

SUMMARY

- ◆ Describes six initiatives STC's Orlando chapter has pursued to advance education and professional development
- ◆ Provides information about resources to help other chapters pursue similar goals

Leveraging Resources: How an STC Chapter Can Support Education in Its Community and Professional Development for Its Members

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Frances Wosmek, a 20th-century U.S. writer, stated that "Education strays from reality when it divides its knowledge into separate compartments without due regard to the connection between them." Oliver Wendell Holmes, a 19th-century U.S. physician and writer, noted that "The main part of intellectual education is not the acquisition of facts but learning how to make the facts live." And Sir Claus Moser, chair of the British Basic Skills Agency, observed that "Education costs money, but then so does ignorance."

These are but a handful of the quotations about education. Holmes, perhaps, strikes closest to home, stressing the living texts of our profession. As Wosmek points out, connecting what we know with what we do forges the link between theory and practice, between information and knowledge. But sheer economic impact counts as well, as attested by a common paraphrase of Moser: "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."

Given the importance of both academic preparation and ongoing professional development to technical communication as a career and a profession, it is vital that the Society for Technical Communication give the subject the attention it deserves. The STC Board of Directors, keenly aware of this imperative, supports education as one of five overarching goals in the Society's 2000–2005 Strategic Plan. As Figure 1 shows, Objective 3

charges the Society to "improve educational opportunities for technical communicators." Under that goal, Strategy 3.2 focuses specifically on educational outreach: "Support secondary and college-level education in technical communication." Sub-strategies include evaluating and developing curricula and materials, and developing a turnkey tutorial presentation on the principles of technical communication for use at in-service training sessions for secondary school instructors and during visits to high school classrooms (STC 2000, p. 4).

This strategic commitment has been translated into action through such initiatives as research grants, special opportunities grants, and scholarships; numerous avenues for professional development; and increasing focus on assisting secondary school educators. This last initiative, for instance, began in June 1999 as a pilot program in which STC's Practical Communication Committee sponsored seven high school instructors to attend the 19th Annual Institute in Technical Communication at Hinds Community College in Raymond, MS (Chisnell 2000).

In addition, much has been accomplished at the chapter level, including a wide range of initiatives such as

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STC Strategic Plan, 2000–2005

Reference Number	Objective	Responsible	Year to Complete
3.	Improve educational opportunities for technical communicators.		
3.1	Increase the activity and value of Special Interest Groups (SIGs)		
3.1.1	Increase SIG-sponsored tutorials at the Annual Conference.	Special Interest Groups	00-01
3.1.2	Hold SIG conferences jointly with regional conferences or conferences of related organizations.	Special Interest Groups	01-02
3.2	Support secondary and college-level education in technical communication.		
3.2.1	Evaluate available curricula and educational materials for secondary school teachers and students.	Academic and Research Programs (Practical Communication)	00-01
3.2.2	Support the development of curricula and educational materials for secondary school teachers and students.	Academic and Research Programs (Practical Communication)	01-02
3.2.3	Collect and publicize model curricula for technical communication degree programs.	Academic and Research Programs	00-01
3.2.4	Develop a high-impact turnkey tutorial on technical communication suitable for presentation to high-school classes, for in-service training for secondary school instructors, and for easy conversion into Web-based tutorials.	Academic and Research Programs (Practical Communication)	00-01
3.3	Provide additional educational opportunities in advanced technologies.		
3.3.1	Investigate the business case for distance learning courses sponsored by STC or strategic partnerships.	Academic and Research Programs (Academic-Industry Advisory)	00-01
3.3.2	Compile and maintain regional speakers' lists for chapter meetings.	Professional Development	01-02
3.3.3	Hold multi-chapter or regional conferences annually in all regions.	Conferences (Chapter and Regional Conferences)	00-01

Year to complete reflects STC years, which begin on July 1 http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/StrategicPlan.pdf

Figure 1. Objective 3 in the Society's 2000–2005 Strategic Plan focuses on educational outreach.

valuable and innovative support to secondary education through curriculum development. A number of chapters have also held high school technical writing competitions over the years, and winners of chapter competitions may be entered in the Society-level International Student Technical Writing Competition.

Education and professional development offer an organizing focus to the Orlando chapter, whose Education Committee has actively supported initiatives in the local educational community since 1994. Formed initially to develop formal procedures for awarding undergraduate scholarships, the committee accomplished its objective and then moved on to broader initiatives. The result has been a very productive 7 years.

This article summarizes the committee's initiatives in six areas:

- ◆ Developing procedures and avenues of communication to govern its own operations
- ◆ Instituting and administering a scholarship program
- ◆ Conducting a high school writing competition
- ◆ Providing instructional support for secondary education in the community
- ◆ Instituting mentoring programs
- ◆ Supporting and enhancing professional development.

Our intent is to offer a helpful point of departure for other chapters that would like to increase their support to education.



Figure 2. Each summer, the Orlando chapter education committee sets its goals and objectives for the coming chapter year.

DEVELOPING PROCEDURES AND AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION

Hayhoe (1999) describes the benefits of drafting a strategic plan for a chapter as “a shared realization” of its current status and a “shared vision” of future activities; in other words, a “blueprint for success” shared by leaders and members alike (p. 1). Even with a chapter strategic plan in place, however, we have found that a successful committee should define its own goals and objectives as a way to achieve the chapter vision. One of the major challenges faced by any professional association committee is how to mobilize limited resources, especially time, to get things done. The answer is twofold:

1. Establish realistic goals.
2. Pursue them with efficiency, professionalism, and teamwork.

In pursuit of these goals, the Orlando chapter Education Committee has, over the past seven years, evolved a charter and operating procedures designed to ensure efficient operation (see Appendix A). We begin each chapter year with specific goals and objectives, and end the year with a final report detailing our accomplishments against those objectives. Figure 2 illustrates a streamlined version of the goals and objectives for 2000–2001, and Figure 3 demonstrates how our year-end report documents the objectives achieved (in this case for the 1999–2000 chapter year).

Let us offer a few tips on optimizing time use that we have found helpful:

- ◆ **Run efficient meetings.** Keep them short, have an agenda, and locate and schedule them to maximize attendance.



Figure 3. The success of the Melissa Pellegrin Memorial Scholarship Fund highlighted a busy and fruitful year in 1999–2000.

◆ **Use e-mail and Web-based discussion groups.**

Strategic use of e-mail and online forums can halve the number of physical meetings and double productivity. There's just one caveat: everyone has to access these resources and use them regularly.

◆ **Divide and conquer.** Tasks that would overwhelm any one person can be more readily accomplished by a committee if the tasks are divided into manageable pieces and everybody pitches in (for example, holding a high school writing competition).

◆ **Publicize results.** Our committee's efforts on publicity encompass five major areas: local newspapers, school newspapers, STC internal media (for example, our chapter newsletter; *Intercom*, the Society magazine; and *Tieline*, the STC newsletter for chapter and Society leaders), our chapter Web site, and chapter meetings.

This last area, publicizing results, merits specific mention. Without publicity, much of what we accomplish would go unnoticed except by those individuals who are immediately affected. Granted, the awareness of these individuals (the scholarship recipient receiving funding, the high school instructor receiving training) is important, but these achievements can be leveraged through judicious public relations.

Finally, while the Society has formal procedures and awards for recognizing committee and chapter activities, we learned that without local fanfare, chapter members often have no idea of the scope of their education committee's accomplishments. Thus, in addition to articles in the chapter newsletter, we have sought ways to make the

committee's members and activities visible at chapter meetings through announcements and frequent reminders of upcoming events. Moreover, the committee shares the workload by soliciting other members' participation in judging events, for instance. Then we capture the fun and recognize the participants by posting photographs in the chapter newsletter, on our Web site, and on poster boards displayed at chapter meetings.

In addition to following the Society's stated goal to "increase the visibility of the technical communication profession" to the larger community, we find that our internal publicity efforts introduce chapter members to Education Committee members who may not be able to attend chapter meetings. And, of course, most everyone enjoys the thanks and recognition such publicity brings.

INSTITUTING A SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

STC has supported scholarships at the Society level since 1971, reflecting its "belief in the importance of assisting students" (Ridgway 1999, p. 30). Acting on this belief, a number of chapters also offer scholarships for local college students; none of these recipients need to be STC members. Like the Society-level scholarship program, chapter-level programs have evolved over the years. As Hirst (2000) of the East Tennessee chapter explains, "Establishing a local STC scholarship is one of the best things a chapter can do to promote its own image, benefit students, infuse itself with new blood, and honor a distinguished chapter member" (p. 34). We could not agree more.

Developing the Orlando chapter scholarship program

The Orlando chapter's scholarship program began in the mid-1980s at the undergraduate level, geared toward the technical writing degree program at the nearby University of Central Florida (UCF). The award amounts varied from one year to the next, because they came from the proceeds of our annual UCF-STC Florida Technical Writing Conference, sometimes supplemented by the chapter's operating funds. The recipients were selected by the UCF technical writing faculty. In 1994, the education committee systematized the procedure by instituting a formal application process, defining selection criteria, and evaluating applications to select recipients.

Currently, the application consists of a simple form, accompanied by a certified transcript and a short (one-page) but important essay. The selection criteria, in approximate order of importance, are as follows:

- ◆ Vision and understanding of technical communication as a profession
- ◆ Ability to express that vision in writing, as measured in the essay

- ◆ Academic performance, as reflected in the GPA and transcript
- ◆ Financial need or other special considerations.

Ultimately, selection is a holistic process involving both mathematical tabulation of committee members' individual rankings plus subjective discussion of each application on its own merits. We've had some late meetings, but we've always reached consensus.

In 1995, the committee extended its reach, expanding the scholarship program to include awards to graduate students in the newly instituted master's program in technical writing at UCF. The graduate student scholarships follow the same selection process as the awards to undergraduates. Then, alerted to the opportunity for informing community college English teachers about our field and possibly attracting some bright students, we initiated Excellence awards for outstanding performance in technical communication at several local schools. The Excellence awards, which are smaller financially, were based solely on the recommendation of community college faculty. In 2000–2001, we extended the Excellence awards to a broader range of Central Florida colleges and universities (beyond UCF), renaming them the "Techie Awards."

Ensuring sustainability

Sustaining such an ambitious financial commitment calls for long-term strategic planning to overcome a chapter's continual turnover in leadership. Many chapters create a fund to honor an illustrious member, what Hirst (2000) calls "a local hero." At the STC Region 3 Trends conference in October 1997, the hosting Orlando chapter dedicated the scholarship fund to honor the memory of an esteemed colleague, Melissa Pellegrin, who had died the previous spring. A former member of the Education Committee and a 1994 graduate of UCF, Melissa had herself been a recipient of an Orlando chapter undergraduate scholarship. She is sorely missed.

Through the generosity of Melissa's friends, family, and coworkers, coupled with equally generous grants from the STC Board of Directors, the Melissa Pellegrin Memorial Scholarship Fund is already well established as a self-sustaining endowment that will preserve her memory and

promote the higher education of Central Florida technical communicators, in perpetuity (see www.stc-southeast.org/orlando/education/college/schlr.html). A plaque bearing the recipients' names occupies a prominent position in the UCF English Department office.

In 1996, the Education Committee decided that rather than further extend the formal scholarship program to the secondary school level, it would be more beneficial to sponsor a high school writing competition (see next section). This venue would not only provide financial awards, but also better serve to expand awareness of technical communication both as a distinct and important discipline and as an attractive career option.

CONDUCTING A HIGH SCHOOL WRITING COMPETITION

High school writing competitions encourage students to develop and apply writing skills, promote awareness of the profession and the Society, and provide civic opportunities for members (Blankinship 1999). Chapters holding high school competitions may send their winning entries to the Society-level competition, established in 1986 as "a unique avenue for recognizing excellence in technical communication at the high school level" (Fisher 1999). Currently, there are at least seven chapter-level competitions that promote high school technical writing efforts: Houston; Manitoba; Northeast Ohio; Northern Gulf Coast (FL); Orlando; Rochester (NY); and Washington, DC (Society for Technical Communication 1999).

The Washington, DC chapter, which had 152 entries in 2000, hosts the largest chapter-level competition (see www.stcwc.org/highschool_comp.shtml). Named in honor of long-time member, competition supporter, and STC fellow Austin T. Brown, this 25-year-old competition was originally called the High School Science Writing Contest. Another long-lived effort is the New York Metro chapter's two-decades-old collaboration with the New York Academy of Sciences. High school students who participate in summer internships write scientific papers about their activities, from which three winners are chosen annually. Although it is not officially tied to the international competition, several winners of the New York Metro chapter competition have subsequently entered the international competition and have won awards (Michaelson 2000, p. 1).

A chapter education committee seeking to expand its community service efforts would do well to consider hosting a student competition, particularly to capture the excitement generated by Web-based communication opportunities. Such expansion parallels Society-level changes. Embracing the centrality of electronic modes of communication and collaborative projects, STC has reorganized the international competition for 2001; the name has been changed to the International Student Technical Communication Competition, the scholarship budget has been dou-

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bled, and the rules have been broadened to include teams (Fisher 1999). While the Society has developed international competition guidelines, chapter-level competition guidelines, deadlines, and eligibility time period are left up to the individual chapter, which is free to adapt the international guidelines for local conditions. Based on our experience, we offer the following suggestions to assist chapters with competitions that are already under way or those that are ready to begin a competition.

What are the keys to sponsoring a successful high school technical writing competition on a chapter level? What lessons learned can we offer? From an education committee standpoint, there are two paths to success.

1. Turn loose an energetic person who will single-handedly overcome all obstacles and make things happen (our committee was blessed with just such an individual, Marty Goodwin, who got our competition off and running in 1995–1996).

2. Divide and conquer the tasks, an approach that has enabled us to continue to build the competition since the departure of its originator (who has since returned).

A relative newcomer to this arena, the Orlando chapter nevertheless has enjoyed several years of successful competitions, resulting in international Honorable Mentions for one of our entries in 1999 and again in 2000, and in a Distinguished, a Merit, and an Honorable Mention in 2001.

Our efforts to promote the competition have paid off in steady growth—from fewer than 10 entries in the first year to more than 150 in the 5th Annual Competition in 2000. The event now spans a five-county area in Central Florida, with a long-term goal of expansion to a statewide competition, with the help of other Florida STC chapters.

Strategically, we have found that the key to success is to educate the target audience. Many high school instructors don't even know what technical communication is or how to bring it into their classrooms. However, once instructors, especially English and science teachers, see the high correlation between the principles of technical communication and the basics of classroom instruction in practical writing, they are quick to recognize its potential.

The most effective path to reaching teachers is not from the top (county-level curriculum coordinators) or the bottom (individual classroom instructors), but from the middle—the English and science department chairs at individual schools. Note, however, that protocol may demand that you get approval at the county level before taking your message to individual schools.

Once the school-level points of contact are established (increasingly, counties and schools are posting Web sites that facilitate the research process), initial overtures can be made through letters and e-mail messages of introduction; follow-up involves telephone contact and, ultimately, face-

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to-face meetings. Classroom visits should generally be reserved for classes that are already working on a technical communication project or at least studying the subject; otherwise, the results will be marginal. Another useful promotional strategy is to ally the writing competition with local science fairs, which will generally already have a much higher profile than a fledgling technical writing competition. A number of chapters already contribute judges to local science fairs (Craig 2000); these chapters might be ready to take the next step and host their own technical communication competitions.

As for administering a competition, many materials exist at the Society level to serve as a template for competition guidelines, evaluation criteria, judging, awards and recognition, and so forth (see www.stc.org). Unfortunately, the ephemeral nature of the Web and the propensity for volunteer turnover at the chapter level contribute to tedious or sometimes impossible retrieval of the excellent information generated by individual chapters, frequently resulting in duplication of effort.

As far as budget is concerned, STC urges local chapters not to charge entry fees since they could discourage some students from entering their work. In addition, financial awards are an obvious incentive to attract entries. How, then, do we cover the costs of the awards and competition administration, besides our chapter funds? One good path is corporate sponsorships—in return for recognition in competition promotional literature and Web sites, many local businesses that are seeking to maintain their image in the community will be willing to lend a hand financially. Beginning with the employers of our Education Committee members, we are learning how to approach companies in the Central Florida area for such sponsorships. Large companies often maintain philanthropy budgets to support community outreach programs. Smaller companies that deal in technical communication products or services can be reached on the basis of their kinship within the profession. The amount of the contribution varies; \$50–\$500 USD is a good range, depending, obviously, on the prospective sponsor's size and budget. Overall, our initial forays into the world of corporate sponsorship have been mutually rewarding for the chapter and the companies that have supported us.

Judicious use of technology and location also reduces our administration costs. As Internet use gains momentum at the high school level, Web-based administration and

marketing of competitions are rapidly becoming the approach of choice. Not only does use of the Web reduce mailing costs, but in most cases it already has much greater market penetration—and this trend will only accelerate. A physical advantage results from Orlando's location, which lends itself to large conventions. We have searched for opportunities to market the competition at state and national conventions of high school English and science teachers, generally for the price of a large stack of our brochures.

Finally, we need to stress the importance of publicizing the competition and the results to leverage members' efforts. After conducting an intensive campaign into researching teacher points of contact, writing and revising the perfect marketing letter to the teachers, and then mailing a large package of materials to over 100 teachers in the Central Florida area, we realized that we had ignored the most crucial gatekeepers to area high school students—our own members. As parents, relatives, and mentors of teenagers, our members should have been the *first* point of contact. Thus, we created a special insert for our chapter newsletter that included an entry form, judging criteria, and photos of the committee preparing the mailing packets (Lippincott 1999). The entire competition was captured in an engaging, informative Web page linked to our chapter site. We maintained high visibility with frequent verbal and visual updates, and liberally sprinkled the competition URL throughout each newsletter. The colorful Web pages were printed and mounted on poster display boards that we brought to each chapter meeting, including the annual chapter awards banquet. We have no doubt that our chapter members now know something about this worthwhile endeavor.

PROVIDING INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT TO SECONDARY EDUCATION

High schools in the U.S. and Canada have begun to address the urgent need for a literate society that can understand complex language and use technology tools to communicate effectively in the workplace. In 1995, for instance, STC fellow Ronald Blicq (1995) documented Manitoba's lead in developing and pilot-testing the first technical communication course taught in Canadian public schools. A few years later, Amy Twait (1998) explained that Minnesota has included technical writing as an approved way its high school students can demonstrate their writing proficiency.

As professional writers of workplace documents, technical communicators are eager to work with high school teachers, but they do not always know how to bridge the academic and business worlds. For example, Piotrowski's (1995) description of how a Cincinnati high school class developed writing skills by revising "real-world" documents for the Department of Energy generated a number of

positive letters to the *Intercom* editor, which were printed in the April 1995 issue. These articles, plus the positive responses from the readership, provide strong evidence of members' willingness to share their knowledge and skills with high school audiences, and Society- and chapter-level efforts support this effort.

Society-sponsored projects

One outcome of STC's goal to develop curricula and educational materials for secondary school teachers and students can be found in the Society's Practical Communication Committee (PCC), established in 1999. This committee couples the energy, vision, and practical knowledge of STC members with the powerful resources of the Society to "explore, develop, and coordinate programs with schools, agencies, and STC chapters to help high school teachers develop and use functional, practical writing curricula" (www.stcregion.org/pcc/pcmain.htm). The PCC works to connect and promote chapters' efforts, network teachers with professional writers, and compile teaching resources. Efforts include an informative Web site and a newly instituted e-mail discussion list.

Under the guidance of the committee's first manager, Dana Chisnell, the PCC established a pilot program to fund high school teachers' attendance at the Institute in Technical Communication (ITC), a week-long training program then held in Hinds, MS. The enthusiastic experiences of the first seven attendees (shared in three sessions at the 2000 Annual Conference), convinced the PCC to continue the funding effort, and these first STC-sponsored attendees will serve as an advisory board. As Chisnell (2000) notes, "STC has begun to make a big difference" in how secondary teachers will implement the principles of technical communication in their writing assignments (p. 48).

Mitzi Harris, Chisnell's successor as PCC manager, plans to extend STC's outreach to secondary education. Her term in office got off to a good start: STC successfully hosted eight teachers and two high school administrators at the 2000 summer Institute in Mississippi. The mix included five language arts teachers, a third grade teacher, a science teacher, and an engineer who teaches technical communication. The STC contingent added an international angle to the Institute with two Canadian administrators, supporting Blicq's (1995) description of Canada's commitment to incorporate functional texts in secondary education.

The ITC moved to the Horry-Georgetown Technical College, Grand Strand Campus, in Myrtle Beach, SC, in June 2001. Nine high school teachers from Washington, Minnesota, Texas, Ohio, Nebraska, and Manitoba attended.

With almost a dozen committee members to provide ideas and support, Harris (2000) reported the PCC's goals for 2000–2001, which included a number of exciting initiatives, each targeting a specific outcome:

- ◆ *Encouraging exchanges between writers and teachers on a listserv PCC has established. We plan to invite the entire STC membership and as many teachers as possible to join the PCC listserv . . . to enable new connections and broader discussion between them.*
- ◆ *Working to develop and promote chapter involvement in education outreach so that all chapters are informed. We have submitted a number of proposals for the STC conference in Chicago . . . about various aspects of education outreach.*
- ◆ *Establishing the PCC Web site as a repository of information and tools to support secondary education outreach. We're developing a bibliography/cyberography of useful texts, resources, and ordering information so that teachers have ready access to them. We're developing and posting lessons suitable for presentation in classrooms by workplace professionals to facilitate their involvement. We're providing links to specific pages on the STC Web site that teachers need ready access to, such as links to chapter leaders and to college-level programs.*
- ◆ *Organizing a SIG for secondary education outreach. There are a growing number of supporters of education outreach, and we'd like to organize their talents and keep them informed of new developments.*
- ◆ *Investigating how to promote TC education by helping high school teachers in alternative programs, such as corporate K-12 partnerships, magnet, and home schools.*
- ◆ *Looking into ways to initiate an internship program for high school teachers, so that they can get a first-hand look at the workplace environments their students are likely to inhabit one day.*

Chapter-level projects

Chapter-level efforts to provide instructional support to secondary education have been varied, but results and efforts have not been publicized broadly. To this end, the PCC has been collecting information about various chapters' activities. Preliminary results are posted on the PCC's Web site, but one can assume that many more chapters than those listed there have given their time as judges for science and engineering fairs, speakers for career days and specific classes, and evaluators for technical writing competitions (Craig 2000). The lack of publicity continues to hamper the Society-level search; even at the chapter level these accomplishments receive scant public attention, judging from their chapter Web sites.

Nevertheless, chapters—or more likely, individual members—continue to reach out to local high schools. Several years ago, the innovative suggestions from over 30 teachers who attended an inservice training workshop run

by the Orlando chapter were published in STC's *Tieline* (Voss 1995). While such publicity is welcome, this newsletter is circulated only to a limited audience of Society and chapter leaders.

Our success story and others, however, were showcased at the 1996 Annual Conference session, "Changing how the world communicates: Secondary curricula in technical communication." Panelists shared handouts and discussed "specific lessons plans and teaching strategies" such as "R&D, production, and marketing of student inventions" (Abbott 1996, p. 47; see also Hayhoe and others 1996; Blicq 1996; Moretto 1996). A few years later, Marc Larsen and his colleagues recounted the benefits of their partnership between a company's product information department and a high school's English classes at the 1999 Annual Conference (Larsen and others 1999). Nevertheless, no account of this activity appears on the Orange County chapter's Web site.

At the 2000 Annual Conference in Orlando, East Bay chapter member Judy Herr shared her success story of "How technical communications pros and inner city students swapped knowledge—and everybody won!" Participants at her progression table learned, among other things, about the chapter's technical literacy project, which came about in 1988 when the chapter tried to launch a local technical writing competition. Instead, members discovered that students "needed to be able to write and understand basic concepts of technical communication before they could compete. And, we were the logical choice to help teachers help students gain those skills" (Weiss 2000). Herr piqued attendees' interest with a preview of several exciting projects. The drafts of articles that she shared, or the projects they described, should be placed on the chapter's Web site, and also linked to a repository of successful models on the PCC site.

To gain maximum return on its members' investment of their professional time in educational outreach initiatives to secondary education, the Society needs to establish and maintain an online database describing the activities of individual chapters in this, and other, areas. Without such a tool, we shall continue to reinvent the wheel and waste precious time.

Our Education Committee is
mindful of ROI, but in our case,
volunteer *time* is our most precious
commodity.

TABLE 1: RETURN ON INVESTMENT ON EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH INITIATIVES VARIES

Activity	Audience	Goal	Outcome	ROI	Disposition
Presentations to college classes	Technical communication majors	Provide “real-world” perspective on our profession	Highly successful	High	Continuing
Career fairs	Community colleges	Distribute literature on STC; Q&A	Limited interest	Low	Discontinued
Presentations to high school classes	Teachers, guidance counselors, students	Introduce technical communication as a career alternative	Mixed	Low to Medium	Limit to technical communication classes or science classes working on a TC project
Participation in teacher inservice training sessions	Multidisciplinary instructional team	Draw upon principles of TC to enhance teaching of writing	Highly successful	High	Continuing
Evaluation of curriculum	County curriculum coordinators	Help select the best materials	Moderately successful, but few quality materials available	Medium	Need to develop materials

Orlando chapter efforts

Return on investment (ROI) is a critical parameter in business. The key to profit is to invest resources wisely. The more limited those resources, the wiser the investment must be. Our Education Committee is mindful of ROI, but in our case, volunteer *time* is our most precious commodity.

How, then, do we get the best ROI on our efforts to enhance instruction in technical communication? There are no hard-and-fast rules, but a good general guideline is to ask how many students will benefit from a particular effort on our part, and how *much* they will benefit, to the extent that benefit can be quantified. Table 1 lists a few examples from our experience.

Our experience suggests that direct classroom visits are more effective at the college level than they are in high school—because of the audience. Panel discussions, workshops, presentations, and portfolio reviews have all been productive with college classes. As high schools begin to

offer courses in technical communication, the ROI on classroom visits is likely to improve. Even so, we can leverage our contribution by training *teachers* rather than students—obviously, any skills and tools we give to instructors are going to benefit far more students than we can reach directly. As discussed previously, we have developed several strategies to make teachers aware of our chapter technical writing competition, and we will target our offers of inservice training sessions to these same teachers.

Specifically, we have submitted a proposal for an STC Special Opportunities Grant to fund two multimedia projects that chapter members can take with them to presentations at high school classes (Jones 2000). One project will provide a tutorial to teachers outlining the challenges and opportunities within our profession, while the other presentation will promote our high school writing competition and encourage student submissions. The grant proposal is currently under consideration. (For more information on Special Opportunities Grants, see www.stc.org/specialopt_grant.html.)

As for career fairs, we are convinced that instead of staffing an infrequently visited table at such an event, it would be more productive to host a luncheon with a target audience invited specifically based on interest in our profession. Before going to the effort and expense of planning a luncheon, we will begin by inviting teachers to our chapter meetings, especially when the meeting topic would be applicable or easily adaptable to a high school audience. When time is limited, it makes more sense to focus efforts in a manner that yields the greatest return.

INSTITUTING MENTORING PROGRAMS

Mentor was the trusted “guardian, teacher, and father figure” to Odysseus’ son in Homer’s enduring tale, and the goddess Athena sometimes disguised herself as Mentor to offer wise advice to the youth (Kaplan 1991, p. ET-185). In a classical sense, then, mentoring implies the pairing of a senior practitioner of an art or profession with a junior member. Key elements of the relationship are candor and trust, discipline (yet with flexibility), and freedom from conventional reporting lines (for example, professor/student, supervisor/employee). If the new practitioner does happen to be an employee who reports to the mentor, however, Kirchem (1998) suggests that the mentor act as an advocate for that employee. Such advocacy would be bounded by the need to maintain equitable supervisory treatment of other direct reports.

Regardless of the relationship, mentoring is not a one-way street. As Langenbach (1996) reminds us, mentoring “provides the opportunity for two people to grow in knowledge and interpersonal skills” (p. 8). Mentors benefit by being exposed to fresh perspectives and new techniques from inexperienced writers, and different tools and technologies used in experienced writers’ previous employment (p. 10). Nevertheless, persons who have mentored may refuse engaging in further mentoring relationships because they feel their time or efforts are unappreciated. Phillips-Jones (2000) recommends that the beneficiaries of mentors must offer positive reinforcement by complimenting, thanking, and reporting benefits to their mentors. In other words, these new practitioners also have obligations, and may need to be taught what they are during the mentoring relationship.

At the chapter level, mentoring relationships include at least three basic variations.

- ◆ **Academe-to-academe** Two possibilities are to pair graduate students (or recent graduates) with undergraduates, and to cast teachers as role models and advisors for future professional communicators. In the academic world, student chapters can facilitate mentoring in important ways. They can invite recent graduates to share their experiences with current students, and they can encourage student par-

ticipation in the nearest professional chapter’s activities (Overturf and Flenar 2000). As advisors and role models, technical communication teachers can prepare students for the professional world by expecting a professional appearance in class, encouraging professional work habits, creating collaborative assignments, and promoting internships (Connors 1992, p. 478).

- ◆ **Industry-to-industry** Two applications are to pair experts with novices within specific skill sets and to assign each new or junior employee a “big brother/sister” to teach them the ropes—sharing the intangible political savvy that can only be acquired with years of experience.

The most obvious recipient of mentoring is the intern. Durbin and DiStravolo (1991) describe the various roles a mentor must assume to guide the intern’s professional growth: travel agent, tour guide, parent, buddy, and teacher. In this era of career shifting and corporate downsizing, however, we must remember that an intern is not necessarily a young, traditional-age college student or recent graduate. Interns come in all ages, from all cultures, and with varying levels of work experience. Kaplan (1991) reminds us that issues of race or gender may complicate a mentoring relationship, and she outlines a number of strategies for addressing such issues. For example, she urges mentors to “develop clear parameters for the relationship” (p. 188). She also cautions mentors not to assume that everyone understands the rules of the particular corporate culture: “Playing by the rules depends on understanding the rules” (p. 188).

- ◆ **Industry-to-academe and academe-to-industry** This is where an STC chapter can make a major contribution, both by pairing experienced practitioners with college students, faculty, and high school instructors, and also by drawing on the specialized expertise of technical communication faculty to enhance the practical skills of technical communicators in the workplace.

Over the years, a number of STC members have urged that the academic world of teachers and students must meet the workplace of practicing professionals halfway in a partnership (see, for example, Hart and Glick-Smith 1994; Hayhoe 1998). Recognizing STC’s pivotal role in facilitating mentoring opportunities, the Society has instituted the Academe-Industry Advisory Committee, managed by STC fellow Kris Sutliff. Among other things, this committee oversees short-term teaching fellowships for practicing professionals and workplace fellowships for full-time technical communication faculty (Sutliff 2000).

On a chapter level, Southard and Reaves (1995) suggest that professionals can look for mentoring partners at STC conferences and chapter meetings. Chapter members might also pair workplace research projects with academic researchers, students as well as teachers (p. 563). Working or retired technical communicators can visit classes or host students in workplace interviews during which they review student resumes and portfolios (p. 562). Electronic mentoring using communication technologies such as e-mail affords students encouragement and a potential employment network, and furnishes teachers with ideas for projects and class development as well as a means of continuing education (Fink, Gasser, and Schubert 1996). Finally, in a financial capacity, in addition to the previously mentioned scholarship programs, an STC chapter can offer to subsidize student member attendance at regional or annual conferences (Overturf and Flenar 2000).

For any of the three variations of mentoring discussed here, one of the keys to success is to strike the right balance between structure and informality. Enough discipline needs to be exerted to ensure that regular face-to-face meetings occur (for example, a standing working lunch once a month), yet the door must always be open for the spontaneous exchanges that nurture the relationship and develop trust.

Another area where STC is in a position to guide eager learners in management and communication skills is through outreach to community volunteer organizations. While this form of service does not fit the formal definition of mentoring (that is, pairing individual mentors and new employees or recent graduates), it does parallel our educational outreach activities in a number of ways. What better model for community volunteers than a society of professional communicators which is itself sustained primarily by volunteerism? Saul Carliner of Bentley College has devoted significant energy to teaching volunteers to run non-profit organizations. He has developed a Web site dedicated to providing resources for volunteer community leaders (Carliner 1998).

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Orlando chapter initiatives

For years, our chapter has strongly supported the first and third of these approaches, within the academic world and between industry and academe. Many of the Orlando STC members who are graduates of the University of Central Florida (UCF) speak to classes, evaluate student portfolios, and invite students to conduct workplace interviews. Such efforts also give mentors the platform to promote STC as a professional networking society.

More formally, UCF's Technical Writing Advisory Board meets every fall to facilitate a community-wide consultation on the types of courses taught in the undergraduate and graduate programs in technical writing. Moreover, professors formulating a newly proposed PhD in Texts and Technology sought input and written support from potential students and from industry representatives, both in Central Florida and elsewhere in the nation.

The Education Committee is currently exploring how to implement a more formal industry-to-academe mentoring program by pairing volunteers from among the chapter's ranks of practicing professionals with interested students from the UCF undergraduate and graduate programs in technical communication to form 1- to 2-year mentoring partnerships. Drawing on resources from other chapters that have already implemented such programs (Bergen 1997; Fisher 2001), we plan to provide basic training in the mentoring process as well as guidelines under which participants should proceed.

The Education Committee also plans to increase our involvement in the second type of mentoring (industry-to-industry) by leveraging the varied expertise of our chapter members through chapter meetings, workshops, and informal "lunch and learn" initiatives, as well as by encouraging professional networking through a suitable online forum (see the section on professional development below).

Such mentoring, coupled with the chapter's financial support through scholarships, strengthens the bonds of the technical communication community. A chapter's mentoring efforts may yield an overlooked benefit to the Society: after graduation, the new professionals in the mentoring program may become STC members wherever their employment takes them.

SUPPORTING AND ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most of our activity in the five areas discussed above has focused on supporting educational institutions in our surrounding community—ranging, literally, from elementary schools (for which we developed templates to help teachers prepare fourth graders for the Florida Writes exam) to graduate programs in technical communication. It is equally important in our educational initiatives that we reach out to our own membership as well. Indeed, in a profession that is inextricably linked to technology, contin-

uous professional development is not a luxury; it is an essential.

At the Society level, of course, the Annual Conference and regional conferences allow great numbers of members to attend—and to present—sessions devoted to professional development. Society periodicals also share information with a large readership, and archived copies in libraries and now online allow future readers to research and apply professional development opportunities. Individuals holding Society positions such as regional directors often conduct professional development sessions (see, for example, Ames 1999). Then there are STC-affiliated workshops such as the Institute in Technical Communication currently held in South Carolina, and the Technical Communication Institute held in Manitoba. These workshops are particularly notable, according to Blicq (1999), because “they are organized by volunteers and staffed by prestigious faculty whose primary recompense is the satisfaction they gain from conveying information to their peers” (p. 28).

In larger chapters, professional development initiatives may be the province of a separate committee. The Chicago chapter, for instance, created the Institute for Professional Development to develop partnerships between academic institutions and practicing professionals. Working together, faculty and chapter members have generated courses for new communicators who have little or no formal coursework or experience in technical communication (Abbott 2000). The Institute serves as a model for other chapters to partner with their local technical communication faculty.

However, we suspect that many chapters, large and small, operate as the Orlando chapter does—on the enthusiasm and efforts of a small core of dedicated members. Each elected officer and committee member thus often does more than one job, with the result that no one is particularly anxious to undertake chairing another committee. How, then, can an education committee help promote the professional development of its chapter’s members, in addition to its outreach to the surrounding educational community?

Based on our own experiences, what we have learned from other organizations, and, especially, from the collected wisdom of other STC chapters, the Orlando chapter has targeted a number of approaches to support the professional development of our members that we plan to tackle in the next few years:

- ◆ Work with the chapter’s program coordinator (in our case, the vice president) to develop valuable presentations for chapter meetings.
- ◆ Support regional conferences with presentations and workshops.
- ◆ Encourage chapter members to share their professional expertise, initially by presenting at chapter

meetings, and providing them with feedback to help them extend their reach to regional and international conferences.

- ◆ Explore the possibility of providing financial assistance to help chapter members further their academic training and participate in professional development activities such as regional and international conferences, in return for sharing what they learn in forums such as chapter meetings, the Web site, or a listserv (within guidelines for application and distribution of resources).
- ◆ Sponsor special professional development activities such as half- or full-day training sessions by recognized experts within or outside STC, offering discounted rates to members.
- ◆ Establish listserves and chat rooms to encourage electronic professional networking, problem-solving, and brainstorming, using STC’s hosting capability.
- ◆ Foster community service opportunities for members through the vehicle of STC.

This list is by no means exhaustive, and in different years, depending on the leadership and needs of the membership and the community, the approaches will vary. For instance, our last two chapter vice presidents, who were responsible for developing programs for chapter meetings, also served on the Education Committee. This overlap has helped us foster professional development by presenting the latest in software products, market trends, and other areas of wide interest.

We are also pleased to report that many of our chapter members have eagerly volunteered to present programs on topics ranging from Web indexing to distance learning. Such presentations serve to inform the internal professional community, and they also generate increased visibility and recognition of expertise by our employers.

A good example of professional networking in action at chapter meetings is the traditional “Washlines” session the Orlando chapter holds each summer following the STC annual conference. Based on the late Gordon McKenzie’s memorable keynote address at the STC Annual Conference in 1994, in which McKenzie strung a rope across the stage and displayed 30 placards bearing topics from which the audience could choose, this lively session calls upon chapter members who attended the conference to share information from the technical sessions with fellow chapter members and colleagues in an informal but informative session (see Benson 1998; Ratcliffe 1998).

One thing is certain: The faster our profession moves, the more important professional development will be to each practitioner.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Chapter-level education committees are uniquely positioned to activate STC’s outreach to education because

they are closest to the action—the schools. To function efficiently, these committees should have an annual planning session to set and prioritize goals and objectives for the coming year. They should not only track their accomplishments against the goals but also leverage those accomplishments through aggressive publicity in appropriate internal and external forums—not in the spirit of self-promotion, but in the interest of sparking more volunteerism to sustain the outreach initiative. Finally, at the Society level, we should establish and maintain an online forum where individual chapters can benefit from each others' experiences in educational outreach and share the tools we develop to help secondary school teachers use the principles of technical communication in their classroom.

To be productive, then, an education committee must not only have a clear vision of its mission and goals, but also have the knowledge to translate that vision into specific, attainable objectives and the commitment to convert the vision into reality.

The Irish poet William Butler Yeats reminds us that “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the start of a fire.” STC is nurturing that flame. **TC**

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APPENDIX A: STC ORLANDO CHAPTER’S EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHARTER AND PROCEDURES

Note: The text can also be accessed at www.stc-southeast.org/orlando/education/goals/charter.html

The Education Committee is a standing committee of the Orlando chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), as specified in the chapter by-laws, Section 2, Paragraph D, under the supervision of the chapter president or his or her designee on the Administrative Council. Its charter is to support educational and professional development relating to technical communication: within our chapter, within the workplace, and, especially, within all levels of the community educational system. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ◆ Awarding undergraduate and graduate scholarships in technical communication
- ◆ Sponsoring/supporting an investment fund to endow future scholarships
- ◆ Awarding community college excellence awards in technical communication
- ◆ Sponsoring an annual high school technical writing competition
- ◆ Supporting in-service education of area secondary and elementary instructors
- ◆ Supporting the education and professional development of chapter members
- ◆ Evaluating curriculum and textbooks
- ◆ Supporting career fairs, “teach-ins,” science fairs, and the like
- ◆ Making presentations to undergraduate and graduate classes at UCF
- ◆ Encouraging mentoring between industry and academe
- ◆ Providing financial stipends to support the professional development of technical communication faculty at UCF and area community colleges
- ◆ Supporting initiatives by STC International on bringing technical communication into secondary school curriculum
- ◆ Providing input to the chapter’s Web site by regularly updating information on the Education Committee’s page

- ◆ Providing input to the chapter newsletter to keep chapter members apprised of committee activities and opportunities

These activities are subject to Administrative Council approval.

The Education Committee has two standing officerships: the chairperson and the coordinator of the high school technical writing competition. The chair is appointed by the chapter president for the chapter year; the coordinator is a volunteer from among the committee’s membership. Other leadership functions within the committee are filled on an ad hoc basis to meet requirements.

Procedures

General communication

- ◆ The Education Committee chairperson will make minutes from meetings available to the Administrative Council and to chapter members either through the chapter president or his or her designee on the Administrative Council who participates on the Education Committee.
- ◆ On the request of the chapter president, the Education Committee chairperson will make records of confidential committee deliberations on scholarships, awards, and contest evaluations available to the Administrative Council, collectively.

Budget development and approval

- ◆ The Education Committee will submit a proposed budget for the chapter year to the chapter treasurer in accordance with his or her schedule. The amounts approved will be governed by availability of funds, the chapter budget, and chapter priorities, as determined by the Administrative Council.
- ◆ Private donations to the Pellegrin fund may only be used to support scholarships.

Scholarship selections

- ◆ The Education Committee has responsibility for selecting recipients of the annual Pellegrin undergraduate and graduate scholarships and for determining the criteria and procedures governing said selection.
- ◆ Evaluation criteria include (but are not necessarily limited to) academic records (GPA, transcripts), an essay, and financial need. Weighting of the criteria is subjective and is the individual responsibility of each committee member.
- ◆ The method of selection is consensus, guided by mathematical ranking and tabulation in conjunction with discussion among committee members.
- ◆ All material in the scholarship applications, all records of committee votes, and all discussion shall

be held in the strictest confidence by Education Committee members.

- ◆ Assuming adequate funds are available, scholarships shall be funded from the Education Committee portion of the chapter operating budget until the Pellegrin Scholarship Fund becomes self-sustaining.

Excellence award selections

- ◆ Excellence awards for community college technical communication students are based on the recommendation of a technical communication faculty member identified by the English Department chair. The Education Committee chair or his or her designee contacts the English Department chairs and the designated faculty members at the community colleges.
- ◆ To be eligible for an award, a recipient must attend an area community college and have completed at least one course in technical communication within the past year.
- ◆ Names of recipients shall remain confidential until they are announced at an STC event.
- ◆ Amounts are determined by the annual budget and the availability of funds.
- ◆ Excellence awards are funded from the Education Committee portion of the chapter operating budget.

Stipends for faculty professional development

- ◆ Budget permitting, financial stipends shall be provided to support the professional development of technical communication faculty at UCF and area community colleges.
- ◆ To be eligible for a stipend, an area college must have offered/taught at least one course in technical communication within the past year.
- ◆ The amounts of the awards will reflect the number of courses offered and the size of the technical communication staff. Amounts are determined by the annual budget and the availability of funds, and are the ultimate responsibility of the Administrative Council and the chapter treasurer.
- ◆ Stipends for faculty professional development are funded from the Education Committee portion of the chapter operating budget.

High school competition

- ◆ The annual high school competition is open to all secondary students in the five-county Central Florida area (Orange, Seminole, Osceola, Volusia, and Brevard).

Note: There is a growth plan to expand the contest both by wider promotion and by seeking support from other STC chapters, initially in Central

Florida (Space Coast Chapter) and, ultimately, statewide.

- ◆ Entries are judged by the Education Committee under specific guidelines established by the competition manager and approved by the committee.
- ◆ If the volume of entries dictates, the Education Committee may seek judging support from chapter members.
- ◆ The method of evaluation is consensus, guided by mathematical ranking and tabulation in conjunction with discussion among committee members.
- ◆ All material in the contest entries, all records of committee votes, and all discussion shall be held in the strictest confidence by Education Committee members.
- ◆ Financial awards/plaques may be presented per committee guidelines and as approved in the Education Committee portion of the chapter operating budget.
- ◆ Budget permitting, contest award winners, their parents, and their faculty sponsors are invited to receive their awards at a suitable chapter event such as the year-end dinner meeting in June.
- ◆ Contest expenses incurred by the competition manager (or other committee members) may be reimbursed in accordance with the Education Committee portion of the chapter operating budget.
- ◆ Monies collected from corporate/private patrons of the high school competition are turned over to the chapter treasurer.

Supporting the education and professional development of chapter members

Note: Specific activities in support of this charter element are presently in the definition stage.

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