

## Epsilon Pi Tau Matters in Enriching Professional and Personal Lives

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This is a profile of *Epsilon Pi Tau* (EPT), an organization that plays a significant role in our relatively new professions. To this end, a brief history is set in context. This is followed by an enumeration of EPT activities to achieve different purposes: recognize and contribute to the professional development of individual members, promote and advance the academic programs with which members are associated, and support and promote professional organizations in technology. Anecdotes of incidents and events are selectively interspersed in the enumeration to exemplify and give life to these items. The paper closes with some thoughts about EPT on the international level.

### A Context for *Epsilon Pi Tau*

The *Handbook of College Honor Societies* (1998) reveals an intriguing history of these societies in higher education in the United States. The first honor society, *Phi Beta Kappa*, was organized in 1776, but the movement really grew dramatically in the early 1900s. Virtually every higher education discipline or professional field of study has an associated honorary group. There are also societies which do not identify with a specific discipline and, like *Phi Beta Kappa*, are dedicated to general studies or emphasize recognition of leadership among the higher education students.

For their ceremonies, many honor societies borrowed their language, form, and ritual from religious European groups like the Masons. Consequently, the ceremonies have a degree of drama and mystique. But the messages in the honoraries' ceremonies are very different. Typically, they are not secret. They express the values of that society and its moral obligations. They stress the importance of the discipline associated with the honorary. The

honorary organizations have not been based on social class distinctions or any other social hierarchical criteria. But they are *elitist* because they focus on recognizing and rewarding "...high achievement in undergraduate, graduate, and professional studies, in student leadership, and in various fields of research" (p. 104, back cover).

EPT interprets, acts upon, and adds to this principle in ways that distinguish it from other honor societies: (a) It conducts a continuing career-long program to serve professional development needs of members; (b) it acts upon the meaning of leadership by recognizing leaders in academe, government, and the private sector; and (c) it has a long-standing international outlook.

In seeking to best serve student members, two critical activities have emerged; their achievement results in a richer program for all members. These are (a) EPT extends its recognition and membership program to faculty, industrialists, practicing technologists, and others who are supportive of the study of technology; opportunities to interact with such models of success in the technology professions is clearly an enrichment for student members; and (b) EPT welcomes accomplished students, faculty, industrialists, and practicing technologists from throughout the world; thus, synergistic and enrichment opportunities accrue to the entire membership. (It should be noted that this worldview was influenced and first implemented by EPT's founder and first executive secretary, William E. Warner, who was prescient, to say the least.) Warner had used the term "International" almost from the organization's inception, and in combining their deference to him with a forward-looking use of the term "technology," the EPT board of directors, almost 25 years ago, adopted the still-used EPT descriptor: "The

International Honorary for Professions in Technology.”

These guides to EPT operations have resulted in an organization that has initiated more than 70,000 professionals since 1929, and currently lists more than 12,000 members who reside in 49 countries. They include students enrolled on the associate through the doctoral degree levels. Those in the education professions include administrative leaders, teachers, and professors from pre-college to university levels who are associated with the subject matter of technology: science; science, technology, and society; or training and workforce development. Also among EPT members are scientists, practicing technologists, and industrialists who have a keen interest in technology, and trainers and human resource development personnel who also maintain a keen interest in the phenomenon of technology and have been supportive of the advancement of the field.

### **Recognizing and Contributing to the Professional Development of Members**

#### *On Recognition*

A recent incident tells more about the meaning of recognition than any formal definition or human development jargon. The setting could have been an initiation anywhere in the world. But this one took place this past spring at an EPT-conducted Exemplary Initiation in Salt Lake City, Utah, during the annual conference of the International Technology Education Association (ITEA). One of the initiates was a senior professor from a distinguished university in an eastern Mediterranean country on assignment to a prominent university in the American West. At the close of the ceremony I moved to his side to shake his hand and extend words of welcome. He could not contain himself. “This is a wonderful experience,” he remarked. “It is something that we must do in my university. We do not do enough of this sort of thing and yet we have so many deserving faculty and students who can benefit from it.”

This speaks volumes about the human need to be recognized by peers. It is true that most institutions of higher education have programs that recognize academic and even leadership accomplishments and promise. But EPT conveys a deep recognition that is very much valued by peers. Further, in the United States and increasingly in other parts of the world, this sort of recognition is be-

coming as valued outside of the academy as it is within the academy.

The EPT recognition program goes considerably beyond a member’s initiation:

- For continuing professional accomplishments, active members can be recognized and elevated to Laureate and Distinguished Service membership, the latter being the highest award bestowed upon members. They may be recommended for these honors by fellow members, chapter leaders, or the board of directors.
- Members in every student, faculty, and practitioner category are eligible to participate in the annual W. E. Warner Awards Program competition. Essay and research products, leadership, and professional practice accomplishments are evaluated. Had there been a full complement of competitors and winners this year the total value of awards would have been US\$12,000.

#### *On Professional Development*

Two anecdotes, separated by many years, are related here. One describes my personal experience as a student leader in an EPT chapter many years ago. The second, which occurred this year, is an example of how EPT serves faculty.

1. EPT chapters at institutions provide a venue for students to engage in meaningful, and sometimes rare, leadership development experiences. As an undergraduate chapter member, I had a profound experience. I was directly involved in all aspects of an effort to award Epsilon Pi Tau International Honors Citations to Walter H. Brattain and William B. Shockley, 1956 Nobel prize winners in physics, for developing the transistor. With a co-trustee mentor, the other student chapter members and I researched the scientists’ accomplishments, communicated with the EPT executive secretary at the International Office, produced citation drafts, planned and implemented the event, invited the honorees and city and university dignitaries, and played an instrumental role in conveying the awards.
2. This past year, one EPT member, a professor at a

German university, sought EPT's assistance in arranging an upcoming sabbatical during which he could spend some time doing research and development at a university in the United States. EPT put him in touch with professors at two major American universities, one in the northeast and one in the southern middle west. The three are sharing their common interests in computer multimedia applications in technical instruction and training situations. Exchange visits over the next year will culminate with the professor from Germany serving at one of the American universities next summer.

Other EPT services also contribute to professional development:

- Scholarship grants to rising leaders to attend important conferences.
- Providing *The Journal of Technology Studies* to all members is in itself a developmental approach. Another guiding editorial philosophy contributes to professional development of new and emerging researchers and authors. The editors consider authors part of a team whose purpose is to produce a publishable article via diligent attention and communication.
- Other EPT publications include informative newsletters and research-based monographs.
- Via the Internet and the EPT website, members can communicate directly with one another or use the services of the International Office to provide a forum to exchange ideas among the diverse membership.

#### **Promoting and Advancing Academic Programs**

Although the recognition program is basic to EPT efforts, it should be clear by now that EPT's policies are guided by the notion that academic programs connected with chapters or with which members-at-large are associated should enjoy benefits as well. The citation to the two Nobel Laureates described above was not only a significant leadership experience for students, it also resulted in considerable positive visibility for the academic department and should be considered as a device for promoting programs:

- The Certificate of Commendation and the International Honors Citation (the latter being the highest honor that EPT bestows on nonmembers) can be

recommended by members-at-large or by chapters to be awarded to benefactors of academic programs with which the members are associated. EPT records show that university presidents, chief executive officers in the private sector, and high-ranking government officials who have been benefactors (donated funds, provided cooperative education opportunities, funded research, etc.) of the academic programs have been nominated and approved by the EPT board of directors to receive such honors.

- Academic program leaders may encourage the EPT chapter to initiate deserving individuals from other technology-related fields within their own or nearby institutions. For example, in addition to the faculty in the various technology preparation programs, science, mathematics, and social science instructors may become involved. Perhaps instructors and staff persons and students who meet informally about computers and other technology advances may be invited to join. Also, teachers in pre-college and pre-university schools who are involved with science and technology in formal instruction or with extracurricular student organizations can influence talented students about their choice of higher education studies. Relationships with these students can be strengthened by offering them initiation into EPT or awarding them an Epsilon Pi Tau Certificate of Commendation.
- Establish a presence and connection with business, industry, and nearby institutions of higher education and develop programs, visits, or invite speakers to chapter programs. Individuals who may not be members qualified as a result of professional accomplishments should be invited to be initiated. One can only imagine the opportunities that may benefit both students and faculty. Cooperative research and development projects and other ventures could, likewise, emerge.
- At critical times, EPT used its prestige and leverage in behalf of academic programs that were threatened by political pressure from outside or within the academy. More often than not, threats to the academic unit in technology were removed, in part, due to EPT efforts.

### Working With Professional Organizations

It can safely be said that in the United States the leaders of most professional organizations that serve technology education are members of Epsilon Pi Tau. It is also true that a growing number of leaders of such organizations in other nations have become members in recent years. EPT policy has long held that the growth, strength, viability, and vitality of a profession depends upon strong and well-led professional organizations. In the late 1930s, William E. Warner, who founded EPT, was instrumental in founding the American Industrial Arts Association, now known as the International Technology Education Association (ITEA), and EPT has been active in supporting existing organizations that serve different areas of specialization in technology studies. As new fields or emphases have emerged in response to a logical need for a new professional group, EPT has bolstered their development. Here are some examples:

- EPT is the official honorary of the National Association of Industrial Technology and the World Council of Associations in Technology Education and is being considered for that distinction by other groups.
- EPT has responded to proposals from organizations to fund specific projects. For example:
  1. With a requirement that the funds be matched by contributions from other sources, EPT provided partial support that enabled a new professional organization to develop a special conference session at which representatives of several engineering disciplines reviewed and discussed science, technology, and society principles to be taught at pre-college levels.
  2. Having identified promising scholars, organizers of an international conference sought resources to enable the scholars to attend the conference. The EPT board responded positively to the proposal and made the award to individuals to attend the conference as “EPT Scholars.”
  3. Initial seed funds provided by EPT resulted in sufficient matching funds to enable the National Association of Industrial Technology (NAIT) to produce *Industrial Technology, Tomorrow's Technology Today*, an interactive CD. Designed for secondary school students, it contains informa-

tion about industrial technology careers and preparation opportunities in community and technical colleges and universities in the United States. In a pilot distribution, NAIT supplied copies to 4,500 high schools in five states; NAIT's goal is to reach all U.S. high schools.

4. EPT participates in international, national, and regional conferences. It also supports the work of 15 professional organizations that serve the entire spectrum of the technology professions.
5. EPT is a founding member of the World Council of Associations in Technology Education (WOCATE). This last statement provides an excellent segue into EPT efforts on the international level.

### On the International Level

While the initiation I described earlier in Salt Lake City took place in the United States, the team that conducted the ritual represented EPT's flagship Canadian chapter from the Province of Alberta. But the team was not entirely Canadian—it included professors from Japan and the United Kingdom. The initiates that day were even more diverse with representatives from Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Israel, Japan, and the United States. But there is more to our international story:

- It was inevitable that the EPT chapters in several of the major PhD-granting U.S. institutions would initiate degree candidates from other lands. This accounts for part of EPT's international membership. In the past decade, however, EPT has been actively supporting and partially sponsoring international conferences and organizations (EPT's status as one of WOCATE's founding organizations has already been mentioned). Further, last September I was pleased to represent EPT as one of the sponsors of the International Conference on Technology Education at the Technical University of Braunschweig which was attended by more than 180 world leaders in technology studies, to present a paper on which this edarticle is based, and to conduct an Exemplary Initiation of new EPT members, leaders from France, Germany, Israel, Nepal, New Zealand, Russia, Taiwan, Uganda,

United Kingdom, and the United States. I also had the privilege of presenting an International Honors Citation to a German professor in recognition of his superlative leadership and exemplary scholarship over a long and highly productive career. EPT has served similarly in conferences in Weimar, Banksa Bystrica, Paris, Jerusalem, and Washington, DC. At those conferences accomplished leaders from Australia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Japan, The Netherlands, Poland, Kenya, India, South Africa, and the United Kingdom were initiated as members, Laureate and Distinguished Service Citations were also awarded to deserving members.

- Another index that exemplifies EPT's international reach is the increasing percentage of non-U.S. authors in recent issues of the EPT-sponsored *Journal of Technology Studies* (up to 40% in the Winter/Spring 1999 issue).

#### Coda

Let me close by revealing how all this is done: All EPT leaders serve on a voluntary basis without compensation, although expenses incurred in connection with EPT service are reimbursed. Annual dues are kept to a minimum, sufficient to ensure that operating, including publication, expenses are covered. In the past 25 years, EPT has built an endowment fund primarily from donations. The bulk of the endowment is guaranteed to be maintained in perpetuity. Earnings can only be used for development purposes and for awards. Earnings have

increased each year, thus enabling the honorary to accomplish even more than initially envisioned. The essential incentive for EPT leaders is to promote excellence in preparation and in the practice of professionals who comprise the fields. A key element in accomplishing and ensuring excellence is reaching the talent in all venues in every country and by encouraging sharing of ideas between and among the wonderful, creative, and productive minds that inhabit the technology professions...and, of course, in recognizing them in the EPT manner.

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#### Reference

Association of College Honor Societies (1998). *ACHS handbook 1998-2001*. East Lansing, MI: ASCH Press.

