

# Mentoring Women Faculty in Technical Communication: Identifying Needs and the Emergence of Women in Technical Communication

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**Abstract.** This editorial provides an overview of the Women in Technical Communication initiative and organization. We trace the history and origins of this now-burgeoning mentoring network, describing both the existing models for mentoring and the ways the Women in Technical Communication mentoring emerged during the organization's first two years. We articulate the ways Women in Technical Communication responded to the call for mentoring, the strategies the organization employs for building participant-driven mentoring, and the organization's objectives moving forward.

**Keywords.** mentoring, Women in Technical Communication, organizational history

**T**he care and advancing of a field requires professors who mentor younger faculty, build national policy, review innovative programs at other institutions, and sustain local programs—to name some key activities that comprise senior leadership. We currently do not have those widespread mentoring practices that ensure an influential top-level professoriate, nor does the field sponsor extensive formal programs that soon will yield mentoring practices. At a time when some apply pressure to deprofessionalize some job titles, reduce tenure's footprint in American universities, and shrink the humanities, we need more tenured professors

to stabilize the field. To effectively mentor upcoming members, leaders, teachers, and caretakers in technical communication is to position the field for sustainability going forward (see McMurtrie 2014). Work is needed in mentoring practices, and this editorial addresses one important area of need—mentoring women faculty in technical communication. In this editorial, we highlight these areas of need, report on some current initiatives that aim to address the mentoring needs of women faculty in technical communication and strategize about what further should be done in order to mentor current and emerging women scholars in the field.

Although many like to use the word “mentoring” within the field of technical communication, relatively little work has been done to examine and understand the problems faced by faculty in the field, and even less about women faculty’s particular problems. The low numbers of women who are tenured professors across the academy demonstrate that women faculty struggle to publish and move up the ranks (June, 2009). While 58% of faculty in technical communication are women, the broader percentage of women as full professors, as associate professors, and as published scholars is lower than the percentage of male colleagues in the field. Further, because 59% of programs in the field are run by women, the need for mentoring women and scholarship on this mentoring is even more pressing (Meloncon, 2014). So, without existing mentoring programs or initiatives to build these mentoring programs for women in the field, we run the risk of having program administrators who may not be adequately prepared to navigate the institutional processes and practices of the university, nor adequately prepared to sustain programs over time.

## **Women in Technical Communication**

As a step toward addressing this need, seven faculty members in technical communication, at seven institutions, who share an interest in feminist methodology, mentoring, and the state of the field, came together over the course of the past two years to consider how we study what professional resources women in the field want and need, how we create a space for discussing those resources, and how we work toward developing and sharing those resources. This editorial, written by three of the steering committee members, addresses the history, purpose, and work of Women in Technical Communication in its first two years, as well as our plans looking forward and how others can become involved.

In this editorial, we discuss the initial luncheons held at the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) Conference in 2013 and 2014

where members of the Women in Technical Communication group and volunteer table leaders asked participants what they wanted and needed in terms of mentoring and support. We also present initial findings and subsequent research those luncheons prompted, as well as summarize the group's involvement across the sister organizations of the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CTPSC) and the Special Interest Group on Design of Communication (SIGDOC) in 2014. The first luncheon was organized and led by the authors and a less formalized small group of women faculty and graduate students. Over the past two years, however, Women in Technical Communication has evolved into a dedicated steering committee supporting the work of women in technical communication through mentoring, resources, and regularly scheduled events that promote networking and relationship building.

## **A Stated Need for Mentoring Women in the Field**

The steering committee believes, as a field, we have not done an adequate job addressing specific training and mentoring needs of women. For example, at the 2013 Women in Technical Communication luncheon (held at the ATTW Conference), over 50 attendees indicated their most pressing need was mentoring. Specifically, attendees sought discipline-specific mentoring, indicating the mentoring they experienced was often genealogical (i.e., mentoring between advisers and students extended past graduation at some universities) and more informal channels were needed to supplement and extend this established tradition. Genealogical approaches to mentoring, however, often depend upon traditions of mentoring and networks. Perhaps for this reason, during the 2013 luncheon, women attendees, particularly from smaller programs or programs whose institutions do not have systems in place for mentoring women, indicated informal mentoring was needed. In other words, women in the field of technical communication expressed a need for informal mentoring outside of their home institutions and/or genealogy.

In response to these calls, the 2014 Women in Technical Communication luncheon that took place at the ATTW Annual Conference in Indianapolis focused specifically on mentoring and included building a corpus of both concerns and ground-up advice from participants. The next few sections of this editorial discuss the initiative and its results within the context of existing research. We then look forward to additional small steps needed to build a mentoring network for women in technical communication.

## Scholarship on Mentoring

While mentoring could be viewed as orientation, or a temporary or pragmatic need for all faculty (and graduate students), or a topic often requested, our long range interest is in a healthy professoriate, and we see improved mentoring of women in technical communication as vital to that health. Yet little scholarship addresses the mentoring needs of women graduate students and faculty.

Published discussions of mentoring dwell on orientation programs and mentor-protégé relations. Often articles about mentoring seek to

- Explain relationships (Mullen, 2008; Rymer, 2002),
- Make typologies (Mullen, 2009; Eby & Allen, 2008; Higgins & Kram, 2001),
- Identify problems (Eby & Allen, 2002), or
- Bolster the credibility of particular programs (Allen, Finkelstein, & Poteet, 2009).

Additionally, both business and academic programs focus on orientation or enculturation, but only a few studies also seek (or make room) for mentoring to foster cultural change (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). Formal mentoring programs in academics often focus on college undergraduates (in STEM fields) and feature collaboration, networking, and peer group mentoring (see, for example, “Building a Better Academic Atmosphere for Women STEM Faculty”). In many cases, graduate students or pre-tenure faculty are mentored more informally, despite regular published (both in print and online) commentaries indicating faculty need formal advice and mentoring (see, for example, the Advice column on *InsideHigherEd* or regularly posted blogs from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*).

*Technical Communication's* discussions of mentoring have been relatively sparse, and most have focused on undergraduates (Zimmerman & Paul, 2007; Stowers & Barker, 2010; Sullivan & Moore, 2013), internships (Tovey, 2001; St. Amant, 2003), and using workplace experiences to deepen teaching (Blakeslee, 2001). For example, Stowers and Barker (2010) highlight coaching as mentoring, and their advice resonates with the intermittent discussions in *Business Communication Quarterly* (recently renamed *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly* in 2014). Within the context of these discussions, gender, as it relates to mentoring, has not been a major topic (Thompson, 1999; Thompson & Smith, 2006).

When technical communication has discussed mentoring and women, it has usually done so with an attention to places of encounter. Indeed,

studies addressing gender as related to technical communication typically focus on workplaces (Bird, 2007; Egan, 1996; Brown, 1993) or undergraduate classrooms (Sullivan & Moore, 2013) rather than on gender in the mentoring of graduate students or faculty. In one of the few reports on faculty mentoring in technical communication, Karla Saari Kitalong (2009) examines mutual mentoring (a synonym, she says, for co-mentoring) that she and two other editors of *Programmatic Perspectives* have deployed. Kitalong's informal approach and subsequent report admits a need for the mentoring of authors. So, though anecdotes of activities that address mentoring (e.g., Career Workshop sessions at the annual ATTW Conference) display an awareness of the need for mentoring faculty, precious little research or theory directly addresses the development of faculty in technical communication.

## **Women in Technical Communication Addresses Mentoring Networks**

Prompted by requests for mentoring and networking assistance from the 2013 ATTW Women in Technical Communication luncheon, the steering committee set out to

1. Create a space to explore the mentoring needs of women in technical communication,
2. Bring attention to the kinds of networks needed to support women and foster sustainable programs, and
3. Build a mentoring network existing outside of attendees' home institutions. Drawing on these goals, the 2014 Women in Technical Communication luncheon (at the ATTW Conference held in Indianapolis) focused on creating mentoring networks through a series of interactive, participatory discussions.

Before the luncheon, the steering committee asked luncheon participants to use a Google spreadsheet to share information about their research and teaching interests, their current service and long-term goals, and their affiliations that would serve as a directory and starting point for finding others in the field with similar interests and concerns who might exchange experiences on those interests. This information served in part as a directory of and in part as a resource for those interested in a mentoring network. We hoped this directory and resource would encourage attendees to contact women they met at the luncheon and find others with inter-

ests similar to their own. We also hoped this resource would help us begin to identify patterns of interest in mentoring.

The Women in Technical Communication steering committee organized the luncheon discussions around three topics—research, service, and teaching—to align with the categories most often used for annual reviews, promotion, and tenure; job searches; and other aspects of professional advancement (e.g., fellowships, awards). The luncheon lasted 90 minutes, and during that time, participants rotated to three different tables where they participated in a series of 20-minute discussions on research, service, and teaching.

The rotation enabled participants to meet new people and to create more organic networks. Each table discussed a series of prompts (see Appendix) the steering committee hoped would encourage productive conversations and bring to light professional advice, questions, and concerns of the attendees. At each table, participants also traded contact information with other participants whose interests and concerns aligned, promising to follow up with at least one person or fellow table participant within two weeks as a further nudge to build networks.

During the 2014 luncheon, table leaders (who included the mentoring steering committee along with an advanced graduate student) took notes on large flip boards. At the end of the time allotted for discussing each topic, table participants circled what they considered to be their best suggestion and shared those suggestions with the entire room. This final activity resulted in a collaboratively generated set of best practices and list of shared concerns for women in technical communication.

The questions and concerns documented at the 2014 luncheon prompted the steering committee to consider how to build and sustain mentoring programs for women in technical communication. We (the authors) see this work as lacking in the field, but necessary for sustainable program building because tenurable faculty are a component of program health and stability—especially with programs and national organizations in our field increasingly led by women faculty members.

## **Data Collection and Analysis Inform Our Mentoring Model**

Preliminary findings from the luncheon suggest new assistant professors often are unsure how to build mentorships, which here we see as creating a network of mentors rather than relying on one-to-one relationships. Building mentorships is especially challenging because traditional one-on-

one relationships so often depend on institutional genealogy (often out of the new professor's control) and on selecting informants to trust (often a tricky sea to navigate in a new academic environment). Findings also confirmed our steering committee's assumptions that mentors themselves need training to be effective.

The Women in Technical Communication steering committee collected data at two levels prior to and during the 2014 luncheon:

1. Demographics of participants including contact information, research, teaching, and service interests, rank, and interests in becoming involved in the field. As noted above, this information was collected and shared with participants through a Google spreadsheet.
2. Concerns and advice related to service, learning, and teaching, in response to question prompts collected on a flip board at each luncheon table. Question prompts are included in the Appendix at the end of this editorial.

Members of the Women in Technical Communication steering committee used multiple coding schemes to analyze the data. For example, we first sorted responses by service, teaching, and research, noting some overlap. We also looked at:

- whether an issue was local (most often to an institution) or general (to the field);
- whether a comment was advice or a concern;
- the rank of the participant who shared the comment;
- whether or not the comment was a call for collaboration, assistance, or mentoring in some way; and
- whether the comment was related to institutional processes and practices (that sometimes spanned local concerns, like how to approach additional funding or course releases in their institution).

These were procedural because they were tied to how the institution worked, but they required both local and global knowledge about how universities work as well as an overall understanding of politics, risks, and red tape.

As we coded data and further discussed the luncheon, we saw a need for more research to build networked, relational mentorships that we might assemble through an infrastructure serving as a clearinghouse and

resource, especially for women who are new assistant professors in the field.

## **The 2014 ATTW Luncheon Highlighted Needs in Technical Communication**

The 64 participants (all of whom self-identified as women interested in technical communication) at the 2014 luncheon were mostly assistant professors and graduate students. Close to 70% of the attendees described themselves as fitting in one of these two groups (groups that should be in the pocket of mentoring—that is, groups who may be most unsure of how to build mentorships yet who are most in need of mentoring if they are to navigate the waters of entering the academic profession).<sup>1</sup> The steering committee and table leaders did not ask attendees to address what mentoring research says about mentoring; instead, we sought attendees' input and concerns about service, learning, and teaching, and ways to handle those concerns. The attendees shared some concerns that literature might predict, but participants also had concerns that may be particular to women in technical communication—concerns such as avoiding gendered expectations that women will perform more service for the department (see Table 1 for a comparison of main points).

While mentoring casts a long shadow on orientation and acculturation to institutional and disciplinary expectations, content including disciplinary knowledge and work processes (the strategies for articulation work) were vitally important to participants even though it is hardly mentioned in mentoring literature. Also, mentoring literature rarely addresses the potential power relationship between mentor and mentees, while luncheon attendees noted they were often more cautious about power relations when engaging in mentoring activities.

The luncheon's round table structure prompted participants to share concerns and advice (which was written on a flip board), and then to choose one of these comments to share with the whole group near the end of the luncheon. In this context, the table leaders (the steering committee and volunteers including a graduate student studying mentoring in technical communication) were positioned more as recorders than as experts. During the table discussions, some topics brought to light a lack of common language for discussing institutional perspectives on categories—especially service.

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<sup>1</sup> The Women in Technical Communication luncheon continues to grow. Over 80 participants attended the 2015 luncheon at the ATTW Conference in Tampa.

**Table 1. Comparison of Mentoring Research Findings and Responses of Luncheon Participants**

<b>The Mentoring Research says...</b>	<b>The Luncheon Participants suggested...</b>
Traditional mentoring covers orientation and acculturation, and if it focuses on relationships, it can chart bad experiences (Eby and Allen, 2002)	Requested mentoring focused on building relationships, specifically on advice-giving but also identifying needed help
The content for mentoring is set by the institution or company--learning how to thrive (Allen, Finklestein, Poteet, 2009)	Content for mentoring seen as twofold--learning disciplinary issues and also focusing on institutional work processes (as technical communication content and processes are closely linked)
Institutions, time, power, gender, and networks are not topics for mentoring programs' research	Institutions, time, power, gender, and networks seen as valuable topics of knowledge both within but also beyond individual programs
Most mentoring does not stress work processes	Processes, procedures, and strategies in relation to research, service, teaching are important conversations; how to mold processes and deploy strategies are central to mentoring advice
Trust, power, and developing relationships are important (with the mentor more powerful than the protégé), and there being an implied ethic that is surveilled by studies of bad experiences (Mullen, 2009)	Relationships, but those relationships and thoughts about power are more cautious and complex

In a number of instances, participants at all levels, from graduate students to full professors, tried to discuss the processes accompanying how their institutions counted work in teaching, research, and service, but did not have shared language in each of the three areas. For example, language for discussing research seemed to be shared across most institutions. Participants understood issues such as venue, collaboration contribution, peer review, number of citations an article receives, and acceptance rate factor into how a scholarly work is weighed toward professional advancement.

Participants knew the purpose of research and the issues that contribute to how it is evaluated (although concerns were still raised about how to strategize research agendas and produce alongside other responsibilities). Likewise, participants talked about how their teaching was evaluated on issues such as course evaluations, course load, new course preparation, and curricular planning in ways that again illustrated a shared language

across institutions. Similar to research, participants were able to talk about what they did, why they did it, and how it was quantified.

In the category of service, however, it became clear from the discussions neither all participants nor their institutions used similar language for talking about what counted as service, how it was evaluated, or why participants needed to include it. In several instances, participants were unclear on not only how much service their institutions expected but on whether department and college service was counted in the same way as community-based or professional-based (beyond the university) service. For many participants, service was a nebulous term where examples from participants were not always understood or recognized, but drew questions and prompted conversations. Further, because service disproportionately falls on women members of the academy (Misra, 2011), this language disparity was particularly telling as we considered the need to develop mentoring networks for women. Such discussions informed the steering committee's belief that mentoring is needed beyond the efforts of individual institutions, beyond the more traditional one-on-one approach, and beyond issues often seen as traditional mentoring topics.

## **Concerns, Initial Conclusions, and Next Steps**

The 2014 Women in Technical Communication luncheon was not focused on finding conclusions related to issues of mentoring. Rather, it focused on sponsoring and hearing conversations that brought to light issues and concerns affecting women faculty and graduate students technical communication. While not necessarily representative of the situation of all women in the technical communication field, the issues raised by attendees suggest a need for mentoring resources beyond those available at the institutional level. The ideas raised during the luncheon discussion also highlight the complexities of preparing women faculty members for vastly different workplace contexts and expectations—or else run the risk of limiting portability. If mentoring is not portable (i.e., it cannot be applied outside of the context of a particular program, department, or institution), how do we—as members of the field—effectively mentor our colleagues?

What follows are observations, concerns, and initial findings suggesting we have much work to do in supporting the professional lives of women in technical communication. We believe, by identifying and opening these issues for discussion, we can begin assembling resources, supporting a networked approach to mentoring that will position the field for forward sustainability.

### **The Attendees Represented Part, but Not All Levels, of Faculty**

Because there were more new faculty and senior graduate students in attendance than advanced faculty (i.e., associate and full professors), the 2014 luncheon proved to be particularly insightful in relation to early career mentoring needs. An important point, only marginally addressed, was the change in standards when faculty move from seeking tenure to seeking full professor status. From discussions at the luncheon and scholarship in the field, we see some women at the associate professor rank remain stuck while serving in administrative roles, sometimes limiting their ability to publish enough for further promotion (see June, 2009). Additionally, although only a few attendees identified as contingent faculty, adjunct, or non-tenure track faculty, we remain concerned about the mentoring needs of our colleagues with contingent positions in the university, particularly because women disproportionately hold these positions (Curtis, 2011).

### **Participants Expressed a Need for Mentoring, though not Everyone in Technical Communication Agrees that Mentoring Specifically for Women Faculty Is Needed**

While the luncheon was planned as a safe and supportive space for women in the field to discuss issues that affect them professionally, we (the authors) were surprised to find some women who claimed such a discussion wasn't necessary because "there are more women than men teaching tech comm." One attendee at the luncheon even questioned another participant's assertions that women of color often receive lower teaching evaluations and those evaluations need to be addressed in a discussion about promotion and tenure documents. In this case, the other women at the table pointed to existing research supporting the assertion about race and evaluations and opened a discussion to how Women in Technical Communication might address such issues.

These initial exchanges bring to light an important issue about mentoring networks. Women in our field may encounter other women who have not experienced the same obstacles and might not recognize their existence. Our perspective on these differing experiences is, as long as some women and women of color express a need for mentoring, it is needed to maintain the health of the field—even if not every woman in the field has experienced similar obstacles. So while we in Women in Technical Communication are genuinely pleased for every technical communication faculty member who is confident without mentoring, we continue in our quest to improve and extend mentoring for at least two reasons:

1. New faculty and senior graduate students continue to ask for mentoring, and
2. The small size of our field puts it perennially at risk of absorption into larger departments, or worse, the dissolution of programs.

We therefore believe that these requests—voiced by participants at the luncheons, during conversations members of the steering committee have had with faculty and graduate students over the past few years, and stated in the scholarship—mitigate claims of non-need. Our work on mentoring aims to improve the health of the field by providing women faculty with resources that can facilitate their professional success.

## **Conclusions**

Drawing from luncheon discussions and existing research, we identify a few emerging needs and initial conclusions about mentoring resources needed in the field:

### **Mentoring Typically Focuses on the Local, and that Makes National Solutions Difficult to Achieve**

Most published research on mentoring has not focused on disciplinary knowledge, but on local practices, technology, and interpersonal relations (Allen & Eby). Yet new faculty in interdisciplinary fields such as Technical Communication need to learn the ropes of a field that is not well grooved and learn the local practices of their work (Mullen, 2009). If mentoring focuses too closely, too locally, it loses portability and also its ability to assist in learning the disciplinary ropes of the broader field. Such focus can also lull new faculty into a false sense of security if they presume that learning the local protects them from poor performance in a disciplinary arena. For example, when new faculty are mentored exclusively by local mentors, the mentoring they receive may consider the needs of the program more than the needs of the individual. So, when a program requires planning of additional new courses or filling a director for undergraduate studies position, local mentors' priorities are split between the good of the program and the good of their faculty mentee.

### **Service Seems to Need Some Field-Level Language to Help Define What It Entails even though Standardizing this Language has Inherent Risks**

"Service" proved to be difficult to discuss, both in person and on paper. All luncheon participants agreed service was part of their work, albeit some-

times an invisible part. Some pre-tenure faculty and advanced graduate students had been warned by academic mentors to avoid service; other participants—who were post-tenure—reported surprise service assignments accompanied tenure (i.e., they were assigned to multiple time-consuming service projects, committees, or both). But participants did not use a consistent language in discussing service work, and this factor made it difficult to sort out in a time-challenged event and easy to let slide into further invisibility. At one table, for example, participants struggled to articulate administrative work as service or scholarship; at another, participants struggled to understand their curricular committee work as part of the “service” category. In both cases, participants indicated the lack of clarity in how service was weighted—does serving on a search committee count for more or less than facilitating job market meetings for graduate students on the market?

Discussions at the luncheon suggested service was further complicated because women are often asked to fulfill service roles in the department—an issue that has been addressed in the scholarship and prompts different conversations than mentoring about service more broadly (see, for example, Misra et al. 2011). A more coordinated language for service may help us address its inequities and increase transparency surrounding the weight of service for tenure and promotion.

Based on the discussions at the 2014 luncheon, we feel confident in saying participants were more thoroughly equipped to discuss teaching and research than they were to discuss service. While this factor might be influenced by the large proportion of participants who are assistant professors or advanced graduate students, these groups have less experience to draw on in the area of service (and their grad school mentors probably coached them to respect the local and not try to prefigure it). It also reveals uncertain footing about the status of service woven into a language replete with hedges. Working toward more robust and widely accepted language for service is a worthy longer-range goal, and one we did not anticipate before the luncheon (although the steering committee did expect lively and needed discussion about faculty service).

### **Mentors Need Support and Guidance, Too**

Discussion among participants at the 2014 luncheon also revealed a need to support and guide advanced faculty who choose to become (or fall into the role of) *mentors*. Participants revealed a need for deeply personalized mentoring about service, research, and teaching: What courses should I plan? What kinds of research should I undertake? Should I take

on an administrative role? Mentors face the challenge of juggling a mentee's personal needs against programmatic and disciplinary expectations. This situation can arise innocuously and grow to a realization that what a particular person needs is (or could be) at odds with what is better for the program's health (e.g., the timing of research leaves). Further, mentoring requires particular skillsets, including listening, empathy, and valuing the experiences of the mentee.

Developing and implementing these skills is not easy. Mentoring is emotionally and intellectually taxing, and determining how best to mentor an individual takes time and practice. In other words, mentors need guidance, support and mentoring of their own if we hope for mentors to provide good mentoring advice. We in Women in Technical Communication work to provide resources for good mentoring.

At the time of this writing, four of the field's organizations, the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW), the Council of Programs of Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC), the Special Interest Group on Design of Communication (SIGDOC), and the Society for Technical Communication (STC) are led by women. As women continue to move into leadership roles in the field, they will increasingly be called on to mentor other women and will need mentoring of their own, and Women in Technical Communication hopes to build a network of mentorship that supports current and emergent leaders. The increasing role of women in leadership strikes the committee as the right time to build these resources.

### **Next Steps, or Continuing the Effort After the Luncheon**

The Women in Technical Communication steering committee saw the 2014 luncheon as the first step in a long-term project of discipline-wide mentoring of women. Since the luncheon, the committee has worked to maintain the momentum of this luncheon, focusing specifically on conducting additional research to help craft a sustainable and useful plan for mentoring women in technical communication.

The Women in Technical Communication steering committee has also focused on using social media to keep enthusiasm going after the luncheons and to provide support between in-person events. Both during the luncheon and on the directory resource, participants indicated they used Twitter and Facebook with some regularity, so both platforms were used to continue efforts from the luncheon. After the 2013 luncheon, for example, a Facebook page was created by an attendee. While traffic on that page has been fairly limited, it serves as a resource for calls for papers, conferences, or a connection to the Mentoring Monday Twitter conversation.

The Twitter handle, @womeninTC and corresponding #womeninTC hashtag, has been relatively more popular, with 277 followers of @womeninTC (as of June 2015) and hundreds of tweets with the #womeninTC hashtag. Additionally, Mentoring Mondays, a Twitter-based discussion of mentoring and strategies for research, service, teaching, and navigating academia, has been facilitated primarily by Kristen Moore with support from the steering committee members and has developed a solid following and active participation.

The GoogleDoc spreadsheet that collected attendee information is still an open spreadsheet that attendees can use as a directory and resource to find potential collaborators, mentors, or both. Participants were encouraged to contact potential mentor network contacts within two weeks of the session, and although some members of the steering committee have had regular contact with participants, we haven't yet collected follow up data to determine the success of this effort.

In 2015, we launched the website WomeninTechComm.org to serve as a hub for communicating about events and participation opportunities, for requesting topics for discussion for both Mentor Monday and conference events, and for sharing resources, such as a blog that aims to summarize Mentor Monday discussions and podcasts for mentors and mentees that address professional issues and concerns to women in the field of technical communication.

Additionally, the committee hosted gatherings for Women in Technical Communication at the 2014 annual conferences of both CPTSC and SIGDOC. At the 2014 CPTSC conference, four of the steering committee members facilitated roundtable discussions about mentoring needs and potential approaches to meeting these needs. The 2014 SIGDOC conference program included a Women in Technical Communication breakfast featuring an invited lecture by Annette Vie and providing an opportunity for women to meet one another and discuss key research, teaching, and service concerns. Attendance at these events suggest, indeed, across the discipline—not just among ATTW participants—a focus on mentoring women and developing mentor networks can assist women towards institutional and professional success.

Drawing on the ATTW luncheon feedback and the CPTSC roundtable data, our mentoring steering committee is now working to produce digital resources for women in technical communication that address professional concerns related to teaching, research, and service. These resources serve dual purposes:

- To support members of Women in Technical Communication who need mentoring and
- To assist those who are or are hoping to become mentors.

For example, we are creating podcasts advocating for a new model of mentoring that sees mentoring as networked not hierarchical. Some of these podcasts will work to catalog reasonable advice about typical problems new faculty encounter as they transition from roles as students to roles as faculty. Other podcasts will address strategies for developing these networked mentoring skills such as being an engaged listener, creating a safe space for the mentee by understanding what is at stake in the mentee and mentor relationship, and being empathetic with the mentee.

These podcasts are just one approach to addressing mentoring concerns, and based upon our research, we think more work than this is needed. The contributors to the luncheon, breakfast, and roundtable, indicated they hoped for a robust and flexible infrastructure of mentoring support that could be used in a variety of situations. From encountering the institutional red tape in their localized situations to understanding accepted research and publication practices, women in technical communication believe mentoring networks can assist in navigating traditionally harrowing situations. We, the authors, do, too. Beyond a one-on-one relationship, mentoring (re-seen as a *network* of support) can provide aid for women in a field where many women struggle to reach full professorship, to feel confident in their professional identity (particularly when put against their personal lives), and to identify their allies in complex and political institutions. The role of mentoring needs to be highlighted, and we in Women in Technical Communication advocate for paying attention to how we mentor. More than just service, we believe mentoring—networked mentoring—is vital to the sustenance of our field.

### **Want to Know More about Women in Technical Communication or Get Involved?**

Follow us on Twitter to participate in Mentor Monday: @WomeninTC or #WomeninTC

Like us on Facebook: Women in Technical Communication

Join us at [WomeninTechComm.org](http://WomeninTechComm.org)

The website includes a form for contacting the steering committee with questions, ideas, or for joining the mentoring network.

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## Appendix

Question prompts related to service, research, and teaching from the 2014 Women in Technical Communication luncheon. Table leaders and participants at each table selected questions from the list that were of most interest to that particular group.

### Research

Possible topics of discussion include:

- How do I decide which journals are most appropriate for my research?
- How much collaboration is appropriate at various levels?
- How do I make room for my research with a heavy teaching load?
- How do I interpret my rpt documents?
- How do I find readers for my research before submission (ie. expanding existing networks)?
- What strategies can I use for not losing momentum on research?
- What tactics can I use to work on more than one project at one time, including how do I think about multiple projects so that they might be more coherent (to myself and others)?
- What strategies can I use to figure out how to fund my research?

### Service

Possible topics of discussion include:

- What exactly is service? Or what does service mean at my school and how do I talk about what I consider service in ways that will be accepted?
- How much service is appropriate?
- How do I say no? How do I judge the opportunity to say no?
- How do I figure out how to balance local, university and national service?
- What are suggestions for figuring out ambiguous language in reappointment/promotion/tenure documents?
- How to be a “good citizen” without having to do all the work on a committee?

- How do I find ways to get involved in national-level service and how do I make sure that my department supports my research at the national-level?
- How do I avoid getting stuck at the associate professor level because of the administrative work I'm asked to do?

## **Teaching**

Possible topics of discussion include:

- How do I ask to teach a new course?
- How do I approach the program director to make a change in the curriculum?
- What suggestions do people have for reducing the amount of prep or grading?
- How do I combine parts of research into teaching?
- What are suggestions on negotiating experiential learning (such as service learning or client projects) into courses when we know it is more work.
- Women (especially minority women) often receive lower marks on student evaluations than white, male counterparts. How do I address this concern during my annual reviews?
- How do I argue for teaching more graduate level courses?