The First Wave (1953–1961) of the Professionalization Movement in Technical Communication

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Abstract

Purpose: To demonstrate that the professionalization of our field is a long-term project that has included achievements as well as setbacks and delays

Methods: Archival research and analysis.

Results: Many of the professionalization issues that we are discussing and pursuing today find their genesis – or at least have antecedents – in the work of the founders of the profession in the 1950s.

Conclusions: Our appraisal of our professionalization gains must be tempered by a certain amount of realism and an awareness of the history of the professionalism movement in technical communication.

Keywords: technical communication, history, professionalization, 1950s

Practitioner's takeaway

- This study provides a consideration of current professionalization issues in the context of their historical development.
- It encourages us to temper our enthusiasm and remain cautiously optimistic about recent gains in the quest for professional status and recognition.
- It makes us better informed about the origin and early development of the profession of technical communication in the United States.
- It contributes to the creation of a strong, shared historical consciousness among members of the profession.

Introduction

As a former president of the Society of Technical Writers and Publishers (STWP) noted, "There was a controversy in the early days. Was technical writing really a profession? Did we want it to be a profession? If it was, how should we get other people to recognize that it was?" (Root, 1972, p. 1). The first generation of professional technical communicators was deeply interested in the process and prospects of professionalization. They set themselves "the task of exploring what it means to become a profession, how professionalization might be achieved, and

what possible consequences might result from our achieving full professional stature" (Savage, 1997, p. 34). The profession-building activities of the 1950s (e.g., the formation of professional organizations and journals, the writing of professional codes of conduct, the creation of academic programs) were attempts to professionalize technical communication. The earliest technical communication journals and conference proceedings included articles strategizing and discoursing about professionalization—for example, Robert T. Hamlett's "Technical Writing Grows into a New Profession" (1952), Floyd Hickok's "Professional, Artisan, Something Else?" (1955), and Israel Sweet's "Is

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Technical Writing a Profession?" (1957). For at least 60 years, in fact, technical communicators have been seeking—and predicting the eventual achievement of—mature professional status (Wright, Malone, Saraf, Long, Egodapitiya, & Roberson, 2011).

Recent discussions about the professionalization of technical communication have shown little awareness of this early history. When scholarly articles on the topic include a literature review at all, they usually limit their review to post-1970 or even post-1980 scholarship. There have been notable exceptions. For example, Smith (1980) offered a historical perspective (1940 to the present) on the "Pursuit of Professionalism" from his vantage point as a member of the first generation of professionals as well as a long-time editor of the Society for Technical Communication's (STC) *Technical Communication*. By tracing technical writers' ethical outlook from the late 1800s to the present, Brockmann (1989) adopted a historical perspective on professionalism that is simultaneously narrower and broader than Smith's. Malcolm and Kunz (2001) provided an account of STC's four formal studies of the certification issue between 1975 and 1998, demonstrating that the organization has had a long-standing interest in the topic. Most recent studies, however, lack this kind of concern with the historical development of these issues.

To be sure, the work on professionalization since 1990 has been more sophisticated and better informed in many ways than the work of pioneers such as Hamlett (1952) and Hickok (1955) and even scholars such as Sweet (1957) and Light (1961). Yet I think we can benefit by knowing the early history of these issues, examining how far back the discussions extend and how little some of them have changed since the 1950s. Many of the professionalization issues that we are discussing and pursuing today find their genesis—or at least have antecedents—in the work of these pioneers.

In this article, I will identify six current professionalization issues (e.g., the role of professional organizations, codification of a specialized body of knowledge, certification by professional organizations) and examine how they were viewed and pursued during the first wave (1953–1961) of the ongoing professionalization movement in technical communication. My purpose for doing this is to demonstrate that our founding fathers (and mothers)

were well aware of these issues and pursued them in earnest. Whether the fact that we have been pursuing professionalization on similar terms for almost 60 years gives us hope or despair for the future, we should at least recognize that professionalization is a long-term project that has included achievements (e.g., professional organizations, scholarly journals) as well as setbacks and delays (e.g., certification of practitioners, accreditation of academic programs).

Three Stipulations

Although some have argued that Reginald Otto Kapp, who started the Presentation of Technical Information Group in England in the late 1940s, was the father of the "worldwide profession" of technical communication (Kapp, 2005), I take the position that the seeds of the technical communication profession in the United States were planted in the 1950s by the founders of the New York-based Association of Technical Writers and Editors (TWE), the Boston-based Society of Technical Writers (STW), and the Los Angeles-based Technical Publishing Society (TPS). Since then, we have been seeking mature professional status and recognition. Thus, when I refer to the *profession of technical communication*, I mean the developing or maturing profession: it has already sprung into being but has not yet fully matured.

Moreover, I take the position that our profession has always been technical communication, not technical writing first and then technical communication later. In other words, the profession did not evolve from writing narrowly to communication broadly; it began broadly as communication (Malone, 2010, pp. 175–176). There were debates in the 1950s about whether the profession should be defined as writing narrowly or communication broadly—in fact, such debates were at the heart of the organizational mergers that took place in the late 1950s (Malone, n.d.)—but they were largely resolved at an early date in favor of communication. The profession's formal adoption of the term *technical communication* as the name of the profession represented a correction, rather than an update, of the name; the term *technical writing* had always been a misnomer when applied broadly to the profession. When STC changed its name from the Society of Technical Writers and Publishers to the Society for Technical Communication in 1971,

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then STC President Mary Schaefer (1971) (Figure 1) wrote that the new name "is explicitly constant with the primary purpose for which our Society was formed [in 1953]—to advance the theory and practice of technical communication in *all* media" (p. 5).

Figure 1: Mary M. Schaefer (1913-2001), first woman president of STC, serving in 1970-1971. During World War II, she left her position as a secretary to become a technical editor in the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, U.S. War Department, Washington D.C. She later worked as a technical communicator at the Naval Research Laboratory, Vitro Corporation, and the Applied Physics Laboratory of the Johns Hopkins University (Shimberg, 1966). Photo from the STC archives.

Finally, when I refer to the *professionalization movement in technical communication*, I am referring to a movement that has been taking place since at least the early 1950s. My research suggests that there have been several waves in the movement. The first wave seems to have crested between 1953 (the formation of TWE) and 1961 (the publication of Light's "The Technical Writer and Professional Status"). Relatively little attention was paid to professionalization issues in the mid- and late-1960s, but the movement picked up again in the United States in the early to mid-1970s with the formation of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) and the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC), the launching of the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, and the publication of Cogan's (1974) "Pursuing Professional Identity and Maturity." I have not traced the relevant scholarship closely beyond this point, but there seems to have been considerable activity in the early 1980s and at the turn of the millennium (1999–2003) (Malone, n.d.). In her call for proposals for this special issue of *Technical Communication*, Coppola (2010a) suggested that the professionalization movement in technical communication may have begun to crest again after a 6- or 7-year hiatus.

Six Professionalization Issues

I use the term *professionalization issue* to refer to something that is believed to be an attribute of a profession's mature status or a means of achieving such a status. Such an issue is an important topic in our discussions about professionalization. With this definition in mind, I will discuss six current professionalization issues under the following headings:

Professional Organizations
Body of Knowledge
Ethical Standards
Certification of Practitioners
Accreditation of Academic Programs
Legal Recognition

In each case, I will try to establish the relevance of the issue to our current professionalization efforts and discussions before discussing the issue's early history.

Professional Organizations

Savage (1999) identified the establishment of "formal organizations that unify the practice and represent the profession" as one of the "key socio-political factors in professionalization processes" (p. 366). More recently, Carliner (2003) has argued that professional organizations in technical communication contribute to feelings of power, status, and legitimacy at both the individual and communal levels. At the individual level, they provide opportunities for affiliation with other technical communicators, professional development, and public recognition of accomplishments. At the communal level, they improve technical communication's standing in the academy by publishing scholarly journals, and they can also improve its standing in industry by certifying technical communicators, increasing the profession's public visibility, and helping to manage industry's perceptions of the profession.

At an early date, technical communicators in the United States recognized that professional organizations were a means of cultivating the profession of technical communication. The men and women who held two breakout sessions at the April 1953 Workshop on the Production and Use of Technical Reports in Washington, DC, to discuss the special problems facing technical writers and editors went on to create the Association of Technical Writers and Editors (TWE) because they believed that "a national organization was

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vital to the growth of the profession" (Clark, 1956, p. 2; Warnock, 1953). Their constitution stated that the organization's primary objective was "to advance the profession" through such activities as developing "a literature of the profession" and promoting professional ethics ("TWE constitution," 1955, p. 8). The Boston-based Society of Technical Writers (STW), also started in 1953, had the same general objective in mind. As their president declared two years after STW's formation, "Now that organization as a national professional society, with graded membership, is complete, we are free to apply our energies directly to our basic program: developing the profession" (Flint, 1955, p. 1). One of the purposes of the Technical Publishing Society (TPS), started on the West Coast in 1954, was "to promote the profession by establishing and maintaining minimum requirements of professional practices" (Van Hagan, 1954, p. 1). These three organizations would eventually merge to become the Society of Technical Writers and Publishers (STWP), the former name of STC. Years later, the editor of STC's *Technical Communication* would remind his readers that "these [early] societies were established and were supported precisely because they were seen as a necessary step on the path toward professionalism" (Smith, 1980, p. 2).

Both Savage (1999) and Carliner (2003) have suggested that we have too many organizations (e.g., STC, PCS, ATTW) to pose a unified front in the struggle for professionalization. Carliner (2003), in fact, sees cooperation, if not consolidation, as necessary to move to "the next level" (p. 98). The founders of our profession—including Samuel A. Miles (Figure 2)—grappled with the same problem in the 1950s. Miles (1955), who had started an organization in New York City in 1954, wrote:

> One thing is certain: the technical writer, by whatever name we may call him, and under whatever definition we may formalize, is here to stay. The continued growth of technical writing is proof of this fact. As I write these words, another group—the twelfth, thirteenth, or fourteenth, depending on the definition of a group—has come to my attention. It is the Technical Writing Improvement Society, of Los Angeles….
>
> TWIS is the third or fourth group ambitious enough to consider itself the nucleus of a national group. All this activity means that there is hope that

we shall soon get together and that the "Tower of Babel" which we are creating will be a firm structure based on mutual understanding. (pp. 3–4).

In late 1955, Miles' organization merged with TWE to become TWE's New York chapter (Kleinman, 1989). This was the first in a series of consolidations that would eventually lead to the creation of STC.

Figure 2: Samuel A. Miles (1916-1982), co-founder and vice president of Miles-Samuelson, a technical publishing business in New York City, and founder (1954) of the New York-based Society of Technical Writers and Editors, an independent organization that merged with TWE in late 1955 to become TWE's first and largest (New York) chapter. As early as 1949, Miles had explored the possibility of creating a "society" of scientific and technical communicators within the framework of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Miles, 1951; "Operation," 1951; "Sam Miles," 1955). Photo from the Fall 1955 issue of the *TWE Journal.*

A major step toward unification was taken in 1957 when TWE and STW merged to form the Society of Technical Writers and Editors (STWE). In the discussions leading up to this merger, TWE and STW argued about membership qualifications and grades of membership. TWE wanted to follow its practice of allowing anyone to join who had a professional interest in technical communication, while STW wanted to restrict membership to technical writers, technical editors, and teachers of technical writing, excluding illustrators, production people, and especially technical librarians. Whereas TWE did not want membership grades, STW wanted membership to be stratified into members, senior members, and fellows (Malone, n.d.). As one TWE member complained, "[STW officers] have set up these classifications so that they can be in the top grades and they are unwilling to become just ordinary members. They want to remain stars" (TWE, 1956, p. 52). After several months of negotiations (Figure 3), the two groups finally compromised, essentially adopting

TWE's policy on membership qualifications and STW's policy on membership grades (Malone, n.d.).

Figure 3: Meeting at Hotel Statler, New York City, on May 14, 1956, to discuss TWE-STW merger. From left to right: Francis H. Achard (STW secretary-treasurer), Elsie C. Ray (TWE secretary), Paul S. Kennedy (TWE treasurer), Richard Frehsee (TWE president), Donato C. Ian (STW 2nd vice president), Irving Jenks (TWE vice president), Paul H. Flint (STW past president), and Ronald D. Eames (STW president). Photo from the archives at STC headquarters.

It is clear from at least one transcript of these discussions that TWE members thought the decisions about membership qualifications would determine the composition of the profession for the future. One member asked, "What profession [are we talking about]?" and another replied, "That will be determined by who is going to be included. Everybody who is going to be included will make up the profession" (TWE, 1956, p. 49). Indeed, the adoption of TWE's policy on membership qualifications may have contributed (however modestly) to the broad-based profession of technical communication that we have today.

Not satisfied by the merger of TWE and STW, however, Light (1959) argued for an even broader coalescence of professional organizations. He noted with dismay that electronics writers were represented by STWE, medical writers by the American Medical Writers Association, science writers by the National Association of Science Writers, and writers in the nuclear energy industry by the Nuclear Energy Writers Association. This "splintering of members of our craft into the corners and tiny pigeon-holes of our daily concerns" struck Light (1959) as counterproductive because such "narrow-minded interest does not lend itself to genuine professional growth" (p. 23). Thus,

he called for a "larger perspective" reflecting "the professional rather than the craft attitude or point of view":

I am convinced that the writing and editing of technical and scientific material constitute the inescapable common denominator of interest and concern to the memberships of ALL these groups, and that differences of approach and concern are matters of degree rather than kind. (p. 23).

By uniting their efforts, Light believed, members of these groups would discover "what the advantages are in collaboration and eventual unification of forces" (p. 23). These particular groups never did unite, and one can only imagine what might have become of the profession if they had.

The final step toward unification of technical communicators in the United States came in 1960, when STWE merged with the Los Angeles-based TPS to become the Society of Technical Writers and Publishers (STWP). TPS's membership, reflecting the entire field of technical publishing, was even broader than TWE's membership. It included such groups as filmmakers, printers, and managers of technical typists (Figure 4)—an inclusivity that had to be scaled back during the merger negotiations. The president of STWE noted that the merger with TPS was undertaken first and foremost because "it was important to the advancement of the profession that we have one National and International Society instead of several" (Grogan, 1960, p. 3). Although TWE and STW had started chapters as far west as Albuquerque, TPS brought many of California's technical communicators into the fold. With the formation of STWP in 1960, members of that first generation of professionals believed that the goal of unifying the profession by and large had been achieved and that mature, professional status and recognition were just around the corner.

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Figure 4: Cover of the September-October 1957 issue of the Technical Publishing Society's magazine. The content in the vertical stripes on the cover reflected the organization's broad definition of the profession, which encompassed writing; editing; graphic arts and art editing; printing and reproduction; visual education; and management. The title of the magazine, *Technical Communications*, also reflected this broad definition.

Body of Knowledge

An important issue in the current professionalization movement is the codification of a specialized body of knowledge. Rainey (2004) viewed the codification of multiple bodies of knowledge for technical and professional communication as the first step in the creation of a workable certification system, which he viewed as the lynchpin of professionalization. He proposed to codify the body of knowledge by creating an encyclopedia of technical and professional communication. More recently, Coppola (2010b) presented a history and description of the Technical Communication Body of Knowledge (TCBOK) project, STC's initiative to create a coherent framework for studying/understanding the technical communication profession's body of knowledge. STC TCBOK is "an effort of many to resolve seemingly archetypal tensions within our profession"—tensions that have existed since the creation of STC (Coppola, 2010b, pp. 10–11). Mature professional status may rest on the important work that is being done now in this area.

Defining a body of knowledge was also an important goal of the first generation of technical communicators. Scholars such as Sweet (1957) and Light (1961) had read Flexner (1915) and, especially, Cogan (1953, 1955), whose definitions of a profession

included the requirement of having a well-defined, specialized body of knowledge. Light (1961) had also read Vannevar Bush's definition of a profession: "First and foremost, its members are the possessors and custodians of a special field of knowledge, acquired by long, assiduous study" (as cited in Light, p. 6). Sweet and Light, in turn, communicated these definitions (i.e., the attributes of a profession) to the larger body of technical communicators interested in the professionalization of the field.

Israel Sweet was the dean of the Evening School at the Pratt Institute in New York City and later Vice President of Education at LaSalle Extension University, a now-defunct correspondence school. At the STWE conference, Sweet (1957) raised the question, "Is Technical Writing a Profession?" He noted that many practitioners and academics were simply calling themselves professionals in hopes of enjoying the privileges of the title. He carefully analyzed the attributes of a profession that Flexner (1915), Cogan (1955), and others had put forth in their articles and decided that most of the attributes were operational rather than definitional. He identified two, however, that were relevant to his question: "a significant body of knowledge directly identifiable to technical writing and unique to the field" and "professional training for technical writers" (pp. 67–68).

Although Sweet (1957) concluded that technical writing did not yet have a unique, substantial, well-defined body of knowledge, he identified what that body of knowledge could be if it existed:

> If there is a body of knowledge directly related to technical writing, it must be, not the content of other disciplines but a content of its own; and it might be assumed that such a body of knowledge might be called technical communication (p. 68).

Note his use of the term *technical communication*. Even at this early date, he recognized the inadequacy of the term *technical writing* for describing the diverse activities and interests of people in the field. Sweet (1957) also concluded that technical writers were not receiving proper professional training. He charged academia with the responsibility of identifying and codifying technical writing's body of knowledge and training technical writers:

> It is the university, in short, that must identify the body of knowledge associated with a particular field

of [*sic*] discipline, and that must explore this body of knowledge in an effort to sharpen its focus and to amplify its considerations. It is the university that must provide professional training for the technical writer (p. 69).

To Sweet, then, technical writing was not yet a profession.

Light (1961) questioned whether the concept of profession was obsolete and whether the goal was still worth pursuing. In either case, he said, the course of action should be the same: technical writers should seek "specialized, academic education and training" from universities (p. 9). Like Sweet, Light believed that the tasks of defining a specialized body of knowledge and developing technical writing curricula are integrally related, and he offered the following explanation as to why technical writing did not yet have a specialized body of knowledge:

> Most professions have a relatively long history of development. From slow emergence in the world of work or thought to the build-up of an organized body of knowledge peculiar to the practitioners, to the specific and special training for performance— this kind of background is still denied the technical writer because of the recency of his emergence. (p. 5)

Light (1961) was fond of calling attention to the illegitimacy of technical communicators: he believed they were "a bastard group of uncertain origin, with no conventional or legitimate genealogy" (p. 5). This fact militated against their upstart desire for professional recognition and status.

Another writer on the subject of a technical writing body of knowledge was Floyd Hickok (Figure 5), the practitioner who founded STW in Boston in 1953. Hickok had a bachelor's and a master's degree in English education and worked as a high school teacher before joining the Navy during World War II. In the military, he received "extensive college level training in electrical engineering" (Hickok, 1963, p. 1). After his discharge, he went to work as a junior electronics engineer at MIT's Laboratory for Electronics. Later, he was promoted to manager of the technical publications department (Hickok, 1963). In March 1955, Hickok flew to England to present a paper at a meeting of the Presentation of Technical Information Group in London

about the professionalization of technical writing (Hickok, 1955).

Figure 5: Floyd A. Hickok (right, 1907-2003), founder and first president of the Boston-based Society of Technical Writers, passes the gavel to the newly elected second STW President Paul H. Flint (left, 1908-1998). Hickok worked closely with Flint in both the Navy reserves and the summer Technical Writers Workshop at Tufts University, where Flint was an English professor and a dean (U.S. Navy, 1962; "Dr. Paul H. Flint," 1957). Photo from the June 1954 issue of the *Technical Writing Review*.

In that paper, Hickok proposed four characteristics of a professional person: he possesses and is able to use "a body of specialized information," he has the necessary skills to do his job well, he performs his job ethically, and he is concerned about recruiting qualified people to the field. Of these four characteristics, only the first one was in question. Defining the body of knowledge only in terms of language and publishing, Hickok (1955) argued, would be a recipe for "a non-professional future"; therefore, "the Technical writer must use, professionally, the body of knowledge of a science as well as that of publishing" (p. 11). Although Hickok believed that the technical writer could claim the title of a professional on that basis, he did not think the technical editor could, for the technical editor was "a service person to another type of professional person," and "a person who must play this role will find it difficult to make valid his claim to professionalism" (p. 11). Hickok was confident, however, that technical writing would eventually become a profession as society's dependence

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on technical communication became greater and the science of communication was better understood through systematic study.

Although the founders of the profession were more concerned with creating professional organizations and establishing academic programs than circumscribing a body of knowledge, they fully recognized the importance of having a well-defined, specialized body of knowledge and worked in their own way to define it—not by creating an encyclopedia or the kind of project that STC TCBOK represents, but by establishing and developing professional journals. The first technical communication journals were created soon after the first professional organizations in technical communication, and they were created, in part, to begin the necessary process of developing and delineating the body of knowledge required for technical communication to become a mature, recognized profession. One of the ways in which TWE and its sister organizations intended to advance the profession was by developing "a body of literature"—a corpus representing the profession's collective attempt to develop, identify, and codify its body of knowledge through research and intellectual exchange. TWE's *TWE Journal*, STW's *Technical Writing Review*, and TPS's *Technical Communications*—the first technical communication journals—served as vehicles for this project. After the TWE-STW merger in 1957, the *STWE Review* carried on the project: "The primary objective of the *STWE Review* will be to contribute to the professional advancement of technical writing and editing" (Grogan, 1958, p. 4).[1]

Ethical Standards

Buchholz (1989) explained that society grants professions a certain degree of autonomy to govern themselves and allows its members to enjoy the privileges of status and recognition in exchange for a promise to "behave responsibly and ethically to all humankind" (p. 62). Savage (2003) noted that "emerging professions almost always articulate a social commitment and a set of guiding ethical principles" (p. 3). Doing so might be viewed as their application for recognition as a profession. Working on behalf of a profession, a professional organization usually makes this

social contract explicit in the form of a code of conduct or a list of ethical principles. The organization may discipline or expel members who behave unethically. In 1998, STC developed a set of ethical principles that members should follow in their professional activities. These principles are organized under the following six headings: legality, honesty, confidentiality, quality, fairness, and professionalism (STC, 1998). To my knowledge, STC does not monitor, enforce, or even aggressively promote adherence to these principles. Even if STC did, it might not change behavior. Dombrowski (2000a) argued that codes of conduct are important but ultimately insufficient: ethical behavior "cannot be reduced to mechanical conformance to rules, because generalized rules cannot capture the complex contingency of real, particular situations, and because ethical conduct usually involves a heavy measure of personal judgment and decision making" (p. 4).

In 1955, Robert T. Hamlett (Figure 6), the first president of TWE, proposed a code of ethics for technical writers as a way of fostering higher professional standards. Hamlett may have taken his cue from the codes of ethics that engineering organizations had created. Hamlett (1952) was a firm believer that technical writers should have engineering degrees. With a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Illinois, he had worked for several years as an engineer before taking a job as a technical writer with Sperry Corporation in New York. He eventually moved into a management position and was in charge of hiring technical writers, editors, and others to staff one of the largest corporate publications offices in the country ("About the authors," 1959). His 1955 code consisted of ten affirmative and negative promises written in first person, presumably to be spoken by the technical writer (Table 1). Some of these promises obviously reflected his own pet peeves—for example, "I will not give 'lip service' to the statement that 'Engineers are poor writers'" (Hamlett, 1955, p. 27). Although it was never adopted, this code of ethics may be the first one written specifically for technical communicators. Hamlett (1956) later developed this code into a full-length article about good and bad technical writers—an article he described as a "Do-It-Yourself Kit" for those who wanted to be regarded as professionals.

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1 For the history of STC's journal, see Smith (1990) and Malone (2008a). For the history of the IEEE Professional Communication Society's journal, see Sanders (1997) and Malone (2008b).

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Figure 6: Robert T. Hamlett (left, 1902-1976), first president of the Association of Technical Writers and Editors (TWE), passes the gavel to incoming president Richard Frehsee (right, 1913-2006). Hamlett was head of the publications department at Sperry Corporation in New York. In the 1950s, he coined and promoted the term *publications engineer* as an alternative to the term *technical writer* (Hamlett, 1952). Frehsee was a long-time employee of IBM in Endicott, New York. Photo from the Spring 1956 issue of the *TWE Journal*.

In a controversial book, Bishop (1963) described the pervasive corruption in the technical writing industry of the 1950s. The images on the book's dust jacket (Figure 7) alluded to the proverbial three monkeys who see, hear, and speak no evil—the evil in this case being greed, fraud, and incompetence. As "the first Technical Writer ever hired on the Pacific Coast by the first technical data subcontracting firm ever formed in the Los Angeles area" (Bishop, 1961, p. ii), Malden Grange Bishop had interviewed and worked with hundreds of technical writers during the 1940s and 1950s. In his book, for example, he told the story of his involvement in an FBI sting operation leading to the arrest of two men who had promised to send government contracts his way in exchange for kickbacks. He told other stories of cut-and-paste artists who patched together military equipment manuals from old manuals; job applicants who falsified their credentials, even one who tried to pass off Bishop's work as his own; and well-paid technical writers who knew less about science than the average high school student. It was in this general context that STWE formulated and disseminated its Canons of Ethics in 1958. These canons were based on a code developed by the Engineers' Council for Professional Development (ECPD), the predecessor of

Table 1: Hamlett's Code of Ethics for Technical Writers, 1955

1.	I recognize the "service" nature of my work. My present and my future depend upon the products of science and its workers in all levels.	6.	I will endeavor to keep a proper balance between literary quality and technical accuracy. I will not insist on "my way" unless it is the only way.
2.	I will not give "lip-service" to the statement that "Engineers are poor writers." (I know that they vary no more in writing ability than any other group. It is my job to recognize the work of good writers and to help that of poor writers.)	7.	I will recognize always the indispensable efforts of others in making my product a good one. The illustrator, the photographer, the typist, and the printer must share in common pride for a job well-done.
3.	I recognize that my profession is founded on quality. The reason for my existence as a technical writer stems from my contribution to the quality of technical writing.	8.	I believe that the prestige of my profession will be increased by higher standards of workmanship, and I recognize my individual responsibility in this respect.
4.	I will not be "sensitive" about credit for my part in creating technical literature. I believe that outstanding performance is its own best reward.	9.	I believe that the prestige of my profession will be increased by the establishment of higher educational standards for technical writers.
5.	I will not "push" my profession. But I will serve fully and effectively in my assigned tasks so that the profession will be "pulled" up by its performance.	10.	I will give my share of support to professional societies which are sincerely dedicated to the raising of standards in technical writing and increasing the prestige of technical writers.

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the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). They were adopted "as a necessary framework within which technical writing must grow if it is to achieve professional status" (Mitchell, 1962, p. 301).
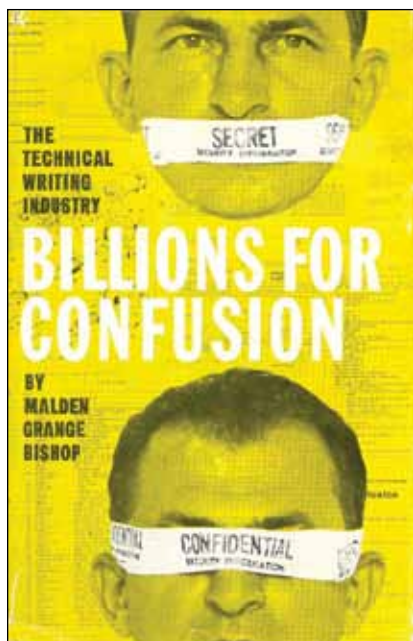
Figure 7: Dust jacket of Bishop's *Billions for Confusion: The Technical Writing Industry* (1963), an exposé of greed, fraud, and incompetence in the technical writing industry during the 1950s. A small press in California had published an earlier version of the book under the title *Go Write, Young Man!* (1961), but the book did not attract broad national attention until the second (retitled) edition.

Brockmann (1989) questioned whether a code based on the problems facing engineers could adequately serve technical communicators, but he also pointed out that there was no agreement in 1958 about ethical standards for technical communication because the profession was still in its infancy. Without consensus, they had to borrow from another profession's code of ethics. Emerging professions create codes of ethics not only to guide the behavior of their members, but also to "provide evidence of professional intentions and ideals" (as cited in Brockmann, 1989, p. 111). The 1958 code, however, did not have a long-term effect on the technical communication profession. Schaefer (1980) recalled that the 1958 code faded into the background, and not much attention was paid to creating profession-wide ethical standards for technical communicators until after Watergate, a scandal that heightened the nation's concern about the lack of ethical behavior in society and the need for education in ethics and guiding principles.

One of the most articulate statements about the important place of ethical standards in the new profession came in 1960 from Hobart C. McDaniel (Figure 8), who would later become president of STWP. McDaniel (1960) believed that a profession originates from the professional attitudes that workers have toward their work. Over time, these attitudes become "moral responsibilities and ethical considerations" that guide behavior and eventually lead to a shared set of ethical standards. Such standards must come "from the profession itself and from the preparatory period of study and learning before entering the profession," not from an external source (p. 36). McDaniel (1960) admonished all technical communicators to follow their professional societies' codes of ethics and promote the highest possible standards of ethical behavior in the workplace. He believed that this was the most important contribution they could make to their profession.

Figure 8: Hobart C. McDaniel (1902-1990), manager of the technical information department at Westinghouse in Pittsburgh and president of STWP in 1962-1963. "Mac" (as he was called) launched a one-man campaign in the 1960s to change the name of the profession from *technical writing to technography* (Galasso, 1963). Due to his influence, the *STWP Review* was subtitled "Journal of Technography" for several years. Photo from the May 1962 issue of the *STWP Newsletter.*

By 1975, most of these early efforts to formulate, promulgate, and inspire ethical standards had been forgotten. At the crest of what might be called the second wave in the professionalization movement, a member of STC's Houston chapter argued that the first step on the path to professional status and recognition must be the development of a code of

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ethics for technical communicators. The following year, STC's committee on ethics, formed in the aftermath of Watergate, drafted a code and proffered it to STC members (Harbaugh, 1978). The resulting "Code of Communicators" was apparently created without awareness of the 1958 code and was not much better by most accounts (Schaefer, 1980).

Certification of Practitioners

STC has considered the certification issue several times in the past 35 years. It appointed committees to examine the feasibility of a certification system in 1975, 1981, 1982, and 1994 (Malcolm & Kunz, 2001). The members of these committees contributed many hours of service—they conducted surveys and wrote reports—but their efforts did not result in a certification system immediately. They discovered that there were not enough interested STC members to support such a system (Malcolm & Kunz, 2001). After many delays and setbacks, STC finally began certifying technical communicators in May 2011. This newly created certification system employs portfolios of work rather than examinations to assess a technical communicator's competencies in six areas: user analysis, document design, project management, content creation, delivery, and quality assurance. Certification is valid for three years, after which the individual must be reevaluated. Recertification requires ongoing participation in professional development activities (Jong, 2010).

Technical communicators have long recognized the role of certification in the professionalization process. Other professions, such as engineering, law, and medicine, have rigorous certification or licensing systems in place; these systems have weighed heavily on the minds of technical communicators seeking status and recognition. The first discussions about the certification of technical communicators apparently took place in the 1950s. At the joint STWE-TPS convention in 1960, the president of McGraw-Hill noted the long-standing interest in the possibility of a certification or licensing system for technical writers: "I understand that this subject has been discussed several times in your annual meetings, but as far as I know nothing has been done about it" (Benjamin, 1960, p. 234). Thus, even at this early date, the feasibility of a certification system had been discussed at several past annual conventions and

had already fallen into that limbo where controversial issues go.

The McGraw-Hill president urged his audience to resurrect the idea as soon as possible: "We have systems for licensing engineers, electricians, plumbers, and undertakers, so why should we not have a system for licensing technical writers?" (Benjamin, 1960, p. 234). During this period, McGraw-Hill sold technical writing services to private companies and the federal government, including the military, but eventually found that the success of this part of their business was being undermined by a plethora of unqualified freelancers ("Technical Writing Service," 1954; Benjamin, 1960). The McGraw-Hill president believed that a system of certification or licensing would "go far to convince military procurement officers and other customers" to use bona fide professionals rather than amateurs. He suggested that this system be implemented through "on-the-job training programs with graded examinations" (Benjamin, 1960, p. 234).

Later that year, STWP's Education and Professional Development Committee took up the issue in earnest, no doubt influenced by this prominent speaker's suggestion. The following statement comes from the minutes of the November 4, 1960, STWP Board of Directors meeting:

> A discussion was held concerning the feasibility of formulating voluntary examinations which, when passed, would entitle the writer, illustrator, or other publication personnel to be registered as a professional and be given a certificate similar to a "professional engineer." This item was referred to the Standards and Ethics Committee with recommendation that they check with state examining boards and other professional societies, and if the project seems feasible, formulate the examinations to test basic "knowledge," not "how he does it or what techniques are required for specific writing tasks." (Berry, 1960, p. 6)

Nothing seems to have come of this initiative, however. As far as I can tell, no examinations were created. The work of this committee, like that of committees in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, was quickly forgotten.

Although Malcolm (1987) recalled attending a session about the certification of technical communicators at the 1964 STWP convention in

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San Diego, I have not been able to find any evidence of this session in the published proceedings of the convention. However, I did find a paper on the subject in the proceedings of the 1964 Institute in Technical and Industrial Communications, an annual conference that English Professor Herman Weisman sponsored at Colorado State University, starting in the late 1950s and continuing throughout the 1960s. Titled "A Program for Accrediting Technical Writers," the paper was presented by A. M. I. Fiskin, an associate professor of English at Drake University. Fiskin (1965) proposed the creation of a certification system that would be based on examinations and have seven steps, with a diploma and the title "Associate Technical Writer" being awarded after Step 4, and with certification and the title "Certified Technical Writer" being awarded after Step 7. The candidate for certification would have to demonstrate (1) knowledge in three scientific fields; (2) competence in the use of English grammar and writing; (3) knowledge of illustration, blueprints, and reproduction; (4) proficiency in editing (e.g., revision, rewriting); (5) ability to work within given formats (e.g., military specifications); (6) in-depth knowledge of two of the scientific fields from Step 1; and (7) ability to manage a large project with many participants. Candidates could skip some steps by getting appropriate university degrees (Fiskin, 1965).

Accreditation of Academic Programs

The accreditation of academic degree programs in technical communication continues to be an important issue in professionalization discussions. Accreditation is a kind of certification: a designated body, such as a professional organization or a governmental agency, certifies that an academic program meets established quality standards for programs of its kind. Davis (2003) argued that the development of professional standards, especially standards for accrediting academic programs, may be "the most important task in our century [i.e., the 21st century] for the profession of technical communication" (p. 84). Noting the benefits of accreditation to academic programs in engineering, Hayhoe (2007) called for STC's Academic Community to work with CPTSC and ATTW to "explore the desirability of establishing an accreditation system" for academic programs in technical communication (p. 408).

The issue of accreditation is related to the issue of program assessment (i.e., the measuring of students' achievement of formally articulated learning outcomes). The discipline of technical communication has seen a proliferation of the literature about program assessment in recent years, with edited collections of essays and special journal issues devoted to the theme. See, for example, the bibliography of this literature on the CPTSC website (St. Amant et al., 2011). See also the special issue of *Technical Communication* on program review and assessment (St. Amant & Nahrwold, 2007) and the book on assessment by Hundleby and Allen (2010). This rapidly growing body of literature notwithstanding, the profession has made little progress in implementing credible systems of assessment, external review, and accreditation of academic programs.

Mark Haselkorn, the 1996–1997 president of IEEE PCS, viewed accreditation of academic programs as an important step in the professionalization of technical communication. In the mid-1990s, he appointed an ad hoc committee to investigate the possibility of using ABET to accredit technical communication programs (Haselkorn, Davis, Goodman, & Nolen, 1998). ABET is a confederation of 30 professional and technical organizations, including IEEE. The American Institute of Electrical Engineers, the predecessor of IEEE, was in 1932 one of the seven founder organizations of ABET's predecessor, ECPD (ABET, 2010). This longstanding relationship between IEEE and ABET suggested ABET (in cooperation with PCS) as a potential accrediting body for technical/professional communication programs. On its Web site, PCS states that it is the only professional organization to give serious consideration to accreditation of academic programs ("ABET Information," 2007). Nevertheless, PCS does not have an accreditation system in place and seems to have abandoned the idea.

The most successful initiative in this area to date has been CPTSC's program review service. Although it does not accredit programs, CPTSC will put an interested academic program in touch with willing and qualified external reviewers. It is the responsibility of the program to negotiate such matters as "expenses, honoraria, and reporting requirements" (CPTSC, 2008a). CPTSC also provides guidelines for a self-study that programs prepare before the reviewers visit campus. The

results of the review are intended for a program's internal use: "The purpose of the review is to help develop strong programs in technical and scientific communication, not to compare or rank programs, and not to establish certification for programs or their graduates" (CPTSC, 2008a). The idea for the review service seems to have originated in 1987 (Little, 1991), but the first review did not take place until 1995 (Rude, 1995, p. 65). The most recent one may have been in 2004 ("Business Meeting Minutes," 2004, p. 104; Tracy Bridgeford, personal communication, May 17, 2011). Rehling (2003), whose academic program underwent an external review in the early 2000s, testified to the value of the process: "an external review visit and report can transform attitudes toward our discipline, with corresponding status and power rewards, based on new understandings of our legitimacy and of the nature of students and studies" (p. 71).

What contribution did the founders of the profession make to the development of adequate educational training and standards? One of TWE mission statements was "to advance the profession through … the establishment of professional college and university curricula for the training of technical writers and editors" ("TWE Constitution," 1955, p. 8). They recognized the pivotal role that college and university degree programs had played in the professionalization of other fields, and they viewed attributes such as a specialized body of knowledge and formal educational training as important to their effort to professionalize. Sweet (1957) was convinced that only universities could properly identify and hone technical communication's body of knowledge and adequately train practitioners. He was not alone in this belief. Richard Frehsee, the second president of TWE, summed up the thinking of many practitioners at the time:

> The question that has bothered many of us is just how do we become of age. It's not going to happen overnight—nor by wishing it were so. It is going to happen, I believe, through education and training. … the real solution lies with the educators, not through quick and dirty courses but in complete undergraduate programs. (Frehsee, 1957, p. 4)

Frehsee (1957) was confident that TWE had academia's ear and could provide consultation and

assistance in creating bona fide degree programs in technical communication.

All of the early organizations had university professors in high positions, and these professors served as liaisons between practitioners and academia. TWE's nucleus group included at least one academic: John A. Walter, an English professor at the University of Texas and coauthor of a textbook titled *Technical Writing* (Mills & Walter, 1954). Although not a charter member of TWE, he was a member of TWE's executive board by 1955 ("Pioneer," 1990). Likewise, STW's nucleus group, located in Boston, included several academics, including John H. Mitchell of the University of Massachusetts (Mitchell, 1989). Paul H. Flint, a Tufts University professor, served as the second president of STW. In a report on the first year of his presidency, Flint (1955) listed the organization's education-related accomplishments: "We have … made preliminary contact with one university with a view to sponsoring symposia for leaders in the field, evening classes for practicing technical writers and summer school courses to prepare advanced undergraduates or recent graduates to begin as Technical Writers" (p. 1). On the West Coast, TPS was collaborating with one of its own Directors, English Professor Mitchell Marcus of Los Angeles State College, to create a graduate curriculum in technical publishing at that college ("30-unit," 1955). The involvement of these academics in the first technical communication organizations, along with other academics such as Jay R. Gould, W. Earl Britton, Christian K. Arnold, Herman M. Weisman, and Henrietta J. Tichy (Figure 9), helped to create the profession's first bridges between industry and academia.

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Figure 9: English Professor Henrietta J. Tichy (1912-1994?), the first woman fellow of STC ("Two Fellows," 1968). The author of *Effective Writing for Engineers, Managers, and Scientists* (1966), Tichy taught technical writing and literature at Hunter College in New York City. Photo from the STC archives.

TWE, STW, and TPS apparently had some success in "establishing" bona fide degree programs at colleges and universities. In the mid-1950s, STW worked closely with administrators at Simmons College, a woman's college in Boston, to create a four-year undergraduate degree program in technical writing. Students pursuing this degree, in effect, had to double-major in journalism and one of the following technical/scientific areas: electronics, chemistry, or biology ("Program," 1956). STW described its involvement as follows:

> … plans were not finalized until this past winter [1955–1956] after discussion between members of the School of Publications and practicing technical writers, members of the STW Boston Chapter Education Committee. Stimulated by the interest shown by these STW members and by their promise of cooperation, college officials approved immediate action on the new program. ("Program," 1956, p. 69)

Launched in fall 1956, the curriculum for the degree consisted of such courses as graphic arts, editing and publishing techniques, layout and design, and article writing, but no courses with the title "technical writing" or "technical editing" ("Program," 1956). The title of the degree was "Technical Writing and Publishing," however, rather than "Technical Journalism" (Simmons College, 1957, p. 41). Other colleges and universities (e.g., Iowa State, Kansas State) were offering bachelor's degrees in technical journalism at an earlier date

(Cortelyou, 1958), but the Simmons program may be the first, nominally, in technical writing.

In 1958, Erwin Steinberg, an English professor, started an undergraduate degree program in in technical writing and editing at Margaret Morrison Carnegie College, the women's college at Carnegie Institute of Technology (Carnegie Tech, now Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh (Figure 10). Steinberg had a working relationship with the TWE/STWE Pittsburgh chapter, and especially its vice-chairman H. C. McDaniel. Each year at Carnegie Tech, Steinberg and McDaniel "put together a full day of lectures and workshops on various aspects of technical writing one day a year" (Erwin Steinberg, personal communication, June 28, 2007). It is likely that Steinberg consulted McDaniel or the chapter about the curriculum for the Carnegie Tech degree. As the editor of the *Westinghouse Engineer* and the manager of a large group of technical communicators at Westinghouse, McDaniel was the center of technical writing activity in Pittsburgh during this period (Janis Ramey, personal communication, September 9, 2009).

Figure 10: English Professor Erwin R. Steinberg (b. 1921) with the first students in the technical writing and editing program at Margaret Morrison Carnegie College. Left to right: Ellen Brady, Sara Shook, Sally Gannon, Steinberg, Janis Geisler (a.k.a., STC Fellow Janis Ramey), and Nancy Ferree. Reprinted from the *Pittsburgh Press,* October 1958.

By 1960, only a few universities were offering degree programs in technical communication, but STWP's Education and Professional Development Committee (EPPC) was already discussing STWP-sponsored accreditation of such programs. The following passage

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comes from the minutes of the Nov. 4, 1960, STWP Board of Directors Meeting:

> A discussion was held concerning whether the EPPC should establish, on behalf of the society, realistic curricula standards for university degrees in technical writing, technical illustration, and other fields it may deem proper, and to recommend to the Board appropriate ways of determining whether these standards are being met by particular educational institutes so that the society can grant or withhold approval of curricula on this basis. (Berry, 1960, p. 6)

This initiative was obviously premature and did not bear fruit. At this early date, the profession lacked a well-developed, specialized body of knowledge and core competencies. As Rainey, Turner, & Dayton (2005) argued many decades later, "Only with a process of codification and certification will the profession be in a position to establish accreditation of academic programs" (p. 335).

The challenge of creating effective academic programs was bigger than the first generation of professionals had anticipated. For this reason, they did not succeed on the scale they had hoped. The cooperation between academics such as Flint and Steinberg on the one hand and practitioners such as Hickok (a former high school teacher) and McDaniel on the other was undercut by the general ill will between their camps. As Gould (1989) recalled, "In the early days, the 50s, technical writing and the technical writers were without much honor, especially in academic circles" (p. 169). The reverse was also true. During the merger negotiations between TWE and STW, a TWE member asked, "How can they [STW] have a man like Flint in their organization? He is an English professor" (TWE, 1956, p. 98). These attitudes posed a formidable obstacle to collaborative educational initiatives. A decade after the formation of TWE, Hamlett (1963) lamented that "Education has not answered the challenge for higher standards in preparing graduates for technical writing careers" (p. 22). Another decade later, Colby (1975) was complaining that Rennselaer Polytechnic Institute's graduate degree program in technical writing (which had been started in 1953, the same year that TWE and STW were founded) was the only academic program in technical communication that he really trusted.

We have continued to create academic programs in technical communication (more than 223 in 2011 by one count [STC, 2011]), but we have not succeeded in implementing uniform program assessment protocols or an accreditation system. There is evidence that industry desires such quality assurance when hiring university graduates in technical communication. Malcolm (1987) noted that a 1983 survey conducted by STC indicated that employers of technical communicators were interested in having STC vet and accredit academic programs.

Legal Recognition

Another current issue in professionalization is government recognition of the profession. On January 25, 2010, STC issued a press release declaring that "STC Efforts Realized as U.S. Government Acknowledges Technical Writers as Distinct Profession." The press release was referring to the fact that the job title "Technical Writer" had been given its own chapter in the 2010 edition of the government's *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. By separating technical writers from other types of communicators, the U.S. government was acknowledging that technical writing had different requirements than other types of writing. According to the news release, this change was important because it gave technical communicators authoritative evidence to use in discussions with employers about the status of their profession (O'Sullivan, 2010).

Although the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics did not formally acknowledge technical writing as a distinct profession until 2010, governmental agencies have long recognized technical writing as a distinct activity and "technical writer" and "technical editor" as official job titles. The National Advisory Commission for Aeronautics (NACA), NASA's predecessor, had "Assistant Technical Editor" as an official job title as early as 1935 (NACA, 1941). That editor, Pearl I. Young (Figure 11), was a scientist by education who worked with NACA engineers on their reports, and in later years she taught in-house report writing courses, produced a style manual for NACA reports, and supervised an editing group of mainly women (Verniel & Douglas, 1996). Thus, Young was an early example of a U.S. government employee with the job title "Technical Editor" in the modern sense, but she was not the first.

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Figure 11: Pearl I. Young (1895-1968), a technical editor and later manager of a technical editing group at the Langley and Cleveland fields of the National Advisory Commission on Aeronautics, the predecessor of NASA (Verniel & Douglas, 1996). Having majored in physics, chemistry, and mathematics at the University of North Dakota, Young began her NACA/NASA career as a Laboratory Assistant (as pictured above) and was promoted to Junior Physicist before moving into editing (c. 1930) (NACA, 1941). She is the eponym of the Pearl I. Young Theater at NASA's Langley Research Center (NASA, n.d.). Public domain photo from NASA.

The *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, published by the U.S. Employment Service in four major editions (and many supplements) between 1939 and 1991, sheds light on the emergence of the government job title "Technical Writer" in the post-World War II era. The first edition of the dictionary, published in 1939, did not include "Technical Writer" at all, but it did include "Editor of a Trade or Technical Publication":

> **Editor, Trade-or-Technical Publication** (print & pub.) 0-06.53. Edits a trade or technical publication: accepts or rejects material; writes editorials and special articles, maintaining editorial policy of publication; makes field trips in search of new practices or first hand information on conditions; consults advisers on trade or technical questions; edits material; plans lay-out and checks and approves final proofs of issue. (U.S. Employment Service, 1939, p. 316)

As a job title, "Technical Writer" made its debut in a 1943 supplement to the first edition of the dictionary: "Technical Writer (profess. & kin.) see Writer, Technical Publications" (U.S. Employment Service, 1943, p. 320). The entry for "Technical Publications Writer" read as follows:

> **Writer, Technical Publications**; ordnance engineer; technical writer (profess. & kin.) 0-06.90. Prepares technical manuals, bulletins, and other publications dealing with subjects, such as improvements in electrical and mechanical equipment and services, and the assembly, use, maintenance, repair, and transportation of ordnance materials: consults workers engaged in developing new equipment and in making improvements, and other sources, such as blueprints, trade and engineering journals, and manufacturers' catalogs, to acquire or verify technical knowledge of subject; selects, organizes, edits, and rewrites articles, bulletins, manuals,
> or other materials dealing with general and particular phases of subject; directs preparation
> of illustrative materials, such as photographs, drawings, and sketches. May specialize in a particular phase of technical writing, such as use, repair, and maintenance of firearms, or tanks, or the application, theory, installation, and operation of telephone and telegraph equipment. (p. 352) Note that the occupation is classified as "profess. & kin."

Thus, as early as 1943, the U.S. government formally recognized "Technical Writer" as belonging to a group of "professional and kindred occupations"—that is, occupations requiring specialized study and training.

Sweet (1957) noted that many technical communicators in the 1950s took great comfort from the fact that government agencies such as the Bureau of Census and the Federal Security Agency listed the technical writer as a professional worker; however, as Sweet (1957) also pointed out, these agencies recognized the billiard player, jockey, dog trainer, freak, masseur, gambler, fortune teller, animal impersonator, yodeler, and stooge as professional workers (p. 65)

The history of the struggle for legal (i.e., judicial) recognition of the profession extends back to at least 1957, when a U.S. federal court ruled that a technical writer was a professional under the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hours Act and therefore exempt from receiving time-and-a-half pay for overtime work.

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From January 1955 to July 1956, David Rothstein worked as a technical writer for Cannon & Sullivan Technical Publications in Los Angeles. He created technical handbooks from engineering data presented on blueprints and was also in charge of deciding what artwork was needed and ordering it. In adjudicating his lawsuit, the court found that "The type of work performed by a technical writer is predominantly intellectual and creative, rather than routine," requiring "judgment or discretion," and that Rothstein was "a bona fide professional employee" (Rothstein, 1957). In other words, the court ruled against Rothstein, who did not want to be regarded as a professional in the Wage and Hours Act sense because it meant less pay for overtime work.

Similarly, the profession received legal recognition from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in the early 1980s. In 1979, a technical publications writer from India was denied "preference status" to immigrate to the United States when an INS District Director decided that he did not belong to a professional occupation. The company that wanted to hire the writer filed an appeal, and the case was sent to a Regional Commissioner, who ruled c. 1980 that technical writing was a professional occupation because entry into the occupation typically required a bachelor's degree from a university. STC's Executive Director had solicited statements to that effect from three editors in the field and an academic program director and submitted them to the petitioner's attorney, and apparently this testimony swayed the INS official. Commenting on the INS's ruling, the editor of STC's *Technical Communication* declared that "Technical Writers [were] Legally Professionals Now" (Smith, 1981, p. 3).

Conclusion

Professionalization has been a long-term project that has included achievements as well as setbacks and delays. If nothing else, our history teaches us to be cautiously optimistic about those achievements. Many times in the past we have felt confident that mature professional status was just around the corner, only to discover that it was farther away than we thought. It is easy to exaggerate or overestimate an accomplishment in the

satisfaction of the moment, particularly when we lack a strong historical consciousness as a profession. Although it would be wrong to describe professionalization as a Sisyphean task, it has been a frustrating one so far. Our appraisal of our gains must be tempered by a certain amount of realism and an awareness of the history of the professionalism movement in technical communication.

The recent achievement of a measure of legal recognition by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is a case in point. We have been trumpeting the government's recognition of technical writing as a profession—or at least a professional activity—since the 1950s, but what has that recognition really done for the technical communicator's professional status? Although persuading the BLS to segregate technical writing from other forms of writing in its Occupational Outlook Handbook was an accomplishment, it was not the accomplishment that STC had set its sights on achieving. STC was trying to persuade the BLS to replace the term "technical writer" and its narrow implications with the term "technical communicator" and its much broader implications (Martin & O'Sullivan, 2010). The fact that the BLS did not *replace* "technical writer" as the name of the occupation more than 40 years after the profession itself officially embraced the term "technical communicator" should give us pause.

Although the unification of technical communication organizations in the late 1950s and early 1960s has given way to a multiplicity of technical communication organizations in the 21st century, and at least one technical communication professor believes that we are "diluting our efforts" with "too many organizations" (as cited in Carliner, 2003, p. 95), there may still be cause for optimism. We should view the creation of organizations such as ATTW and CPTSC and international organizations of technical communicators in places like Australia, Japan, Germany, France, and Switzerland as evidence of the profession's continued growth and relevance over the years. In recent decades, there have been attempts to achieve greater cooperation, if not unification, among these organizations. In the 1990s and early 2000s, for example, representatives of the major technical communication organizations met annually for an informal Summit of Technical Communication Organizations (Carliner, 2003). TCeurope and Intecom are international umbrella organizations that

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foster cooperation among national organizations. There has also been some cross-pollination among the U.S. organizations. Several STC fellows are officers or directors of IEEE PCS, ATTW, and CPTSC. A former president of STC is now the editor of the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.

As early as 1960, STC discussed the feasibility of creating an internal system for accrediting academic programs (Berry, 1960); more than 50 years later, however, we still do not have an accreditation system in place. The unsuccessful attempt of IEEE PCS to create such a system in the 1990s underscores the difficulty of the task. Although it has been helpful to several programs, CPTSC's Program Review service does not provide the kind of quality assurance that might come from ABET accreditation, for example. Nor was it ever intended to do so. Nevertheless, important progress is being made in developing and assessing student learning outcomes in technical communication programs. Scholars have developed a sizable corpus of assessment literature in technical communication, and CPTSC now offers an annual Award for Excellence in Program Assessment (CPTSC, 2008b) in connection with the CPTSC Research Assessment Project (Coppola, 2008).

One important sign of the discipline's maturation is the interest it has shown in the study of ethics in recent decades. Although organizations such as ATTW (2011) and STC (1998) have codes of ethics to guide members in their professional practice, we no longer view these codes (if we ever did) as sufficient by themselves to foster ethical behavior. We seem to have a better understanding of the motivations and mechanisms behind such behavior—if the amount of literature on the subject is any indication. There has been a proliferation in the literature about ethics in technical communication scholarship since 1970 (Dombrowski, 2000a, p. 4). Introductory textbooks in technical communication usually include a section or chapter about ethics. For example, Anderson (2010) integrated "Ethical Guidelines" throughout his textbook. There are several books devoted to ethics in technical communication (Allen & Voss, 1997; Brockmann, 1989; Dombrowski, 2000b; Markel, 2001). Undergraduate and graduate curricula in technical communication often include modules, if not entire courses, in ethics.

Finally, significant progress seems to have been made in the areas of certification and body of knowledge.

Recent achievements in these two areas are grounds for being optimistic about the profession's future. STC's implementation of a certification system for technical communication professionals this year represents the culmination—and in some respects, the achievement—of many years of hard work. It may not be all hyperbole to say that "A Monumental Day Dawns for Technical Communicators" (Jong, 2010, p. 6). We will have to watch closely to see whether certification changes the employment landscape and the public's perception of the profession. In the 60 years that have passed since technical communicators created the first professional organizations and journals in technical communication, the profession has had time to develop a specialized body of knowledge and create outlets (e.g., professional conferences and journals) for documenting, exploring, and critiquing it. As a framework and portal, STC TCBOK promises to make that body of knowledge accessible to anyone who wishes to know what technical communication is and what technical communicators do.

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