special Interest Groups and state/region/chapter groups were more generously funded to ensure that the Association's resources benefited members' professional development requests. A new *CRLA Tutor Training Handbook* was published in 2003.

The Association supported the work of ACDEA's Blue Ribbon Commission and in 2007 helped ACDEA transition into the Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) to take collaborative action for high standards and professional development. CRLA continues to nominate worthy CLADEA Fellows as paradigms of professional practice.

The new decade. CRLA's training certification programs were renamed International Tutor Training Program Certification (ITTPC) and International Mentor Training Program Certification (IMTPC) in 2010. In 2011 the organization contracted with a management company to take over responsibilities of membership services, mailing, and the website. CRLA tutor program certification and new ITTPC pins for trained tutors are sought by more and more programs, and the *Handbook for Training Peer Tutors and Mentors* was published in 2012.

CRLA offers this 2012 conference in Houston—its 45th annual conference—to celebrate your work as members of the first organization in the field of college reading, learning assistance, developmental education, tutoring, mentoring, and student success!