



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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ELIMINATE THE NEED FOR TEXTBOOKS BY LEVERAGING PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Course materials must be updated continually in order for professional and technical programs to stay current with industry and to ensure students are graduating with the necessary skills. But, textbooks are a big expense for students, and when they are updated often, students lose the opportunity to save money by purchasing used books. This problem prompted me to look for alternative methods to provide students with the most recent industry news, information, techniques, and technology.

The best resources for staying current on trends when I worked in the industry were tradeshow and publications distributed by professional organizations. Maintaining memberships in these organizations provided continuous access to the latest information on what my competitors were doing, on innovations in technology, and on current industry research. Additionally, participation in these trade groups provides the opportunity to stay politically active and aware of local and federal regulations that may impact one's business. Also, many trade organizations provide student memberships at reduced rates, and most organizations allow colleges or individual faculty members to join and participate in tradeshow, publications, webinars, and other member benefits.

Students who attend tradeshow and conferences can learn from formal presentations made by industry leaders. For students who are unable to attend these professional gatherings, the presentations and supporting research are often made available via the organization's website. Many of these organizations also maintain searchable archives of all of their own publications—i.e., newsletters and white papers on industry trends. Instructors can often obtain written permission to use these research papers, presentations, webinars, and vendor information to supplement course materials.

For example, I teach a course about issues related to computer applications within the hospitality industry. Ever-changing technology is a challenge for this industry, which makes textbooks a difficult source for current course materials. Therefore, I secured permission from the leading professional organization in the hospitality industry to use the materials posted on its website as my

primary course materials—eliminating the need (and cost) of a textbook. Our local chapter of this organization also pays to send two of our student chapter members to its national tradeshow each year—building positive ties for our college and its students throughout the industry. These same industry experts are frequent guest speakers in our classroom, and several students have secured internships as a direct result of maintaining active memberships.

Steps to using a trade organization to supplement your teaching are:

- Identify the leading professional organizations in your industry, preferably one that has an active chapter near your college;
- Join the organization, naming the college or individual faculty member as the member;
- Create a student chapter if the organization allows;
- Attend the monthly events hosted by the organization and, if there is a charge (i.e., lunch or dinner meetings), rotate participation among interested students;
- Circulate to students any newsletters generated by the organization; and
- Assume the materials on the organization's website are copyrighted and that they require written permission before using them for your courses.

Professional organizations and their members, as well as the vendors that support that industry, provide a rich source of guest speakers, mentors, internships, and employers for your students. Your college may also consider sponsoring an event or booth at these tradeshow to build your institution's image within the industry. Faculty making presentations at these events and writing for the industry publications can also build the prestige of your program, which helps graduates with job placement and provides outreach for recruiting new students from industry.

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