

**What Does History and the Recent
NAITTE Membership Survey
Suggest for Our Future? A Call to Action**

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In 2004, in response to concerns about declining membership, the National Association of Industrial and Technical Teacher Educators (NAITTE) conducted a survey of its members. What was a concern then is of even greater concern today. This essay is an attempt to extend the conversation begun by Gagel (2006) through his synthesis of results of the 1993 and 2004 NAITTE membership surveys (reported elsewhere in this journal). The focus of this commentary will be twofold: It will examine additional historical perspectives that may help us better understand NAITTE as it exists today and also consider possible actions that could be taken by the NAITTE leadership and other concerned member volunteers.

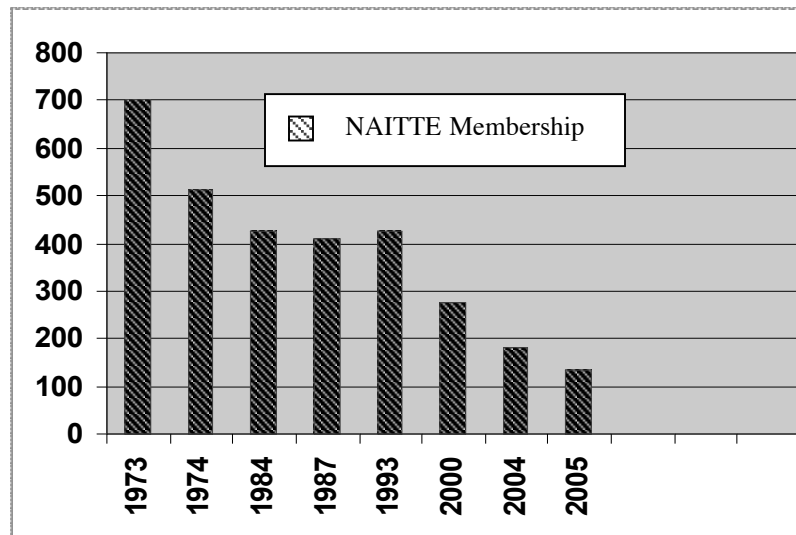
Membership Patterns

Membership numbers and changes in composition are not new concerns for NAITTE, but that does not diminish the importance of those concerns. Nineteen seventy-three was the peak year for NAITTE membership with 702 members reported (Evans, 1988). In 2005, NAITTE membership records listed our lowest numbers in 79 years with 134 paid and honorary members. Figure 1 represents NAITTE membership trends since 1973.

NAITTE has long been a broad-based and inclusive teacher education organization closely associated with the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE, formerly the American Vocational Association, AVA). Its core has remained technology and trade and industrial teacher educators, but membership beyond that core has varied across time. In 1937, NAITTE described its membership as coming from both general and vocational industrial teacher education. By 1950 membership

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Figure 1
1973-2005 NAITTE Membership Trends



was identified as industrial arts or industrial teacher educators. In 1967 membership had been expanded to include educators from health occupations and technical teacher education. Then in 1985 military and industrial trainer training was added to our target for membership to better serve the then growing number of NAITTE members who had begun a shift toward trainer training (Evans, 1988). By the end of the 1970s, most health occupations teacher educators had left NAITTE to support the Health Occupations Teacher Education Association which chartered in 1976 (Evans, 1988). Membership numbers were further affected by the end of the 1990s when most industrial trainer educators had severed ties with ACTE and NAITTE, affiliating instead with the Academy of Human Resource Development and/or other similar training specialty groups. Similarly, most military trainer

educators now attend conferences focusing specifically on military training instead of affiliating with ACTE and NAITTE. A similar pattern seemed to emerge as a result of individuals who chose to view industrial arts and its progeny, technology education, as solely general education, dissociated from career and technical education. These individuals thus shifted away from participation in ACTE and NAITTE. In 2004 slightly less than half (47%) of NAITTE members reported themselves as based in the field of technology teacher education, while almost 40% reported themselves as trade and industrial teacher educators. The remainder split between the areas of technical teacher education and trainer training (Gagel, 2006). In spite, or perhaps because, of this history of shifts in membership focus, Gagel (2006) reports that many NAITTE members identified the opportunity for teacher educators from a variety of disciplines to mix and interact as an important historical strength of the organization that may well have contributed to NAITTE's long life.

It has also been suggested that NAITTE membership may have declined due to the contraction of teacher education programs in universities across the country, implying that forces are in play that are beyond our control. To a certain degree this may be true, but what, in fact, is our realistic membership potential? Rupert Evans (1988) suggested that it was difficult to estimate the potential membership for the NAITTE organization. One way that was suggested previously was to compare the membership against the total number of faculty listed in the Industrial Teacher Education Directory (ITE Directory). However, even as far back as 1988, this method of potential membership estimation was considered problematic because of the increasing number of directory listings that appeared to have little to do with teacher/trainer preparation. Anecdotally, this trend of including in the directory programs that have no teacher education component appears to have continued and perhaps even increased.

An additional decline in potential membership may relate to student memberships. In the early 1970s Evans (1988) reported that NAITTE membership numbers included 292 doctoral students as compared with 72 doctoral student memberships in 1986. The 2005 NAITTE membership roster

included 6 student memberships. The 2005-2006 ITE Directory listed 23 doctoral level programs with 74 reported graduates (Schmidt and Custer, 2005-2006).

Perhaps an alternative approach to considering potential membership population using the ITE Directory, would be to attempt to identify persons who appear to have been reported as teacher educators or trainer trainers (including the designation “professional” which may over estimate the number of teacher/trainer educators because it appears to mean different things at different institutions). With that idea in mind a review of the 1995-1996 ITE Directory indicates that there were 187 teacher/trainer education programs represented by 537 faculty persons described as possibly having teacher or trainer education responsibilities (Dennis, 1995) compared to the 2005-2006 ITE Directory which listed 121 teacher/trainer education programs represented by 417 faculty persons who were described as possibly having teacher or trainer education responsibilities (Schmidt and Custer, 2005-2006).

How many potential members exist certainly impacts NAITTE membership numbers, but many other issues may also affect potential membership. Some comments reported by Gagel (2006) from the survey suggest that some members perceive a decline in benefits, products, and/or services from NAITTE. Considering that concern raises a sort of chicken-and-egg question: Has NAITTE membership declined because of a decrease in member benefits, products, and services, or have benefits, products, and services diminished due to reduced membership and the accompanying decrease in income and the number of willing volunteers?

Benefits, Products, and Services

The benefits, products, and services offered by NAITTE have always been critical to the success of the organization. NAITTE provides a number of benefits and products to its membership. Those include publishing the *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education* and co-sponsoring the Industrial Teacher Education Directory. The organization awards scholarships for promising doctoral students and offers recognition for quality research and scholarship. NAITTE has long provided

opportunities for professional communication, leadership, and service for technology, trade and industrial, technical, and teacher trainer educators.

Journal of Industrial Teacher Education

Gagel (2006) reported that participants in the 2004 member survey ranked the *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education (JITE)* as the most valued product that NAITTE provides to its membership. Emphasis on the importance of maintaining a quality journal is not a new phenomenon. In *The History of NAITTE*, Evans (1988) indicated that after the *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education* came on line during 1963, membership increased from 405 to 516 members in one year. The degree of importance our NAITTE leadership places on the journal is reflected in how NAITTE resources are currently allocated. *JITE* accounts for more than 70% of NAITTE's current budget.

Reflecting concerns for the need to reduce costs for publication of the *JITE*, the NAITTE board has heard proposals over the last decade to reduce the number of issues per year and to explore electronic publication as an alternative to hard copy. Gagel (2006) reported that membership would prefer maintaining four issues per year and that the paper format was still clearly preferred. However, survey respondents suggested that if an electronic format were to become necessary, a complete printed volume should still be provided each year. Recent NAITTE officers' decisions reflect a similar commitment to maintaining a quality journal published 4 times per year in traditional paper format.

ITE Directory

The Industrial Teacher Education Directory, co-sponsored by NAITTE and the Council for Technology Teacher Education (CTTE), has been published since 1957 (Evans, 1988). Gagel (2006) reported that respondents to the 2004 membership survey ranked the ITE Directory as the second most important NAITTE product. Just over one third (35.8%) of survey participants reported that the current electronic format (new in 2004) was not satisfactory for them. The current format is made

available electronically to members with a password in pdf format. It is disseminated through department chairs who then must either make electronic copies or print hard copies for departmental personnel. Objections to the electronic format seemed to focus on distribution. Respondents indicated that chairpersons too often did not disseminate the directory to all NAITTE and CTTE members. Some respondents also expressed a preference for the traditional paper copy format.

In addition to the respondents' concerns noted in the 2004 survey (Gagel, 2006), ITE Directory editors have also recently voiced several concerns. The electronic format was originally created as an attempt both to modernize the publishing process and to control printing and mailing costs. It appears to have successfully accomplished both those goals but at the expense of creating dissatisfaction among some members related to access issues. Additionally it has created a situation in which the editors must now possess not only editorial and layout skills but sophisticated computer skills as well. As the current editors approach the end of their tenure there are concerns about difficulties this situation may create when recruiting new volunteers to assume the editorial responsibilities. It would seem that what is needed is to study the issues of future format and dissemination in the context of what end users want and need from the ITE Directory.

News and Views Newsletter

Charles Gagel (personal communication, March 2, 2006) indicates that the NAITTE newsletter, "News and Views," was published historically at least twice per year. In the 1980s, editors found they had difficulty obtaining appropriate publishable materials for inclusion in the newsletter. In attempts to both improve the newsletter and cut costs for the organization, "News and Views" went through a number of transformations. In 2000 "News and Views" moved to an electronic format. When published on the web, a notice was sent out to the general membership via the NAITTE list serve announcing that it was posted and suggesting that members link to the web page. In 2002 the newsletter announcement process was modified to a format whereby the newsletter was posted on the web site, but included

in the email announcement that went out on the list serve was a direct link to the web page. Throughout this time the editors continued to receive too few quality submissions for inclusion. The “News and Views” newsletter was not published in 2005.

In his comparison of the 1993 and 2004 NAITTE surveys, Gagel (2006) reported that about one quarter of the 2004 respondents felt that the web-page-based electronic format of the “News and Views” newsletter was not appropriate and/or useful. Many of those who did not support the electronic format said they did not receive notification of publication of the newsletter. It appears there is a need to explore the level of demand for a newsletter in some alternative form. Individuals exploring options for the newsletter should examine such issues as

- What is the interest level among the membership in reviving the newsletter?
- If sufficient interest appears to exist, how often should the newsletters be published? When should it be published (i.e. just prior to the annual conference or immediately following the conference, etc.)?
- What should be the future mission of the newsletter? Should it
 - become the annual business report for NAITTE to replace or supplement the annual business meeting traditionally held in conjunction with the breakfast meeting at the annual conference
 - communicate a pre-conference agenda and report
 - become a post-conference report describing award winners and providing abstracts of member presentations
 - include practitioner articles (e.g., best practices or best programs, articulation, dual enrollment, workforce development, mentoring, curriculum development, inventory procedures/tracking, classroom management, etc.)
 - feature program oriented articles (e.g., special projects, funding, collaboration, etc.)?
- Should the newsletter have a new name that better reflects the services it provides to the membership?

- Should there be a link on the NAITTE web site to current and archived newsletters?
- Should there be a notice in the *JITE* explaining when and where to access the electronic version of the newsletter, (i.e. Activities and Services section of the inside back cover of *JITE*)?

ACTE Conference Events

NAITTE member participation in the annual ACTE conference appears to have declined in recent years. This may have many causes. One explanation that has been heard anecdotally is that increased costs associated with conference attendance have occurred concurrently with reduced university travel budgets and changing restrictions on the use of federal Perkins funds.

A second cause for the decline may relate to NAITTE's relationship with ACTE. It appears that at one time NAITTE had representation on the Planning and Policy committees of three ACTE divisions: Technology Education, Trade and Industrial Education, and Technical Education. Today the Technical Education Division no longer exists, and NAITTE has no formal relationship with the Trade and Industrial Division. All planning for NAITTE participation at current conferences now occurs under the umbrella of and subject to approval by the Technology Education Division (TED) of ACTE. Historically it appears that NAITTE made calls for presentation proposals focused on teacher education and related research from across the membership. A committee of NAITTE members reviewed the papers and selected NAITTE conference presentations. Currently, ACTE conference presentations are reviewed and selected at the division level. For 2006, TED has invited NAITTE to have a representative participate in review of TED proposals. This is a positive move for NAITTE, but insufficient, as technology teacher education represents slightly less than half of NAITTE membership. Somehow NAITTE must once again become capable of influencing selection of NAITTE members' presentation proposals across ACTE division lines since affiliation with only one ACTE division excludes NAITTE input from the proposal review processes in other areas of member interest.

Gagel (2006) reported that in the 2004 member survey NAITTE Research Symposia were ranked number one in importance among NAITTE events at ACTE Conferences. NAITTE is affiliated with two Research Symposia: 1) the NAITTE Graduate Student Research Symposium and 2) the TED/NAITTE Research Symposium for Professionals in the field. Each of these has had its own issues in recent years.

With the declining number of doctoral candidates in the field, review committees have complained that there often were too few high quality, properly formatted student research presentation proposals submitted to allow the Graduate Student Research Symposium to occur every year as intended. Unfortunately, under current ACTE policies, once an event is cancelled, it is not automatically allotted time in subsequent conference schedules, thus adding to the difficulties inherent in sustaining this symposium as a high quality annual event. The problems with the TED/NAITTE Joint Research Symposium stem from the fact that it is restricted to presentation proposals related to technology education alone. This effectively excludes the more than half of the NAITTE professional members who represent other constituencies from participating in the Research Symposium.

The annual NAITTE breakfast and business meeting was once a well attended opportunity for networking, socialization, professional recognition, and assurance that NAITTE was under sound leadership. A number of issues have emerged to erode the effectiveness of this annual event in providing those opportunities. Scheduling at appropriate times has become more difficult under recent ACTE conference event scheduling guidelines. Costs have escalated rapidly with even the most modest breakfast ticket now costing \$25 per person or more. The end result is that the 2005 NAITTE breakfast had fewer than 35 in attendance with more than half of those on the program in some capacity. Gagel (2006) reported that members ranked the breakfast last in importance among NAITTE conference events with comments suggesting that events focused on networking, graduate student recognition, and social activities that would include guests and spouses might prove to be more valued alternatives in the future.

Identity / Mission

There was clear evidence in the Gagel (2006) report that many members were ready to consider changes in our organizational mission and name. Gagel reported that over 40% of respondents were ready to support an organizational name change and two-thirds of respondents would support a name change for the *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education* as well. Similarly, more than one-third of survey participants indicated some degree of dissatisfaction with the NAITTE mission statement. Gagel (2006) reported that the common thread across these three areas of dissatisfaction appear to be concern about continued identification with the term “industrial.” In examining suggestions for new organizational names and journal names, it is also apparent that several members propose that NAITTE seek to become a more international organization. If these concerns are to be addressed seriously, attention must be focused on assuring that future changes in target constituency serve to concentrate on, rather than dilute, our core audience. NAITTE can ill afford to become more fragmented along special interest lines, thus risking further decline in membership.

Gagel (2006) pointed out that even though there has been sustained interest among the membership for NAITTE to become more international, it is still a U.S. association. Nevertheless, in an increasingly global society, career and technology teacher educators from around the world may have similar interests and concerns. Perhaps it is time to explore ramifications and opportunities associated with becoming a truly international organization. To make this transition we would need to work to better meet the needs of our international counterparts. A decision to expand internationally would require numerous substantive changes in how we do business. Perhaps a starting point would be to

- Change the NAITTE name to reflect a broader, more international focus. (One possible name is the International Association of Technology and Technical Teacher Educators.)

- Rename the *JITE* to reflect an international audience. (A possible new name for the journal might be the *International Journal of Technology and Technical Teacher Education*.) This change would also necessitate a substantially increased effort to encourage submission of additional scholarly work from around the world.
- Revise our mission statement to reflect a commitment to the needs and interests of a broader, more international teacher educator membership.

The 2004 member survey alluded to discussion at ACTE about creating a Teacher Education Division (Gagel, 2006). That did not happen. There were also questions about the possibility of moving NAITTE out from under the umbrella of the ACTE annual conference either by creating a teacher education conference independently or affiliating with an alternative organization. Respondents indicated that NAITTE was not large enough to create an independent conference distinct from that of ACTE or other similar organization and too diverse to successfully survive affiliation with or merger with any of the several organizations proposed in the Petrina, Brauchle, Gregson, Hershbach, Hoepfl, Johnson, Stern, Walker, & Zuga (2003) report. The only alternative organization suggested as an alternative to ACTE affiliation that has a sufficiently diverse constituency to resemble that of NAITTE was AVERA (now ACTER, Association for Career and Technical Education Research). However, in 2004 its membership numbers were reportedly as small as those of NAITTE and already included many NAITTE members. In addition while its focus on research is related to teacher education, it is not identical to that of NAITTE.

Two recent events may hold promise for the future of NAITTE. One was the successful Career and Technical Education Research Conference 2005 (CTERC 2005), which was held the day before the 2005 ACTE conference in Kansas City. This research conference was sponsored by ACTER. ACTER leadership meetings were held the evening before and the morning after CTERC 2005. This format allowed greater input into the selection of presentations as well as the number of presentations. The

CTERC 2005 was coordinated with the ACTE conference but not managed, planned, or limited in scope by ACTE. This format also allowed those planning to attend the ACTE conference to arrive a day earlier and participate in events of greater interest to teacher educators and researchers. The one-day format also allowed participants on limited travel budgets to participate in the research conference, then leave if there were not additional ACTE events of interest. It would appear worthwhile for NAITTE to explore the possibilities for either collaboration with ACTER to expand future Career and Technical Education Research Conferences or to consider an ACTER/NAITTE sponsored Career and Technical Education Research and Teacher Education Conference. If this is not a possibility, it would appear advantageous to consider planning a NAITTE pre-ACTE conference that could mirror the structure of the ACTER event.

The second event that may hold promise for NAITTE is the early development of the Academy for Career & Technical Teacher Education (ACTTE, aka the Academy). This new organization began accepting charter memberships in December 2004. Its first constitution was ratified in December 2005. Talks have begun to amend its constitution to allow for affiliation with organizations that could retain their own identity and autonomy but be collaboratively linked with the Academy and have representation on its leadership committees. Organizations expressing early interest in affiliation with the Academy include ACTER, the honor society Omicron Tau Theta, as well as representatives from agriculture teacher education and family and consumer sciences teacher education. This partnership has the potential to eventually provide the strength of numbers needed to facilitate creation of new benefits for NAITTE members.

Conclusion and Call to Action

The results from surveys conducted by the NAITTE leadership in 1993 and again in 2004 provide evidence to support concerns that leaders of NAITTE have voiced for some time. However, response rates (27% response rate (n = 116) reported for the 1993 survey and 22% response rate (n = 40) for the 2004 survey) for these studies suggest that NAITTE leadership

exercise caution in taking action based solely on the study results. Nonetheless, examination of trends and history of NAITTE suggests a sense of urgency is necessary to assure a vibrant future for this venerable organization. It would appear that this discussion focuses on two types of issues: those that require immediate action and those that warrant further study by NAITTE leadership.

Immediate Needs

Form and sustain an aggressive Membership Recruitment Committee. Gagel (2006) reported that members considered face-to-face contacts to be the number one action likely to increase membership. This should serve notice to the membership committee that a letter-writing campaign conducted in conjunction with the membership chair, while important, should not replace more personalized contacts both with past members and with potential new members.

Establish procedures to better coordinate information between list serve manager, ITE Directory, and membership manager. Responsibilities, decentralized among several leaders dealing with diverse responsibilities and locations create challenges in managing the flow of current, accurate contact information across the organization. It is imperative that the organization operate from a single contact list of members that is as accurate and up-to-date as possible. There seems to be a need to develop and document procedures for keeping contact information current and available for NAITTE leadership functions.

Establish rules for discontinuing membership services. Recent NAITTE membership records listed our lowest number of members ever, with 125 paid members, 9 honorary members and an additional 50 former members who were 1-2 years behind in dues.

“During the 1940s, throughout the 1950s, and into the 1960s, the number of members fluctuated considerably depending on two factors: a. the energy of the chairman of the membership committee, and b. the energy and hard-heartedness of the secretary-treasurer. If the membership committee chairman did not send out promotional

material, few new members were recruited. If the secretary-treasurer failed to send our notices of the expiration of membership, most members simply assumed that they belonged and did not send dues in for the new year. This problem was compounded by soft hearted secretary-treasurers who continued to keep people on the membership list and to send mailings to persons who were a year or two delinquent in their dues.” (Evans, 1988, p. 26-27)

It is important that we learn the lessons from our previous mistakes. It is imperative that NAITTE leadership take steps to assure that effective rules are in place to link delivery of services to payment even as we actively attempt to encourage members who are in arrears to renew. This will make greater coordination between the membership chair, ITE Directory editor and *JITE* editor even more important.

Encourage the JITE editor and staff to become active in soliciting a broader range of manuscripts. Gagel (2006) reported some respondents’ concerns for quality and content of the *JITE*. Members suggested that the *JITE* might consider expanding the scope to include such content variations as theme-based issues, graduate student research, best practices, non-refereed articles of special interest, public policy, or international approaches to career and technical teacher education. Since the *JITE* has long been identified as the single most important benefit of NAITTE membership it seems imperative that the journal focus on the interests of a broad reader audience.

Issues for Further Study

- Examine policy needs as well as format and delivery possibilities for the ITE Directory
- Explore affiliation options with the Academy of Career and Technical Teacher Education
- Explore options for a pre-conference format which parallels or affiliates with the CTERC
- Study implications and opportunities for expansion to a true international organization
- Study member interest in a NAITTE newsletter

- Consider alternatives to the annual Breakfast Business Meeting.

NAITTE is at a critical point in its 79 year life. Membership has declined, the needs of membership appear to have changed, and the mission of the organization has been brought into question. If we are to survive another decade in this fast changing and increasingly global society, a great deal of work must be completed in a limited time frame. We have a cadre of committed officers, but that small group of leaders can not make these critical decisions alone. Choices that do not properly represent the views of the general membership will cost critical membership support. We have to decide whose interests we represent, what services are essential to our membership, and how to provide those critical services in an affordable manner.

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