Bridging the Gap Between Industry and Academe
Bonnie Spivey and Dan Voss

Using their own mentor-mentee relationship as a pilot project, the authors planned and implemented a successful mentoring program pairing professionals in the Orlando Chapter with graduating seniors in the technical communication program at the University of Central Florida. This paper (and presentation) provides a detailed description of the planning and execution of the new program, along with feedback from participants at the end of the first year, and an update on the program midway through its second year. It also provides a glimpse into the special trust that can grow between mentor and mentee—and the mutual personal and professional growth that can result from such a relationship. In addition, the session includes a turnkey package (both hard-copy and electronic) of administrative forms and materials that can readily be adapted to implement a mentoring program within another STC chapter or organization. The package is also available from either presenter or from the Orlando Chapter Education Committee.

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

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

Imagine, then, teaming the power of age and experience with youth and energy to promote growth, not only within the traditional framework of formal mentoring relationships, but to benefit STC at both the chapter and Society levels. In keeping with this vision, the Orlando Chapter of STC, in conjunction with UCF, instituted a formal mentoring program, pairing veterans from the front lines of industry with talented technical communication students. The goal: to bridge the gap between industry and academe.

HISTORY/ORIGIN OF MENTORING

Generally, mentorship pairs experts with novices to promote growth. One classic example of a successful mentoring relationship can be found in the realm of Antiquity, in ancient Greece, residing somewhere between Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Hopefully, the fruit of our mentoring program will not fall far from that tree. Carlos Parada, author of *Genealogical Guide to Greek Mythology*, has traced the concept of mentoring back to Greek mythology, finding its roots in the tale of Odysseus (Figure 1).

> Mentor 4 was an old friend of Odysseus. To him Odysseus entrusted his household when he joined the coalition that sailed against Troy. Athena, assuming several times the shape of Mentor 4, became the guide of Odysseus' son Telemachus, giving him prudent counsel. Since then, wise and trusted advisers have been called "mentors." [1]

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

Types of Mentoring

Today, mentoring occurs within industry, within academe, and across the two. Within industry, mentoring programs pair senior personnel with new hires or junior personnel. In this case, the most obvious recipient of mentoring is the intern. In "The Mentoring Program at Silicon Valley Chapter," published in the February 2001 issue of *Tieline*,[2] Lori Fisher suggests that companies like Cisco and IBM Corporation achieved notable success with their long-standing internship programs and "have used them to instill in participants the political savvy that can only be acquired with years of experience."

Mentor Athena   Protégé Telemachus   Absentee Father Odysseus

Figure 1. Mentoring has its roots in Antiquity.

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

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

On a chapter level, members might pair workplace research projects with academic researchers, involving students in their projects. A prime example of this concept was the creation of an educational outreach multimedia presentation in 2002 by UCF graduate students Cindy Hauptner and Bob Stultz under the guidance of Dr. Dan Jones at UCF and Dan Voss of Lockheed Martin. A tremendous success, this grant program—described in the April 2003 edition of *Memo to Members*—offered compelling proof of the natural synergy between industry and academe.

General Guidelines

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

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

Definition of Mentoring

According to the STC Guidelines for Mentoring Programs,[3] mentoring is a way for more experienced technical communicators to share their experiences with new or less experienced "protégé." A mentor acts as a trusted counselor, or guide, who assists the mentored protégé in setting and achieving goals for developing career direction and skills. By participating in a

mentor/protégé relationship, mentors develop valuable skills that can further their personal and professional development as well. The relationship between mentor and protégé[*] requires honesty, openness, commitment, and effort by both individuals. If they are willing to put forth the effort, there are enormous benefits to be realized.

Benefits

While the technical communication industry becomes increasingly competitive, today's students must become progressively more focused. Mentoring, then, seems to be a wise decision for the mentee in terms of enhanced skills, job placement in a fiercely competitive market, and accelerated career development. The benefits to the mentor may seem less readily apparent. However, professionals who have served the mentor role have found it to be beneficial in many ways, not the least of which is the satisfaction of helping a beginning fellow professional to grow. Thus, the benefits of having mentor/mentee relationships under the belt make the process a two-way street (Table 1).

Table 1. Mentoring is a two-way street.

Mentor Benefits
• Gain personal satisfaction from helping others discover their potential
• Enhance coaching, feedback, and leadership skills
• Gain exposure to new perspectives from the mentee
• Expand professional networks
Mentee Benefits
• Develop networks
• Receive career guidance
• Increase their visibility
• Learn to adapt to changing professional and organizational circumstances
• Develop or enhance skills needed to move forward in their careers

For years, the Orlando Chapter has strongly supported an informal partnership between industry and academe, although without the structure of a formal mentoring program. For instance, many of our chapter members (some of whom are graduates of the University of Central Florida) have spoken to classes, evaluated portfolios, and invited students to conduct workplace interviews via visits or e-mail surveys.

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[*] For our purposes, we have adopted the term mentee instead of protégé.

The new mentoring relationship should serve to strengthen the traditional ties between the chapter and the university and also provide STC with a platform to:

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

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

Course Credit. On the same note, mentees have the option of combining technical writing assignments with chapter needs. One particular example of this was the brochure we generated to support our initiative to find corporate sponsors for our chapter's educational outreach program. Instead of creating a brochure for an imaginary company to satisfy course requirements, a mentee created a real-world document she, in turn, was able to display in her portfolio. That's a classic win-win scenario.

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

Increased Visibility. Mentoring allows the mentee to become more involved, providing organizations with a low-risk method of identifying potential leaders within the group. Also, the program provides chapter members who were previously inactive with an opportunity to increase visibility by serving as a mentor or mentee. Similarly, mentors have the opportunity to sharpen their

coaching and feedback skills, while simultaneously gaining a fresh perspective by exposure to new ideas.

Preliminary Research

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

Silicon Valley Chapter. Before deciding on our strategy, we researched other mentoring programs within STC. Lori Fisher's article, cited above, describes how the Silicon Valley Chapter implemented a mentoring program back in 1999. Its informal program currently serves the needs of the local professionals and is facilitated by a mentoring web page containing a mentor/mentee database. There are no requirements limiting participants, and the professionals are linked directly to one another via e-mail addresses. Coordination is left to the mentee.

Carolina Chapter. The Carolina Chapter offers a mentoring program almost identical to the Silicon Valley's. While this approach is useful to a large network of individuals seeking expertise on various topics, the strategy did not meet the specific needs of our chapter to forge a link between industry and academe.

Lone Star Chapter. The Lone Star Chapter has provided its members with a mentoring program since 1993. The program pairs student members and new writers with professional practitioners for a period of six months to promote growth. As outlined in "Mentoring Project Helps New Technical Communicators" by program manager Jane Bergen, the program was initially limited to students, but in 1997 the chapter's Administrative Council changed the guidelines to accommodate new writers as well. Students were then permitted to enroll for a period of no longer than six months, and after graduation could re-enroll as new writers. They were assigned different mentors for each phase.

Piloting the Program. As we charted the course for the new mentoring program, we drew upon our own experiences to forecast the needs of future participants. Notably, we discovered that our monthly face-to-face meetings were the main catalyst for our relationship, with communicating by phone a close second. E-mail, however, served as an important practical link as well. While switching between our mentoring and project coordinator hats became challenging at times, our overall experience has been extremely positive.

As we witnessed firsthand, the mentee is often reticent about coming to the mentor in real time with questions. This is understandable, considering that the reticence

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

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

OK, then—back to Borders. Nothing happens without paperwork (Figure 2).

Figure 2. 14 Cups of Coffee = 1 Mentoring Program

BUILDING OUR PROGRAM

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

Developing Guidelines and Procedures

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

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

Selection Criteria. While we wanted to include as many interested mentees as possible, we knew we had to have selection criteria in case the number of mentees exceeded the number of mentors. Besides the obvious

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

Interest Surveys. Eventually, we realized that a significant part of the guidelines and procedures was dependent on the number of mentors and mentees who would potentially be interested in the program. Thus, we created interest surveys for the mentors and mentees, disseminated them via listservs and e-mail distributions, and based our decisions on the results. The tremendous response—a fortuitously equal base of 10 mentors and 10 mentees—enabled us to customize the guidelines and procedures to better fit the needs of the chapter.

Creating Administrative Forms

After a long working session (we literally worked until the custodial staff kicked us out of Borders), we were able to draft the mentor and mentee applications (Figure 3), the mentor and mentee agreements, the contact log, and the implementation timeline for the program. We knew we had to keep the forms simple and un-intimidating so as to not deter potential applicants by burying them under mountains of paper. We decided to make all the forms electronic, downloadable from www.stc-orlando.org/education/mentor/mentor.asp. Applicants merelyhad to type in their information, save and the document, e-mail the forms to their program coordinator.

Next came the mentor and mentee agreements, designed to serve both as a preliminary outline of participant goals and as an icebreaker for a team's first face-to-face meeting. When the teams met for the first time, the mentors and mentees finalized the agreements, saved copies for their records, and e-mailed them to their appropriate program coordinators. Finally, we established a basic contact log to provide basic structure without imposing undue paperwork.

The next step in implementing the program was to gain the Administrative Council's approval. After drafting the mentoring packet, we e-mailed it to the core team for its feedback. After final review at an Administrative Council meeting, the program was approved unanimously. We were good to go! Prospective mentors and mentees were asked to submit their applications, electronically.

Figure 3. Applications were submitted online.

Making the Pairs. We paired mentors and mentees based on their stated goals and interests. To aid in the pairing process, we included personality profiles, preferred method of communication ratings, focus area checklists, and short-answer questions on the applications. For example, an extroverted, structured mentor well-versed in online Help files would be the perfect match for an outgoing mentee who preferred a well-regimented learning environment and is interested in pursuing a career in online documentation.

Once the basic needs had been matched, other aspects, like preferred method of communication, were considered. For instance, mentors who preferred communication via e-mail as a primary medium were paired with mentees who also stipulated this.

Kicking Off the Program. Once the program coordinators and the chapter president finished pairing participants into mentor-mentee teams, participants were notified of their selection and asked to fill out the initial mentor or mentee agreement forms. The group was then invited to a mentoring kickoff session. Mentors and mentees were introduced via an innovative "treasure hunt" and asked to finalize their mentor/mentee agreements (Figure 4). From there, it boiled down to regular one-on-one communication between mentor-mentee pairs.

Gathering Feedback. During the mentor/mentee relationship, both participants were asked to keep a basic contact log, and to provide a few simple, non-time-consuming reports to the program coordinators at two points during the year, as well as a simple evaluation at the end of the process.

Figure 4. "X" marked the spot for Sherri and Barb.

YEAR 1 RESULTS

At the end of the first year, we conducted three evaluations to measure the effectiveness of the mentoring program and to identify improvements we could make for Year 2: (1) we gave mentors and mentees a post-assessment with subjective numerical self-evaluations in three skills areas, and compared the results with a pre-assessment we administered 10 months earlier; (2) we had mentors and mentees numerically evaluate their overall satisfaction and their success in meeting their objectives; and (3) we independently evaluated the program by analyzing the mentor-mentee agreements and the contact logs and subjectively evaluating the results versus the objectives. Results of these evaluations are summarized in Tables 2-5.

Pre- and Post Assessments

Table 2 compares pre- and post-assessments. Mentees clearly felt much better prepared for job search and placement as a result of their mentoring. They also reported a significant growth in job skills. The mentor data was inconclusive. Even in the one area of improvement (job skills), a closer look at the data shows this was influenced by very high scores from the three youngest mentors—who could reasonably be expected to still be on the steep slope of their professional skill growth curves. Based on subjective numerical self-evaluations before and at the end of the mentoring program, mentees reported significant growth, especially in job search skills. Statistical results from mentors were not significant.

Table 2. Analysis of Personal Growth
Post- vs Pre-Assessments: Mentees

Category	Mentee Growth, Pre to Post
Growth in job search skills	40%
Growth in job knowledge (technical communication)	28%
Growth in career readiness	10%
Aggregate growth	**24%**

Post- vs Pre-Assessments: Mentors

Category	Mentor Growth, Pre to Post
Growth in ability to teach job search skills	3%
Growth in job knowledge (technical communication)	18%
Growth in readiness to coach a mentee	-6%
Aggregate growth	**6%**

Program Evaluation

Table 3 shows how mentees and mentors evaluated the program on a scale of 1-10 in terms of (1) overall satisfaction and (2) success in meeting their objectives. Dropping the highs and lows to get the truest picture, we came up with aggregate ratings of just under 9 for overall satisfaction and just under 8 for meeting objectives. Clearly, the program was rated a success—with some room for improvement on meeting objectives. Perhaps most significantly, 5 of 9 mentors signed up on the spot for a second tour of duty, only one said no, and three were maybes. All 9 mentees said they would welcome the opportunity to serve as mentors in the future.

Based on numerical program evaluations, both mentors and mentees expressed strong satisfaction with the mentoring program and said it met their objectives.

Table 3. Evaluation of Program Satisfaction
Program Evaluations: Mentees

Category	Average Evaluation*
How satisfied were you, overall, with the mentoring program? (1-10)	9.0
How well did you feel the program met your objectives? (1-10)	7.75
Would you be willing to serve as a mentor in the future?	100% Yes

* Dropping the highest and lowest scores.

Post- vs Pre-Assessments: Mentors

Category	Average Evaluation**
How satisfied were you, overall, with the mentoring program? (1-10)	8.6
How well did you feel the program met your objectives? (1-10)	7.8
Would you be willing to serve again as a mentor in 2004-2005?	5 Yes, 1 No, 3 Maybes

** Dropping the two highest and two lowest scores.

Analysis of Mentor-Mentee Contact Logs

As program coordinators, we came up with essentially the same conclusion when we independently evaluated the contact logs versus the mentor-mentee agreements. The results, shown in Table 4, confirm overall program success, with room for improvement—especially on the number of face meetings, the relative lack of which we felt contributed to the difference between an 8 and a 10 in meeting objectives.

Analysis of the mentor-mentee contact logs showed a median of 3.0 face meetings, a mix of face meetings and e-mail as the dominant communication mode, and job search and placement as the primary, though not the only, focus.

Table 4. Analysis of Contact Log

Tm	# Face Mtgs	Dominant Communi-cation Mode	Primary Focus	Success Level (1-10)*
1	1	E-mail	Job search	7
2	4	Mixed	Job search	8
3	1	E-mail, STC meetings	Medical writing	6
4	3	"Meet to eat"	Academics	8
5	2	E-mail	Mentee withdrew	4
6	3	Meet to eat, office visit, e-mail	Job search and content	10
7	3	Meet to eat	Resume, career, social skills	10
8	4	Face meetings, e-mail	Academic, career	9
9	3	Face meetings, e-mail	Resume, chapter service	7
Aggregate				**7.8**

Subjective rating (1-10) by program co-coordinators.

Recommendations for Improvement

Combining the feedback we received in the program evaluations with our own observations, we came up with seven areas for improvement in Year 2 (see Table 5). While we certainly want to repeat the successes in job search and placement we achieved in Year 1 (several of the mentees found jobs quickly!), we'd also like to "open the aperture," especially in academic coaching and chapter service.

Mentors and mentees suggested program improvements for Year 2. Above all, they stressed the importance of face-to-face meetings.

Table 5. Concatenated Recommendations

Recommendations on Improvements for Year 2 of Mentoring Program
• **Start sooner.** Recruit and establish mentor-mentee pairs in summer; be ready to go with the fall term.
• **Meet more as a group.** Have a mid-year and year-ending get-together, in addition to the kickoff meeting.
• **Encourage participants to meet more face-to-face.** E-mail's great, but to get the most out of a mentoring relationship, you have to meet.
• **Provide a little more direction.** Especially at the beginning. But also give the teams room to operate.
• **Promote chapter service.** Working together on chapter projects nurtures a mentoring relationship by adding practical application of skills to a mutual goal.
• **Add variety.** Continue to focus on job placement, but add academic coaching, "shadowing" at work, and other activities.
• **Maintain one contact log.** No need to have two, as we did in Year 1.

YEAR 2 STATUS

For Year 2 of the mentoring program, the co-coordinator role passed from the authors to the new manager of the chapter's Education Committee, Gail Lippincott; and the incoming FTC president, Jen Selix. We handed off the baton at a midsummer planning session and passed along the ideas for program improvements.

Our successors got off to a great start in recruiting, winding up with approximately the same number of mentor-mentees pairs as we had in Year 1 (including a couple of returnees).

Concerning the proposed earlier start, well, we hadn't reckoned with Hurricanes Charlie, Frances, and Jeanne—all of which came directly over Central Florida, and which wrought havoc with everyone's schedule, including the mentoring program. Jen and Gail fought back with an innovative "virtual kickoff" to set things in motion, then used the administrative tools (mentor-mentee agreements, contact logs) to keep things on track until they could get everybody out from under the wreckage and into one room at the same time.

It was too early in the program when this paper went to press to make a substantive assessment on Year 2, but based on the enthusiasm at a post-holiday group get-together, the participants appeared to have survived the rainy start and the program was rapidly gathering momentum. We'll provide a real-time update in the conference presentation.

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