

Internship Experience:

Engaging in the Big Discourse

Stephanie Allen, Clif Mims, Stephanie Roberts, Beaumie Kim and Jeeheon Ryu

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Since serving as AECT interns at the 2002 conference in Dallas the five of us have spent a great deal of time reflecting on this beneficial experience. During one of these discussions Stephanie Roberts made the following observation. “My freshman English professor used a term in our class that takes on deeper meaning each year: the Big Discourse. He saw it as his responsibility to introduce us to the Big Discourse and provide us the tools we needed to engage in that discourse.” This, we believe, is the essence of the AECT Internship. Interns are introduced to the larger discourse taking place within the association and the field. They are expected to seek out professional dialogues and to engage in them directly. With wisdom, AECT collectively recognizes that new ideas, energy and leadership need to be infused into the system constantly, and that the internship is one of the sources for the new.

To capture the AECT internship experience is a rather difficult task. Before serving as interns, we had heard past interns relate their experiences enthusiastically but we had not understood fully what they were saying. During the conference friends and colleagues would ask us “How’s it going?” or “What have you been doing?” and these were hard questions to answer because we did not know exactly at that time where the experience was leading us. In fact, the internship allows each participant to have experiences that satisfy individual interests and talents appropriately, rather than prescribing a tight program for each participant.

This article presents a picture of how unique, varied and valuable the intern experience can be. While some of our reflections are very broad and others very specific in focus, we have discussed as a group our shared conviction that these experiences are not limited only to the AECT interns. The possibilities for similar experiences are available to other potential leaders in the field. We hope that within these stories you find the space where you would fit in and contribute to AECT.

Tapping into the professionals

Stephanie Allen

AECT was an important part of my graduate school experience long before I recognized it as such. The year I attended my first AECT conference, I was working as an instructional designer and project manager at an international company and anticipating going back to school full-time to complete a doctorate in instructional technology. During the conference, I met several students from Utah State University (USU) who spoke very highly of their Instructional Technology program and who introduced me to the head of the department. That initial exposure to USU’s program and to its students and leaders made a

positive impression on me, and eventually led me to select USU as the school from which I earned my PhD. The connections I made at that AECT conference were as important as the content I learned from attending various presentations.

The second AECT conference I was introduced to the head of Brigham Young University's Instructional Psychology and Technology department. We had several discussions, and he invited me to visit BYU and to make a presentation to the students and faculty during the coming semester. He also encouraged me to keep in touch and to apply for an opening coming up in the department the following year. Within eight months I had done all of those things and was offered a position as an assistant professor in the Instructional Psychology and Technology department. Once again, a connection I made at the AECT conference dramatically impacted my future.

My third AECT conference also provided me with the chance to meet excellent individuals who will impact my career and experience in the field of instructional technology for years to come. During this conference, I was selected to be an ECT intern, along with my four co-authors. It was such a pleasure to be an intern with these outstanding people. Over the course of the week, we became more than fellow graduate students; we became friends. I look forward to continuing our friendship as colleagues and AECT leaders over many years to come. During this same conference, I had the privilege of meeting many current AECT leaders and past ECT interns. It was exciting to see how many past interns are now in leadership positions within the organization. It made me realize that we are all on a continuum of contribution and that we all can and should take opportunities to play significant roles within AECT.

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My experiences as an AECT member have given me a good view of the instructional technology field and have granted me the chance to make and strengthen rich friendships and professional relationships that will continue to impact my career in the field in positive ways.

Shadowing the leaders

Clif Mims

Prior to attending the Dallas conference I asked several previous interns for advice on making the most of this opportunity. I repeatedly heard suggestions about feeling comfortable in meeting all the “big names” in the field and about “shadowing” leaders in my areas of interest. My natural tendency is to be reluctant about approaching those I admire. However I have found that throughout AECT there is a real desire for the next generation to become actively involved, and I found that my interest and inquiries were well received.

My specific areas of interest are teacher education and technology integration. I was hoping to have an opportunity to talk with Rhonda Robinson, Rodney Earle, Ed Caffarella, Sharon Smaldino and many others that I admired for their work in these areas. Dr. Earle came and had breakfast with the interns and gave us over an hour of his time discussing his views on where we have been and where he thinks we are headed in K-12 technology integration. I made a special effort to visit the graduate student lounge and meet Dr. Caffarella, and I participated in an informal question and answer session about both the field of instructional technology and the AECT organization. Furthermore, I had a quick conversation with both Sharon Smaldino and Mary Herring, officers in the Teacher Education Division, in the hallway and they invited me to any of the division meetings that I wished to attend. I wound up shadowing both of them, gaining an insider's perspective about this particular division and meeting many people with whom I have continued to keep contact. Individuals like Kay Persichitte, Guy Westhoff and

Judy Duffield have all been mentors that have offered much needed assistance and advice through emails, phone calls, and visits at other professional conferences and workshops.

It was during the casual conversation between sessions with Dr. Robinson that I discovered Northern Illinois University was accepting applications to fill a faculty position in which I was interested—a position for which I subsequently applied and was hired. The internship provided me with an all-access, behind the scenes pass to gain first-hand experience in areas of interest to me. I found that all the divisions and individual members that I approached encouraged my presence and interest. In fact, I repeatedly heard those that I approached state that they welcomed any graduate student that shared my interest regardless of whether or not they had been awarded an internship. I would encourage all graduate students and new members to AECT rest assured that their participation is welcomed.

Finding mentors from across the field

Stephanie Roberts

With the warm encouragement I have always experienced from our then Department Chair at the University of Northern Colorado, Kay Persichitte, I applied to be an AECT intern at the 2002 convention. At the time I was engaged in an independent study in Change with the specific goal of learning the different models and getting immersed in as much research as possible. The first book I read was Dr. James Ellsworth's *Surviving Change*.

As I was working through the AECT internship application, one question kept bothering me: whom would I shadow for a day if I could? On the one hand, getting to spend a day with one of the leaders—getting to hear their thoughts, getting to see what circles they moved in—was definitely something I wanted to do. On the other hand, this “shadowing” notion felt like tagging along, more getting-in-the-way than learning. And I just wasn't sure I wanted to do that.

The one thing I knew for sure was that I wanted to be involved with the Change Division (then a council), so I thought I would see who was president of that division. At the time, lo and behold, it was Dr. Ellsworth. What a nifty coincidence! I was almost done with his book, certainly had enough questions to ask I him, and I really wanted to know more about how to get involved in Change. So I put Dr. Ellsworth's name in that blank on the application, and sent it off.

After Dr. Joanne Bentley sent me an email saying I had been selected, I made it a priority to find Dr. Ellsworth. He as very gracious, and we wound up having a long conversation

about his book, change in general and change within AECT. In the course of the conversation, he asked me what my dissertation topic was. I told him that my topic stems from a blend of my humanities and philosophical background mixed with my love for technology and change, yielding what seems like a difficult dissertation in our field but a perfectly normal one in the humanities. It turned out that

Dr. Ellsworth teaches courses for a humanities-oriented PhD. and has specialized expertise in the ethics of technology and the role of change as a paradigm for leadership. He offered to let me attend sessions with him and to continue discussing my dissertation. These discussions with Dr. Ellsworth suddenly gave the dissertation a shape and fullness I had not imagined. He was able to tell me about practicing

in a military setting, a path I am still considering after graduation, and he ended up serving as an external member of my dissertation committee. Now I am heavily involved in the Change Division as Communications Officer-elect, and I'm making progress on the dissertation topic I really wanted to pursue but had almost ditched because I thought it might be too unwieldy and too off-base.

I think every other student out there ought to hear that the leaders of this field are very open to discussing their work and your work with you. They want to help you if it's a good fit for them. Furthermore, these interactions may provide you access to expertise not available to you in your program or school. You may find a potential committee member, a future research collaborator, a future colleague, or even a mentor. Also, the doors for participation within this organization are wide open. Not only have I become involved in Change, but I've made connections with others who have given me avenues for writing and opportunities that have opened doors in other places for me. No longer on the periphery observing, I am now in the thick of involvement with AECT and doing what I can to keep the organization strong and to improve it. Through the internship, I found both the support I needed for my work and many avenues through which I can give back to the organization. But you need not have an internship to do any of this. Attend a division meeting; attend the social events; attend the presidential sessions; find the people whose work you enjoy and talk to them. As Sharon Smaldino put it, everybody can raise their hand and get involved.

Moving toward the community

Beaumie Kim

In the fall of 2002, I was busy taking my comprehensive exams at the University of Georgia (UGA) but took time to apply for the ECT Foundation internship program anyway. I did not let the opportunity slip away because I realized

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The Dallas Convention Interns: Clif Mims, Stephanie Roberts, Beaumie Kim, Stephanie Allen and Jeeheon Ryu

that going to a graduate school is a holistic experience that you have as a part of the community, not just taking classes, passing tests, and writing the dissertation. At that time I was involved in various research, service, and social activities, and I believed that I could extend my experience to the larger community by serving as an AECT intern. The AECT internship program promised to provide good opportunities to engage in leadership, to build relationships with students and researchers from other places, and to participate in service to the community.

The 2002 convention internship turned out to be a special opportunity for me to learn not only about AECT, but also about a research community from my country, Korea. KSET (The Korean Society for Educational Technology) is one of the leading professional organizations in the field in Korea. The first day of the conference when KSET directors came to meet the AECT board of Directors, the ECT interns were also there being introduced. The KSET leaders introduced their organization and discussed the possibilities for an Asian chapter of AECT and for international membership. When I attended the International Council later on in the afternoon, the issues raised at the board meeting were addressed by the past-president Charles White, and I learned that the past-president becomes the representative of the AECT board to the International Council. That same night, I got to meet the people from KSET as well as other Korean leaders, and Korean students studying in the U.S. and in Korea. At a kick-off celebration for KSET's relationship with AECT, all the Korean members were invited to a dinner, an invitation planned for extension to the entire AECT community in the following year. I spent most of my evening with the Korean members as they shared their personal stories about graduate school, professional activities and even their past internship experiences. It was rather unusual for me to choose to spend long hours with the people I met for the first time at a conference, but starting the day with leaders in the field had motivated me, and being presented as an intern filled me with a willingness to meet new people.

When I walked into the meetings of different divisions and councils, people were delighted to see a graduate student attending. I believe that many student members do not realize how many opportunities are there for them to get involved (neither did I). My fellow interns and I had a great conversation about how we could let other graduate students know about the opportunities as student members and how we could help them feel accepted as members of the community so that AECT does not let many talented individuals pass by who could contribute tremendously to the organization.

As the internship experience was moving toward closure, some of us were saying that we want to wear the medal every year so that we could still get the special attention. What I now know is that the special attention was not coming from the medal but from ourselves standing up with pride. Looking back at the experience of being an intern at AECT, I realize that the difference it made to me was that I was changed by "wearing a new hat." It was not so much that people looked at us and treated us differently while we were wearing the interns' medals, but that we thought of ourselves and others as belonging to a community, which magically changed the experience we had at the convention.

Sharing the leadership of AECT

Jeeheon Ryu

The history channel is my favorite TV program. I love to watch the program not only because it shows how we humans have fought to overcome obstacles, but also because it tells that there is no achievement in history accomplished by a single individual. Although we may tend to think that only one person made some major contribution because it was usually represented by that person's name, we must recognize that many lesser-known and anonymous contributors

have supported each of those well-known people. Roald Amundsen, for instance, is famous for his successful Antarctic expedition. Though we should not underestimate his efforts and leadership in leading that expedition, we must also acknowledge how many collaborators supported and made possible Amundsen's achievement. The history channel teaches me over and over that history is a masterpiece created by a tapestry of contributors, even though most of them will remain unknown.

The ECT Intern experience showed me the exact same lesson; the existence and accomplishments of AECT have been achieved through the collaboration of many contributors. It was like wearing new glasses to me; I had a totally different perspective on the organization. Before serving as an intern, AECT was just one of the conferences I attended where people came and presented their research. To me conferences were an extension of classroom activities which are prescheduled by an instructor. I thought of myself as a follower of the conference plan even when I was a presenter. Furthermore, I did not pay any attention to how many people were working hard to organize the AECT conference. The internship was a journey in which I discovered that my role is as a collaborative contributor to the legacy of AECT.

I was anxious at the initial meeting with the other interns and Dr. Joanne Bentley. Frankly, although I was happy to be selected as an intern I was also pretty anxious because I had no clue about what I was expected to do and learn. However, it did not take a long time to realize what to learn as an ECT intern. At the first day of the conference the interns were presented at a board meeting of the ETC. I observed the board members, who took their tasks very seriously, functioning precisely together to consider deeply ways in which they could improve AECT. This was my starting point in realizing how AECT works and who makes the organization's accomplishments possible.

The interns had breakfast meetings with leading scholars in our field everyday during the 2002 AECT conference. It was a quite privilege to meet them and discuss issues with them. What I realized through those meetings was that these leaders contribute to the community of AECT as well as working on their individual academic pursuits. Their leadership is not accomplished through lengthy lists of publications alone, but rather through enthusiastic participation in the academic community. At a division board meeting, the energy and dynamism of the discussions further increased my view of the work behind the scenes at AECT. Still, I was asking myself, "Why are they working so hard? For what?" Interestingly, the answer was come to me at the last day of the 2002 AECT conference in a division committee meeting.

I attended a division meeting, and there were very few people. Although the number of attendants was small, their level of concern for the division was high and their

enthusiasm just as great as what I encountered at the other board meetings I had attended. More impressively, these were not board officers; they were simply members of the larger organization. But I realized that they were the power behind AECT's historical achievements. They were contributing to their part to the future achievements of the organization. Why do they voluntarily participate to the activities? Because they know that they are a part of the leadership of AECT.

On my way back home from the convention, I felt as though I were returning to a harbor as a junior sailor with the Antarctic expedition of Amundsen. Although I was not a famous member of the expedition, I was a part of the journey to the South Pole and was honored by supporting it. Similarly, since I realized how AECT works and how many people make it successful through their efforts, my perception of the organization dramatically changed. The intern experience changed the way I perceive my role as a graduate student within AECT. Although I am just a graduate student, I realized that I am the part of the leadership of AECT. My contribution is a very important part of helping to build the legacy of AECT. As a matter of fact, I have been a part of the leadership since I entered to this field but I did not realize that before having the intern experience. Now I see that AECT is my community and that as a contributor to the community, I am sharing the leadership of it.

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Conclusion

The AECT internship provided each of us with experiences appropriate to our individual interests and expertise. Our all-access pass did help introduce us to the many larger discussions taking place across the organization. We were able to connect with other graduate students and to develop new ties with some of the pillars of the field.

We can attest to the fact that AECT actively seeks new ideas, energy and leadership that can strengthen the organization. Our final thought for you is that AECT wants you to be involved. We discovered that the doors are wide open, and we know that you do not need an intern's medallion to step through those doors. We hope these stories encourage you to step through the doors and find your place within AECT.

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