

# Signals

July/August 2007

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## ACE Leadership Institute class begins leadership projects

In June, the 16 inaugural class members of the ACE Leadership Institute left Albuquerque with their first assignment: to develop a proposal for a project to conduct at their home institutions. The projects will help participants apply what they learn during the institute while providing a significant benefit to their departments or institutions.

Class members and summaries of their projects include:

**Tobie Blanchard, Louisiana State University**, will employ new technology to make the television and radio pages of the LSU AgCenter's Web site more user friendly and offer better options to visitors when viewing video or listening to audio. She will lead a team in developing a template for adding podcasting of audio and video to the Web site. She also plans to make podcasts available on iTunes and other podcasting sites.

**Maria Bowie, University of Georgia**, will be co-chairing the Communications Committee of Georgia's Education Roundtable, a collaborative effort of several state agencies and nongovernmental organizations committed to sending a unified message about water conservation. She will bring the viewpoint of cooperative extension to the discussion table in the development of public education programs and partnerships.

**Linda Breazeale, Mississippi State University**, will oversee the compilation of new or existing disaster response information, including weather-related or natural disasters and health disasters (human and animal). Once this information is compiled, training will be arranged for county personnel to make them aware of disaster-related concerns and let them know where they can access information.

**Mark Crossler, Oregon State University**, will develop a repository for extension and agricultural experiment station market research. The intent of this project is to create a library of market research that can be shared within and among state cooperative extension services, agriculture experiment stations, and agricultural college communication departments.

**Steve Dodrill, Oregon State University**, will lead a team of ACE members with expertise in distance education and instructional design, information technology, writing, electronic media, and graphic design to improve interactive learning opportunities on the ACE Web site. Outcomes will include the unveiling of "ACEWeb 2.0" in 2008 and the integration of successful communication technologies into Oregon State University Extension Service Web sites.

**Melanie Eirich, University of Nebraska**, will develop a project management community of practice within the University of Nebraska's Communications & Information Technology unit to bring about change to the method of project intake, scope, prioritization, tracking and delivery. Customer expectations with regard to project communication and delivery will be taken into consideration so as to determine additional improvements and support.

**Emily Eubanks, University of Florida**, will create an operating external advisory committee to provide guidance to the teaching, research and extension efforts of UF's Environmental Horticulture Department.

**Becky Goetz, Purdue University**, will develop a downloadable iPod tour of the College of Agriculture campus for recruitment.

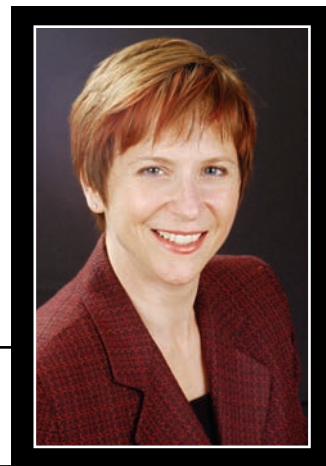
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ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE



IN AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND LIFE AND HUMAN SCIENCES

## From the President



Guess who is the most anxious person at an ACE annual meeting? It isn't the new member who is attending her first meeting and wonders, "Why do all these people hug so much?" It isn't the Gary Hermance speaker. It isn't the session presenters or Critique and Awards Outstanding Professional Skill award winners. It isn't the SIG leaders or state representatives or even the president.

It is, my friends, the president-elect. Because at the end of that meeting, just a few days and hours away, the president-elect takes the post of president. And the gavel is heavy. Really. This isn't just a metaphor. And you have to cart it home. I didn't think about that and am really grateful to the K-State Car Team of Baker-Hill-Ashlock for bringing it back.

So, I was reading previous "first columns" from ACE presidents (yes, searching for inspiration or seeking to plagiarize, call it what you will). The common theme was how they were excited and honored, and that the task was daunting.

It is daunting, but when you are surrounded by such great folks – motivated, enthusiastic, persistent – and tremendous support from Headquarters, it seems a lot less scary. Taking over the helm of a healthy organization is not that bad. In fact, it's pretty cool.

I think it is why we are going to get a number of important initiatives rolling and keep the ball rolling on others.

1. Larry Whiting did an outstanding job of leading the Journal of Applied Communications Task Force, but there is more work ahead as we strive to create an

online offering that maintains high standards and improves the impact factors of the journal.

2. Requests for proposals will be coming out for several initiatives, including the ACE Headquarters contract and multi-year contracts for meeting planning and registration for the annual meetings.

3. Where will we meet in 2010? You tell me. A request for proposals will be issued this fall.

4. The first class of participants in the ACE Leadership Institute will be working all year on projects and developing leadership and management skills through face-to-face and mediated learning activities. They will graduate at next year's meeting.

5. We'll be looking at the Critique and Awards program to see if improvements can be made.

6. Another group is looking at the ACE seal of approval as a means of determining quality of materials and cataloguing those items.

7. We'll also be hearing new ideas from our Development Fund group as they make plans.

So all that sounds a little like work, doesn't it? That's okay because we work hard...but we also have fun. So for a little fun, I've listed my top 10 list from the 2007 ACE/NETC annual meeting in Albuquerque, N.M., organized by the incredibly capable Robert Casler, Bob Sams, Terry Canup and a cast of dozens. Here's my top 10, in no particular order. (This was tough – I had to leave off the salsa dancers.)

1. Tony Hillerman and the incomparable Jeanne Gleason – she was so impressive up there interviewing Tony (May I call you Tony?). Great format, great interview, great moment.

2. All the happy, shining faces at the awards banquet. (And me not messing up too many names – apologies to all those offended, especially Craig Gautreaux. I was sweating bullets and don't mind sharing that.)

3. The hospitality suite game "Things a Pirate Would Never Say." One of my favorites: "Arrr, where's your strategic plan?"

4. Launching the ACE Leadership Institute.

5. Amanda Aubuchon's excellent assistance and leadership.

6. Tom Knecht's acceptance speech for the Professional Award. Made me cry. Then Bob Sams made me cry. What is it with these guys?

7. Quote: "Listening is not waiting to speak." – Marcus Ashlock

8. Kevin Roark, the Los Alamos communications guy. Wow.

9. The research papers. Gosh, they are all so smart.

10. The X-tension Chords – we're not worthy, we're not worthy!

Kris Boone

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kris M. Boone". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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# In Brief

## Alaska Sea Grant makes the most of NPR's Science Friday

To take advantage of National Public Radio's Science Friday broadcast on global climate change, Alaska Sea Grant staffed a sales table for its hot-off-the-press 2008 wall calendar and provided books and videos for greeting packets compiled for host Ira Flatow and his crew. Like Flatow's June 8 broadcast, Alaska Sea Grant's annual wall calendar sports an International Polar Year theme. The calendar includes beautiful photos of Alaska and related educational text by

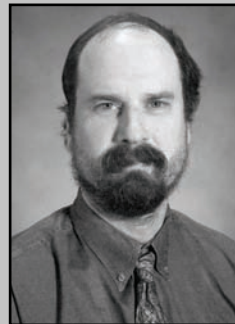
Doug Schneider, Alaska Sea Grant's public information officer, that explains how a warming climate is affecting the environment in Alaska. The calendar project was led by Alaska Sea Grant's marketing specialist, Kathy Kurtenbach, and designed by Dave Partee. Thirty calendars were sold to people who attended the radio broadcast.

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## LSU ACE member wins Louisiana Farm Bureau award

Bruce Schultz, LSU AgCenter communications specialist, received the Louisiana Farm Bureau's Regional Wallace Communicator of the Year Award for 2006 during the organization's recent annual convention in New Orleans. Schultz, a former newspaper reporter for 25 years, has worked for the LSU AgCenter since 2004. He works with area media and

also writes articles and shoots photographs for the AgCenter. He is the current chair of the photography SIG.



**Bruce Schultz**

## Alaska Sea Grant publications earn awards

Two Alaska Sea Grant publications earned awards recently. "The Gulf of Alaska: Biology and Oceanography," edited by Phil Mundy, and "Common Edible Seaweeds in the Gulf of Alaska," by Marine Advisory Program agent Dolly Garza, were selected as 2006 Notable Government Documents by the Library Journal.

Linda B. Johnson, chair of the American Library Association Notable Documents Panel, offered this congratulatory note: "It is a bit unusual for more than one publication from the same state to be selected, so this is

a true accomplishment attesting to the importance and quality of your publications. I know that many librarians use the list for selection purposes, thus enriching their collections."

The seaweed guide won a bronze award in ACE's C&A competition and an Award of Excellence from the National Association of Government Communicators, both in 2006.

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ACE is a non-profit association representing professional communicators and information officers generally within the land-grant university system, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state agricultural agencies, similar institutions in other countries and those with professional interests in agricultural communication.

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ACE develops professional skills of education, government, and research communicators and information technologists to extend knowledge about agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences to people worldwide.

Stop by the ACE Web site  
[www.aceweb.org](http://www.aceweb.org)

ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE



IN AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND LIFE AND HUMAN SCIENCES

# Our History

## Historic reflections on our professions

During the early AAACE meetings, we questioned each other about the common problems of our jobs...how to get color into publications (a costly and new technique in the 1950s); how to visualize concepts when we had no artist or designer; how to handle the new method of television; how to train county agents; how to gain the respect of specialists, research people, and administrators and teach them the importance of writing and expressing themselves; and most of all, how to explain farm production techniques and homemaking skills. By and large, during this age of experimentation and trial, we were concerned about what some communicators now call “skills.”

Of course, AAACE held us together and helped us realize that we all had common goals. We learned lots of other things, too, such as that there were two kinds of people among us: opinion leaders and followers. Interestingly, it always seemed to me that most AAACE folks were really opinion leaders, more so than most anyone else in the agricultural community.

Some of those early AAACE members had it all over the administrators they served, too, as evidenced by the development of the National Project in Agricultural Communications – that grandiose effort, largely the result of AAACE thinking and funded by the Kellogg Foundation through a grant – that many deans and directors at first thought to be a waste of time.

That’s not too complimentary perhaps, but the AAACE people were agriculture’s agents of change. So were many of our administrators, but the AAACE people were *believers*. AAACE members had access to information from other sources and were encouraged to share the details with administrators.

When I returned home from a meeting where we talked about rural development, my extension director chastised me to no end for even becoming involved in such a discussion. He had seen a copy of the AAACE printed program and told me rural development was no business of mine or of other AAACE members. What we had done was to meddle in program stuff and we should wait to act until our “superiors” told us how and what we should report about the program of rural development.

No amount of discussion or explanation could change his opinion. So finally I told him that if he wanted a voice in what AAACE did or discussed, he should pay the \$25 it then cost to join the organization and become a member.

Maybe he was right and I was disrespectful. But at the time I didn’t think we had tried to plan a program. I thought we at the meeting had merely discussed possible ways to explain the program.

The point is, AAACE provided a feeling of professional pride not only in my colleagues and me but also in how others began to perceive communicators. Call us journalists, information people, designers, artists, communicators, editors, radio announcers, TV hosts, or any kind of agricultural journalist or home economic journalist – still AAACE (or ACE), it seemed to me, was made up of professionals. Eventually, most other folks with whom we worked recognized that those of us who worked in those fields belonged to a profession just as important as their own. Today, many of us worry about the “agriculture” in our name, but personally I feel we’ll lose something if we ever discard the term completely. Just the term alone may be what makes us a bit unique.

The question we probably will always have is how, or which, or what is the

*right* way. Probably our answer will have to be “all of the above.” At the same time, we still need to respect those who would rather say, “None of the above.”

No doubt everyone could write a book containing various examples of the psychological warfare we’ve each experienced...the frustrations, disappointments and agonies. Maybe we could even include a few examples of successful ventures, like a former ACE member who claimed if he told program people that *research* showed audiences wanted such-and-such, everyone believed him and began to explain that particular subject better. Now we get into the question of honesty and truth in communication, a subject NPAC once treated. Pretty heavy stuff for anyone!

Perhaps, then, part of our problem lies in the archaic, internal organizational culture surrounding us. ACE itself needs to avoid becoming part of that culture. Otherwise, we’ll continue to have the same kind of frustrations that bug innovative, aggressive individuals in most any kind of formal organization. That means we need to face up to our own limitations and simply do the best we can in whatever way we can...perhaps we need to continue to be opinion leaders, to discuss, merely to try to keep on keeping on.

In summary, perhaps we need to recall some of the last words of Lester Schrup about the time he retired. He said, “No group has been more tongue-in-cheek about its sphere of operations than the agricultural college editor group. None has exhibited a more deep-seated passion for improvement.”

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## Fun facts about Traverse City

As you begin thinking about the 2008 ACE meeting in Traverse City June 10-13, here are a few tidbits to whet your appetite for Northern Michigan.

1. The Anishinabeg (ancestors of the Chippewa and Ottawa tribes) migrated to the Grand Traverse Bay area in about 1400 A.D., likely from what is now part of New York state.
2. European settlers began to arrive in 1846. The first cherries were planted by Peter Dougherty, a Presbyterian missionary, in 1852.
3. At its deepest point, Grand Traverse Bay is 612 feet.
4. The estimated 2006 population of Grand Traverse County is 84,952; Traverse City proper has just over 15,000 souls.
5. Michigan produces 70-75 percent of the nation's tart cherries, with a good many of those produced in Grand Traverse and surrounding counties.
6. Michigan State University horticulturists were instrumental in introducing European grape varieties to the Leelenau Peninsula, thereby helping establish a thriving grape and wine industry.
7. Madonna's folks have a winery just north of Traverse City (Ciccone Vineyards, in Suttons Bay) – one of many lovely wineries on the Leelenau Peninsula.
8. Bruce Willis and Demi Moore are among many celebrities who have kids enrolled in the internationally renowned Interlochen Arts Academy.
9. Sleder's Family Tavern, just east of downtown Traverse City, was built over 120 years ago by Bohemian immigrants who worked in the city's thriving 19th century sawmills.
10. Golf Magazine has selected Michigan's Golf Coast as one of the top six golf destinations in the country.



We at Michigan State are looking forward to hosting you in one of the Midwest's loveliest areas.

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## Make your Web newspaper easy to read and scan

To give your electronic newspaper page life and make it easy to read and scan, here are some suggestions from Texas A&M University doctoral student Burell David Kingery's dissertation "An Analysis of Digital Typography and Page Layout for Headlines in Electronic Newspapers" (2000).

The news story on your newspaper Web page has three parts: layout, body text and headline, and all three are important for both the reader and the scanner. Here is what Kingery found in his survey research.

### The Three Parts

- The **layout** of the Web newspaper page should be in newspaper style with columns 2 to 2 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches wide. Photographs, maps, charts and graphics add interest to the page and to the story. Avoid jumping stories; readers prefer stories to begin and end in the same place.
- The **body text** should be a 12-point serif typeface – Times New Roman is preferred – set in either justified or ragged-right lines because readers do not differentiate between them. Use bulleted matter and subheads of two to four words to summarize key points and give readers an idea about what's coming next in the story. To keep readers interested, keep paragraphs short (50 words or less) and provide lots of white space by putting a blank line between paragraphs. There is no need to indent paragraphs.
- The **headline**, a summary of the story, should be flush left, five to 10 words, no more than 45 characters overall and no more than 32 characters per line. The preferred size and font of the main headline is 24-point Book Antiqua, clean, clear, and easy to read and scan. A drop headline of two to three lines in 14-point Book Antiqua, also flush left, completes the story summary. Written correctly, the above combination of headlines provides complete information about the story in the fewest words, making it easy for scanners to decide whether to read the story or move on to another.

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## Writing for the Web

You don't need to learn a different writing style to write for the Web. Writing news stories for the Web is no different than writing for print. The best writing style for news, on paper and on the Web, is the inverted pyramid: summary lead and KISS (keep it short, simple).

And the best part is that you already know all of those techniques. You learned them in journalism school or on the job, and you've probably been using them all your professional lives.

I am speaking about only the writing – not the audio, the video, the blinking buttons, and other gimmicks of Web sites. Moreover, researchers agree that Web readers, like newspaper readers, are attracted by the headline and the text rather than by graphics or pictures.

The technique of writing for newspapers – as taught in schools of journalism throughout the country – is simple: Write tight, be clear and concise, write short sentences and short paragraphs, use words correctly, obey the rules of grammar and spelling, and get to the point quickly with the inverted pyramid lead.

The Web does not require a different style of writing; it only provides a more broadly based medium for much wider dissemination of information.

Today, in general, researchers and professionals agree that Web readers, like newspaper readers, want to know quickly what the story is about, and most of them do not want the details of a full story. Therefore, the recommendation is that Web stories follow the traditional inverted pyramid style of writing news: summary lead to get to the point quickly, short sentences, short paragraphs, and no more than one screen of copy. One screen of copy is 250 words, or one sheet of paper, double-spaced.

One of the pioneer researchers in Web writing, Jakob Nielsen, recommends that because readers read 25 percent slower on the Web than in newspapers, writing for the Web ought to be half as long as newspaper stories. A researcher for the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Fla., Roy Peter Clark, believes that any story can be told in 800 words.

Because large blocks of type tend to lose readers, the recommendation is that no paragraph be longer than five lines on screen and that paragraphs be separated with a blank line. All of that is nothing more than the electronic equivalent of newspaper white space.

There is no question about the writing; it must be accurate, clear, concise, and vivid, and use strong verbs. Researchers recommend using a conversational style that avoids overuse of punctuation marks, all of which provides for a smooth flow of language and ease of understanding.

If you do need a lengthy story, the recommendation is that you rely upon the old newspaper technique of using subheads to break up the copy, to provide more white space, and to alert readers as to what is coming next. In addition, you should write in "chunks," that is, completing one topic before moving on to another. Chunk writing normally is restricted to fewer than 100 words, further attesting to the value of tight writing.

But be careful. Web readers generally read the Web the way they read newspapers. Most newspaper readers don't scroll; they read no more than the first four or five paragraphs and move on to another story.

On the Web, those who do scroll read an average of six Web sites, though some read up to three times that many. These

readers are seeking additional information because they are interested in that specific topic. Those additional Web sites are called "hypertext," meaning "beyond text" or "additional text," and they are nothing more than the electronic name for the newspaper "sidebars."

Below are specific suggestions for making Web site news stories readily understandable and interesting.

- Write in the conversational active voice: subject, verb, object. Tell, rather than write, your story.
- Avoid synonyms; repeating key words reinforces understandability.
- Obey the rules of grammar, punctuation, syntax, precise word use and spelling, subject/verb agreement, and noun/pronoun agreement.
- Write objectively; don't use opinion words.
- Use strong verbs.
- Ensure that no paragraph is longer than five lines on screen.
- Ensure that no line is longer than five inches on screen.
- Separate paragraphs with a blank line.
- Write tight. No story should be longer than one screen (250 words).
- Use subheads and hypertext sidebars for lengthy stories.
- Get to the point quickly with the summary lead – the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the story – and the inverted pyramid.
- Copy edit your work, and rewrite as many times as necessary.

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**Larry Jackson, Kansas State University**, will focus on ways to provide better information delivery about technology to KSU county faculty and agents around the state. He and his team are considering developing an electronic newsletter that will be distributed by area tech support specialists.

**Faith Peppers, University of Georgia**, will plan, organize and implement a crisis communication plan writing workshop for public affairs coordinators across the University of Georgia campus' 15 colleges and numerous institutes and centers. This workshop aims for each college to leave with the majority of their crisis communication plans written. She has secured funding through Homeland Security to hold statewide training for UGA faculty, public affairs staff and Georgia agriculture industry representatives on training crisis spokespeople.

**Deb Pryor, Kansas State University**, will produce a 90-second daily program focusing on topical agricultural subjects. The targeted audience and the focus of the information will be developed in coordination with KTKA. Video of guest speakers and special presentations will also occasionally be provided.

**Bob Ratliff, Mississippi State University**, will conduct a communication needs survey of the Division of

Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine at Mississippi State University. Individuals in leadership roles in the division – including deans, directors, department heads and heads of the four MSU research and extension centers in the state – will be surveyed. The working group will then meet with the leadership from each unit to discuss the survey results and determine how to improve current communications support and how to implement new communications objectives.

**Ashwani Srivastava, Alcorn State University**, will introduce and demonstrate innovative uses of computer technology and computerized farm management practices to small, limited-resource farmers and rural families through his Computer Adoption Project (CAP).

**Linda Sleichter, Kansas State University**, will establish a cataloguing system for the many images within the KSU Communications Department, with the intention of expanding it later for others throughout K-State Research and Extension.

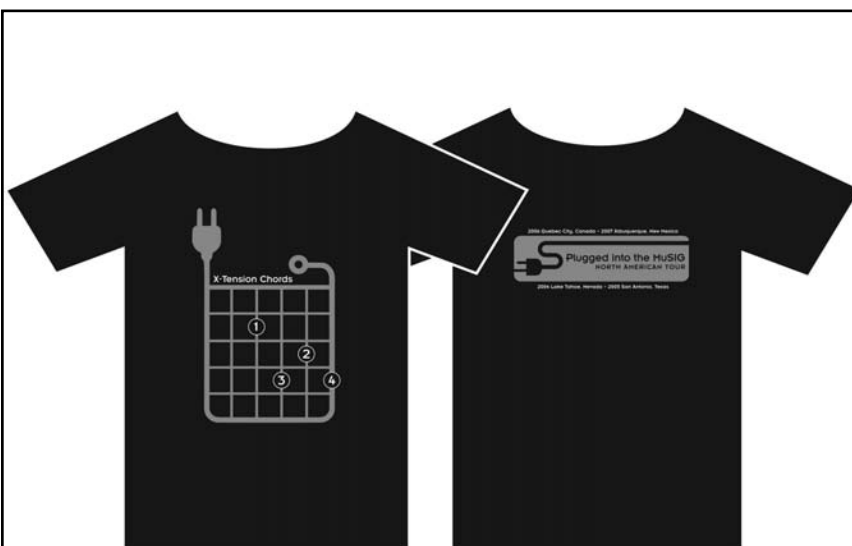
**Leighton Spann, Mississippi State University**, will develop a way to effectively market a select group of extension video productions in a central location and set the stage for implementation, possibly through use of an online system

offering these materials either for free or for a fee.

**Rob Stout, Washington State University**, will work closely with four select counties, learning centers, and research centers to inventory the types of printed materials they are creating locally and evaluate the materials to be produced centrally by WSU Extension's Publishing and Printing (EP&P). Goals include brand identity and consistent quality on all materials, central oversight of all projects to eliminate duplication of services, saving counties money, and using available capacity in EP&P so as to keep money in the WSU Extension system.

Class members will present their projects at a poster session during the 2008 ACE meeting in Michigan. That meeting will bring an end to their formal institute training. Members of the 2008-2009 ACE Leadership Institute will kick off their first session immediately following the ACE meeting.

Terry Meisenbach  
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## Be a rock star! Own your very own X-Tension Chords T-shirt!

Commemorating ACE's own band and benefiting the ACE Development Fund.

Shirts are \$20 plus \$5 shipping.  
Sizes medium and large available.

To order a shirt, e-mail the ACE  
Coordinator at [ace@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:ace@ifas.ufl.edu)



# Association for Communication Excellence

## Membership Application

If you are joining ACE for the first time, please complete this form and return it to:  
 ACE Headquarters, University of Florida, P.O. Box 110811, Gainesville, FL 32611; Fax: 352/392-8583

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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Select your membership type. For help in determining which membership is right for you, please visit [www.aceweb.org](http://www.aceweb.org). With the exception of student/recent graduate memberships, all first-year memberships are \$50.

- Active (Any person whose duties relate to communicating about agriculture, natural resources, life sciences, or human sciences or who has a professional interest in communications related to those areas)
- Institutional (For active memberships paid by an institution)
- Student/Recent Graduate (For full-time undergraduate or graduate students and those who have graduated within the last two years. Dues for full-time students and persons in their first year after graduation are \$25. Dues in the second year after graduation are \$50. In the third year after graduation, members are considered active members and pay full dues.) Year in which you graduated or will graduate \_\_\_\_\_
- Charter (For the designated representative of a charter country; all persons in that country who qualify for membership receive affiliate member status.) Name of country applying for charter status: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Interest Group (SIG) Choices

- |  |  |                                      |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academic Programs                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Information Technologies  | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership and Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Research    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electronic Media                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Design                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Media Relations           |                                      |

Publications

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- To receive the Journal of Applied Communications (JAC) in printed form, check here. Please note that the JAC is currently not available in electronic format.

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