

Teresa Hunt

Elizabeth Tebeaux

Texas A&M University

At the March 2006 annual conference, Teresa was elevated to Fellow in the Association for Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW). This was the last time most of us would see Teresa before her death. She died December 23, 2006. Her death left a huge vacancy in technical communication because of her commitment to technical writing and her service to ATTW.

Teresa received a PhD in Rhetoric and Technical Communication from Michigan Technological University in 1994. She taught a wide range of rhetoric, composition, and technical communication courses at Northern Michigan University (NMU) and served in many positions, including department head, director of composition, and director of graduate studies. She developed courses for various curriculum levels in technical writing and arranged interviews/internships for technical communication students. In 2004, she received the NMU Distinguished Faculty Award. And until her death, she was serving as Interim Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs. In this position, she administered and coordinated NMU's Academic Quality Improvement-related activities, documents, and annual updates.

Teresa joined ATTW in 1991 and served on the Executive Committee as a member-at-large from 2001–2004. She became the fundraiser for ATTW in 2001 and by early 2006 had raised nearly \$50,000 to support the annual ATTW meeting. To be blunt, without this fundraising support, the annual ATTW meeting would not have been possible. She served as chair for the ATTW Committee on Technical and Scientific Communication from 1999–2004.

From a research perspective, Teresa largely focused on the history of technical communication. With Michael Moran, she co-edited *Three Keys to the Past: The History of Technical Communication*. Her book, *Writing in a Milieu of Utility: The Move to Technical Communication in American Engineering Programs, 1850–1950*, was reissued in 2000 as part of the ATTW Contemporary Studies in Technical Communication series. This small book

Programmatic Perspectives, 1(1), March 2009: 97–99. Contact author: e-tebeaux@neo.tamu.edu.

does an exemplary job of explaining the problems that technical writing courses faced in the late nineteenth-century through the early years of the twentieth century. Teresa was a superb writer. Her analysis of the cultural situation in the university academy that underpinned the problems faced by technical writing curriculum and faculty remains the most incisive of all efforts to discuss the modern history of the teaching of technical writing.



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Teresa received the 1999 Nell Ann Pickett Award for Outstanding Article published in *Technical Communication Quarterly*—“Technical Communication from 1850–1960: Where Have We Been as a Discipline”—a summary of much of her work in this area.

Teresa has also targeted professional issues in her research. Her co-edited, two-volume collection with Jerry Savage, *Issues of Power, Status and Legitimacy in Technical Communication*, focuses on the professional challenges faced by technical communication faculty. During the fall of 2006, she and I were in the final stages of drafting a history of ATTW. Her sudden death left me with that project, which because of her absence, became the toughest of my two decades of writing about the history of technical writing. In every paragraph, I could hear her voice in emails, late night phone calls, and drafts we compiled, one during a two-day writing session at NCTE in 2004. The history will appear in *Technical Communication Quarterly* in 2009, an appropriate venue because *TCQ* would not exist without *The Technical Writing Teacher*, the first journal established by the founders of ATTW in 1974. Teresa was deeply committed to the project; she wrote me in a 2002 email that the “new kids in ATTW don’t know anything about ATTW or the people who made it happen. We need to write our history before it’s too late.”

Those of us who had the privilege of knowing Teresa remember her as a clear-headed, pragmatic, hard-working, and committed member of ATTW and the preparation of both technical communicators and technical writing students for the world of work. She was forever charming, funny, and real. She was a solid academic, but never took the academic game too seriously. She loved her friends, her students, her garden, her cat, and her family. She loved clothes, shoes, and shopping. Research was important, but she never thought it should take the place of what was really important in life. Teresa was in the process of writing about the origins of technical writing instruction at West Point, a project that fascinated her. During our last phone conversation the first week of December 2006, she was sick,

but talking about the need for more historical studies of technical writing. A comment I keep making—technical communication cannot claim disciplinary status without finding and writing its history, from its earliest beginnings—is a comment Teresa made repeatedly: “Tech writing has been around for centuries,” she would say. “We have to lay it out, piece by piece; then connect the pieces.” And from another email, she wrote: “Mike’s [Moran] correct: The history of technical writing hasn’t been written, but we’re moving forward. In another decade we can show the world that we have a richer history than literature.” She envisioned a book on the history of technical writing in the USA, one for England through the 1800s and one for ancient technical writing. We both knew that each book would take multiple authors for the project to happen.

In short, technical communication has lost one of its visionaries, not to mention a person who was a mentor to many students and a friend to many of us in technical communication.