

The Role and Expectations of Professional Societies

Panelists: Ms. Kathy Frame, Biotechnology Institute
Ms. Margaret E. Wickham St. Germain, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Ms. Tina M. Leaym, Dow Corning Corporation
Ms. Kim C. Millspaugh, Shell Global Solutions Inc.

Facilitator: Ms. Janet M. Smith, Dow Corning Corporation

Throughout the chemical enterprise, when something needs to be done, chances are that a technician does it. Technicians are self-starting workers; professional societies can benefit by engaging these achievers. Moreover, technicians can benefit from the career development opportunities available in professional societies.

The key for technicians is identifying the opportunities. Potential volunteers should look carefully at the mission and scope of any volunteer organization to find something captures their interest.

Just do it

Margie St. Germain joined ACS over 30 years ago, when most of the volunteer positions were filled by older, male, PhD chemists. A young, female, BS chemist, she was one of the few to join a committee via recommendation of the ACS president. She has since served in most of the leadership roles available at ACS and is currently a regional chair. Her advice: be interested, be involved, be vocal.



Participants from the 2006 Conference on Biotechnology Education, hosted by BioTech
www.biotechinstitute.org

Myriad opportunities are available. Workforce organizations, like the Biotechnology Institute (BioTech), focus on professional development almost exclusively. BioTech is dedicated to educating teachers, students and the public about the promise and challenges of biotechnology. BioTech projects include minority mentorships, teacher-leader programs, and the examination of the relationship among industry, academia, government, and professional societies.

Professional societies focus on the support and improvement of a given profession. ACS, for example, is chiefly concerned with the advancement of chemical professionals and their interests. Volunteer opportunities exist at the national, regional, and local level; there are also opportunities in the technical divisions and the Technician Affiliate Groups (TAGs-local professional organizations for technicians affiliated with local sections of the ACS). Some positions require full ACS membership to participate, but many do not. However, most technicians qualify for full ACS membership due to their work experience, regardless of their degree.

Volunteer opportunities also exist at work. Kim Millspaugh, for example, used her experience as a volunteer for ACS to found the Employees for Sustainable Development at Shell Chemical Company.

Professional development through professional societies

A professional organization, like ACS, offers many opportunities for professional development. By simply getting involved, volunteers acquire a new network of



TECH member Carol White presents a paper at the Spring 2005 ACS National Meeting.

<http://membership.acs.org/t/tech/>

experienced professionals. When needed, the network can act a career counselor, resume reviewer, and headhunter. The network can help new employees identify the difference between a bad day and a bad job.

Professional societies can provide a supportive environment to develop and test new skills. Tina Leaym started her career as a chemical technician but was recently promoted to scientist. While she was interviewing for her new position, she realized that she was answering all of the questions with examples of her work with ACS.

Formal career development opportunities are also available. TAGs and local sections offer personal and professional development seminars, general and organic chemistry review sessions, resume reviews, and more.

The Committee on Economic and Professional Affairs (CEPA), working with the ACS Department of Career Management and Development, offers resume reviews, career workshops, mock interviews and workshops, and career literature including “What a Technician Should Know Before Taking a Position in Industry.” Workshops are also being developed specifically for technicians and mid-career chemists. Plus, technicians have access to all of the resources of CEN-ChemJobs.

What do professional societies need from the rest of the chemical enterprise?

In a word—education. Employers, employees, educators, and students all need to be educated on the opportunities professional societies offer and encouraged to get involved. Despite the professional development opportunities available, many employers refuse to support their employees in their endeavors. Despite the resources available, many educators neglect to emphasize the importance of participation to their students.

Additionally, everyone needs to be reminded of the value of an associate’s degree. Technicians with associate’s degrees are often overlooked by hiring managers and human resource personnel in favor of those with Bachelor’s degrees. However, Bachelor’s degree chemists often leave their positions for other opportunities. Additionally, a graduate of an associate’s degree chemical technology program often starts work with far more experience and training than a Bachelor degree graduate of a non-chemical technology program.

Only by getting everyone involved in professional societies will the societies truly represent everyone.



In 2006, a group of ACS committee members visited Capitol Hill to discuss pensions and employee nondiscrimination.

<http://pubs.acs.org/cen/>

Follow-up activities

- Identify local professional organizations
 - Look for leadership opportunities with the organizations
 - Look for career development materials
- Identify the background of the executive boards of your ACS local section. Encourage people whose backgrounds would diversify the board to do so.
- Look for opportunities to become engaged in local projects.
- Host a panel discussion on professional societies