

Status Report on the Attempt to Start a Gulf Coast Electrical-Electronics Technology Teachers Association

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Abstract

In 1999 Dr. Luke Faulkenberry at the University of Houston and Dr. Larry Brillhart at North Harris College in Houston were given a small Ford Foundation Mini-grant under the auspices of the University of Houston to try to start an electrical-electronics technology teachers association in the Houston-Gulf Coast area. This association is to include teachers from high schools, community colleges, universities, and proprietary schools. The objective is to bring the electrical-electronics technology teachers together to discuss items of common interest, forge linkages between the schools, and improve communications among the teachers and the schools represented.

The first meeting was held on April 28, 1999. Twenty-five of the approximately 80 electrical-electronics teachers in the area attended. Among the items of common interest are articulation, curriculum matters, political matters effecting teaching and education funding, and teaching methodologies. The next meeting is November 10, 2000. There are funds enough for three meetings, so another funded meeting will be held in the spring semester of 2001, although the final report is due in December of 2000.

This paper will summarize the progress of the association through spring 2001, and provide any lessons learned to assist people wishing to start a similar association.

Introduction

The electrical and electronics teachers in the community colleges and universities in the Gulf Coast area around Houston, TX have always kept in touch informally. The primary reason has been the need for articulation of electrical and electronics courses for students with associate degrees who subsequently pursued a baccalaureate degree from one of the area universities. This loose, informal association generally did not include teachers from proprietary schools or high schools. The meetings between teachers were not organized, and linkages often broke down as people changed positions, places of employment, or just got busy.

The faculty members in the Electrical-Electronics Technology Department at the University of Houston College of Technology had occasionally commented about how nice it would be to see electronics teachers at other institutions more frequently to discuss items of common interest. I had spoken to community college faculty who had expressed a similar interest. The problem was

in trying to fund and organize some meetings to see if a formal or semi-formal organization was feasible. I saw a notice concerning Ford Foundation Mini-Grants to promote articulation and transfer had become available through the Gulf Coast Articulation Consortium. I called Dr. Larry Brillhart, Associate Dean of Applied Technology at North Harris College, to ask if he would like to collaborate on a proposal to request funding to initiate an association of electrical and electronics technology teachers for Houston and the surrounding Gulf Coast area. He readily agreed.

Fred Lewallen, Associate Professor in the Electrical-Electronics Technology Department at the University of Houston College of Technology, and Cheryl Upshaw, Associate Professor and Program Coordinator of Electronics Technology at North Harris College, agreed to work with us on the project. We received the grant. We were notified in fall of 1999 but did not receive funds until December 1999.

This grant was to fund an organizational and a follow-up meeting (funding for an additional meeting was added later) for a Gulf Coast Area Electrical and Electronics Technology Teachers Organization. The organizational efforts were focused on the electrical and electronics technology teachers at member institutions of the Gulf Coast Articulation Consortium, but also included electrical and electronics teachers from all of the greater Houston and Gulf Coast area community colleges, universities, proprietary schools, and high schools.

The purpose of the proposed association was to encourage dialogue and forge linkages among all electrical and electronics technology teachers at all of the institutions in the greater Houston and Gulf Coast region.

Methods

An internet search resulted in several sites that dealt with starting a nonprofit organization. One site⁴ provided questions and answers as well as referencing books available about starting nonprofit organizations. A very complete site, written by Carter McNamara⁶, contained many detailed instructions on starting nonprofit organizations as well as writing strategic plans for all types of organizations. McNamara points out that the very first steps of starting a nonprofit organization are a very clear mission statement, stating what kind of a nonprofit organization it is to be (incorporated, tax-exempt, charitable, educational, etc.), rethinking the real need for another nonprofit organization, and finding fiscal sponsorship to help start the organization. Both McNamara and Hummel² provide similar checklists for starting a nonprofit organization that include similar first steps, mentioned above, and continue to include steps for recruiting board members, preparing budgetary and bookkeeping procedures, obtaining a lawyer, and appropriate filing of documents for incorporation and tax-exemption. Both McNamara's internet site⁶ and Hummel's book² provide detailed instructions on accomplishing each of the items in the checklist as well as listing other resources to aid in starting a nonprofit organization. The University of Wisconsin has an internet site⁵ that contains a list of sites related to starting nonprofit organizations. There is a newsletter published by Nonprofit Issues, Inc.⁷ that deals with issues of interest to nonprofit organizations.

Many of the procedures outlined in the nonprofit organization literature seem to be more suited to starting a foundation or other large organization rather than a local electronics teachers organization. We did write a statement of purpose and will need to complete other steps such as a budget, record keeping procedures, and filing for tax-exemption as the organization becomes more formal. We began by dealing with simpler issues.

The first task was to obtain the names and addresses of all of the electrical and electronics teachers in the area. Dr. Brillhart and his associates obtained the community college teacher information, I obtained the university teacher data, and an associate obtained the high school electronics teacher list. We were unable to obtain a list of proprietary institution teachers, but did get the addresses of the institutions that offer electrical or electronics technology. The total came to about 80 teachers. We found out later that there are about 15 post secondary proprietary school electrical and electronics technology teachers.

A date, April 28, 2000, was selected for the first meeting. An invitation letter to the first meeting, in Appendix 1, was sent out by email to every teacher for whom we had an email address, and by mail to every teacher whose address we had. We mailed several invitations in an envelope addressed generically to the electronics teachers at each proprietary school. A follow-up letter was sent out about three weeks before the meeting.

The first meeting, held at the Houston Southwest Hilton Hotel, had 25 people in attendance. The people were receptive to the idea of an association for Gulf Area electrical and electronics teachers, and liked the idea of having all types of schools, community colleges, high schools, proprietary schools, and universities represented. They wanted to have another meeting before deciding whether or not to commit to an association, although everyone thought it was a good idea. A suggestion form was handed out and the responses are in the report on the April 28, 2000 meeting report in the next section. The meeting report was mailed or emailed to all of the people who attended the meeting.

The second meeting was held at the University of Houston Hilton on November 10, 2000. There were 20 teachers and a guest speaker in attendance, but several previous attendees emailed or telephoned their regrets that they would not be able to attend. After the speakers a short business meeting was held. The teachers attending decided to proceed with formalizing the association, and a transition steering committee was selected. The steering committee, with Dr. Brillhart and Dr. Faulkenberry as ex-officio members, is to plan the steps to take to make the organization a formal association, and to plan the next meeting. The second meeting report has been emailed or mailed to all of the teachers who attended. The suggestion form was emailed to the members with the report. A copy of the second meeting report is included.

The steering committee will need to file as a nonprofit organization in the State of Texas, and file for sales tax exemption. Many of the subsequent requirements for an organization, such as budgeting and recording procedures will be developed as needed. The Texas sales tax codes³ are clear on the tax-exemption of organizations such as this one, but the United States tax codes¹ are much less clear. It may turn out that the requirement for filing income taxes is high enough for

nonprofit organizations that this association will not need to be concerned with income tax exemption.

First meeting report

The Report for the Friday, April 28, 2000 meeting began with a list of attendees (excluded here). The meeting, held at the Hilton Houston Southwest Hotel, began at 11:30 with a welcome by Dr. Luke Faulkenberry, Electrical Technology teacher at the University of Houston. Luke pointed out that the meeting and luncheon were funded by a Ford Foundation mini-grant. The purpose of the mini-grant is to fund this luncheon (April 28) organizational meeting and two follow-up meetings of Gulf Coast Electrical and Electronics Technology Teachers. The purpose of the organization, if it becomes a formal organization, will be to provide a forum for the interchange of ideas and information on curriculum, articulation, core curriculum, teaching, student matters, and other topics of interest to electrical-electronics teachers in the Gulf Coast Area. As the food arrived then, the group began their meal.

As dessert began Dr. Curtis Johnson, Professor of Electrical-Electronics Technology at the University of Houston, began his talk on his adventures in Azerbaijan. Dr. Johnson was in Azerbaijan on a Fulbright Scholarship. His task was to set up a computer laboratory with access to the World Wide Web. Dr. Johnson said that was not an easy task in a developing nation. He also described the higher education system in that nation. The talk was interesting and informative.

Dr. Larry Brillhart, Associate Dean of Applied Technology at North Harris College, conducted a discussion on topics of interest to the group. First, everyone introduced themselves to learn who was there, where they were from, and what programs they represented. There were faculty from high schools, both public and private community colleges, and four-year universities. Dr. Brillhart then asked the group what they would like to obtain from the association, and for suggested topics for presentations in future meetings. Several items of discussion were pursued that are briefly summarized in the following paragraphs.

One attendee said he would like to see more high school electronics teachers at future meetings and volunteered to obtain a list of all HISD electronics teachers for future mail outs. Another attendee from Tomball college indicated this was a good type of gathering because it fostered communications between institutions with differing needs and a wide variety of clients. In the ensuing discussion it was noted that the Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM) requirements by the State are sometimes at odds with local needs. An area association might be able to effectively communicate with the State on this issue. Additionally there is talk that the State of Texas may try to tie WECM to high school programs. The impact of that is not known.

It was suggested that a list serve be started for the area electrical and electronics technology teachers. Luke Faulkenberry said he would look into a list serve. It was also suggested that the list of attendees be distributed to the attendees with the meeting report (the attendee list is attached).

It was suggested the group might wish to look at standardizing college level introductory electronics courses. It was also suggested that program advisory committees could be an industry link for the organization if it continues. The group decided to wait until the association had more identity before involving advisory committees.

The group agreed the association was a good idea, but that another meeting was needed for people to decide whether or not to formalize the association. The meeting then adjourned.

The responses to the questionnaires included in the report follow. Eleven of the meeting questionnaires were filled out. The responses are listed with the question.

1. What did you like about this meeting? Responses: good start; good interchange of information; meeting other educators in the area; informative meeting (speaker); good speaker, good food, and good people; great lunch; it is a good way to find identification for the electrical/electronics teachers in the area; the setting and meal; this meeting was very positive and productive; and great ideas presented.

2. What could have been improved in this meeting? Responses: setting of a goal to achieve, more input from more people – more ideas, industry involvement, give a restroom break, give the next one at the University of Houston Hilton Hotel, add more people, and an I-web forum for the group would be very helpful to find out more about what other schools are doing.

3. What are some topics that you would like to hear an expert in the area speak on at the next meeting? Responses: is anyone providing IPC certification? What software is being used?; electronic fusion control; the same areas; ideas on teaching techniques and setting up laboratories and laboratory experiences; and how to organize all area electrical and electronics teachers into one body with unified ideas and goals.

4. Please list an area or two you think the schools represented here could profit by working on together. Responses: because of our diversity we could list all of the areas being taught to better serve our students; articulation; compare and contrast teaching techniques, syllabi, lesson plans, etc. for the wide variety of subjects taught within electronics; electronics/networking; coordinate courses for transfer; list of high schools; and not sure yet.

5. List someone that should be asked to the next meeting. Responses: Steve Roland and Gerald Brown from the San Jacinto College Central Electronics Department; all electronics teachers; and industry representatives.

6. Other comments if any. Responses: good presentation on Azerbaijan; I think these meetings are a great idea; and great! let's have more.

Second meeting report

The report for the Friday, November 10, 2000 meeting began with a list of attendees. The guest speaker was Ms. Sylvia Clark from Texas A&M University.

The meeting was held at the University of Houston Hilton Hotel. It began at 11:30 with a welcome by Dr. Luke Faulkenberry, an Electrical Technology teacher at the University of Houston College of Technology. After the welcome everyone introduced themselves, told where they were from, and what programs they represented. As in the first meeting there were teachers from high schools, both public and private community colleges, and four-year universities. The meal was served at 11:30, so as people began eating Luke pointed out that the meeting and luncheon were funded by a Ford Foundation mini-grant. The purpose of the mini-grant was to fund the initial organizational meeting, and two follow-up meetings of Gulf Coast Electrical and Electronics Technology Teachers. The purpose of the organization will be to provide a forum for the interchange of ideas and information on curriculum, articulation, core curriculum, teaching, student matters, and other topics of interest to all electrical-electronics teachers in the Gulf Coast Area. The membership is to be comprised of electronics and electrical technology teachers from high schools, community colleges, proprietary schools, and universities.

Because the number of students in Texas is expected to greatly increase in the next ten years the Texas Legislature is trying to find ways to educate more students more efficiently. The State cannot afford to fund the vast increase in the faculty and physical plant needed to educate those students. Thus, the legislature has mandated a common core for the universities and community colleges, semester hour caps for state supported baccalaureate degrees, and common course numbering systems to aid articulation. It was then interesting to hear from our guest speaker, Ms. Sylvia Clark, about a similar guideline for one area of high school education.

Ms. Clark has been contracted by the TEA to develop, with teacher input, a common state curriculum for high school electronics programs. The major goal of the program is to develop an effective electronics program curriculum such that a student may transfer from one high school to another and not lose credit. Electronics technology is the first area to be developed, others are to follow.

Next, one of our own, Mr. Robert Eaton, spoke concerning his involvement in Ms. Clark's TEA project. Mr. Eaton was one of the electronic technology teachers who worked on the common curriculum with Ms. Clark. Mr. Eaton told us how the project is positively effecting his program.

Most of the meeting time consisted of the speeches, so Dr. Larry Brillhart, Associate Dean of Applied Technology at North Harris College, conducted a brief business meeting. Those in attendance indicated that continuing Gulf Coast Electrical Electronics Technology Teachers Association (GEETTA) was desirable. Dr. Brillhart asked the next task needed to make the group a self-sustaining association. He pointed out that the grant recipients intended to help start the organization, but not assume the long-term leadership. It was decided that a steering committee should be appointed to plan both the transition into a self-sustaining organization and the program of the next meeting. The steering committee members are Mr. Robert Eaton, Ms.

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Cheryl Upshaw, Mr. Kevin Magee, and Mr. Stanley Young. Luke Faulkenberry and Larry Brillhart will serve as ex-officio members of the steering committee for the duration of the Ford Foundation Mini-grant. The meeting then adjourned.

Results

The desired outcomes of the funded meetings were the forging of linkages between teachers who attend, and formalizing the association if it seemed desirable to the teachers who attended.

The results to date of this project are:

1. The two meetings, were thought interesting and worth while by the participants.
2. The decision to become a formal association and the naming of a steering committee to accomplish this task. This will include registration as a non-profit organization.
3. One of the steering committee members has begun a web page for the association.

Some recommended steps to take for initiating organizations such as this one follow:

1. A seemingly obvious, but major, recommendation the project participants have is to start planning the meetings very early.
2. Obtain a list of likely participants. The web pages of area schools are helpful for this. Community colleges and high school teachers may have organizations that may help identify potential participants.
3. Contract the meeting facilities based on a guess as to how many may attend. One must promise a more exact number later, and hope the estimate based on the RSVP count is close enough. Note: A funded luncheon such as the ones we had are helpful but not mandatory. A brown bag lunch meeting can be held with very little, if any, cost.
4. Plan the meetings with an eye to the time that the participants can attend. Ask someone from each type of school when their best meeting time is. For the Houston and surrounding gulf area it turned out to be Fridays around noon.
5. Contact and obtain speakers for the first meeting. This can be difficult unless they believe in the project because you do not know how many people will attend. Contact the speakers early.
6. Prepare and distribute by mail and email an initial document explaining the purpose of the association, announcing the meeting, and inviting the potential participants. An RSVP is essential for the first meeting if food is to be provided. After that a semi-informed guess can be made as to the number of attendees.
7. A follow up mailing (and emailing) is necessary to remind people of the meeting. The second mailing makes the project more credible, we believe, because the second letter is evidence the project still exists. The second mailing is a good time to again request that people RSVP if food is to be served.
8. Hand any evaluation documents out at the meeting and ask that the participants fill them out before they leave. It is very hard to get evaluation documents returned, even by email. Also provide a sign up sheet. Request addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses on the sign up sheet because one or more of the responses from an individual may not be legible.
9. If possible, get a person who is good at taking notes, and has no other task at the meeting such as speaking, to record the meetings.

10. Be prepared to answer a lot of email and telephone calls with an explanation of the project.
11. Thank everyone profusely for attending and contributing.
12. Write thank you letters to the speakers.

Conclusion

The project was very rewarding. We met a lot of people, renewed old acquaintances, and helped put in motion a worthwhile organization. An abstract for a paper at the American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference in Albuquerque, NM this summer, June 24-27, 2001, has been accepted.

The evaluation instrument for the project was the suggestion form. The meeting discussion and evaluation forms indicate the project was a good idea. At the last meeting a teacher from Lee College invited UH to visit and update the articulation agreements between the institutions, so linkages are forming or, as in this case, reforming. The most stringent evaluation of the project was that enough support existed for the steering committee to be formed to formalize the Gulf Coast Electrical-Electronics Technology Teachers' Association, GCEETTA (or perhaps GCEETA). This has occurred.

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