

Report of the 2006 SSCA Summer Planning Retreat

Overview. The SSCA constitution states that the officers “shall meet for the purpose of strategic planning” and that “no more than five years shall elapse between such meetings.” The first formal strategic planning session was held in the winter of 2003 when ten leaders of the association met in Memphis. Another planning session was held in Tallahassee in the summer of 2004 with a group of four officers. Reports of these sessions were made to the Executive Council and are now available on the SSCA website. These meetings serve several vital functions:

- 1) orient the leaders to the key issues and problems facing our organization
- 2) identify and assess ways to improve the association
- 3) plan the implementation of new policies, procedures, or practices

Because these are important to the success of our association, I called for a formal strategic planning meeting to be held June 23-25th, 2006. Past-president Ken Cissna offered to host the meeting in Ellijay, Georgia. Given the centrality of this location to the officers, I accepted his gracious invitation.

The SSCA Constitution states that members of the executive committee and the chair of the finance committee participate in the strategic planning meeting. Additionally, I invited all members of the finance committee. Those attending included Emmett Winn, Executive Director; Charles Tardy, President; Craig Smith, Vice-President; Jerold Hale, Vice President-Elect; Jean DeHart, Advertising Manger; Patricia Amason, Chair of the Finance Committee; and, Ken Cissna, Immediate Past President.

In preparation for the meeting, participants read reports of the '03 and '04 meetings as well as the reports of the ad hoc Committee on Participation and Voting and from the Resource Development Committee, both prepared during 2004.

In the 2003 planning meeting, the participating officers identified 5 functions central to the fulfillment the association's mission:

- 1) professional development of members (teaching, scholarship, service, leadership, administration)
- 2) relational development of members (networking, fellowship)
- 3) organizational development of association (preservation and perpetuation of the organization through maintenance of a strong financial foundation; recruiting and retaining members)

4) identity maintenance (place for members in a community of scholars; communication of organizational identity to external constituencies)

5) efficient provision of services (annual convention; academic journal; newsletter, website; membership directory; information regarding accomplishments of members of the association)

These critical functions served as the basis for our discussions. In order to assess our association's success in achieving these functions, I asked participants to think about these specific questions, which subsequently became the primary agenda items for our discussions:

- 1) Do these five functions adequately encompass the mission of our association?
- 2) What are we doing to fulfill these functions?
- 3) Are these efforts successful?
- 4) What can we do to enhance our association's ability to serve these functions?

From Friday evening through late Sunday morning, the participants discussed the issues generated by these questions and charted plans for improving the association. Question 1 above was addressed first and we concluded that this list well represents our association. We considered additional functions but decided that they were outside the scope of our organization or could be encompassed within these five. Questions 2-4 organized our analysis and assessment of the 5 functions. The report below summarizes the highlights of our discussion and identifies the resulting decisions and proposals. We recognize that not all recommendations can be implemented easily, or immediately. Actions that are more urgent, or are of higher priority, are indicated in bold.

Professional Development of Members

Description. The group noted that convention sessions, including the newly instituted workshops provide meaningful opportunities for members to learn about the profession and to develop as scholars and teachers; our journal provides publication opportunities; our association awards recognize and encourage professionalism in teaching, service, and research; and that we provide numerous opportunities for individuals to learn and develop leadership skills.

Evaluation. We suggested that though we serve our members well, there are many people in our region who are not members and that we should reach out to them. We could do a better job of informing people new to the region of what we offer and we don't offer many services significant to adjunct faculty, especially professionals who teach part time. Further, the association does not financially support research and professional activities

Recommendation.

- 1. The convention should have more panels devoted to teaching.* The Vice President should encourage division chairs to program panels that would assist adjunct teachers
- 2. The association should undertake efforts to promote its services and benefits to new members.* The Advertising Manager should prepare a display about the association and convention for the NCA convention
- 3. The association should provide short courses at the convention.* The Vice President should develop short courses that would be targeted teaching sessions comparable to those offered at the NCA convention and include a fee, advance registration, and certificate.
- 4. The association should sponsor association leadership mentoring programs. The Immediate Past President will have a session at the next convention on association participation where we try to teach and recruit members to be association leaders. Also, the Vice President-Elect will meet at the convention twice, rather than once, with the division chairs in order to prepare them for their duties in planning the next year's convention and leading their groups.**
- 5. The association should institute a small, model program funded by the association to support research and outreach activities. This program will be especially, but not solely, to assist graduate students and smaller programs/universities. \$3000 will be allocated to this. The Finance Committee Chair will propose this on a one-time, trial basis to the Finance Committee for inclusion in the '07-'08 budget. The President will appoint an ad hoc committee to draw up the policies for this program**
- 6. The association should involve the candidates for Vice President Elect more in the convention, especially in the UHC.* The Vice President-Elect will attempt to include the candidates as participants on UHC panels or in UHC functions.

Relational Development of Members

Description. In addition to the inherent opportunities for interaction afforded by our convention, we program events every day of the convention (opening reception, breakfast business meeting, breakfast roundtable discussions; awards luncheon and reception) that enable members to initiate and maintain relationships. The size and structure of our convention fosters the development of meaningful professional relationships.

Evaluation. Many consider this function be a strength of the association. Nonetheless, we might be able to program more events that foster interaction among diverse individuals. Some members have regretted the demise of an off-site social event at our convention, though most have not thought this important enough to support.

Recommendation.

7. *The Executive Director should produce an online directory to facilitate contacts among members.*
8. *The Vice President should organize a panel at the convention for new faculty in the region.*
9. *The Vice President should schedule a reception for new members at the convention to be hosted by the President and other officers.*
10. *The Vice President should consider holding an onsite social event at the convention, perhaps following the awards reception on Saturday night.*
11. *The Executive Director should acquire “new member” ribbons.*
12. *The Vice President Elect should schedule a breakfast session for the UHC.*

Organizational Development of Association

Description. We noted several recent innovations that promote the functioning of our association. The website has been radically revised, there is a renewed commitment to the financial stability of the association, and an officer listserv has been operative for more than 6 months. Additionally, previous officers have prepared detailed guidelines for the performance of the roles of president, vice-president, and vice-president elect.

Evaluation. The participants suggested the association needs a more critical culture of accountability. Questions, criticism and disagreement should be encouraged. The officers’ guidebooks could be updated. We could do more to promote our convention to potential attendees, not just to our current members. We need policies and procedures to guide some of the decisions being made by standing committees and the executive director, e.g. on naming and giving of awards.

Recommendation.

13. *The officers will update their guidebooks.*
14. *The President will ask pertinent committees to formalize (write) their procedures.*
15. *The Executive Director will put these documents (officer guidebooks) on the SSCA website.*
16. *The Vice-President elect will create and chair a membership committee.*

17. *The President will charge ad hoc and standing committees to raise money for awards, plenary speaker, and developmental grants.*
18. *The President will appoint an ad hoc committee to formulate policy on awards.*
19. *The President will charge the finance committee with an examination of the life membership fee.*
20. *The officers should institute efforts for long range development and planned giving.*

Organizational Identity

Description. The association takes numerous steps to advance its identity as an association of scholars and professionals. The operation of the journal, including the Taylor and Francis redesign, enhances this image. Advanced publicity about the convention, e.g. announcement of plenary speakers, workshops, etc., fosters this as well.

Evaluation. Some individuals view our association as insufficiently scholarly and some think we are esoteric and impractical. Likewise, for some people, the strong rhetorical and public address area is seen as a strength of the association and for some a sign of a narrow foundation. Some divisions may feel marginalized or neglected.

Recommendation.

21. *Officers should make an effort to recognize the value of all divisions and interest groups of the association.*
22. *Officers should seek information from division members and leaders about problems.*
23. *Officers should attend business meetings of disaffected units.*
24. *The association should reach out to potential members. (As noted previously, the Vice President Elect will form a membership committee.)*
25. *The Executive Director should consider adopting a new logo for the association.*
26. *The President will forward to the publication committee a recommendation from the executive committee that the name of our journal be changed to “The Communication Journal.”*

Provision of Services

Description. The group noted that we offer members many important, expensive, and time-consuming services: journal, convention, website, and newsletter. The officers are continuing to seek and make innovations to improve all of these.

Evaluation. Recent changes in the executive director's office have enhanced the collection of advertising revenue. We could do more to document the history of the association.

Recommendations.

27. The Executive Director will include on the website oral histories of our association that are provided to him.

28. The Executive Director will initiate a section of the website devoted to job advertisements that will be free for department members of the association.

29. The association will attempt to have a room with internet access available to members at the convention.

30. We will conduct a survey of members about their needs and suggestions for improvement of the association, particularly in regard to the convention. We are uncertain about the breadth and depth of members' interest, for example, in using data projectors and other technologies at the convention and need additional information.

31. The President will organize a workshop session at the next convention dealing with SACS assessment requirements.

32. The officers, particularly the President, should take positions on public policies when they advance the interest of the association.

Conclusion

Though not detailed here, the group also discussed budget issues raised by the Executive Director and Chair of the Finance committee. Suggestions were made for clarifying the categories used for organizing and reporting the association's revenue and expenditures; as well as for projecting association expenses and revenues.

In the last session of our meeting, we reviewed all of the actions listed above and identified the steps that should be taken by specific officers in order to enact these recommendations. Some changes will be immediate while others will take months and years to bring to fruition. Progress reports will be made at the executive council meetings

in November at the National Communication Association as well as at our annual convention in Louisville.

I think the group clearly achieved the three objectives of the meeting described in the first paragraph of this report.

Charles H. Tardy,
SSCA President