

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 895

CS 510 739

AUTHOR McDowell, Earl E.
TITLE Certifying Technical Communicators in the 21st Century.
PUB DATE 2001-10-00
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the STC Region 6 Conference (11th, Minneapolis, MN, September 30-October 2, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Certification; Higher Education; Occupational Surveys; Questionnaires; Student Surveys; *Technical Writing
IDENTIFIERS Science Writing; Technical Communication

ABSTRACT

During the 1980s, meetings were held throughout the United States to discuss certification for technical communicators. Discussions were guided by a series of questions regarding the educational requirements and professional duties of technical communicators. In January 1983 the STC (Scientific and Technical Communication) Board authorized the Committee on Certification to survey the opinions of employers of technical communicators. In 1985, the certification questionnaire was sent to all 7300 members. In 2001, 40 undergraduate and graduate STC students responded to two of the survey questions. In the 1985 study, 1250 responses were analyzed, while 40 questionnaires were analyzed for the STC students. Survey results indicate that STC students should administer certificate programs in scientific and technical communication. In fact, 83% of the respondents agreed with this, and 95% said they would apply for the program. Over 75% of technical communication students believe they should receive certification by completing a BS in technical communication, and 63% believe that tests should be developed in different communication areas. Sample questionnaire is attached. (NKA)

Certifying Technical Communicators in the 21st Century

STC Region 6 Conference
Earl E. McDowell
October 1, 2001

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

E. E. McDowell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

STC considered certifying technical communicators in 1964, 1975, 1981 and 1982. In 1983 President Kent Cook, Jr. appointed Andrew Malcolm as manager of the ad hoc Committee on Certification. During the 1980s meetings were held throughout the United States. The following questions were used to guide the discussion:

What should a certification program include? (training, experience, tests, supervised work certificates, record keeping, judges arbitrators, standing committees, etc.)

Would employees value certification? (credibility: validity; reliability; basis for hiring, promoting, increasing salary, willingness to pay fees, etc.)

What would a certification program cost?

How many persons would apply for certification?

How much would applicants pay?

What would the applicants' technical communication vocation be? (writing, editing, illustrating)

What would the applicants' technical skills be and should STC certify those skills?

Who would operate the program? (entirely STC, entirely a contractor, or a combination)

Should dues income be used to support certification or should it be self-supporting through fees?

This plan became an STC Certification Program document but was not approved by the STC board. The initial features were as follows:

1. There would be two levels of certification, regular and senior:

Regular certification would require a combination of four years of education and experience of which two or more years would have to experience.

Senior certification would require a combination of six and one-half years of education and experience.

2. Persons holding Senior membership would be permitted to obtain certification without monitoring of experience by STC.
3. Testing would be by discipline, i.e., writers, editors, etc. Applicants would be required to perform writing, editing, etc. to demonstrate specific skills.

Procedures

In January 1983 the STC Board authorized the Committee to conduct an opinion survey of employers of technical communicators. In the fall of 1983 the Board authorized the Committee to survey all of its members. In the spring of 1985 the certification questionnaire was sent to all 7,300 members. In 2001 I asked 40 undergraduate and graduate STC students to respond to two of the questions used in the 1985 survey, as well as answer four additional questions.

Results

The results, indicate that 1,250 were analyzed in the 1985 study, while 40 questionnaire were analyzed for the STC students. The results are reported in Table 1:

Table 1
Responses to Certification Questions

ITEMS	Responses	
	1985 %	2001 %
Should STC be the organization that administers a program for certifying technical communicators?	61	83
Would you apply for certification as a technical communication yourself?	71	95
Should professional with a BS degree in STC receive certification without taking a test?		77
Should educators develop certification tests in various technical communication areas?		63
Should employers develop certification tests in various technical communication areas?		41
Would you take tests to be certified in different areas of STC?		92

Discussion

The results of the 1985 and 2001 survey seem to indicate that STC should administer certificate programs in scientific and technical communication. In fact, 83 percent of the respondents (2001) agreed with this statement. Moreover, 95 percent indicated they would apply for the program. Over 75 percent of technical communication students believe they should receive certification by completing a BS degree in technical communication, and 63 percent believe that tests should be developed in different communication areas. Almost all students (92%) believe that they would be certified in different areas.

Technical Communication Certification Questionnaire

Please take approximately ten minutes to answer the following questions regarding certification programs in the technical communication discipline.

1. Do you favor certification programs for some occupations?

Yes No

If you answered yes, please continue with question 2. If you answered no, please continue with question 12.

2. Do you feel a certification program should include accrediting educational programs in technical communication?

Yes No

If you answered yes, please continue with question 3. If you answered no, please continue with question 12.

3. Which of the following technical communication programs should be certified?

Technical Writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Technical Editing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Technical Illustrating	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Technical A/V	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Marketing Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Technical Communication Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Document Design	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No

4. Should Scientific and Technical Communication (STC) be the organization that administers a program for certifying technical communicators?

Yes No

5. Would you favor a program that required periodic re-certification?

Yes No

6. Do you believe that a certification program would benefit your organization?

Yes No

If you answered yes, please continue with question 5. If you answered no, please continue with question 12.

7. When considering several candidates for employment, would you favor the candidate with a certification in technical communication?

Yes No

8. If a current employee obtained a certification in technical communication, would you...

Give special recognition for this achievement? Yes No

Increase the employee's salary? Yes No

Increase the employee's responsibilities? Yes No

9. Would your organization pay a \$50.00-\$200.00 certification fee for full-time employees?

Yes No

10. Would you apply for certification as a technical communicator?

Yes No

If you answered yes, please continue with question 11. If you answered no, please continue with question 12.

11. If your organization were unable to pay a \$50.00-\$200.00 certification fee, would you be willing to pay your certification fees yourself?

Yes No

Demographics

Please answer the demographic questions below.

12. How many years have you been a technical communicator? _____ Years

13. How many years of education in technical communication do you have? _____ Years

14. How many years of training in technical communication do you have? _____ Years

15. Are you a member of STC? (Please check yes or no.) Yes No
If you answered yes, how long have you been a member of STC? _____ Years

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. Please send your responses in the self-address stamped envelope (SASE) provided. If you provide your address on the SASE, you will be mailed the results of this study.



CS 510 739



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)
Reproduction Release (Specific Document)



I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: <i>certifying Technical Communicators in the 21st Century</i>	
Author(s): <i>Earl E. McDowell</i>	
Corporate Source: <i>University of Minnesota</i>	Publication Date:

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign in the indicated space following.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
<p>PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY</p> <p><i>SAMPLE</i></p> <p>TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)</p>	<p>PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY</p> <p><i>SAMPLE</i></p> <p>TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)</p>	<p>PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY</p> <p><i>SAMPLE</i></p> <p>TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)</p>
Level 1	Level 2A	Level 2B
<p>↑</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>↑</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>↑</p> <input type="checkbox"/>
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) and paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche, or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: <i>Earl E. McDowell</i>	Printed Name/Position/Title: <i>Earl E. McDowell, Professor</i>	
Organization/Address: <i>Department of Rhetoric University of Minnesota 22 COB 57 Paul Minnesota</i>	Telephone: <i>612-624-3657</i>	Fax:
	E-mail Address: <i>mcdoe001@umn.edu</i>	Date: <i>Feb. 18, 2002</i>

