

Memo to Members

STC Orlando Chapter: A 2003 Chapter of Distinction

Special Feature
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Orlando Chapter and UCF Launch Mentor Program

Building a Bridge from Industry to Academe

By Bonnie Spivey and Dan Voss



What does it take to start a mentoring program? Lots of determination, lots of organization, and lots of coffee. Fourteen bottomless cups to be exact. Let us explain. Five months ago we initiated a mentor-mentee relationship for the double purpose of the mentoring itself and also as a pilot for a potential mentoring program between the [Orlando Chapter](#) and the [University of Central Florida](#).

At first, the mentor (a battle-scarred industry veteran) and mentee (a bright-eyed UCF senior) had to wonder if they would face a generation gap. But as more punch-holes appeared on the Borders Café frequent drink card, the feared generation gap never materialized. In fact, we were both thrilled to realize that our age and youth were actually exactly what the doctor ordered for a fruitful mentoring relationship.

"...as more punch-holes appeared on the Borders Café frequent drink card, the feared generation gap never materialized."—Rip and Shirley

Imagine, then, [Rip Van Winkle](#) (you can guess which one that is!) joining forces with [Shirley Temple](#), teaming the power of age and experience with youth and energy to promote growth, not only within the traditional framework of formal mentoring relationships, but to benefit STC at both the chapter and Society levels. In keeping with this vision, the Orlando Chapter of STC, in conjunction with UCF, hereby announces its plans to institute a formal mentoring program, pairing veterans from the front lines of industry with talented technical communication students. The goal: to bridge the gap between industry and academe.

BACKGROUND

History/Origin of Mentoring

Generally, mentorship pairs experts with novices to promote growth. One classic example of a successful

mentoring relationship can be found in the realm of Antiquity, in ancient Greece, residing somewhere between Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Hopefully, the fruit of our mentoring program will not fall far from that tree. Carlos Parada, author of [Genealogical Guide to Greek Mythology](#), has traced the concept of mentoring back to Greek mythology, finding its roots in the tale of Odysseus.

"Mentor 4 was an old friend of Odysseus. To him Odysseus entrusted his household when he joined the coalition that sailed against Troy. Athena, assuming several times the shape of Mentor 4, became the guide of Odysseus' son Telemachus, giving him prudent counsel. Since then, wise and trusted advisers have been called 'mentors.'"

OK, then, so much for Antiquity. Let's hit Fast Forward for a few millennia. So what does all this have to do with the new program we are launching?

Types of Mentoring

Today, mentoring occurs within industry, within academe, and across the two. Within industry,



Mentor
Athena

Protégé
Telemachus

Absentee Father
Odysseus

Mentoring has its roots in Antiquity.

mentoring programs pair senior personnel with new hires or junior personnel. In this case, the most obvious recipient of mentoring is the intern. In "The

Mentoring Program at Silicon Valley Chapter,” published in the February 2001 issue of *Tieline*, Lori Fisher suggests that companies like Cisco and IBM Corporation achieved notable successful with their long-standing internship programs and “have used them to instill in participants the political savvy that can only be acquired with years of experience.”



Youth brings energy.

Within academe, two possibilities are to pair faculty with students not in their classes or to pair seniors, graduate students, or recent graduates with underclass students to promote growth.

For our purposes, we are concerned mainly with mentoring that occurs across industry and academe, pairing practicing professionals with students. For years, companies like NASA, Siemens, and AT&T have taken this approach, often in the form of co-op programs, using the strategy both as a platform for early identification of potential leaders and as a low-risk screening process for potential new hires.

Perhaps [Dr. Lauren Kessler](#), professor of journalism at the University of Oregon, provides the clearest differentiation of the types of mentoring in her recent [article for *etude*](#), an online magazine of literary nonfiction: “Less chummy than a friendship, less formal than the tie between employee and boss, more personal than a student-teacher relationship, the connection between mentor and protégé can last a lifetime.”

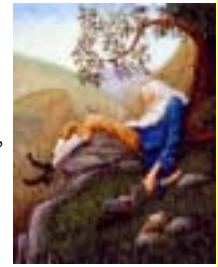
[Dr. Lauren Kessler](#) (Jon’s sister) has published ten books. She is currently on tour with her latest, [Clever Girl](#).



On a chapter level, members might pair workplace research projects with academic researchers, involving students in their projects. A prime example of this concept is the recent creation of an educational outreach multimedia presentation developed by graduate students Cindy Hauptner and Bob Stultz under the guidance of Dr. Dan Jones at UCF and Dan Voss of Lockheed Martin. A tremendous success, this grant program—described in the [April edition of *Memo to Members*](#)—offered compelling proof of the natural synergy between industry and academe.

General Guidelines

All types of mentoring relationships pair experts with novices to promote growth. There are, however, certain guidelines that ensure the success of these connections. First and foremost, the relationships must fall outside all formal channels of supervision and evaluation. For instance, a supervisor, professor, or anyone the mentee reports directly to cannot serve as mentor. The bonds of trust will simply not form because of the power dynamics.



Age brings experience.

Secondly, in order for a mentoring program to properly develop it must strike the right balance between structure and flexibility. On the one hand, enough discipline needs to be exerted to ensure that regular face-to-face meetings occur (e.g., a working lunch in a suitable public venue once a month); yet the door must always be open for the spontaneous exchanges that nurture the relationship and develop trust.



14 bottomless coffees = 1 mentoring program.

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Definition of Mentoring

According to the [STC Guidelines for Mentoring Programs](#), mentoring is a way for more experienced technical communicators to share their experiences with new or less experienced “protégé.” A mentor acts as a trusted counselor, or guide, who assists the mentored protégé in setting and achieving goals for developing career direction and skills. By participating in a mentor/protégé relationship, mentors develop valuable skills that can further their personal and professional development as well. The relationship between mentor and protégé¹ requires honesty, openness, commitment, and effort by both individuals. If they are willing to put forth the effort, there are enormous benefits to be realized.

BENEFITS

While the technical communication industry becomes increasingly competitive, today’s students must become progressively more focused. Mentoring, then, seems to be a wise decision for the mentee in terms of enhanced skills, job placement in a fiercely competitive market, and accelerated career development. The

benefits to the mentor may seem less readily apparent. However, professionals who have served the mentor role have found it to be beneficial in many ways, not the least of which is the satisfaction of helping a beginning fellow professional to grow. Thus, the benefits of having mentor/mentee relationships under the belt make the process a two-way street.

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Mentor Benefits	Mentee Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Gain personal satisfaction from helping others discover their potential ✓ Enhance coaching, feedback, and leadership skills ✓ Gain exposure to new perspectives from the mentee ✓ Expand professional networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Develop networks ✓ Receive career guidance ✓ Increase their visibility ✓ Learn to adapt to changing professional and organizational circumstances ✓ Develop or enhance skills needed to move forward in their careers

For years, the Orlando Chapter has strongly supported an informal partnership between industry and academe, although without the structure of a formal mentoring program. For instance, many of our chapter members (some of whom are graduates of the University of Central Florida) have spoken to classes, evaluated portfolios, and invited students to conduct workplace interviews via visits or e-mail surveys. The new mentoring relationship should serve to strengthen the traditional ties between the chapter and the university and also provide STC with a platform to:

- ✓ Strengthen the local technical writing community
- ✓ Stabilize student STC membership
- ✓ Attract mentees as potential long-term STC members after graduation
- ✓ Generate positive word of mouth advertisement for the chapter
- ✓ Promote STC as a professional networking society
- ✓ Help the chapter execute educational outreach initiatives at the high school and college level
- ✓ Strengthen and expand the relationship between UCF and STC
- ✓ Increase attendance at STC chapter meetings.
- ✓ Identify and develop potential leaders within the chapter.

Increased Person-Power

From the chapter's perspective, one notable advantage resulting from the mentoring program lies in the increased person-power that the mentees represent. Organized into mentor/mentee teams, the chapter workload can be divided, providing mentees with a chance to gain valuable work experience.

Course Credit

On the same note, mentees have the option of combining technical writing assignments with chapter needs. One particular example of this is the brochure we will need to support our initiative to find corporate sponsors for our chapter's educational outreach program. Instead of creating a brochure for an imaginary company to satisfy course requirements, a prospective mentee now has the option of creating a real-world document he or she can, in turn, display in a portfolio. That's a classic win-win scenario.

Valuable Experience

Other chapter needs lean more towards the administrative side of the spectrum. Similarly, teams will have the option of choosing projects that will strengthen mentees in target skill areas. For instance, volunteers are needed to coordinate fund-raisers, educational outreach initiatives, and publicity campaigns. Several other opportunities are also available. The idea is to create a symbiotic relationship between chapter and mentees. This is not to say that menteeship requires "slave labor," merely to point out the abundant opportunities for growth.

Increased Visibility

Mentoring allows the mentee to become more involved, providing organizations with a low-risk method of identifying potential leaders within the group. Also, the program provides chapter members who were previously inactive with an opportunity to increase visibility by serving as a mentor or mentee. Similarly, mentors will have the opportunity to sharpen their coaching and feedback skills, while simultaneously gaining a fresh perspective by exposure to new ideas.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

The first step in making this vision a reality was to follow the *STC Guidelines for Mentoring Programs*, described above. This comprehensive document proved to be a tremendous resource.

Silicon Valley Chapter

Before deciding on our strategy, we researched other

mentoring programs within STC. Lori Fisher's article, cited above, describes how the Silicon Valley Chapter implemented a mentoring program back in 1999. Its informal program currently serves the needs of the local professionals and is facilitated by a [mentoring web page](#) containing a mentor/mentee database. There are no requirements limiting participants, and the professionals are linked directly to one another via e-mail addresses. Coordination is left to the mentee. The [Carolina Chapter](#) offers a mentoring program almost identical to the Silicon Valley's. While this approach is useful to a large network of individuals seeking expertise on various topics, the strategy did not meet the specific needs of our chapter to forge a link between industry and academe.

Lone Star Chapter

The [Lone Star Chapter](#) has provided its members with a mentoring program since 1993. The program pairs student members and new writers with professional



To avoid reinventing wheels, we explored mentoring programs at other chapters.

practitioners for a period of six months to promote growth. As outlined in "Mentoring Project Helps New Technical Communicators" by program manager Jane Bergen, the program was initially limited to students, but in 1997 the chapter's Administrative Council changed the guidelines to also accommodate new writers. Students were then permitted to enroll for a period of no longer than six months, and after graduation could re-enroll as new writers. They were assigned different mentors for each phase.

Piloting the Program

During the past five months, "Rip" and "Shirley," in addition to contributing to Borders' stock performance, have piloted the mentoring program. Through our own experiences, we were better able to assess the needs of future participants. Notably, we discovered that our monthly face-to-face meetings were the main catalyst for our relationship, with communicating by phone a close second. E-mail, however, served as an important practical link as well. While switching between our mentoring and project coordinator hats became challenging at times, our overall experience has been extremely positive.

As we witnessed firsthand, the mentee is often reticent

about coming to the mentor in real time with questions. This is understandable, considering that the reticence grows out of respect for the mentor's time or position, but it can be very limiting to a mentoring relationship because some of the most valuable feedback is often a result of real-time communication. To benefit fully, the mentee has to be comfortable calling the mentor and asking, "Hey, do you have a minute?" Otherwise, the relationship will not maximize its potential.

A mentoring program must strike the right balance between structure and flexibility...face-to-face meetings [must] occur... yet the door must always be open to spontaneous exchanges.

Likewise, the mentor has to be comfortable critiquing the mentee's work, being honest about its quality rather than sugar-coating his or her response to spare the mentee's feelings. After all, how else does a writer learn to write?

OK, then—back to Borders. Nothing happens without paperwork.

BUILDING OUR PROGRAM

We had the vision, but we needed the structure, so over several extensive planning sessions and with much caffeine, we drafted and revised the structure of the program to fit the needs of our community.

Developing Guidelines and Procedures

One of the first tasks was to develop guidelines and procedures, the foundation of the program. We based the initial draft on the Lone Star Chapter's procedures, adapting them to fit our needs. A notable difference in our program is the time span. We chose a one-year timeframe for the mentoring relationship, with an optional extension to a second year. Essentially, the program will span two semesters.

Eligibility

To participate, students must be enrolled in the technical writing track at UCF and (1) be in their senior year of the undergraduate program, (2) be in the graduate program, or (3) have graduated from either program within 6 months of the application date. The idea was to focus on students closest to the job market, as we felt a mentoring program would most likely be of greatest benefit to them.

Selection Criteria

While we wanted to include as many interested mentees as possible, we knew we had to have selection

criteria in case the number of mentees exceeded the number of mentors. Besides the obvious restriction of the number of available mentors, we felt that STC membership should also be required as a reasonable prerequisite for the value received. In addition, we elected to take advantage of the existing structure of the [Future Technical Communicators \(FTC\) Club](#) at UCF, both because we expect a significant part of the mentee pool to come from this organization and also because “Shirley” is its current president. Since FTC costs nothing and entails no obligation, we included FTC membership as a requirement for mentees.

Interest Surveys

Eventually, we realized that a significant part of the guidelines and procedures was dependent on the number of mentors and mentees who would potentially be interested in the program. Thus, we created interest surveys for the mentors and mentees, disseminated them via listserves and e-mail distributions, and based our decisions on the results. The tremendous response—a potential base of 12 mentors and 14 mentees—enabled us to customize the guidelines and procedures to better fit the needs of the chapter.

Creating Administrative Forms

After a long working session (we literally worked until the custodial staff kicked us out of Borders), we were able to draft the mentor and mentee applications, the mentor and mentee agreements, the contact log, and the implementation timeline for the program. We knew we had to keep the forms simple and un-intimidating so as to not deter potential applicants by burying them under mountains of paper. We decided to make all the forms simple and electronic, downloadable from www.stc-orlando.org/education/mentor/mentor.asp. Applicants can simply type in their information, save the document, and e-mail the forms to their program coordinator (Dan for mentors, Bonnie for mentees).

Next came the mentor and mentee agreements, designed to serve both as a preliminary outline of participant goals and as an icebreaker for a team’s first face-to-face meeting. When a team meets for the first time, the mentor and mentee finalize the agreements, save copies for their records, and e-mail them to their appropriate program coordinators. Finally, we established a very simple contact log to provide basic structure without imposing undue paperwork.

Gaining Approval from the Administrative Council

The next step in implementing the program was to gain

the Administrative Council’s approval. After completing the first drafts of the mentoring packet, we e-mailed them to the core team for its feedback. Karen Lane and Mike Murray were especially helpful with their suggestions, which we integrated into the documents. After the final review at the July Administrative Council meeting, the program was approved unanimously. We were good to go!

Rooted in STC policy and structured by clearly defined guidelines and procedures, the chapter’s efficient new mentoring program offers participants [Web-based turnkey electronic forms](#).

The Application Process

Prospective mentors and mentees are asked to submit their applications, downloadable at www.STC-Orlando.org/education/mentor/mentor.asp, on or before September 15, 2003. (For more details, see *Getting Involved* box on page 6.)

The Pairing Process

We plan to pair mentors and mentees based on their stated goals and interests. To aid in the pairing process, we included personality profiles, preferred method of communication ratings, focus area checklists, and short answer questions on the applications. For example, an extroverted, structured mentor well-versed in online Help files would be the perfect match for an outgoing mentee who prefers a well-regimented learning environment and is interested in pursuing a career in online documentation. Once the basic needs have been matched, other aspects, like preferred method of communication, will be considered. For instance, mentors who prefer communication via e-mail as a primary medium will be paired with mentees who have also stipulated this.

Kickoff Session

Once the program coordinators and the chapter president have finished pairing participants into mentor-mentee teams, participants will be notified of their selection and asked to fill out the initial mentor or mentee agreement forms (downloadable from www.STC-Orlando.org/education/mentor/mentor.asp). The

group will then be invited to a mentoring kickoff session, to be held either in late September or early October (possibly a Saturday lunch). During this meeting, mentors and mentees will be formally introduced and asked to finalize their mentor/mentee agreements. From there, it boils down to regular one-on-one communication between mentor-mentee pairs.

Feedback

During the mentor/mentee relationship, both participants will be asked to keep a basic contact log, and to provide a few SIMPLE ☺, non-time-consuming reports to the program coordinators at two points during the year, as well as a SIMPLE (promise!) evaluation at the end of the process. Coordinators will use the reports and feedback to modify and improve the program for 2004-2005 and also to write articles for potential publication and prepare a proposal for a presentation at the 2005 STC conference offering a turnkey toolkit that will help other chapters that are interested in instituting mentoring programs to get them off the ground.

As Lauren Kessler points out, "...it is unlikely that Athena will meet you at the local Starbucks [close enough!] to offer advice over skinny lattes..." She goes on to ask "where [then] can you find your own mentor?" Look no further. The Orlando Chapter mentoring program eagerly awaits you!

END NOTES

¹ For our purposes, we have adopted the term *mentee* instead of *protégé*. Not all lexicographers have swallowed that coinage yet, but we believe it is a matter of linguistic reality at this point. To any linguists purists who take umbrage, deal with it! ☺

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Getting Involved

The Orlando Chapter of STC invites you to apply for its 2003-2004 inaugural mentoring program. To apply, simply download the application forms from the chapter website: www.STC-Orlando.org/education/mentor/mentor.asp. The deadline for submission is September 15, 2003. If you have any questions or comments about the program, please feel free to contact either or both of the program coordinators, Bonnie Spivey at futuretek2003@hotmail.com, or Dan Voss at daniel.w.voss@lmco.com. We look forward to this exceptional opportunity.