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Five Wants From AAACE
From a Print Freak

A comment by Mark Allen (Michigan) at the print media session of our national meeting this year started me thinking about what I want out of AAACE. Mark expressed the opinion that our media sessions had been long on mechanics (printing and layout techniques) and possibly short on professional training in writing and editing skills.

Since I fancy myself a writer rather than an engineer, equipment technician, or subject matter specialist, I was ready to say, "Hear, hear!" But I needed to mull over what I did want out of AAACE besides fun and games, of which I believe I have had a lot.

Now that I've thought it over, I've come up with five things I would like to get out of our professional organization, starting with Mark's "druthers" as Number One.

1. **Technical knowledge of construction and application of the English language.**

Probably everybody else got all of this they wanted in English Comp I & II and a smattering of literature. But every once in a while I read something that makes me think I didn't. New writers come along now and then with a totally new angle on technique or style. What makes it work? And the masters — how did they achieve their impact? What arrangements of words gave them their appeal?

English construction and techniques of expressing thoughts and emotions with words are our basic tools. Shouldn't we stimulate a little more thought and discussion on them, share or expose techniques of the great writers?

If our answer is yes, what forms can the professional writer training take?

Here are a few suggestions that would interest me:

Talks and discussion with English language authorities. Here I'm thinking of people like Sheridan Baker, Ohio State English professor, who has studied how noted authors and speakers have applied word patterns to achieve their lasting impact. (One Bakerism makes his whole book, The Practical Stylist, worthwhile: "The minute the beginner tries to sound dignified, in comes a misty layer of words a few feet off the ground and nowhere near heaven." I wish I had written that. And he has a whole book full of such observations.)

Critiques by outstanding writers: One summer for variety I took in the Indiana University's Writers' Workshop instead of the AAACE Conference. They had enrollees send in a short story, book chapter, or article, depending on the course(s) you enrolled in. Their guest faculty of outstanding authors went through these before the workshop and spent as much time as you wanted going over them with you between lecture periods.

This may be a little heavy for AAACE meetings but might be considered. Editors from some of the magazines we write for might critique samples.

Semantics: Another type of authority we should hear from frequently is the semanticist, like S. I. Hayakawa. We had one on either a regional or national program once but this is a subject professional writers could get something out of on a more formalized and regular training basis.

Editing: Someone suggested at the annual AAACE print media session that AAACE come out with an editing manual to help train new editors. We

old editors have all perfected our editing skills, of course, but we might find such a manual and an occasional session on editing technique of academic interest.

Readability analysis: Has anyone done anything on readability since Rudolph Flesch? What measures are available besides the Flesch formula and the Fog Index? Can we hear from their authors?

We all know these have limitations but we also know they are useful in arguing with empirical research minded authors. So how can we improve on their use and accuracy?

2. *Current knowledge and theory of basic communications processes (BCP).*

The apparent broad backing of AAACE members for committees planning a national BCP research and training component comparable to the old NPAC was greatly encouraging.

My goal in writing is to influence change for the better. I assume that, while the scientific way or method based on research does not always prove better than the traditional, it does more often than not. As long as this is true, science can lead society gradually toward a higher form of civilization.

To be put to use, the scientifically based alternatives must be supplied at the time and place people need them to solve specific problems.

We waste much time printing and broadcasting information that, while new or midly interesting, is not needed by anyone at the moment and therefore is not applied and is soon forgotten. With this in mind it makes sense for us to find out what gets the scientific methods put into practice.

My own major interests in BCP as a writer are (1) techniques of finding out what information people are needing, (2) what forms communicate it to them best, (3) which forms bring quickest adoption, if these differ from 2, and (4) which forms they prefer if these differ.

One digression might be in order at this point on the morality of techniques of persuasion. I regard my duty as one of supplying information on the scientific alternatives at the point of decision making. It is legitimate for me to advocate the scientific method as much as I can, as long as the group is free to choose my suggested alternative(s) or argue for others.

3. *Aids in establishing two-way contacts with audiences.*

As implied above and as stated by educational psychologists, two-way communication is necessary for most effective transfer of knowledge. We can't bring applicable information to people at the time and place they need it to solve problems unless we establish two-way rapport.

The oldest and still most effective method of getting communications from Extension audiences is county long range planning. County extension Councils and their advisory committees draw up long range (3 or 5 year)

plans (with Extension personnel as advisors), setting goals or bench marks for local business, community, and individual producer concerns.

Communications specialists have not begun to scratch the surface of the role they can play in assimilating this information and getting it transferred from public to college so research and education plans at the institution can be based on the real world needs.

Other means of two-way communications that have been tried with lesser success have included formal surveys and interviews, informal visiting, and monitoring of telephone questions and office calls.

I would like to hear more discussion and comparison of successes with these and any other two-way communications techniques. Anymore I have little confidence in the opinions of specialists and less in those of administrators regarding what information the public wants and needs from us. The former are too biased and the latter are too far from the scene of action.

My own feeling is that communicators could probably do more good for society by helping the public communicate their wishes to institutions than by all current efforts at helping institutions pour out a reverse flow of uncalled for and unplanned information. Yet we spend almost no time at people-to-institution communication, or discussing it professionally, at least.

4. *Knowledge of new hardware and how we can use it.*

Although my interest in maintenance and running of hardware approaches zero, I do want to know what is available for getting my deathless prose into print, on the air, or enshrined on film. So I'll sit through some talks on this subject—but, like Mark Allen, I think we overdo it, probably because it lends itself so well to show-and-tell.

5. *Socializing opportunities with colleagues.*

Many AAACEers have wisely observed a great deal of knowledge is gleaned at impromptu sessions after the formal ones at AAACE national and regional meetings. And a little libation is a remarkable stimulus for philosophical discussion—whether it is remembered the next day or not. More learning takes place when you are having fun, we're told. Come to think of it, I've put this request from AAACE much too far down the list. Seriously, some of my best memories center around AAACE after-hour parties.

These are things I would like to receive from AAACE, in order of importance, except for the expressed doubt over the last. We have received some of each but I believe a change of emphasis may be in order toward more serious work on 1, 2, and 3 if we want to maintain AAACE as a respected professional organization.