IPCC 2005: Limerick

CPTSC and the ATTW International Committee keep building on the success of the international roundtable for technical communication educators. Organized at the IPCC Conference in Limerick, Ireland, this year's roundtable drew 27 technical communication educators from nine countries compared to 18 from six countries at the 2003 roundtable organized in Milan, Italy. This year's participants came from Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, and the USA.

Building on the successes of the 2000 London Roundtable and the 2003 Milan Roundtable, the Limerick Roundtable discussed new initiatives to support international exchanges among technical communication and to promote technical communication programs in all countries. The 2005 agenda, organized by Jacqui Bleetman from Coventry University (UK) and Debby Andrews from the University of Delaware (USA) focused on three initiatives designed to advance programs internationally: Facilitating program partnerships, supporting international activity in the TC library, and internationalizing CPTSC.

1. **Facilitating program partnerships**
   The purpose of this discussion was to facilitate and support partnerships between and among programs, between students as well as faculty. These could include partnerships in which students work across institutions on common projects via the Internet or exchanges of students for a semester or other period between institutions. The idea was also, as a group, to facilitate more interaction of faculty internationally as they join program advisory boards, serve as external evaluators, or prepare joint research proposals, perhaps based on pedagogy and program planning. The CPTSC and ATTW organizations might thus enhance their own international reach through such partnerships. Three universities in the UK, for example, have programs that fit within the broad category of technical communication: Coventry (www.coventry.ac.uk); Sheffield Hallam (www.shu.ac.uk; and Plymouth (www.plymouth.ac.uk).

Additional suggestions at the meeting included the following:

- Compile a list of technical communication programs in different countries with program descriptors
- Develop a list of specific online courses and programs that allow for exchanges of students and credits. The University of Twente (NL), for example, currently offers an online course on user support (online help design).
- Team up with "Engineers without Borders" to build program partnerships
- Continue to organize meetings for educators at international conferences
- In the case of European programs, attend to the Bologna agreement and the process of European standardization, including the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

For collaboration with European programs, the Bologna process will be particularly important as it changes the structure of European programs and credit systems. Signed by 29 countries in 1999, the Bologna agreement is an action framework for coordinated reforms leading to a "European Space for Higher Education" by 2010 in order to ensure the "global competitiveness" of European higher education. As a part of the agreement, countries are pursuing a number of objectives:

- Develop a common framework for comparable degree structures in all member countries
- Institute a division of programs into undergraduate and postgraduate (in North America, graduate) degree programs,
- Introduce a compatible credit system (ECTS)
- Develop comparable quality standards
- Remove obstacles to the free mobility of faculty and students

In a nutshell, European programs are undergoing major restructuring, which will make them more compatible with the structures of programs in North America, so that collaboration should become easier.

2. **Supporting international activity in the TC Library**

Geoff Sauer, the coordinator of the Technical Communication library (http://tc.eserver.org), had called for more international activity in the TC library. In particular, he had asked for suggestions about indexing categories and for international links, including links to international journals. The goal is to increase the international dimension of the TC Library.

There was much support for international activity in the TC library. The group offered to send links to research resources from different contexts. The group also suggested that a call with details of what specifically was needed would be helpful.

3. **Internationalizing CPTSC**

Begun at the 2000 London Roundtable, this discussion explored different ways of infusing a non-U.S. specific perspective into CPTSC. The key question was how we might best incorporate and serve the needs of programs in all countries and ultimately enhance all our programs.

CPTSC has a lot of valuable history and experience to offer to programs in all locations. To internationalize CPTSC, a number of ideas emerged: For example, one of the early ideas was for different regions to form regional affiliates or chapters in order to provide regional structures that would allow for public funding in different countries and regions (e.g., the EU). Other ideas included organizing CPTSC conferences in different locations other than the United States, for example, in Europe. The challenge here may be that currently more than 90% of CPTSC members reside in the United States. Fewer may therefore be able to travel to conferences on other continents. A third idea was that CPTSC simply continue organizing roundtable meetings for educators at international technical communication conferences. These meetings may also help diversify CPTSC membership.

A number of technical communication conferences are generally attended by the same people, but most can attend only one or two, so it may be difficult for educators to come together internationally to discuss program development. Participants suggested that we might need an alliance of the various conferences that address scientific and technical communication, such as IPCC, ATTW, CPTSC, which may also include conferences of associations in other countries, such as CATTW (Canada). A larger conference could have "braided strains" on particular aspects of scientific and technical communication, including one on program development. This is a discussion that may need to be addressed at the level of the executives of the associations.

Overall, the 2005 Limerick Roundtable continued earlier successes and provided important directions for future initiatives designed to mutually enrich our programs.