ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

Valerie Paige Hale

The Graduate School
Morehead State University
August 31, 2015
FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADUATE STUDENT MEMBERSHIP IN THE ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY (AECT)

Abstract of capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education At Morehead State University

By

Valerie Paige Hale
Salvisa, Kentucky

Committee Chair: John H. Curry, Associate Professor

Morehead, Kentucky
August 31, 2015

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ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADUATE STUDENT MEMBERSHIP IN THE ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY (AECT)

The purpose of this study is to investigate factors influencing membership in the Association of Educational Communication & Technology (AECT). This study seeks to understand what factors influence graduate students’ decisions of whether or not to maintain membership in AECT. Participants include current and former members of AECT drawn from the organization’s membership database. Invitations to participate were be sent via email. The instruments used for this study include surveys created by both the leadership of AECT and the investigator in order to meet the purposes of this study. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone with a subset of participants from each of the three subgroups who volunteered to provide further information. Data analysis used to investigate research questions and hypotheses included descriptive statistics and a qualitative analysis focusing on identifying themes from semi-structured interviews.

KEYWORDS: Graduate Student, Membership, Association, Professional, Involvement

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Date
FACTORs INFLUENCING GRADUATE STUDENT MEMBERSHIP IN THE ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY (AECT)

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DEDICATION

I want to first and foremost thank my God for the many blessings He has showered on me in life and especially through the last three years as I have undertaken this doctoral journey. I have been blessed with so many abilities and aptitudes, and I was lucky enough to put them on full display as I worked my way through this program.

I dedicate this work to my dear husband, Lance. You have supported me throughout this process and have been my rock and biggest fan. I love the way you love me.

I must also thank my wonderful family. I have missed out on a number of gatherings as well as leisure time with my close relatives, but their understanding has meant the world to me.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to the precious daughter I am carrying. I hope the completion of this degree will send a clear message to her that she can accomplish anything in life she puts her mind to.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people I would like to acknowledge as they have played integral roles in the completion of this project. I must first thank my chair, Dr. John H. Curry. He has supported me throughout and has been very receptive to my questions. At the same time, he has pushed me to be independent and trust myself as the expert on my topic. Dr. Jeannie Justice, Dr. Chris Miller, and the other professors in our program have also empowered me as a scholar by collaborating on various projects and presentations.

I must also thank AECT for trusting me to conduct this important capstone study. Both the leadership and general members of AECT have supported me and become my true professional family.

In addition to the excellent faculty, my fellow cohort members and other students in the program have been a huge source of support. In them I have made lifelong friends.

Lastly, I must acknowledge my family as well as my coworkers for their patience as my attention has been drawn in so many directions for the past three years.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Contemporary scholarly societies are at a crossroads, and their perceived relevance, membership rolls, and influence are all at stake. One’s membership in a field-specific professional organization was once taken for granted and viewed a core component of what it meant to be a professional (Fitzpatrick, 2012). This is no longer necessarily the case. Emergent factors impacting scholars’ relationships with their respective organizations include “the changing funding environment, the increasing casualization of the academic workforce, and the ease of creating direct ties among individual colleagues in online social networking systems” (Fitzpatrick 2012).

Ample research exists extolling the benefits of professional association membership (Desmond & Symens, 1997; Hall, 1993; Young & Boling, 2004; Thomas, Inniss-Richter, Mata, & Cottrell, 2013). Traditional benefits include access to cutting-edge research through scholarly journals, networking, professional/career development, and opportunities for developing presentation skills at conferences (Young & Boling, 2004).

The Association of Educational Communication and Technology

The Association of Educational Communication and Technology (AECT) is the premier international, professional organization representing the field of educational technology. The current definition of the field adopted by AECT in 2004 states that “Educational technology is the study and ethical practice of facilitating
learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate
technological processes and resources” (Januszewski, 2008, p. 343). By virtue of
representing a very dynamic, changing field, AECT faces unique challenges ranging
from the diversity of professional practice that it attempts to include under its
organizational umbrella to its repeated efforts to adopt a definition of the field which
represents that breadth of philosophy, practice, and research (Persichitte, 2008, p.
327).

Statement of the Problem

Chief among AECT’s concerns is the imperative of encouraging and retaining
the membership of energetic graduates students beyond their graduation, because this
population is likely to determine the strength and drive the future of the organization
at large. Currently, graduate students make up nearly one-third of the organization’s
membership. This same group, though, is not renewing its membership at a rate
commensurate with the rest of the organization. This leads to a pressing question.
Namely, what steps can be taken to foster positive membership intentions and
strengthen the commitment of graduate student members?

Purpose of the Current Study

To clarify the current dilemma, several questions must first be answered.
Assuming that today’s graduate students are aware of these traditional benefits, are
these benefits in and of themselves compelling enough reasons to drive interest in and
the long-term investment of time and resources of today’s graduate student members?
Could graduate students’ retention in scholarly societies be driven by factors novel to those that traditionally drew and maintained membership? Stated differently, are other factors driving students’ decisions not to maintain membership in their respective scholarly societies?

The current study seeks to identify the factors driving graduate students’ decisions of whether or not to maintain membership in AECT. Suggestions for recruiting as well as fortifying the membership and building the commitment of this population will be discussed.

**Significance of the Current Study**

This significance of this study is twofold. First, relatively little research currently exists on the topic of declining membership in professional organizations (Phillips & Leahy, 2012). Second, this study is significant, because its results will be directly applied to a real world problem. Specifically, this study looks to provide actions steps for promoting the retention of graduate student members of AECT as they transition into professional roles.

**Conceptual Framework**

Existing research on issues related to membership retention in professional associations tends to revolve around two main conceptual perspectives including Social Exchange Theory and Social Identity Theory. By far, Social Exchange Theory has been applied most often to the study of membership within professional associations (e.g., Alotaibi, 2007; Bauman, 2008; DeLesky, 2003, Phillips & Leahy,
2012; Rapp & Collins, 1999; Yeager, 1981). Specifically, this theory holds that both
the giver and taker in the social exchange must believe that they have been
satisfactorily compensated for an exchange to occur, and the benefits of a given
exchange are to be weighed against the costs (Blau, 1964). Social Identity Theory is
somewhat different. It holds that “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives
from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the
value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255)
is what is important.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research Questions

In order to identify factors that drive graduate student members of AECT
to renew their memberships, this study will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Why do graduate student members initially join AECT?
2. Why do individuals continue their membership in AECT?
3. Why do individuals discontinue their memberships?

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis based on social identity theory.

- Participants who report a combination of ‘socially’-focused reasons for
joining (i.e., professor/mentor recommendation, opportunities for
networking, division participation, convention participation, etc.) are more
likely to maintain membership in the organization and express positive
intentions for future membership.

**Hypothesis based on social exchange theory.**

- Participants who report greater value in opportunities for tangible benefits provided by AECT (i.e., discounts, journal subscriptions, etc.) and/or report that the benefits they reap from membership outweigh the costs will express positive intentions for future membership.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

**Assumptions**

This study includes the following assumptions: (a) the current and former AECT members who take to this survey as well as those who are selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews will respond honestly and accurately, and (b) professional associations such as AECT are essential to the establishment and ongoing relevance of a profession.

**Limitations**

One key limitation of this study is that the three groups of respondents will have been graduate student members of AECT during different eras. One group is comprised of current graduate student members, whereas the other two groups are comprised of former graduate student members who held that status at different points throughout the organization’s history. For example, some former graduate student
members may be early career professionals, whereas others may have been graduate students 35 years ago or more. As such, they likely had very different experiences as graduate students that may have impacted their decisions to either maintain membership or leave the organization. For example, the Graduate Student Assembly (Special Interest Group) is relatively new as is also the incorporation of social media into the graduate student member experience.

This study was specifically designed to address membership retention issues of graduate students within AECT in order to inform and shape ongoing organizational development efforts. As such, the conclusions and prescriptions that come out of this study may not be appropriate to apply to other contexts and thus should be considered with caution.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms will be used interchangeably throughout this study: professional association, professional organization, scholarly society, and professional society. For the purposes of this paper, several key terms are defined below:

**Professional Association**

Merton (1958) describes the professional association as “an organization of practitioners who judge one another as professionally competent and who have banded together to perform social functions which they cannot perform in their
separate capacity as individuals” (p. 50). Moreover, Jacob, Shifflett, Gaulee, de Klaver, Lee, Komolpun, Okhidoi, & Raattananuntapat (2013), described the role of a professional organizations as, “to develop members in their chosen profession. Whether the path to that development is through conference participation, networking or by exposure to the new ideas and people that membership brings” (Jacob et al., 2013).

Special Interest Group

Special Interest Groups within professions and professional associations have been conceptualized as: A number of groups, called segments, within a profession, which tend to take on the character of social movements. Segments develop distinctive identities and a sense of the past and goals for the future, and they organize activities which will secure an institutional position and implement their distinctive missions (Bucher & Strauss, 1961, p.325). Based on this conceptualization, special interest groups, for the purpose of this study, include those subgroups, or divisions, within a professional organization that are named for and serve the interest of segments of the larger organization’s membership.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter examines the concept of professions, professionalism, and professionalization while also examining the history of professional associations, trends in membership, factors affecting membership, and theoretical explanations for membership. Based on their research of professional organization membership, Phillips & Leahy (2012) found that, “perceived value of membership predicted current membership status” (p. 216). The current research is salient, because membership in professional associations has declined in recent decades (Bauman, 2008; DeLeskey, 2003). Moreover, this trend inevitably leads to a diminution of an informed, contributing membership body (DeLeskey, 2003). Research suggests, though, that while the maintenance of an active membership is essential, relatively little research has been devoted to involvement and participation in voluntary associations (Cutler, 1976; Phillips, 2011).

This review of literature is organized into eight sections: (a) professions, professionalization, and professionalism; (b) professional associations and membership; (c) theoretical basis membership in professional associations; (d) social exchange theory; (e) social identity theory; and (f) other factors influencing membership in professional associations.
Professions, Professionalization, & Professionalism

To fully understand professional organizations and scholarly societies, one must first form a solid understanding of their foundational institution—the profession. Scholars have long attempted to create a consensus definition for both the term and overarching concept of a “profession” (Abbott, 1988; Barber, 1963; Cruess, Johnston, & Cruess, 2004; Greenwood, 1957; Parsons, 1939; and Wilensky, 1964). Barber (1963) defined professions in behavioral terms. This allowed him to draw a distinction between specific professional behaviors and general occupational behaviors. Barber (1963) defined professional behavior in terms of four attributes. Barber (1963) stressed that professions had a “high degree of generalized and systematic knowledge” and secondly, that they are primarily oriented to the interest of the community rather than individual self-interest (p. 672). Other key attributes included, “a high degree of self control of behavior through codes of ethics” and a “system of rewards (monetary or honorary) that is primarily a set of symbols of work achievement” (Barber, 1963, p. 672). Greenwood (1957) also highlighted several key attributes of all professions including: (a) systematic theory; (b) authority; (c) community sanction; (d) ethical codes; and (e) a culture (p. 45). Around the same time period, Goode (1957) elaborated on the idea of a profession having its own unique culture by characterizing the same construct as that of a community. Similarly, Cruess et al. (2004) later included some of the same elements in their definition as Barber (1963) such as an explicit recognition of professional ethics and the mastery of a body of knowledge. Uniquely, Cruess et al. (2004) posited a
profession, “is a vocation in which knowledge of some department or science or learning or practice of an art founded upon it is used in the service of others (p. 74). Cruess et al. (2004) references a profession’s inherent social contract between itself and society and, subsequently, its being accountable to that society. This social contact, “grants the profession a monopoly over the use of its knowledge base, the right to considerable autonomy in practice, and the privilege of self-regulation” (p. 74).

Both the Barber (1963) and Cruess et al. (2004) definitions implicitly suggest how a profession differs from an occupation. Specifically, they emphasize professions’ emphases on the organized, voluntary association of members who work for the common good. The definitions of “profession” discussed above are the result of what social scientists have described as the process of professionalization. By understanding this process, one can better conceptualize what constitutes a profession. The process of professionalization has also been the subject of debate and definition. Caplow (1954), when writing about the sociology of work, crafted a definition of professionalization. Abbott (1988) distilled the Caplow (1954) definition by positing professions begin with the establishment of professional associations. Abbott (1988) then asserted that professions “change their names in order to lose their past and to assert their monopoly, and, most importantly, to give themselves a label capable of legislative restriction” (p. 11). Lastly, Abbott’s synthesis of the Caplow (1954) definition emphasizes that professions establish a code of ethics to “assert their social utility, to further regulate their incompetent, and to reduce internal
competition” (p. 11). Lastly, professions participate in the political process in order to gain legal recognition and influence though licensure of work within their respective professional jurisdictions (Abbott, 1988).

Although many seek professional status, relatively few occupations in modern society actually attain it (Wilensky, 1964). To further support this assertion, Wilensky (1964) provided a set of sequential steps for professionalization within the context of what he termed, “The professionalization of everyone”. Specifically, he observed and examined the “first events” in numerous American professions including: the first training school, first university school, the first local association, the first national association, the first state licensing law, and the first code of ethics. He concluded that the sequence of the process of professionalization generally fell in that order regardless of field or specialization (Wilensky, 1964).

Once a general definition for professions is agreed upon, then the processes by which they come to be, otherwise known as professionalization, can be explored and defined in their own right. Like the concept of professions, the process of professionalization has also been the target of scholarly inquiry (Bosanac & Jacobs, 2006; Bucher & Strauss, 1961; Neal & Morgan, 2000; and Wilensky, 1964). The term professionalization is “commonly used to describe how occupations become recognized as ‘professions’ and how they go about consolidating this status and improving their services” (Neal & Morgan, 2000, p. 9). Although it is somewhat obvious that professionalism is the process by which professions are established, the importance of this process is less clear. When one’s work is recognized as being
professional, the individual has a sense of pride, achievement, and security. At the same time, the integrity and visibility of his/her respective field of expert knowledge is preserved (Bosanac & Jacobs, 2006). The actions that result in professionalization, though, are less clear. In his seminal work, “The Professionalization of Everyone?,” Wilensky (1964) attempted to further distinguish an occupation from a profession by outlining the actions that result in professionalization. He noted, “any occupation wishing to exercise professional authority must find a technical basis for it, assert an exclusive jurisdiction, link both skill and jurisdiction to standards of training, and convince the public that its services are uniquely trustworthy” (p. 139).

By understanding the concept of a ‘profession’, one is lead to a better understanding of the process of ‘professionalization’. That, in turn, leads to an understanding of the product of this process, namely ‘professionalism’. Professionalism has also been the focus of scholarly inquiry (Jago, 1984; Noordegraaf, 2007; Roth, 1974; VanZandt, 1990; Wilensky, 1962, and Wilensky, 1964). Jago (1984) defines ‘professionalism’ as “an attitude that motivates individuals to be attentive to the image and ideals of their particular profession” as well as an “ideology that serves as a substitute for institutionalized structures for guaranteeing continued work and competence” (p. 122). Moreover, VanZandt (1990) elaborated on these ideas by describing professionalism as “an internalized mechanism that should complement such similar external monitoring mechanisms as credentialing” (p. 243). The description of ‘professionalism’ as both an ‘ideology’ and as an ‘internalized mechanism’ echoes the use of the term ‘ethics’ in several of
the definitions of ‘profession’. As such, one could argue that this characterization brings the discussion of these terms full circle.

**Professional Associations and Membership**

The definition of professionalization crafted by Wilensky (1964) references the establishment of both local and national associations. Today, professional associations can be found at the local, state, national, and international levels. According to Fitzpatrick (2012), although membership in professional organizations was long viewed as a core component of belonging to a profession factors such as the, “changing funding environment, the increasing casualization of the academic workforce, and the ease of creating direct ties among individual colleagues in online social networking systems have contributed to the tenuous relationships that many scholars feel to their organizations today” (p. 650). Although they are referred to using various names including professional organizations, professional societies, and scholarly societies, this paper will primarily use the term professional association(s). Those that choose to include the term ‘scholarly’ typically value the production and consumption of research and involvement in other scholarly activities. Just as the organizations themselves are referred to using various terms, the actions behind them do also and include the terms: voluntary action, voluntary participation, citizen participation, discretionary participation, social participation, common interest activity, and citizen involvement (Smith, 1975, p. 247). Merton (1958) describes the professional association as “an organization of practitioners who judge one another as
professionally competent and who have banded together to perform social functions which they cannot perform in their separate capacity as individuals” (p. 50).

Moreover, Jacob, Shifflett, Gaulee, de Klaver, Lee, Komolpun, Okhidoi, & Raattananuntapat (2013), described the role of a professional organizations as developing members to emulate their chosen profession though various activities to include participating in conferences, networking with professional peers, and being exposed to new ideas in the field (Jacob et al., 2013).

Another facet of membership in professional organizations is its role as an agent to reproduction rather than change. That is to say, members of professional organizations traditionally serve to reinforce long-held values through licensing, training, disciplining of professional behavior, and professional development (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002). Additionally, professional organizations often have a statement of purpose that guides and associations. Although these statements are common, some organizations’ stated aims do not necessarily coincide with what they actually do and stand for (Merton, 1958). Merton notes, “this is true for declarations designed not only to reach the general public but also, as everyone connected with such association knows, to reach the membership of the organizations itself” (Merton, 1958, p. 50).

Membership in professional organizations is typically voluntary (Merton, 1958). Due to the nature of voluntary affiliations in professional associations, it is common for individuals to flow both in and out of these organizations over time (McPherson, 1981). When studying voluntary group affiliations, McPherson (1981)
found that, “observable class differences in affiliation appear to be due to a tendency for high status persons to join organizations at a greater rate, and to remain in them longer” (p. 724). This could, have implications for student members of professional associations, because they are typically considered to have lower status both in prominence within the organization and also in resources (e.g., funds for paying membership dues and attending conferences). This is important, since membership and retention are tied to many organizations’ financial health (Jacob et al., 2013). Repeat membership and participation in organizational events such as conferences can also be viewed as indicators of membership satisfaction (Jacob et al., 2013). Although ongoing membership and participation in conferences is important, a wide range of factors make up the full picture of why individuals are engaged in professional organizations (Jacob et. al., 2013). Just as certain factors appear to increase a person’s likelihood of joining a professional organization, Collins & Rapp (1999) explored reasons why nurses choose not to join their state professional association. Reasons included lack of time as well as knowledge about the organization (Rapp & Collins, 1999).

By virtue of their voluntary nature, professional organizations vary in size. McPherson (1983) found that an organization’s size is linked to its overall strength and success. For example, larger organizations tend to have a more stable membership. Moreover, organizations that “provide a service, produce a product, or attempt social change” benefit from being larger, because “most tasks are more easily accomplished by many collaborating workers” (McPherson, 1983, p. 1047). Larger
organizations are generally stronger, because membership is viewed as a resource. This is especially true given all kinds of organizations, professional and otherwise, require their members to contribute resources (Knoke & Prensky, 1984). Moreover, organizational resources include, but may not be limited to, participation, labor, information and expertise, access to target groups, and money/membership dues (Knoke & Prensky, 1984).

Some professional organizations offer smaller groups that represent sub-specializations that can serve the purpose of making the organization more appealing to both current and potential members. Due to the diversity of many professional fields, organizations frequently offer opportunities for specialized interactions (Jacob et al., 2013). A prominent avenue for meeting this need is the establishment of what have come to be known as special interest groups or SIGs. Special interest groups, “provide more specialized opportunities for smaller groups by creating networking opportunities and exposure to new research, collaboration and access to experts in similar fields” (Jacob et al, 2013). The SIG phenomenon was also described by Bucher & Strauss (1961). They referred to SIGs as ‘segments’ and noted that these groups “tend to take on the character of social movements” (p. 325). Moreover, Bucher & Strauss (1961) noted that these segments often, “develop distinctive identities and a sense of the past and goals for the future, and they organize activities which will secure an institutional position and implement their distinctive missions” (p. 325). Individual SIGs or segments may vary in their relative levels of development and influence. The segments within a profession or professional
organization are frequently at different levels and phases of development and engaging in activities relevant to their standing within the larger organization (Bucher & Strauss, 1961). Moreover, SIGs can help members of professional organizations develop their unique professional identities.

Special Interest Group activity within professional organizations has also been examined from the perspectives of membership benefits (Browne, 1976), organizational maintenance (Browne, 1977), and members’ voluntary actions (Smith, 1975). Although these organizations produce benefits that are meant for group consumption, others are meant for the benefit of individual members and may include: insurance programs, legal representation, research assistance, and social functions (Browne, 1976, p. 258). The benefits offered, though, vary from group to group and specialization to specialization. Moreover, when studying organizational maintenance, the leaders of professional organizations recognize that the survival of the group depends upon their own ability to meet the needs of their members (Browne, 1977). Similarly, Smith (1975) explicitly defines the member actions that underlie involvement in professional organizations and related groups. First, Smith (1975) defines voluntary action as “the action of individuals, collectivities, or settlements insofar as it is characterized primarily by seeking of psychic benefits (e.g., belongingness, esteem, self-actualization” (p. 247). Another key aspect defining voluntary action is that it is discretionary in nature. In other words, voluntary action is not determined primarily by biosocial factors, coercive factors, or direct remuneration (Smith, 1975).
Members’ commitment to the organizations in which they form voluntary associations has also been a focus of considerable research (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Cutler, 1976; Gruen, Summers, & Acito, 2000; Hanks, 1981; Houglan & Wood, 1980; Knoke, 1981; McPherson & Lockwood, 1980; and Palisi and Jacobson, 1977). Historically, a significant gender difference has consistently been found in association membership with males having higher membership rates across age groups (Cutler, 1976). Moreover, membership rates and stability have traditionally increased with age (McPherson & Lockwood, 1980). It is important to recognize that, since little research has been devoted to this topic in the last 25 years, it is unclear if and, to what extent, these findings stand today. In spite of this, certain factors have been found to influence the membership and participation rates of younger persons. In his study on youth membership in voluntary associations, Hanks (1981) found that, “independent of social class background, ability, academic performance, and self-esteem, participation in voluntary organizations in adolescence is related to the form and extent of people’s participation in political activities in adulthood” (p. 221).

Additional inquiry into age differences in association membership has focused on generational trends. Specifically, Wiley (2015) examined the membership trends of four groups: the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. The Silent Generation was defined as members born between 1900 and 1945, whereas the Baby Boomer group included individuals born from 1945 to 1965. Moreover, Generation X spanned 1965 to 1980, and Millennials includes individuals born between 1980 and 2000 (Wiley, 2015). This study also examined how the
primary attributes of each group impacted voluntary membership in professional organizations. For example, members of the Silent Generation likely fought in WWII or were children during it. Silent Generation males were typically breadwinners and women were homemakers (Wiley, 2015). As such, the values of sacrifice and hardship led to a strong work ethic as well as comportment that were disciplined and respectful of authority. These attributes resulted in a highly engaged, satisfied membership that is “less familiar with technology and digital channels of communication” (Wiley, 2015, p. 3).

The Baby Boomer generation continues to assert a strong presence in associations and, “by virtue of its size and average age, this generation exerts considerable influence politically, economically, and culturally” (Wiley, 2015, p. 3). Like the Silent Generation, this group tends to be heavily involved in professional societies. Unlike the Silent Generation, this group is less fearful of and adaptable to new technologies (Wiley, 2015). Although Baby Boomers also possess a strong work ethic, when compared to the Silent Generation they are “more likely to question authority and challenge the establishment” (Wiley, 2015, p. 4). Like the Silent Generation, Wiley (2015) found that Baby Boomers tend to be more satisfied with their organization membership when compared to the younger peers.

The two younger generations represent a departure from their predecessors. Generation X grew up in a time of social change and often holds more liberal views toward careers and family. They also tend to be independent, self-reliant, and more questioning of authority (Wiley, 2015). They were the first generation to grow up
with technology and are generally more comfortable with it. This generation also focuses on finding a work-life balance and strongly values family life (Wiley, 2015). Lastly, Wiley (2015) found that “when Generation Xers opt not to join a society, it is most frequently due to cost (p. 4).

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are now an even larger group than the Baby Boomers (Wiley, 2015). Unlike the aforementioned groups, “technology drives their professional and personal lives” (Wiley, 2015 p. 4). Millennials are goal-oriented and tend to value higher education. The cost of higher education and economic challenges often means that members of this generation are less economically independent than their forbearers. Millennials also value parental attention and self-expression, and this results in confidence that may be said to border on a sense of entitlement (Wiley, 2015). This study also found that, “compared with people of other generations, a higher percentage of Millennials have not been a member of a professional society or trade association in the past 12 months” (Wiley, 2015, p. 4).

In addition to studies on voluntary associations in general, special interest group member commitment, and the impact of age on membership, research has also focused specifically on student membership. According to Cutler (1976), “older and younger persons belong to fewer voluntary associations and participate to a lesser extent in those to which they do belong than members of the middle age strata” (p. 54). One could reasonably extrapolate that “younger persons” may refer to student members, whereas “older” persons refer to mid-career members and those
approaching or in retirement. Desmond & Symens (1997) found that although “membership in professional organizations is an important aspect of the professional development of graduate students”, many “do not belong to professional organizations or delay membership until late in their graduate student careers when they are about to enter the job market” (p 180). Additionally, involvement in professional organizations also provides graduate students with opportunities to learn about and participate in various activities that lead to professionalization including: publishing, participation in networking, learning how to write effect grants, preparing curriculum vitae, participating in mentoring relationships, attending annual meetings and conferences, and participating in other career development activities (Brown & Hanson, 2003; Desmond & Symens, 1997; Hall, 1993; Hickson III, 2006; Mata, Latham, & Ransome, 2010; and Thomas, Inniss-Richter, Mata, & Cottrell, 2013). Additionally, some professional organizations offer opportunities for participation in virtual learning communities (Allan & Lewis, 2006) through both social media and other forums.

The Association of Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) has not escaped these generational trends and continues to seek explanations of and solutions for these membership problems with the hope of strengthening the organization and promoting sustained leadership. This chapter will examine the foundational social psychological research on group membership and focus, more specifically, on membership in professional associations and what constitutes strong organizational membership. Potential attributes of an association’s strength and
organizational health include membership retention/attrition which, in turn, translates into the number of members an association can rely on to pay dues and, thus, bring in revenue (Harris & Culbertson, 2009). Another possible attribute of a strong professional organization is the number of members who are actively involved (Inzeo, 2009). Involvement can take on many forms including volunteering, participating in governance activities, and providing ad hoc service (Inzeo, 2009). Within AECT, common involvement includes holding an office or leadership positions, publishing in one of the association’s publications, attending/presenting at the organization’s annual conference, facilitating conference sessions, and reviewing proposals. Encouraging members to participate in these kinds of activities can serve the dual purpose of aiding succession planning by preparing members for future roles in the organization through leadership skills development (Patterson & Pointer, 2007).

Arguably as important as members’ active involvement and service is their commitment to the organization as evidenced by their ongoing membership. Membership rates are indicative of organizations’ relevance and solvency. As a result, organizations actively pursue membership recruitment and retention activities as well as member participation, volunteer management, and fundraising (Faulkner, 2005). Organizations have also sought to examine how they can remain valuable and relevant to the target demographics that they were originally founded to serve (Caraveli, 2007; Fox, Anderson, Cufaude, Nichols, Pelov, Shark, & Fuller, 2003).
Other Factors Surrounding Membership in Professional Associations

In order to promote membership growth, recruitment, and retention, organizations have undertaken marketing campaigns and initiatives aimed at asserting their value. These may include efforts to assess the current marketplace as well as the image of the organization with the intent of identifying goals and action steps (Lamb-Mechanick & Block, 1984). Marketing initiatives may also include a shift toward open access to the scholarly journals and other publications offered by the association (Fox, 2007). Through these actions, organizations seek to adopt demand-driven models to provide existing and potential members the benefits and value of membership. For younger members, this may coincide with a demand for tangible services as well as evidence that association membership is enhancing and advancing them in their career endeavors (Funk, 2006). Moreover, as consumers, members of professional organizations are provided the opportunity to customize their products, and services to match their individual wants and needs (Steen, 2005).

Theoretical Basis for Membership in Professional Associations

Although membership in professional societies a complex topic in many ways, psychological theories can shed light on what organizations can do to both attract and retain members (Skarlicki, Lucas, Prociuk, & Latham, 2000). To this end, psychological research and theories can contribute to the understanding and solving of problems related to membership retention (Skarlicki et al., 2000). Two prominent psychological theories that lend themselves to the topic of membership in
professional organizations and prevalent in research on this topic include both Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974).

**Social Exchange Theory**

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) is a prominent social psychological theory. Specifically, it looks at motivations for making voluntary associations. Blau (1964) noted that social exchange is limited to, “actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others and that cease when these expected reactions are not forthcoming” (p. 6). Furthermore, “social exchange can be observed everywhere once we are sensitized by this conception to it, not only in market relations but also in friendship and even in love” (p. 88). Much of the existing research on group and intergroup interaction and voluntary affiliation is girded by the assumptions of social exchange. The concept of “incentives” and “incentive systems” are at the forefront of much of this literature (Browne, 1976; Cafferata, 1979; Clark & Wilson, 1961).

Browne (1976), for example, in his study of the benefits of membership, found that membership dues are expressly exchanged for the acquisition of goods and services. Moreover, he found that, “members do behave rationally in the pursuit of valued and usable services or goods. That is, to say, organizational membership has positive utility to the individual members and they belong because they appraise the group in terms of that utility” (Browne, 1976, p. 259).

The exchange paradigm and, specifically, the conceptualization of social behavior as an exchange is rooted in behaviorism and behavioral psychology.
Homans (1958) noted that the kind of exchange that goes on with the social behavior of humans is not wholly unlike the behavioral reinforcement observed in Skinner’s operant conditioning of pigeons. A key difference, though, is that social behavior between humans is mutual. In a dyad, each person involved in the social exchange is, “emitting behavior reinforced to some degree by the behavior of the other” (Homans, 1958, p. 598).

Knoke (1986) expanded upon the idea of social behavior as an exchange by focusing on incentive systems inherent in associations and interest groups. Specifically, Knoke (1986) noted the, “organizational provision of incentives is the major economic exchange mechanism through which a collective secures the resources necessary for its maintenance and growth” (p. 10). Although economic exchange mechanisms readily come to mind, affective incentives such as social gatherings and friendships can also be in play (Knoke, 1986). The conceptualization of social exchange as a construct driven by incentives is found throughout the research literature (Clark & Wilson, 1961, Knoke & Wright-Isak, 1982; Zald & Jacobs, 1978). Incentives and incentive systems are discussed in greater depth later on in this paper.

Befu (1977) explored how cultural factors can impact social exchange including: sociocultural context and rules of exchange. First, social exchange does not occur within a vacuum. Befu (1977) noted that, sociocultural context, or cultural context, refers to the cultural and social environment within which social exchange takes place. Next, the rules of exchange “refer to the specific cultural rules governing
what should or may be given or returned in a given type of situation defined in terms of the specific relationship between the participants, occasion for the exchange, etc.” (p. 260).

**Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974), or Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior (Tajfel, 1979), is also very prominent in social psychological research. Alternately known as the “social identity approach”, it refers to “a set of concepts, ideas, and principles contained in social identity theory and self-categorization theory” (Potmes & Branscome, 2010). Social Identity deals with “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Its focus on identity in the context of intergroup behavior makes it a viable theoretical model to apply to the study of professional associations. According to Social Identity Theory, or SIT for short, individuals have a tendency to classify themselves and those around them into social categories such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). According to Tajfel (2010), “the aim of a theory of intergroup behavior is to help us to understand certain selected uniformities of social behavior” (p. 68). Social Identity Theory has contributed to social psychological research and the study of interpersonal and group behavior by examining various
intergroup phenomena including group identification, intergroup bias and
discrimination, and social identity in multicultural settings (Brown, 2000).

Social identity is a function of both identification and social classification. As
such, an understanding of these social constructions is essential. According to
Ashforth & Mael (1989), social classification “enables the individual to locate or
define him- or herself in the social environment” (p. 21). Similarly, through social
interaction, or interaction with others, a person comes to establish his/her place as
both an individual and part of a larger collective (Jenkins, 2004). Furthermore, social
identification can also be viewed as the “perception of oneness with or belongingness
to some human aggregate” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21). Accordingly, Jenkins
(2004) notes, “if identification is a necessary prerequisite for human life as we
understand it, the reverse is also true. Individual identity—embodied in selfhood—is
not a meaningful proposition in isolation from the human world of other people” (p.
18). Social identity theorists assert the importance of identity within organizations. As
such, they define organizations as institutions that possess the following
characteristics: (a) they have members; (b) members pursue explicit objectives that
serve to identify the organization; (c) there are criteria for identifying and recruiting
members; (d) labor as well as specialized tasks and functions are performed by
individual members; and (e) there is a recognized pattern of decision-making and task
allocation (Jenkins, 2004, p. 142-43). In a professional organization such as AECT,
self-categorization and identification can vary from leader, participant, contributor,
author, researcher, editor, student, agitator, etc. The aforementioned literature
suggests that individuals’ reasons for personal identification are numerous and vary both within and between organizations.

Social Identity Theory has long been used a lens through which to examine intergroup behavior including organizational identification and membership (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bhattacharya, Hayagreeva, & Glynn, 1995; Tajfel, 1979). The application of Social Identity Theory to intergroup behavior has gone in various directions including examining intergroup discrimination (both against and in favor), conflicts of interest, and self-esteem (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Similarly, Ahmed (2007) found intergroup bias resulting from interactions between what were termed in-group and out-group members. Factors impacting this intergroup bias included real or perceived favoritism or higher expectations of in-group members as well as social distance (Ahmed, 2007).

**Incentive Systems & Membership**

Clark & Wilson (1961) explored organizations’ active use of incentive systems. Specifically, they found that, “organizations distribute incentives to individuals in order to induce them to contribute actively” and that “aspects of organizational behavior and change are explained by exploring the differing consequences of different incentive systems (Clark & Wilson, 1961, p. 129). Specifically, they explored three different incentive systems including: material, solidary, and purposive. The comparison of these systems, though, was rooted in three key premises or assumptions. First, Clark & Wilson (1961) noted that,
“incentives by definition are scarce. Unless a commodity, a status, or an activity is relatively rare, it provides no inducement to anyone.” Also, these incentives, both tangible and intangible, are not distributed equally and one incentive may have a greater impact upon members than others (p. 132). Secondly, “an organization’s incentive output must not exceed its available incentive resources” (p. 133). Lastly, the organization’s executive will, “maintain his organization” by “attempting to obtain a net surplus of incentives and by distributing incentives to elicit contributions of activity” (Clark & Wilson, 1961, p. 133).

Once these premises are established, the three types of incentives can be better understood. The first type, *material incentives*, is consistent with the aforementioned elements of Social Exchange Theory. Material incentives include: “tangible rewards; that is, rewards that have a monetary value or can be easily translated into ones that have” (p. 134). The second type of incentive established by Clark & Wilson (1961) is *solidary incentives*. These incentives are “basically intangible; that is, the reward has no monetary value and cannot easily be translated into one that has” (p. 134). These incentives vary greatly and can include socializing, sense of group membership, and social status association with membership (Clark & Wilson, 1961). These types, called *purposive incentives*, are also intangible. They are different from solidary incentives in that they stem from the stated ends or goals of the organization rather than from associating with others. Manifestations of purposive incentives include the elimination of corruptions, the adoption of certain laws or practices, or the beautification of the community (Clark & Wilson, 1961). One could argue, though,
that both solidary and purposive incentives are more in line with social identity, whereas material incentives are more in line with social exchange.

Consistent with incentives and social exchange, March & Simon (1958) focused on the role of motivation and voluntary organizational membership. Specifically, they noted, “decisions to participate in the organization—either to enter or to withdraw—are a major class of decisions made by the organizational members that focus attention on the motivational problems involved in using human beings to perform organizational tasks (p. 110). They mentioned incentives but, rather, referred to them as inducements (March & Simon, 1958). In this vein, they suggest, in order to motivate participants, organizations should strive for a balance between inducements and contributions.

**Summary**

The current review of literature indicates that profession associations hold important roles in society that are maintained by their members. These include establishing codes of ethics, overseeing certification standards, and promoting scholarship. The membership roles of professional associations are derived from the professions they represent. As such, maintaining and growing membership is a leading concern for the long-term sustainability and relevance of professional organizations. The relevance of professional organizations is typically conceptualized in terms of two social psychological perspectives including Social Exchange Theory and Social Identity Theory. Each of these theories examines what aspects of
association membership lead to continued participation. In the context of voluntary associations, Social Exchange Theory asserts that the decision of individuals to join and maintain membership contingent on rewards. This theory holds that the rewards of membership must outweigh the cost of joining or renewing for an organization to maintain its rolls. On the other hand, Social Identity Theory examines how one finds value in the intangible, social aspects of membership such as a sense of belonging, interpersonal connection, and the satisfaction associated with being a contributing member of the organization. This review of literature also examined other aspects impacting membership in professional organizations including changing member demographics, a trend toward open access organizational resources, and competition with related organizations.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The goal of this study was to investigate the factors influencing membership in the Association of Educational Communication & Technology (AECT) by examining what factors influence graduate students’ decisions of whether or not to maintain membership in AECT. To investigate this topic, three subgroups within the larger AECT membership were surveyed including: (a) current graduate student members, (b) former graduate student members who were no longer members of AECT, and (c) current professional members of AECT who were also members as graduate students. In addition to the surveys, volunteers from within each subgroup were selected to participate in individual, semi-structured interviews to further narrow and investigate graduate students’ reasons for maintaining and/or ending their membership in the organization. Due to their prevalence in the reviewed research, the design and implementation of this study were guided by both Social Exchange and Social Identity theories.

For the current study, a mixed-method design featuring a series of surveys accompanied by a semi-structured interview component addressed the research questions and hypotheses. Again, the survey questions were mainly guided by the assumptions of Social Exchange Theory, whereas the semi-structured interview questions were primarily rooted in Social Identity Theory. Research questions and hypotheses are outlined within the study’s methodology. The procedures are outlined in the following sections: (a) Sampling and Procedures, (b) Variables, (c)
Instrumentation, (d) Data Analysis, and (d) Human Participants and Ethics Precautions.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

**Research Questions.**

1) Why do graduate student members initially join AECT?

2) Why do individuals continue their membership in AECT?

3) Why do individuals discontinue their memberships?

**Hypothesis Based on Social Identity Theory.** Participants who report a combination of ‘socially’-focused reasons for joining (i.e., professor/mentor recommendation, opportunities for networking, division participation, convention participation, etc.) are more likely to maintain membership in the organization and express intentions for maintaining future membership.

**Hypothesis Based on Social Exchange Theory.** Participants who report greater value in opportunities for tangible benefits provided by AECT (i.e., discounts, journal subscriptions, etc.) and/or report that the benefits they reap from membership outweigh the costs will express positive intentions for future membership.

**Sampling and Procedures**

The target populations for this study were current and former members of AECT—specifically three subgroups of the organization including: (a) those who currently were current graduate student members, (b) those who were current professional and were also graduate student members, and (c) past graduate student
members who were no longer members of AECT. Participants were identified through AECT’s membership database of current and former members. The entire current graduate student membership, which at the time of this study made up approximately one-third of AECT’s total membership, were invited to participate in the survey. Also, the entire current professional membership whom was graduate student members was also invited to participate. Lastly, a survey was sent out the entire population of former members who were active in the organization as graduate students. Although the members of each of these groups were invited to participate via email, they were also given the option of completing a hard copy of the measure. No one took advantage of this option.

Each of the three survey forms included the following appeal for additional voluntary participation: “We plan to follow up with some respondents by email or phone. May we contact you? If so, please indicate your preferred contact method by filling in the box with your email address, Skype address, or phone number.” Of the participants who volunteered in response to this statement, selected volunteers were contacted for a semi-structured follow-up interview. To avoid selection bias, every seventh volunteer was initially contacted. In the even that one of these individuals did not respond after two attempts, the next person on the list was contacted. The semi-structured interview were designed according to the central themes of Social Identity Theory including: “Why do you belong to AECT?” and “What do you feel you need to learn more and become engaged in AECT?” Central themes form Social Exchange
Theory were also included in the survey questions—particularly on the current member surveys (e.g., “What benefits of membership are most appealing to you?”).

Prior to sending out the surveys, several steps were taken to help ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument. First, each survey was disseminated to at least five individuals fitting the target population for a thorough review of items. Minor changes were made based on verbal and written feedback. Next, each of the three surveys was piloted by sending them to 25 members of the sample population. This provided an opportunity to address technological difficulties associated with the administration of the online surveys. The final instruments were then sent out to the remaining population with a request for participation through the AECT listserv. The researcher worked with AECT’s Director of Electronic Services to separate the both former and current members of the organization into groups for each of the surveys. The surveys were administered via Survey Monkey. The first page of each of the surveys included information regarding informed consent (see the informed consent document included in the appendix). The bottom of the first page of each of the surveys included the informed consent information, and individuals were instructed to respond to one of two items—either giving consent or refusing to. Those individuals choosing the latter option were redirected to a page thanking them for their time. Those providing consent were directed to the remainder of the survey instrument.

In advance, an email was sent to all potential participants prior to the study to serve as notice of the forthcoming research study. Additionally, two email reminders
were sent approximately a week apart after the initial distribution of the survey instruments. The purpose of these follow-up emails was to serve as a reminder for individuals who had not yet completed their respective surveys. Additionally, efforts were also be taken to increase response rates including personalizing the emails and instrument instructions (e.g., using participant’s first and last names in the instructions and instrument). Although efforts were made to ensure that the survey was easily accessible, participants will also be given the option to complete a written copy of the instrument or over the phone. Again, no one took advantage of this option. Links to the surveys were also posted on AECT’s individual division social media pages (e.g., Facebook) as a way of increasing participation.

Variables

The predictor variables for this study included four main areas: (a) professional identity, (b) AECT membership exchange, (c) institutional and/or collegial influences, and (d) demographic variables. Predictor variables (a) and (b) are directly related to the suppositions of social exchange theory and social identity theory. The two remaining predictor variables were based more on personal and organization observations as well as a review of the relevant research literature.

Instrumentation

Three surveys were created and designed in conjunction with the leadership of AECT for the purposes of this study. Although they are very similar to one another, each of the three surveys varies slightly and was created to assess a different
subgroup’s reasons for retaining or ending their membership in AECT. The three retention surveys are titled: 1) Current Professional Members Who Were Graduate Student Members; 2) Former Graduate Student Members; and 3) Graduate Student Members. Each survey also asked about demographic information (age bracket; gender; nationality, work setting, etc.), reasons for initially joining the organization, and whether or not the respondents would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview by phone or email. All three measures can be found in the Appendices of this study. As previously stated, prior to sending out the survey, several steps were taken to add to the reliability and validity of the instrument. First, each survey was disseminated to at least five individuals fitting the target population for a thorough review of items. Then changes were made based on verbal and written feedback. The semi-structured interviews were centered around a combination of open-ended questions that explored themes related to the participants’ professional identity and perceived benefits as related to their choice of ending or maintaining membership in AECT.

Data Analysis

To facilitate analysis of the data, responses to each of the three surveys were statistically analyzed using Survey Monkey’s embedded platform. First, preliminary analyses were obtained to provide basic descriptive statistics for each of the three respondent groups. The semi-structured interviews were recorded via the Tape-A-Call mobile application, and the participants’ responses were then professionally
transcribed using Rev.com. The semi-structured survey transcripts were analyzed thematically. Word clouds were generated for each of the open-ended survey questions in order to determine frequent words and phrases. The open-ended survey questions were coded for key terms. Because word clouds examine prevalence only, excerpts from the various interview questions were also included to help provide context to the key terms. These themes across the three survey populations were then compared and contrasted in relation to the research questions and hypotheses.

**Human Participants and Ethics Precautions**

The research methodology described in this section was run through and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Morehead State University and also reviewed internally by AECT. An informed consent letter was included at the beginning of each survey to ensure that participants are aware of their rights and know whom to contact if they have any questions or concerns. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous and would in no way impact their relationship with AECT or, in the case of current graduate students, their home universities or professors.

**Limitations**

Several limitations were apparent prior to the beginning this study. One limitation of this study was that the three groups of respondents were graduate student members of AECT during different eras. One group was comprised of current
graduate student members, whereas the other two groups were comprised of former graduate student members who held that status at different points throughout the organization’s history. For example, some former graduate student members were early career professionals, whereas others may have been graduate students 35 years ago or more. As such, they likely had very different experiences as graduate students that may have impacted their decisions to either maintain membership or leave the organization. For example, the Graduate Student Assembly (Special Interest Group) is relatively new as is also the incorporation of social media into the graduate student member experience.

A few additional limitations were noted as the sampling and other study procedures commenced. For example, the distribution lists created for the three survey groups were pulled from the larger AECT membership database. In a few instances, individual members were assigned to the wrong group (e.g., a current graduate student member placed in the former graduate student member distribution list). This may have occurred due to the changeable nature of membership status. For example, if a graduate student member had let his membership lapse for a week or two or even graduated during the time the distribution lists were created but then renewed prior to receiving the actual survey, he would have been assigned the wrong instrument. This issue could have also stemmed from respondents’ self-identification. For example, one individual included in the Current Professional Members group worked as a professor but was, at the same time, a current graduate student pursuing
her Ed.D. Although an argument can be made that this individual simultaneously belongs to two of the survey groups, she likely received one survey over the other based on the profile she set up on the AECT website. Although this appeared to have occurred but infrequently, it is still worth noting.

As is the case with qualitative research methods, it is also important not to assume that the survey respondents were representative of the entire group they were assigned to. For example, those members of the Current Professional Members group who took the time to respond to the survey and/or volunteered to participate in the interviews may be some of the more involved, committed members of the organization. As such, they would not be representative of the entire group.

Lastly, this study was specifically designed to address membership retention issues of graduate students within AECT in order to inform and shape ongoing organizational development efforts. As such, the conclusions and prescriptions that come out of this study may not be appropriate to apply to other contexts and thus should be considered with caution.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors influencing membership in the Association of Educational Communication & Technology (AECT). This study sought to understand what factors influence graduate students’ decisions of whether or not to maintain membership in AECT. Participants included current and former members of AECT drawn from the organization’s membership database.
Invitations to participate were sent via email. The instruments used for this study included surveys created by both the leadership of AECT and the investigator in order to meet the purposes of this study. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone with a subset of participants from each of the three subgroups who volunteered to provide further information. Data analysis used to investigate the research questions and hypotheses included descriptive statistics and a qualitative analysis focusing on identifying themes and their contexts from semi-structured interviews.
Chapter 4

Results

Overview of the Study

In order to obtain a full picture of the factors influencing graduate student membership in AECT, the survey data were analyzed quantitatively with a focus on descriptive statistical trends, while the semi-structured survey responses were organized and interpreted qualitatively with a focus on themes. Specifically, the data obtained from each of the three surveys were first analyzed to obtain descriptive statistics including respondents’ age and gender. The semi-structured survey transcripts were coded and analyzed thematically. Specifically, word clouds were generated for each of the open-ended survey questions in order to visually represent key words and phrases. Because word clouds examine prevalence only, excerpts from the various interview questions were also included to help provide context to the key terms. Emergent themes from across the three survey populations were then compared and contrasted in relation to the research questions and hypotheses.

Review of Surveys & Technological Ease

Several steps were taken to help ensure the clarity of the surveys as well as to troubleshoot any technical issues that participants might encounter as they accessed and completed the online instruments. The three surveys were first piloted by sending them to 25 members of the sample population. This provided an opportunity to address technological difficulties associated with the administration of the online
surveys. One significant issue was discovered through this process. Namely, the informed consent page did not come up for several individuals and they were instead taken directly to the first question. This was corrected in the Survey Monkey program before the actual surveys were sent out by AECT.

Prior to sending out the surveys, several steps were taken to help ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument. First, each survey was disseminated to at least five individuals fitting the target population for a thorough review of items. Minor changes were made based on verbal and written feedback. The final versions of the instruments were then sent out by AECT to the three participant groups with a request for participation.

**Surveys**

The three surveys were sent out through the pre-existing AECT distribution lists. Although the three surveys asked some similar questions, each was specifically tailored for its target audience (See Appendix B-D for each of the three survey instruments). In order to disseminate the surveys, individual databases were constructed from the main AECT membership rolls. This allowed the researcher to capture a large pool of potential participants for each of the three groups. The three groups included: 1) current professional members who were also members at some point as graduate students, 2) current graduate student members, and 3) former members who where members at some point as graduates students. In order to obtain a large enough pool of the latter group, AECT’s Director of Electronic Services
pulled names of former members from the last three years.

The task of dividing members into these three target groups was somewhat complex. The current professional member group \((N=871)\) included both regular and affiliate members. The current graduate student member group \((N=961)\) included any member with “student” associated with their account. This group also included student members or AECT affiliates. Lastly, the former graduate student member group \((N=1147)\) included individuals who ended their membership over the past three years. It did not include affiliate members. This group may have included individuals who only identified as students in order to register for the annual conference and may have never intended to renew thereafter. As such, constructing a usable list of former graduate student members proved somewhat challenging. For example, the former graduate student member group, in particular, was not guaranteed to have the individuals’ updated contact information, so the number of individuals who actually received the link to the survey may have been considerably smaller. Of the initial participant pool, the response rate (e.g., number of members who completed their respective surveys) was as follows: current professional member respondents \((N=105)\), current graduate student member respondents \((N=131)\), and former graduate student member respondents \((N=137)\).
Quantitative Analysis

General Descriptive Statistics & Demographic Findings

Participants were drawn from both the current and past AECT membership database. Each of the three groups represented a heterogeneous sample of individuals tied together by their current or past membership status. Although gender is reported jointly, the remaining descriptive statistics will be reported separately.

**Gender.** Individuals who responded to each of the three surveys were asked several common questions. One of those was to identify his/her gender. This question yielded varying responses by group (see Table 1). Both the current graduate student and former graduate student groups had a significantly higher response rate from women, whereas the current professional member group was more evenly split.

Table 1

*Gender Distribution by Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>% Male</th>
<th>% Female</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Professional Members</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Graduate Student Members</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Graduate Student Members</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age.** The current professional members group included any current member of AECT who does not identify as a graduate student. As reported above, a roughly
equal number of male and female current professional members responded to this survey (see Table 1). The gender distribution was more equal for this group than it was for either of the two graduate student groups. These groups indicated a greater percentage of female respondents. Just as this group differed from the two graduate student groups in gender distribution, it also differed in the age distribution of its respondents (see Table 1). The majority of respondents in the current professional member group were over 40, and more than half were over 50. One might expect this group’s members to be older as a whole, since its respondents were no longer in graduate school at the time of the survey and many had been active in the field for years. Conversely, the current graduate student members (see Table 2) and former graduate student members (see Table 3) were younger overall, but they were still older, overall, than traditional graduate student populations. Specifically, 48.86% of the current graduate student respondents were over age 40.
Figure 1. Age Distribution for Current Professional Members.
Figure 2. Age Distribution for Current Graduate Student Members.
Figure 3. Age Distribution for Former Graduate Student Members.

Taken together, the demographic findings on gender and age indicate that the younger constituencies of AECT, at least those participating in this study, were more strongly represented by women.

Current Professional Members

In addition to the basic demographic questions, individuals in this group were asked to respond to items that explored various aspects of their membership in AECT. These included how long they had maintained membership in the organization, what their reasons were for initially joining AECT, and the nature of their current career positions.
The first dimension measured for this group of participants was their continuity of membership, that is, whether or not they had maintained continuous membership since their time as graduate student members (see Table 2). The majority of respondents (77.33%) in this group indicated that they had maintained continuous membership status since graduate school. Another 26.66% of respondents indicated they had discontinued their membership temporarily at one point or another. Answers provided to an open response survey item that further explored reasons respondents temporarily discontinued their membership is included in the Qualitative Analysis portion to this chapter.

Table 2

Membership Continuity of Current Professional Members Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>% Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Yes, I have been a continuous member since initially joining</td>
<td>77.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) No, I was a nonmember for one or more years immediately following my</td>
<td>13.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time as a graduate student member.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) No, I was a nonmember for one or more years during some other time(s).</td>
<td>13.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another dimension of membership explored in the surveys was members’ reasons for initially joining AECT. Seven options (see Table 3) were included in the surveys, and respondents were also given the opportunity to provide their own
reasons (see Figure 5). The top reasons for initially joining rated as “Somewhat” to “Very Important” by a largest percentage of respondents included: 1) Opportunity to participate in the AECT International Convention (86.67%); 2) Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor (80.95%); 3) Online and in-person networking with other professionals in my field (81.90%); 4) Access to professional journals and other publications (80.95%); and 5) Opportunity to participate in one or more AECT Divisions (71.43%). The responses were ranked not solely by the greatest percentage of respondents endorsing the reason as either “Somewhat” or “Very Important” but by a weighted average of importance. For example, although the option “Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor” had a lower total percentage than several other options, it was ranked second highest overall, because it had a very large percentage of individuals who endorsed it as “Very Important.” Again, respondents in this group were also given the option of providing “other reasons” they joined AECT. Their responses to this open response question are included in the Qualitative Analysis portion to this chapter (see Figure 5).
Table 3

*Current Professional Members’ Reasons for Initially Joining AECT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>60.95%</td>
<td>(105)</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to professional journals and other publications</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>40.95%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>(105)</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discounts on AECT/Springer professional books</td>
<td>36.19%</td>
<td>31.43%</td>
<td>21.90%</td>
<td>10.48%</td>
<td>(105)</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to participate in the AECT International Convention</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>31.43%</td>
<td>55.24%</td>
<td>(105)</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online and in-person networking with other professionals in my field</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>12.38%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>41.90%</td>
<td>(105)</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition discounts at Walden University</td>
<td>83.81%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>(105)</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to participate in one or more AECT Divisions</td>
<td>15.24%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>43.81%</td>
<td>27.62%</td>
<td>(105)</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to providing information on their gender, age, membership continuity, and reasons for initially joining, the survey also asked respondents from the current professional members’ group about their current career positions (see Table 4). The overwhelming majority of respondents in this group indicated they currently hold career positions in higher education (71.43%). These would include individuals working in the professoriate, those holding administrative positions, and those working in university-based instructional design/e-learning positions. It is important to acknowledge that just over 10% of respondents identified as students. Although these individuals maybe would have been a better fit in the Current Graduate Student Members group, those who responded may have identified more with their current careers than their educational endeavors. Additionally, this subset of respondents may have included individuals who, for the sake of membership, pay regular member dues, because their student status is less than full-time. The fact that a sizeable number of students responded to the Current Professional Members survey may indicate a flaw in the survey distribution/grouping methodology.
Table 4

*Current Professional Members’ Career Positions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Position</th>
<th>%Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional – PK-12 Education</td>
<td>11.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional – Higher Education</td>
<td>71.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional – Business Industry</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>10.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Current Graduate Student Members**

In addition to demographic questions, individuals in this group were asked to respond to items that explored various aspects of their membership including their reasons were for initially joining AECT, whether they intended to continue membership into the future and, if not, why they plan to discontinue their membership after graduation. The first dimension measured for this group of participants’ was their reasons for initially joining AECT. Although seven options (see Table 5) were included in the surveys, respondents were also given the opportunity to provide their own reasons (see Figure 6). The top reasons for initially joining rated as “Somewhat” to “Very Important” by a largest percentage of respondents included: 1) Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or
mentor (92.37%); 2) Access to professional journals and other publications (80.15%); 3) Online and in-person networking with other professionals in my field (79.38%); 4) Opportunity to participate in the AECT International Convention (70.23%); and 5) Opportunity to participate in one or more AECT Divisions (67.94%). Respondents in this group were also given the option of providing “other reasons” they joined AECT. Their responses to this open response question are included in the Qualitative Analysis portion to this chapter (see Figure 6).
Table 5

*Current Graduate Student Members’ Reasons for Joining AECT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor</td>
<td>4.58% (6)</td>
<td>3.05% (4)</td>
<td>24.43% (32)</td>
<td>67.94% (89)</td>
<td>(131)</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to professional journals and other publications</td>
<td>4.58% (6)</td>
<td>15.27% (20)</td>
<td>33.59% (44)</td>
<td>46.56% (61)</td>
<td>(131)</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discounts on AECT/ Springer professional books</td>
<td>33.59% (44)</td>
<td>26.72% (35)</td>
<td>25.19% (33)</td>
<td>14.50% (19)</td>
<td>(131)</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to participate in the AECT International Convention</td>
<td>10.69% (14)</td>
<td>19.08% (25)</td>
<td>31.30% (41)</td>
<td>38.93% (51)</td>
<td>(131)</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online and in-person networking with other professionals in my field</td>
<td>7.63% (10)</td>
<td>12.98% (17)</td>
<td>44.27% (58)</td>
<td>35.11% (51)</td>
<td>(131)</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition discounts at Walden University</td>
<td>80.92% (106)</td>
<td>9.92% (13)</td>
<td>1.53% (2)</td>
<td>7.63% (10)</td>
<td>(131)</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to participate in one or more AECT Divisions</td>
<td>16.79% (22)</td>
<td>15.27% (20)</td>
<td>47.33% (62)</td>
<td>20.61% (27)</td>
<td>(131)</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The future membership intentions of the current graduate student group were also explored (see Table 6). This question was included, in part, because internal research from AECT indicated that a large number of graduate student members were leaving the organization after only two years of membership (AECT, 2014). Of the current graduate students surveyed, only 14.5% indicated that they intended to end their membership upon completion of their degree. It is important to note, though, that individuals who took the time to participate in the survey may not be representative of the AECT’s student membership. Specifically, those graduate student members who are less engaged and/or ready to leave the organization may not have responded.

Table 6

Current Graduate Student Members’ Future Membership Intentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you plan to continue your membership after you complete your degree?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Former Graduate Student Members

In addition to demographic questions, individuals from the Former Graduate Student Members group were asked to respond to items that explored various aspects of their experiences as former members of AECT. These included their reasons for initially joining AECT, whether they intended to renew their membership at some point in the future and, if not, why. The first dimension measured for this group of
participants was reasons for initially joining AECT. Although the same seven options were provided to this group as the two previous groups (see Table 7), the Former Graduate Student Member respondents were also given the opportunity to provide their own reasons (see Figure 8). The top reasons for initially joining rated as “Somewhat” to “Very Important” by a largest percentage and a weighted average of responses included: 1) Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor (89.05%); 2) Access to professional journals and other publications (79.57%); 3) Online and in-person networking with other professionals in my field (62.05%); 4) Opportunity to participate in the AECT International Convention (60.59%); and 5) Opportunity to participate in one or more AECT Divisions (51.83%). Respondents in this group were also given the option of providing “other reasons” they joined AECT. Their responses to this open response question are included in the Qualitative Analysis portion to this chapter (see Figure 8).
Table 7

*Former Graduate Student Members’ Reasons for Initially Joining AECT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor</td>
<td>6.57% (9)</td>
<td>4.38% (6)</td>
<td>27.74% (38)</td>
<td>61.31% (84)</td>
<td>(137)</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to professional journals and other publications</td>
<td>8.76% (12)</td>
<td>11.68% (16)</td>
<td>37.23% (51)</td>
<td>42.34% (58)</td>
<td>(137)</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discounts on AECT/Springer professional books</td>
<td>33.58% (46)</td>
<td>34.31% (47)</td>
<td>21.90% (30)</td>
<td>10.22% (14)</td>
<td>(137)</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to participate in the AECT International Convention</td>
<td>21.90% (30)</td>
<td>17.52% (24)</td>
<td>25.55% (35)</td>
<td>35.04% (48)</td>
<td>(137)</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online and in-person networking with other professionals in my field</td>
<td>18.98% (26)</td>
<td>18.98% (26)</td>
<td>36.50% (50)</td>
<td>25.55% (35)</td>
<td>(137)</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition discounts at Walden University</td>
<td>88.32% (121)</td>
<td>7.30% (10)</td>
<td>2.19% (3)</td>
<td>2.19% (3)</td>
<td>(137)</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to participate in one or more AECT Divisions</td>
<td>26.28% (36)</td>
<td>21.90% (30)</td>
<td>36.50% (50)</td>
<td>15.33% (21)</td>
<td>(137)</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Analysis

In addition to survey questions that yielded quantitative data on participants’ demographic characteristics, qualitative data was also collected in the form of two open response survey questions per group as well as a semi-structured interview for each of the three groups. The two open response questions posed to each group varied slightly and were optional. For example, one asked, “Are there other reasons you joined AECT?” The prior question included a listing of the most common reasons, so only a portion of the respondents opted to provide additional, personal reasons above and beyond those already listed. Similarly, another open response question asked, “If you answered ‘no’ to the previous question, please tell us why you plan to discontinue your membership.” In this case, only the smaller subgroup of individuals who planned to leave AECT responded.

In order to explore the open response survey questions, word clouds were used to support theme-based content analyses of individual responses. According to McNaught & Lam (2010), “a word cloud is a special visualization of text in which the more frequently used words are effectively highlighted by occupying more prominence in the representation” (p. 630). In order to provide context to individual words and themes highlighted in the individual word clouds, specific passages including those words and themes were included to provide context.
Qualitative Analysis of Survey Open Response Questions

**Current Professional Members.** For those individuals in Current Professional Members group who indicated they had not maintained continuous membership, they were asked to provide reasons for why they chose to temporarily discontinue their membership. Common reasons provided by the respondents included a perceived cost prohibitive nature of membership and/or conference attendance, lack of institutional support, and/or that memberships in other professional organizations were of greater benefit to their research and career paths at the time (see Figure 4).

Commenting on the lack of importance or value placed on membership in AECT by one institution he/she worked for early on in his/her career, one respondent in the Current Professional Members group wrote, “The university that I first worked for did not prioritize this organization for faculty.” Another wrote, “My institution doesn't pay for memberships to professional organizations and the costs, for regular membership (vs. student membership), have been too high for me to afford out of pocket.” Another respondent commenting on his/her lack of personal funds wrote, “I didn't have the funds. Then professionally I needed to be attending other conferences.” Although an aberration, one respondent cited a very different reason. Namely, he/she indicated that his/her first experience with AECT was not ideal stating, “The conference was very unorganized.” Because this respondent is a current member, he/she presumably later recognized value in membership and returned to the organization.
Although Table 3 showed Current Professional Members’ rankings of why they initially joined AECT, additional reasons not listed in that survey question were captured in an open response item stating, “Are there other reasons you joined AECT? Please comment.” This question was optional. A total of 37 members from this group chose to provide additional reasons. A handful of those respondents opted to answers “no” (meaning they had no other reasons for joining) rather than just skipping the optional item. Twenty-one of those responses provided reasons that were unique from the previous question’s answer choices.

Common themes identified through this open response question that stood out from those included in the original question were: a) having opportunities to access and participate in research, b) staying up on trends and learning more about the field; and c) access to employment opportunities. In general, the reasons the Current Professional Members espoused for initially joining AECT had more to do with what they could gain from the organization or what the organization could do for them.
This is consistent with the suppositions of Social Exchange Theory and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Commenting on one of the reason options from question 6, one current professional member wrote,

The opportunity to participate in division [sic] while imjpo9rtant [sic] to me turned out not to be a factor because at the time it was very hard to break into the ‘inner sanctum’ and so opportunities were somewhat limited at the time.

Although this quote does not necessarily highlight a novel reason for initially joining AECT, it does provide potentially important context for this group’s time as graduate students. Remember, the Current Professional Members group, as a whole, is older than the other two groups. Although the questions do not specifically ask what years its members were graduates students, it does suggest that the real or perceived openness has varied over time. This makes sense given the fact that the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) division has only been in place since 2006. Prior to its inception, graduate students did not have a formal division home or broad portal outside of their professors through which to engage in organizational leadership.

A closer examination of individual responses helped to contextualize the other common reasons for joining including access/participation in research, learning more about the field, and access to employment opportunities. Consistent with the theme of learning more about the field, one respondent from the Current Professional Members group member wrote that AECT is a “key source of ongoing professional development and opportunity to share knowledge with other similar professionals
(i.e., academics, professors).” Consistent with these themes, another Current Professional Member noted similar reasons for initially joining including, “interaction with fellows [sic] members of AECT. Employment opportunities, research sources, technology and information updates.”

Figure 5

*Current Professional Members Group: Other Reasons for Joining AECT (Word Cloud of Open Response Themes)*

Current Graduate Student Members. Respondents from the Current Graduate Student Members group were also given the opportunity to respond to two open response questions as part of their survey. Again, responding to these questions was optional. Building off of the options given in the prior question that asked why they initially joined AECT (see Table 5), the first open response question asked, “Are there other reasons you joined AECT? Please Comment.” A total of 48 members from this group chose to provide additional reasons (see Figure 6). A handful of those respondents opted to answer “no” (meaning they had no other reasons for joining).
rather than just skip the optional item. Twenty-two of those responses provided reasons that were unique from the previous question’s answer choices.

Common themes emerging from this open response question included: (a) it was a requirement for their doctoral program; (b) to gain instructional design and/or experience in the field at large; and (c) to build one’s curriculum vita/scholarly credentials. The latter two themes may overlap slightly depending on the context of a student’s response. Although not identical, these reasons mirrored those provided by the Current Professional Members group.

Examining individual responses helped to contextualize these common themes. In response to this “other reasons for joining” question, one graduate student member wrote, “To keep current on research and practice.” Another noted, “Membership was a requirement of my first doctoral course in the field of Educational Technology.” Another student noted, “It was required as part of a graduate course to access publications offered by AECT.” Yet another student wrote, “I was in a small group that presented during the poster session. Some sort of presentation is a requirement for graduation.” In some cases, the requirement theme overlapped with two options from Question 4 (see Table 5). Namely, this open response theme could be seen as overlapping with the following stock reasons: (a) “Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor;” and (b) “Access to professional journals and other publications.” Specifically, some faculty members require membership so that their students have access to publications for their classes. Presumably, a subset of the professors who require membership for access to
publications also hope that this initial commitment will lead to students finding value in the organization. Others, though, require membership as a way to introduce their students to what they see as a valuable professional community and resource.

Other prominent open response themes included gaining experience in the field and building one’s professional credentials. One student noted that he/she joined in order “to meet Ph.D. program reps (representatives) at the conference.” That response could fall under the “networking” banner but could also fall in line with the theme of building one’s professional credentials. Another respondent wrote, “Make me learn better about what AECT is.” Yet another graduate student respondent summed up this theme well by writing, “Professionalism—I want to keep current and continue learning.” Unlike the themes found in the Current Professional Member group’s answers to the same open response item, access to employment opportunities did not emerge as a key theme for the Current Graduate Student Members group. The older age demographic of this group may suggest that many of the Current Graduate Student Members simultaneously hold career jobs while attaining their advanced degrees. This may not have been true when the Current Professional Members first joined AECT.
While the Current Professional Members group was asked why some among its ranks had temporarily discontinued their membership at one point or another over the years, the Current Graduate Student Members group was instead questioned about their future membership intentions. Unlike the previous questions about reasons for joining AECT, this open response item stood alone and had no previous answer options with which to overlap. As such, this item yielded a wider range or responses. Response themes varied greatly and included the following key themes: a) not feeling connected to the AECT community, b) not having time to get very involved, c) membership does not apply to the member’s current career path/needs or not sure whether it necessarily will following graduation, and d) anticipated ability to pay membership dues going forward.

A total of 24 members from this group chose to respond to this open response item. A few of those respondents opted to respond with “not applicable” rather than
just skip this optional item. As a result, a total of 21 respondents provided reasons they anticipated not renewing their membership going forward (see Figure 7). To this end, one member wrote,

I haven’t really the time to keep involved in the organization and currently I only get emails and the TechTrends. I have no sense of the community as a whole the way with other organizations I’m involved with, so I don’t know whether it is worth keeping a membership at this time.

Another respondent from the Current Graduate Student Members group added, “I’m really not sure whether or not I’d keep the membership. It depends on the type of field I end up in. I may be expected to join other professional groups.” Similarly, another student noted, “It’s more relevant to my academic graduate career. I probably won’t get recognition from continuing with AECT in a business/industry job.”

Another respondent expressed concerns about future membership costs noting, “Once the student rate disappears, unless I get a significantly better paying job, I will not be able to afford membership.” One other current student member noted that he/she needed more time in the organization to have a better idea of his/her membership intentions. This respondent reported, “I’m not sure yet. I’ve only been a member for a short while and don’t feel I can make a decision yet.”
Former Graduate Student Members. Like the other two groups, Former Graduate Students were also asked about their reasons for initially joining AECT in the first place. As previously noted in the quantitative analysis section (see Table 7), individuals from the Former Graduate Student Members group were asked to rank the relative importance of various common reasons for joining AECT. Like the other two groups, the Former Graduate Student Members were asked, “Are there other reasons you joined AECT?” A total of 55 members from this group chose to provide additional reasons (see Figure 8). A handful of those respondents opted to answers “no” or “not applicable” rather than just skip this optional item. Seventeen of those responses provided reasons that were unique from the previous question’s answer choices. Common themes for initially joining that emerged from this open response question included: a) to be a part of a leading organization in the field, b) to better
understand and stay up to date in the field, c) access to service/award opportunities, and d) the relatively affordable cost of student membership. These reasons were somewhat broader and less focused than those reasons for initially joining AECT espoused by members of the other two groups.

Examining individual responses helped to contextualize these common themes. In response to the other reasons for joining question, one former graduate student member wrote, “It’s the leading organization in my field, so I felt it was important to be a part of it as a graduate student.” Another echoed this sentiment noting, “To be a part of this important organization.” Related to the theme of better understanding and staying up to date in the field, one former student member added, “I joined primarily to gain a better understanding to the culture and focus of the organization to determine if my professional interests aligned well with the group.” Another added, “(because) Educational Technology is my field and discipline.”

In reference to the cost of student membership versus benefits, one respondent echoed the sentiments of several others when he/she reported joining AECT for access to “service opportunities, award opportunities” and still others joined to participate in the PacifiCorp Competition and other similar opportunities. Others cited clearly exchange-focused benefits such as joining “just to list another membership on my resume” or “added to my CV so I could graduate.” One former graduate student member noted, “Generally, I only stay in organizations for the long term if I have either a certification through them (ISA, ASQ, PMI) or if I get a tremendous amount of networking value (e.g., BGS, Mensa) relative to the cost.” These heavily
exchange-focused themes were more apparent in the Former Graduate Student Members open responses than with the other two groups.

Figure 8

*Former Graduate Student Members: Other Reasons for Joining AECT (Word Cloud of Open Response Themes)*

Whereas the Current Graduate Student Members were asked about their future membership intentions, individuals from the Former Graduate Student Members group were asked to provide reasons for why they do not plan to renew their membership in AECT (see Figure 9). A total of 53 members from this group chose to respond to this open response item. Only one respondent opted to answer “not applicable” rather than just skip this optional item. As such, 52 respondents provided reasons they anticipated not renewing their membership going forward. Common themes identified through this open response question were: (a) cost vs. perceived benefit/value; (b) funding/ability to pay; (c) deciding that another professional
organization was more appropriate at the time; (d) perceived academic vs.
practitioner/industry focus; and (e) previous disappointing experiences with AECT.

Of the respondents to this question, a handful were unsure as to whether they
would one day renew their memberships. Their reasons were highly dependent on
personal circumstances. Commenting on the themes of cost vs. benefit and
funding/ability to pay, one respondent wrote,

I’m uncertain about my renewal—there was only two options for the answer
to this question. I may renew my membership once I factor in the cost related
to the benefits to determine the feasibility because I would be paying out of
pocket.

The concern of cost was often intertwined with the consideration of whether
membership in AECT was the most beneficial for the respondents’ career trajectories
or current circumstances. To this end, one respondent noted,

It’s too expensive. I’m an adjunct professor, teaching in a language field. My
priority is membership in my language’s professional organization over
participating in AECT. Adjuncts don’t get funding for membership, so the
cost is a bit much now that I'm not a student.

Other former graduate student respondents left open the possibility of rejoining if
their financial situation improves.

Former Graduate Student Member respondents also cited competition for their
membership and their need for organizations that benefit them in their current
positions. This respondent also spoke to the theme of AECT’s research over industry (practitioner) focus. One respondent wrote,

I have no current plans (to renew), but that doesn’t mean I never will. For now, I work in online education administration and I just didn’t [sic] find AECT resources relevant to my role or professional needs. I believe AECT is a great organization, but the focus seems to be on research and academics and that just isn’t what I need to be successful in my position.

Reasons consistent with this theme include, “I’ve changed my research focus” and “(I now have a) different focus in my career.” Another wrote, “(this) organization is much more geared for academic perspective, while I am working in private sector.”

The motivation underpinning each of these reasons was squarely centered on how AECT could benefit these former members professionally. These individuals decided they could find the specific benefits they needed elsewhere.

Lastly, a small handful of respondents cited disappointing experiences with AECT as their reason for non-renewal. The reasons ranged from more abstract concepts such as sense of community to specific issues with the annual conference or organization’s website. One respondent wrote, “I did not find enough value or sense of community in AECT. More is available through Twitter and Facebook networks.”

Another highlighted various perceived grievances noting,

I didn’t get much out of my membership. Not only that, but the association didn’t even send me a reminder to renew or request to renew—it’s like they didn’t care if I was a member or not. I was not impressed with the annual
conference—other graduate students were snobs depending on where you went to school, and you could only get involved if you came from certain institutions. Waste of time and $$.

Another respondent from the Former Graduate Student Member group expressed disappointment over AECT’s website noting,

The website is hard to navigate specifically when searching using key words. In contrast, Google Scholar in combination with a university subscription yields many relevant journal articles. To use AECT for research, it requires going to the specific AECT website and even then, it is difficult to find articles related to my area of research.

Although individuals’ disappointing experiences and perceived grievances are difficult to plan for and address proactively, they are no less important to consider within the broader picture of why some former members have no intention of renewing their membership in AECT.
Figure 9

Reasons Why Former Graduate Student Members Plan Not to Renew Membership (Word Cloud of Open Response Themes)

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Summary of Open Response Themes

Although some common themes were repeated throughout, the open response items represented a diverse set of factors influencing graduate student membership in AECT. Motivations appear to have been impacted by students’ relationships with faculty who recommended they join. Factors including but not limited to becoming involved early (e.g., attending/presenting at a conference), perceived benefits of membership including access to publications, and ability to pay all played in a role in ongoing membership. These and other prominent factors as well as their relationship to the assumptions of Social Exchange and Social Identity Theories and the research questions will be explored further in Chapter 5.
Qualitative Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

At the end of each of the three surveys, respondents were asked the following:

“We plan to follow up with some respondents by email or phone. May we contact you? If so, please indicate your preferred contact method by filling in the box with your email address, Skype address, or phone number” (see Appendices B-D). Individuals who agreed to further contact and were successfully reached were questioned through one of two semi-structured interview protocols created specifically for this study. The first interview protocol was given to selected volunteers from both the Current Professional Members group and the Current Graduate Student Members group (see Appendix E). The same interview protocol was conducted with volunteers from both of these groups, because the questions specifically examined aspects of their experiences as current members of AECT. The interview conducted with members from these two groups included seven open-ended questions. A separate interview protocol was conducted with selected volunteers from the Former Graduate Student Members group (see Appendix E). Although it had some overlap with the other interview protocol, it necessarily included unique questions that targeted the respondents’ past associations with AECT.

A subset of the survey respondents from each of the three groups who agreed to provide additional information was contacted to participate in the individual semi-structured interviews described above. Initially, every seventh volunteer was contacted. At least two contacts attempts were made per individual. In cases where there was no reply, the next person on the list was contacted. This general selection
procedure continued for each of the three groups until saturation was achieved. Although many volunteers were contacted, ultimately a total of nine interviews were completed for each group. One of the interviews from the Current Graduate Student Members group was thrown out because there was a technical issue with the recording and the researcher was unable to get back in contact with the student volunteer to redo it. As such, only eight complete interviews were included in the results for the Current Graduate Student Members group.

The tone, depth, and breadth of the interviews varied both across groups and from individual to individual within groups. Factors such as years of membership, personal ties/involvement in leadership, initial motivations for joining, and institutional support all impacted the responses of the interviewees. Key themes will be examined in the following pages. These factors as well as their relationship to the assumptions of Social Exchange and Social Identity Theories as well as the research questions will be explored in depth in Chapter 5.

**Thematic Content Analysis of Semi-Structured Interview Protocols**

The same seven question, semi-structured interview protocol was conducted with volunteers selected from both the Current Professional Members and Current Graduate Student Members groups (see Appendix E). These questions examined respondents’ reasons for joining, length of membership, future membership intentions, and levels of organizational involvement. Due the Former Graduate Student Member group’s past association with AECT, a separate interview protocol
was developed to examine the nature of their relationship with the organization. Like the interview developed for the current member groups, this semi-structured interview protocol also included seven questions (see Appendix E). Unlike the first interview protocol conducted with current members, the former members interview gauged respondents’ length of membership, levels of organizational involvement while members, perceived benefits of membership, and future membership intentions. In spite of the different protocols, there were a few overlapping questions for all three groups. Those questions shared by all three groups will be discussed together, whereas a separate section will include unique responses from the Former Graduate Student Members group.

**Question 1: Why did you join AECT in the first place?**

**Current Professional Members.** Although a versions of this question were first addressed in the survey, including it in the semi-structured interview portion of this study allowed respondents to speak more in depth on the topic. Additionally, this interview questions enabled the researcher to better pinpoint the individual interview respondent’s reasons, since answers to the parallel survey items could not be traced to any single survey taker.

In response to this interview question, 5 of the 9 respondents from the Current Professional Members group directly indicated that they joined at the suggestion and/or strong urging of a professor, advisor, or mentor. This is consistent with the results found in the survey question that asked the same thing (see Table 3). On the
whole, the interview responses did not indicate that the respondents were encouraged or required to join simply to access books and other resources for their classes. Instead, each of the five respondents indicated that the suggestions to join were based on their professors’ expressions of real value in membership in AECT. On respondent stated,

I think I was a Master’s student at the time and my advisor said, she’s like,

“You have to do this. This is a great group. If you’re going to be in this field you have to be involved.” Said, “Join,” so I said, “Okay,” because I really respected my advisor.

Another respondent stated,

I joined as a student briefly, for about two years, it was earlier on in the 2000s. I did it on the recommendation of one of my faculty that was working, at that time of the year, University of Florida. I just joined. Basically he said, “You should join this, it’s a good organization.”

Yet another respondent simply answered, “My boss recommended it and paid for it.”

Although the other four respondents to this interview question did not directly state that they joined due to the strong suggestion of fellow member, each expressed possessing a clear awareness of AECT’s status as the premiere organization in Educational Technology and, thus, the important role it could play in their career development. One respondent stated,

Well AECT is the premiere organization. I would consider it for instructional designers, and I’ve been hearing everybody saying how nourishing the
conference is and just their whole community. And so when I had the funds to join it, I took advantage of that.

Another stated,

Well I’ve know [sic] of AECT for many years. I’ve been in the field for a long time. They’ve always filled a void around Educational Technology for me. I just think that there are so few organizations that truly represent what we do.

Whether based on a direct suggestion or having developed a sense of AECT’s worth in the field through other sources, interviewees from the Current Professional Members group indicated joining based on a realization that membership would aid in their professional identity development.

**Current Graduate Student Members.** In general, the Current Graduate Student Members’ responses to the question, “Why did you join AECT in the first place?” were more varied than those provided by respondents from the Current Professional Member group. Three respondents from this group indicated joining because it was a requirement for a class. Typically, joining provided these students with a book or other required texts that would be used in their coursework. One of these respondents stated,

I had to join AECT for a class I was taking. There was some online resources that we needed for that class that AECT made available online to its members and so it was really a matter of have [sic] to. But after I finished that class, I ended up renewing my membership.
Several other interview respondents from this group joined based on general suggestions from their professors but not necessarily for the primary purpose of accessing publications. One respondent noted,

So all students of Ed Tech, or what you call Educational Technology, were encouraged to join it as members. I didn’t know anything about AECT at the time so I welcomed the opportunity. I looked into it and saw, well, there was a lot of material that would help me to learn more about Ed Tech, Educational Technology, so I joined and so far I have not regretted.

Another Current Graduate Student respondent spoke to the theme of professor recommendations to join stating,

One of the professors was explaining all of the different organization that we should consider joining and AECT was the one that basically he said, if you’re going to join anything, this is the one you should definitely join right away. So I did.

Throughout the surveys and interviews, the influence of professors and other mentors came up repeatedly.

One interview respondent also highlighted how graduate student members who are already actively involved in AECT have the power to bring peers into the fold. In response to this question she stated, “I joined AECT after another student that was also a member of AECT in our doctoral program at (school name omitted) told me about the great association and all of the different perks that AECT had to offer.”
Another respondent from the Current Graduate Student Member group also cited the power of direct organizational outreach in boosting student membership and subsequent involvement. In speaking of collaboration between his program and AECT, one student reported,

One of the projects that we took on as part of our classes was a usability test on a previous iteration of the (AECT) website. Phil Harris (AECT’s Executive Director) came in and spoke and entertained questions as part of this. As a gesture of faith, he offered, I think, free admission to the conference that year for everybody in that class.”

The student went on to say that only a couple of students took advantage of that generous offer but he, in particular, has since held several leadership positions in the Graduate Student Assembly and continues to be actively involved in the organization.

**Former Graduate Student Members.** In general, this group’s responses to the interview question “Why did you join AECT in the first place?” were consistent with the prominent themes endorsed by the other two groups of respondents. Although consistent, their reasons were more narrowly focused. Specifically, all nine of the interview respondents from the Former Graduate Student Members group endorsed only one of two reasons. Either (a) they were required to join for their graduate programs (e.g., to access publications to use in their classes, etc.) or (b) membership came highly recommended by their professors.
Just as the reasons for joining AECT endorsed by members of this group were more narrowly focused than those provided by the other two groups, their responses to this interview question were also to the point and generally less verbose. One respondent stated, “I was encouraged by one of my professors to submit something and get involved in that way. She really encouraged me to be a part of it.” Speaking of the requirement of becoming involved as a graduate student, one interviewee stated, “I believe one of the three courses that I was taking required attendance at a relevant professional meeting and to report on that as it relates to subject matter within the particular course and particular assignment.” Another respondent, noted, “It was made part of a course I took. It was one of the requirements was to join.” Another reported, “It was required to join as part of a course requirement . . . to get access to required readings.”

Although a general theme was related to students being required to join by their graduate programs, a few respondents to the semi-structured interview gave a unique perspective on this requirement. When speaking of a specific professor, one respondent stated, “He required everyone in the cohort to join.” Although this respondent remained a member of AECT throughout her three years in graduate school, this particular student did not appreciate being forced to join. This respondent noted, “I also think when you’re forced into something, sometimes the negative there’s a negative tone with that. Do you know what I mean?” This former member also felt that the professor made it a requirement for self-serving reasons. As such, this respondent let his/her membership lapse soon after graduation and expressed no
intention of renewing. It is important to note that in this respondent’s case, he/she works in the P-12 setting, so he/she did not view his/her membership in AECT as being as vital to his/her career trajectory as some of his/her other affiliations seem to be.

Other respondents expressed unique takes as to why they initially joined AECT. Although not specifically required to join, one reported, “I was involved in a Master’s degree program at (school name omitted) for IDT . . . and this (AECT) was one of the groups that everybody was signing up for, so I joined as well.” This respondent recognized a consensus existed at the time that AECT was the premiere organization that students in his program were joining. Another respondent from the Former Graduate Student Members group stated, “I was a graduate student in (school name omitted) and one of my professors came into my Master’s class and asked if anyone wanted to publish an article. I was one of them that volunteered and at the time there was no volunteer program, an internship program, at the AECT Conference. It wasn’t as organized as it has been recently.” This student recognized that not only his professors valued student membership but also that partnering with active members served as a foot in the door.

As noted above, the Former Graduate Student Member Group expressed a variety of perspectives on the theme of being required to join AECT. Whether they joined because it was a stated requirement for their graduate programs, for access to resources for specific classes, or simply because it was just strongly encouraged, their stated motivations were almost exclusively external. That is to say, an outside
influence persuaded them to join. The motivations for joining AECT expressed by this group will be compared and contrasted with those of the other groups. Additionally, this group’s reasons for joining will be further examined in Chapter 5 within the context of the suppositions of both Social Exchange and Social Identity Theories.

**Question 2: How long have you been a member?**

**Current Professional Members.** Just as the respondents from the Current Professional Members were older (see Figure1), this group’s members had also held membership in AECT, as a whole, longer than respondents from the other two groups. While only 2 of the 9 Current Professional Members who were interviewed had been members for a year or less, three others reported having been members of AECT for at least 20 years. The other respondents reported membership lengths of three, seven, nine, and 10+ years respectively. Two of the respondents who had been members for at least seven years reported having discontinued their membership at some point after graduate school before later returning to AECT.

**Current Graduate Student Members.** This group was also asked the question “How long have you been a member?” Not surprisingly, the length of membership of the interviewees from the Current Graduate Student Members group was significantly shorter than that of the Current Professional Members group. This group’s length of membership, though, was longer than that of the Former Graduate Student Members group. While 3 of the 8 interview respondents from this group
reported having been members for a year or less, four respondents reported membership lengths ranging from three to five years each and another two years. As such, several of the respondents from this group had been involved with AECT long enough to have participated in some leadership roles or activities such as the annual conference that could lead to a deeper connection with the organization. The breadth of these experiences will be examined further in the analysis of the interviewees’ responses to Question 3.

**Former Graduate Student Members.** When asked the same question worded in the past tense (e.g., “How long were you a member?”), individuals from this group of interview respondents reported having only held membership in AECT for a relatively short time. Specifically, 5 of the 9 interviewees had only been members for two years or less. Additionally, 4 of the 9 had only been members for one year or less. Of the respondents who had held membership beyond two years, one had unintentionally allowed it to lapse but fully intended to renew at some point. Another who reported that she had been required to join as part of her graduate program maintained membership for a total of three years and chose not to renew after graduating. Another interview respondent indicated that she had been a member for between four and five years but inadvertently let her membership lapse. Likewise, another respondent from this group stated that he let his membership lapse but intended to renew at some point. Unlike the student who felt forced to join by faculty
and remained a member for three years, this former member respected his professors’ opinions and felt that he had benefitted from his time as a member of AECT.

One respondent from the Former Graduate Student Member group presented with a very different narrative and was truly an aberration when compared to the other individuals interviewed. This former member reported having joined AECT around the year 2000 as a graduate student. This former member quickly won several high profile organizational awards and assumed various key leadership roles. This former member only discontinued his/her membership 18-months or so prior to being interviewed for this study.

The various reasons interview respondents from this group cited for failing to renew membership will be discussed along with their responses to interview Question 6.

**Question 3: Have you participated in any AECT events or leadership roles (annual conference, webinars, sit on a committee, etc.)?**

**Current Professional Members.** Of the nine members who responded to this interview question, only one answered with a flat out “no.” That respondent had been a member of AECT for three years. One other respondent, who had been a member for less than a year, only attended the 2014 conference. Although the range of organizational involvement and leadership varied across this group, the majority of interview respondents indicated having been involved to one degree or another.
One respondent who had been a member for over 20 years had continuously served at the highest levels including having been a past-president. Another respondent who had also been a member for over 20 years stated,

I think I’ve missed one or two annual conferences since I joined. I served on the AECT Board twice. I was President of the (name omitted) division which doesn’t exist anymore. I’m on the board for (name omitted) division. I chaired the Leadership Committee. I chaired the (name omitted) competition. That’s about it.

Another longtime member indicated that he/she had not recently served in any high level leadership roles but instead actively served in the background as an editor/reviewer for one of AECT’s major publications, reviews conference proposals, and regularly presents at the annual conferences. Yet another respondent who has been a member for seven non-consecutive years starting in graduate school and now as a faculty member stated,

I’m President-elect currently of (name omitted) division. That is really my first leadership role. Last year, I was officially on the executive team for (division name omitted). I can’t remember what . . . I was social media coordinator or something like that. I did basically handle Facebook. Other than that, I have not really done anything leadership-wise for AECT.

This respondent did not consider his conference presentations or other involvement when asked about leadership.
Mentorship was also a theme that emerged from this group’s responses to this interview question. One respondent, who had been a member for over 10 years while working in higher education administration, lamented not being more actively involved in AECT himself. This respondent went on to indicate that he had enabled individuals on his staff to become involved. He stated,

I have participated on webinars. I have sent staff to AECT meetings. I haven’t gone myself, which I wish I had but there’s just so many competing responsibilities . . . It’s been more prudent for me to take care of the bigger things and especially for the younger developing staff to expose them to AECT. I’ve been probably more supportive in sending new people as opposed to going myself.

Although not as actively involved as he would like to be, he/she exhibited his/her commitment to AECT by bringing new, young professionals into the fold.

Yet another respondent from this group talked of mentorship from a different perspective. Although he/she joined AECT to attend the last conference and had only been a member for a year, he/she spoke positively of her involvement. This respondent reported having reviewed proposals for the upcoming conference and participated in a couple of webinars. He/she also expressed interest in applying to be a part of the upcoming NSF Early Career Symposium. When speaking of his/her involvement in the recently started mentorship program, this respondent stated,

I must tell you that they did a mentorship program and it never, they never really followed through . . . we were supposed to meet back in February
something, but it’s not a negative comment. My mentor is very awesome. He reviewed my papers, and he really got me going to the point where I was able to say, well I worked on one . . . so even though the mentorship program formally seemed like it didn’t regain momentum after the conference, the mentor that I was assigned, he really worked with me, and I appreciated that. Based on his/her comments, the ties this early career member made via the mentorship program appeared to leave him/her with a positive outlook on membership and an intention to continue her involvement in AECT well into the future.

Current Graduate Student Members. This group was also asked, “Have you participated in any AECT events or leadership roles (annual conference, webinars, sit on a committee, etc.)?” Of the eight interview respondents, five of them reported having participated in a variety of AECT events or leadership roles, while three reported having little to no involvement. When the respondents’ answers to this interview question were compared against their answers to Question 2, it appeared that those individuals who have been members of AECT longer demonstrated greater levels of organizational involvement and leadership. This finding makes sense, because more involvement opportunities present themselves over time. Of the interview respondents, three individuals had been involved in leadership roles within the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) and had also attended conferences and
research symposia. In reflecting on his/her involvement in GSA leadership and transition into other leadership roles, one interview respondent stated,

My first year I attended the conference and that’s when I met (names omitted) and became involved in the GSA. I’ve been involved in the GSA for two years. This year, I’m switching to the Culture, Learning, & Technology (CLT) Division.

He/she went on to note,

I have made a network of friends and associates and I really appreciate the fellowship, I guess you would call it, and continuing with the projects and things that we’ve gotten started, it’s just a positive experience that I enjoy and I feel like I'm learning a lot from my peers and from others in the organization and making contacts that may serve me well later in my career.

Of the three interview respondents who reported no involvement, two had only been members for less than a year. The third had been a member for five years but cited financial restraints as keeping her from attending the annual conference. One interview respondent who reported no participation in leadership or AECT events did not realize that members needed to formally join divisions by logging onto the AECT website to affiliate themselves with them. This respondent was also unaware that news and happenings related to AECT’s various division are often communicated to members who are involved with the organization through social media platforms like Facebook.
Although the levels of organizational involvement varied from individual to individual interviewed, the overall levels of participation in AECT events and/or leadership activities were greater for this group than for the Former Graduate Students Members group. Factors such as reasons for initially joining and length of membership appear to influence levels of involvement. A further discussion of these influences will be conducted in Chapter 5.

**Question 4: What are your current reasons for being a member of AECT?**

**Current Professional Members.** The nine interview respondents’ answers to this question reflected many of the common reasons found in the survey including: networking, opportunities to present at the annual conference, and access to publications and other resources. Another key reason cited by the interview respondents from the Current Professional Members group was generally keeping current in the field of Educational Technology. Although the respondents’ answers to Question 4 reflected many of the aforementioned common reasons for being a member of AECT noted in the survey responses, additional reasons were also reported. These included opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, make professional connections, be in fellowship with esteemed peers, enhance one’s professional credentials, and receive mentoring. One interview respondent who had been with the organization for over 20 years stated,

*I’m a member of AECT. I suppose that’s the most fundamental . . . I’m a member because this is a place where I tend to go to present at conferences.*
It’s a place I go to network and reconnect with associates and colleagues. That’s the most fundamental level. It’s certainly a place I have not needed to go to or haven’t gone to for the job (leads). At a prior time in my career I did, but currently it’s primarily a source for professional connection and for trying to remain current if you will on what’s going on. It’s not the only source I would employ to do that but it’s a source.

His/her response indicated an evolution in reasons for being a member of AECT even before he/she was specifically asked about it through Question 5.

Another seasoned member responded with some of the same prominent themes while also commenting on his understanding that AECT helps to define and maintain our field’s unique identity by stating,

I think one (reason) is access to the information. I’m having a bit of a crisis I think. Right now my organization sits in information technology, and I have the feeling that we are being swallowed up. The identity that we keep with AECT I think is critical. I fear that our field in one way, shape, or form will be obliterated by just the size and breadth and funding of Information Technology. I think Educational Technology will become kind of subservient to that. I don’t think the values and the principles and some of the skill sets are the same. I think I’m probably more supportive today of AECT than I’ve ever been, only to help maintain that identity.

His/her response reflected a deeper value in AECT. This respondent’s sentiments were more frequently reflected in the responses of long-time, invested members.
Another 20+ year veteran member cited his/her main reason for being a member as “fellowship.” This can reasonably be viewed as a deeper, nuanced progression of the theme of “networking.” To this end, she stated,

The fellowship, being my professional family. There’s no question about it, that’s my professional home. Also, being on the foundation, still active with the foundation. I consider myself kind of a behind the scenes support person for the executive director and board members.

This response indicated a deeper identity-focused understanding of her role in AECT. As such, his/her answer indicated not only fellowship opportunities but also avenues for giving back and supporting organizational growth.

Although many of the long-time members reported deepening understandings and reasons for membership, some of the newer members also reported valuable insights. On respondent, who had only been a member for one year, commented how AECT’s many divisions provide multiple lenses through which to view the field of Educational Technology. This respondent stated,

One thing too, the fact that the divisions are still varied. It provides you with a good way of seeing how the field is evolving and also . . . one thing that I hope to get from it but I haven’t been able to do it except for . . . I haven’t been actively looking for that, is what other opportunities for like collaborative research or publications, that type of thing.

This respondent also cited his/her involvement in the newly developed mentorship program and how she had benefitted from it. He/she reported that even though the
program did not really take off as a group after initial meetings, he/she still received valuable one-on-one support and an “awesome” mentor who really worked with him/her and has since remained in touch.

**Current Graduate Student Members.** This group was also asked, “What are your current reasons for being a member of AECT?” As previously reported, the members of this group, on the whole, were relatively new to the organization. Several respondents had only been members for less than a year, and the longest memberships ranged between three and five years. As such, the reasons they reported for being members of AECT, as opposed to their reasons for initially joining, generally reflected their relative rookie, outsider status. The Current Graduate Students’ reasons being members of AECT revolved around what they could access from membership including: networking opportunities, the publications, opportunities to attend the conferences at discounted rates, webinars, etc. One respondent spoke to the theme of access stating,

> Frankly, it’s a one-year membership so I haven’t canceled it. I’ve being doing the journals that they send out every month. Actually, there have been a couple articles that a couple of classmates and I have used to further our research for classes or whatever. I probably will continue. Honestly, this is a field I plan to work in, so I plan to maintain my membership. I’ll probably go in ATD also. I’m looking at corporate jobs. I know AECT is not necessarily corporate. It doesn’t have a corporate slant. I love higher education. It really interests me.
Because this respondent had only recently joined AECT, he/she reported that his/her reasons for joining had only changed from initially wanting a discount, presumably to attend the conference, to having access to publications. His/her response also displayed an understanding of AECT’s higher education focus while also showing that he/she had not yet become familiar with all aspects including divisions like Organizational Training & Development (OTD) that offers a home to those with more corporate-focused career aspirations.

**Question 5: Have your reasons for membership changed over time?**

**Current Professional Members.** In response to this question, the interviewees provided mixed perspectives. Specifically, the respondents were split on the question of whether or not their reasons for membership had changed over time. As one would expect, the two members from this group who had only been with the organization for less than a year reported no change in their initial reasons for joining. On the other hand, the more established members expressed a sense of evolution over time in their motivations for maintaining membership.

The interview respondents’ answers to Question 5 indicated a distinct evolution over time for those individuals who had been members for many years. For some respondents, they viewed their reasons for joining as having changed over time, while others just noted a difference in how their initial reasons for membership are playing out now that they are in different places personally and/or professionally. To
this end, one long-time member, when asked if his/her reasons for membership have changed, reported,

Not really. I mean the foundational reasons haven’t changed. I think that what I’m getting out of it has changed because now I have publishing partners and things like that. I remember when I first joined and I was like, “Oh my gosh. I’m sitting at a table with the person that authored my textbook.” Now I’m like, “Okay, I’m publishing with these people I know.” The purpose for being a member hasn’t changed but what I get out of it has changed. This interviewee’s response evidenced a fulfillment of his/her initial reasons and goals for joining.

Although not in disagreement with the respondent quoted above, another interviewee and long-time member conceptualized the shift differently. This respondent indicated his/her reasons for membership had certainly evolved over time stating, “Because you’re a professional, you’re constantly evolving. The beginning is having contact with the people, being able to have those resources available because of having the research agenda for publication and for tenure.” Another long-time member echoed these sentiments as well stating,

I think the networking cases, one that’s sort of consistent, perhaps even more important as one progresses though a career. The conference, again, tends to be the place of the rallying point for networking. This is a place where you’re introduced to new people by your mentors, and it’s a place where you can make connections. It’s a place where you can find common interests and, of
course, it’s a place to share your knowledge too. I think that all of those are reasons. I think some of those elements become more important than others. I think that’s just for me sort of a natural progression over one’s career.

**Current Graduate Student Members.** This group’s respondents were also asked whether their reasons for membership had changed over time. Generally speaking, superficial, exchange-focused reasons were predominant throughout the responses of the graduate student groups. In spite of this, deeper identify-focused reasons reflecting change over time, as asked about in Question 5, were emergent in the responses of a couple of the interviewees. These deeper responses were evidenced by those interviewees who reported longer lengths of membership (e.g., three to five years). One respondent whose reasons for membership were particularly tied to networking opportunities stated,

> Initially it was a financial reason, but now I feel like I’m invested, I’m vested in the organization and I feel like I’ve become part of the family. I feel like it’s a close connection. It feels more to me than just a professional organization. I feel like everyone is genuine and friendly and it feels almost like a social get together. Initially it was for financial reasons, and now it’s because I recognize the worth of being a part of the organization, which is being a part of this social network.

The quote represents a cross-section of the themes of Social Exchange and emerging Social Identity found within this group of Current Graduate Student Member
respondents. Although the majority of respondents suggested exchange-focused reasons for being a part of AECT, a small portion of those who had been members for longer periods of time evidenced a shift toward having professional and personal identities that were intertwined with their membership in the organization. Implications for and factors leading to these kinds of social shifts will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

**Question 6: Do you plan to continue your membership into the future? Why or why not?**

**Current Professional Members.** Each of the nine interview respondents from the Current Professional Members group responded in the affirmative to the question of whether they plan to continue their membership into the future. Many of the reasons girding these intentions echoed the reasons for membership reported in their answers to interview Question 4.

Although all answered to the affirmative, the certainty of their future membership intentions varied from individual to individual. Not surprisingly, the two respondents who had been members of AECT for a year or less provided the least committed responses. One respondent stated that continuing membership “would depend on the boss” and whether it “will benefit my job.” This respondent ultimately concluded, “so far things are looking good.” The other newer member reported concerns related to the financial commitment of both joining and paying to attend the conference stating,
I’d definitely like to continue. The only thing is that because of membership fees are like $500? How much is it again? I don’t remember . . . so as long as I can afford it, I’d definitely . . . as a matter of fact, I have a meeting with my boss, and I’m going to bring it up. So as long as I’m able to afford it, like I said, I really appreciate the organization and the group and just everybody that I’ve spoken to that’s a part of it. They just seem like they want everybody to grow, and they have this love and passion for instructional design, and I’ve never really seen that before.

Although their intentions to continue their membership were positive, these two early career members expressed financial constraints and unreliable workplace supports as potential factors for their future in AECT.

Each of the remaining seven interview respondents in this group indicated firm intentions of continuing their memberships into the future. These respondents had been members for between 3 and 22 years. All but one had been a member for at least seven years. Two of the 20+ years veterans of AECT indicated that they would continue their membership in AECT indefinitely, because it had become a key part of their professional identity. One noted,

I do. I would probably maintain my membership even into retirement probably. I maintain the membership because, again, it’s a piece of your professional identity. I think that’s also an important element. We also know through research that we’re more loyal to our professions than we are to the organizations that we wok for. I think membership does create a component of
one’s professional identity. Who do you belong to? Who do you associate with? I'm not talking about individuals. Now I’m talking about the organization level. I think that is an important component of professional identity.

Another long-time member stated, “AECT has helped define who I am, without a question. I’m sure you realize this, but I continue as a keynote speaker at an international level, so I'm constantly traveling the world, being an ambassador for AECT.” To these two respondents and several others interviewed, membership in AECT was an extremely valuable if not, inextricable piece of their professional identities.

**Current Graduate Student Members.** The eight interview respondents in this group of Current Graduate Student Members each responded in the affirmative indicating that they plan to continue their membership into the future. In spite of this, their responses indicated a range of enthusiasm and commitment relating to this fact. Although positive, lukewarm responses from two different interviewees were noted. One well-established current graduate student respondent who had been a member of AECT for five years at the time of the interview had been quite involved in both organizational leadership activities and events. This interviewee stated,

I don’t see why I wouldn’t (remain a member). I would expect that membership alone is going to be a tax write-off. I’m sure, unless wherever I
go (to work) happens to pay for it, in which case, again, I don’t have to worry about it. Remaining in contact with people in the field, that’s of value.

This respondent’s tepid resolution to maintain membership in AECT appeared to be rooted in exchange—that is, what the affiliation could afford him.

Two other respondents from this group answered solidly to the affirmative with each citing the chance to network and learn from the expertise of leading scholars and likeminded colleagues in the field. When reflecting on his involvement and future plans to attend AECT events, one respondent from this group stated,

I think the webinars are a good thing. The webinars I’ve participated in have been very informative and they get some really big names to do those. I think those have been really good. I can’t wait to go to a convention and actually meet people and get some professional development out of it. That’s pretty much it.

Reflecting on his/her intentions to remain a member of AECT, another member from this group also reflected on the opportunity for future networking by stating,

As a professional, yeah, I would still continue to be interested in being a member. I think honestly, my interest would increase. Right now, I’m in school and talking to my professors, and talking to my classmates, and have plenty of people to talk to about these things right now. When I go out into the field, I don’t know if I’ll have working with others or I’ll be on my own. I’ll want that kind of contact—even more then.
This respondent’s enthusiasm to not only continue participating in webinars but also to attend more AECT activities such as future conferences suggests that a strengthening tie to the organization over time is likely.

**Question 7: What benefits of membership are most appealing to you?**

**Current Professional Members.** The various responses to this question provided by the nine interview respondents from the Current Professional Members group repeated many of the same themes that emerged from both their answers to the survey as well as the other 6 interview questions. Common benefits of membership frequently highlighted by this group’s interviewees included opportunities such as networking, service, collaborative research, publication, career development, access to resources, and attending the annual conference.

Reflecting on several of these themes, one respondent from this group focusing on the overarching theme of “resources” noted,

Most appealing. Certainly I think access to resources that we’ve already talked about online—ready, easy access to those resources. Not just online materials but when I say, “resources,” also access to people. If I had a project for example right now that was dealing with copyright, I know there would be members in AECT I could call upon to talk about that with. If I had a question or wanted to know some information from a guru or expert, I could contact them of course. I could do that anyway whether I was a member or not, right?
I mean we know who these people are. Certainly networking would be the piece of that.

Continuing on this theme, the respondent stated,

I think the opportunity to contribute to one’s profession is an important benefit and that means sharing knowledge. That means having outlets for contributing in that sense. To share what you’re doing, whether it be a conference session presentation or a roundtable or a poster. All of those are to me important benefits, to be able to share what you’re doing. Part of that too is the notion of identity and re-connection. The association and the conference in particular provide an opportunity to rejuvenate the batteries, to re-energize.

Overall, the Current Professional Members responding to this seventh interview question were generally able to articulate how the benefits of membership served as common threads tying them to AECT.

In conclusion, each of the members of the Current Professional Members group responded to these interview questions in ways that indicated clear intentions to remain affiliated with the organization and, in most cases, maintain their involvement in the coming years.

**Current Graduate Student Members.** This group was also asked, “What benefits of membership are most appealing to you?” The various answers to this question provided by the eight interview respondents from the Current Graduate Student Member group repeated many of the same themes that emerged from both
their answers to the survey and the other six interview questions. Namely, benefits of membership frequently cited about by the interviewees included: networking, accessing opportunities to attend AECT events, gaining exposure to big names/prominent researchers, receiving mentoring, and making personal connections with others in the field.

Exploring several of these themes, one respondent from this group cited the prospect of ongoing personal and career development as the most appealing benefit of membership in AECT noting,

They provide a vast number of opportunities for us and I really want to contribute, as I said to publication of my research, to also attend conferences, maybe even present at webinars, you know, with AECT to share my research. I think that’s one of the ways I want to be more active in the research field because I’m really upset with research so that’s one forum I am going to hold onto because I see they really encourage that kind of . . . they really encourage us to do that kind of thing, to present and they provide opportunities for us to go out there and present what we have, as well as learn about more technologies.

In general, the interviewees responding to this seventh interview question were readily able to cite benefits of their membership in AECT.

Overall, each of the members of the Current Graduate Student Member Group responded to this interview question in ways that indicated clear intentions to remain
affiliated with the organization and, in most cases, deepen their involvement in the years to come.

**Thematic Content Analysis of Remaining Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

**Former Graduate Student Members.** Due the Former Graduate Student Member group’s past association with AECT, a separate interview protocol was developed to examine the nature of their relationship with the organization. Like the interview developed for the current member groups, this semi-structured interview protocol also included seven questions (see Appendix E). The three questions shared by both interview protocols were discussed above, but questions asked only of the Former Graduate Student Members group are discussed in this section. Unlike the first interview protocol conducted with current members, the former members interview gauged respondents’ length of membership, levels of organizational involvement while members, perceived benefits of membership, and future membership intentions.

**Question 3: Were you a member for any amount of time following graduation?**

**Former Graduate Student Members.** This question was unique to the Former Graduate Student group. It, in particular, allowed the researcher to examine how closely respondents’ membership status was to their schooling and whether their membership intentions endured beyond graduation.

As previously reported, individuals from this group of interview respondents had only held membership in AECT for a short time. As such, 5 of the 9 interviewees
had only been members for two years or less. Additionally, 4 of the 9 had only been members for one year or less. As such, the majority of respondents from this group had not been members for any amount of time following graduation. One respondent reported that she was required to join as part of her graduate program, maintained membership for a total of three years, and chose not to renew after graduating. This individual’s negative feelings toward her professors appeared to negatively impact her desire to become an actively involved member of AECT.

Another interview respondent indicated that she had been a member for between four and five years but inadvertently let her membership lapse. Likewise, another respondent from this group stated that he let his membership lapse but intended to renew at some point. Unlike the student who was a member for three years and felt forced to join a professor she did not like, this former member respected his professors’ opinions and felt that he had benefitted from his time as a member of AECT.

One respondent from the Former Graduate Student Member group presented with a very different narrative and was truly an aberration when compared to the other individuals interviewed. This individual reported having joined AECT around the year 2000 as a graduate student. He quickly won several high profile organizational awards and assumed various key leadership roles. He continued his involvement in AECT long after graduating and only discontinued his membership 18-months or so prior to being interviewed.
Question 4: Did you participate in any AECT events or any leadership roles (annual conference, webinars, sit on a committee, etc.)?

**Former Graduate Student Members.** Overall, the involvement and leadership experiences of the Former Graduate Student Member group were limited relative to respondents from the other two groups. When interviewed, 4 of the 9 respondents reported having participated in no AECT events or leadership roles. Three others had participated in only one event. Specifically, two respondents had attended and presented at one conference and another had attended Summer Leadership/Board Meetings as a requirement of his graduate program. Two respondents, who happened to have held membership longer than most of the other interviewees from this group, reported significantly more involvement in AECT events and leadership roles. One of these two respondents reported attending four conferences as well as having presented at a couple of them. As previously described in the analysis of Question 3, the other respondent, whose situation was an aberration from the rest of this group, had been involved at the highest levels of AECT prior to discontinuing his membership. This respondent’s break with the organization stemmed not from a lack of connection or involvement but, rather, from feeling unappreciated. When describing how he/she perceived his/her service the respondent stated,

Oh, absolutely thankless. I didn’t even hardly get a thank you. From my perspective, it was cold . . . after my decade of service, from being a volunteer to an intern to the coordinator of all the different positions. I’ve been on the
awards committee, the leadership committee, four or five other committees. It was like my service was not needed anymore. Like, okay, I’ve got other things I can focus on.

Because this respondent was the only one from the Former Graduate Student Member group with such a long history in AECT and with so many high-level involvement experiences, it is impossible to know whether or not he/she represents a sizeable portion of former members. Regardless, individuals’ perceptions of whether or not they are valued or appreciated for their organizational service is an area worth further investigation.

Like several other respondents from the Former Graduate Student Members group, this interviewee also expressed disapproval in the fact that no representative of AECT reached out to him/her after his/her membership lapsed. To this end, the respondent continued,

I’m surprised that literally not one of them (AECT leadership) have reached out to me . . . nothing. I literally have received . . . I think (AECT leader), he’s reached out to me with some questions. He’s like “Do you know about this or do you know about that kind of thing,” but I would say no one has reached out saying, “Hey, are we going to see you at conference, we miss your contributions.” Nothing. And I’m okay with that. That sends a message to me that I’m not needed, and if that’s the case, I need to focus somewhere else, and that’s fine.
Similarly, another former member noted, “One of the things that they (AECT) could do to improve most definitely (would) be to outreach to those people whose memberships are expiring even. Nothing, I didn’t get any contact from them whatsoever.”

With the exception of one very involved former member, this group, when compared to the both the Current Professional and Current Graduate Student Member groups, was significantly less involved in organizational and leadership activities. The lower levels of organizational involvement and leadership reported by the interview respondents from this group are not surprising given its members’ largely externally-motivated reasons for joining and shorter length of membership.

**Question 5: Did you benefit from your membership? If so, how? If not, why?**

**Former Graduate Student Members.** In response to this question, 7 of the 9 interview respondents replied in the affirmative. Their responses to this question ranged from “Yes”, “Oh yea, definitely”, to “Absolutely did.” The remaining two respondents replied negatively to this query. One of the two respondents stated,

> What I’ve found is that memberships in organizations like AECT, ATD, and a lot of these others really don’t offer me anything except networking. If I choose to attend one of these sites and then I find that the people I'm networking with are just like me, they’re looking for people to network. So, you basically have a bunch of people who are looking for jobs.
This respondent went on to discuss his perception of the lack of value in organizational membership in general stating,

But it seems like everywhere I went, there was still more money coming out of it. So I really didn’t see any benefit from staying in AECT, and it’s not just your organization. ATD and a lot of other I’ve bailed on too.

The second respondent who replied to this question in the negative was the same individual who expressed feeling forced to join AECT in the first place by a faculty member whom he/she did not ultimately get along with or respect. That relationship left a lasting, vicarious impression that bled over into his/her relationship with AECT.

The respondent from the Former Graduate Student Member group who had belonged to AECT for over a decade and who had been active at the organization’s highest levels indicated that, despite feeling unappreciated and that his/her service was unneeded, he/she still found value in the organization. Specifically, this respondent stated,

I put so much into it. I would love to be involved in AECT and for it to succeed. I saw the value, but apparently people didn’t see my value in (my) contributing. I just have to focus on where people see the value that I’m producing and it wasn’t that AECT board and that’s fine.

Again, while this former member did not rule out eventually renewing his/her membership in AECT, he/she expressed a general malaise with organizational involvement and its lasting benefits for him/her as an active, contributing member.
Although every member of this group, for one reason or another, ultimately let their AECT membership lapse, the vast majority expressed having derived some degree of benefit from their time with the organization.

**Question 6: Why did you discontinue your membership?**

**Former Graduate Student Members.** As previously reported, more than half of the respondents from this group of Former Graduate Student Members were members of AECT for two years or less. 4 out of 9 respondents were members for only one year. It is important to note that those respondents who were members for two or fewer years each joined because it was required or highly recommended by their graduate programs. Their initial extrinsic motivation for joining AECT did not generally appear to translate into recognizing value in membership. Moreover, their membership did not result in lasting efforts to become involved or grow in the organization.

Although three other interview respondents from this group reported being members for three or more years each, two of them let their membership lapse. Although these two respondents expressed favorable impressions of AECT and stated they will likely renew at some point, they did not express an urgency indicating membership in AECT was highly rewarding to them. One of these respondents stated,

I didn’t discontinue because I felt that is was a bad organization or anything. I think I just got tremendously busy and I got back at . . . I work in a K-12 system where you just sort of drown for 10 months. Yes, so It was just one of
those things where, whoops, I guess I let that slide, and perhaps part of that
had to do with when I was really getting out there, I did feel a deeper
connection and then when I wasn’t getting out there (I did not).

The third respondent who had been a member for three years indicated no intention of
renewing and clearly indicated that he/she only joined because it was a requirement in
his/her graduate program. This respondent’s less than favorable views of one faculty
member who required membership appeared to only add to his/her resolve to not
renew.

As previously noted, the story of one interview respondent from this group of
Former Graduate Student Members stood out from the rest. Specifically, this
individual had been an active member of AECT for over a decade prior to not
renewing his/her membership. This individual had won various awards and had taken
on numerous leadership roles. When commenting on his/her reasons for leaving
AECT, he/she stated that first, his/her institution did not value AECT and he/she,
“had to fight every year to do membership, to take the week off to go to the
conference. The service, the publications, they just were not valued.” Secondly this
individual also mentioned that he/she had held a leadership position for several years
that required a lot of “thankless” work with little assistance. Without notice, this
individual stated that he/she was stripped of this position without being first
consulted. He/she stated, “After my decade of service…it was like my service was
not needed anymore. Like okay, I’ve got other things I can focus on.” Although this
individual did not rule out the possibly of one day rejoining AECT, he/she indicated
feeling as though he/she was not missed, because no one had reached out to him/her since ending his/her membership. In summation, this interviewee stated,

I put so much into it. I would love to be involved at AECT and for it to succeed. I saw the value, but apparently people didn’t see my value in contributing. I just have to focus on where people see the value that I'm producing and it wasn’t that AECT board and that’s fine.

**Question 7: Are you currently a member of other professional organizations? If so, how would you describe your current involvement with them?**

**Former Graduate Student Members.** In response to this question, 5 of the 9 respondents indicated that they were not involved in any other professional organizations. Although some of the respondents gave no further details as to why they were not members of other organizations, others cited clear reasons. One respondent indicated that he/she had pulled back to take a break from all professional affiliations after deciding his contributions to AECT were not appreciated. Another respondent cited personal reasons noting,

I guess for the past year I’ve had, I hate to say this, but I’ve had a year that’s been tremendously difficult. Like a year and a half of tremendously difficult things with some medical stuff and some personal and some—I had a friend who died, and just a lot of stuff, so I have let a bunch of things slide. Actually, I was thinking once June comes, I need to regroup and revamp and look at what I'm doing and where I’m going.
Another individual who opined that the cost of membership did not translate to adequate benefits stated the following when asked whether he/she was currently a member of other professional organizations,

I am not. I am not involved, and I don’t plan on joining any anytime soon unless there are some organizations that can actually provide something for me. And it’s not a matter of it being free, but it’s something that actually applies to what I'm trying to do and gives me some kind of value for effort.

Although the majority of interview respondents from the Former Graduate Student Members group reported not being involved in any other professional organizations, the remaining four respondents reported only currently being a member of one professional organization. Of those four, only one of them reported membership in a related organization (e.g., AERA). The other three reported holding current memberships in practitioner organizations outside of Educational Technology (e.g., a nursing association, an association for teachers of physical education, etc.).
Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

General Discussion

Study Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing membership in the Association of Educational Communication & Technology (AECT) by examining what factors influence graduate students’ decisions of whether or not to maintain membership in AECT. To investigate this topic, three subgroups within the larger AECT membership were surveyed including: (a) current graduate student members; (b) former graduate student members who are no longer members of AECT; and (c) current professional members of AECT who were also members as graduate students. In addition to the surveys which included a couple of open-ended questions, volunteers from within each subgroup were selected to participate in individual, semi-structured interviews to further narrow and investigate graduate students’ reasons for maintaining and/or ending their membership in the organization. The design and implementation of this study were guided by both Social Exchange and Social Identity theories due to their prevalence in the reviewed research.

Review of Research Questions and Hypotheses

The current study sought to answer the following research questions within the context of Social Identity and Social Exchange Theories. Specifically, four targeted research questions guided this study including:
1. Why do graduate student members initially join AECT?

2. Why do individuals continue their membership in AECT?

3. Why do individuals discontinue their membership?

Each of these questions, asked in various ways throughout the surveys and interviews, helped to provide a clear picture of factors influencing members’ perceptions of value in their affiliation with AECT.

The following hypothesis was consistent with the assumptions of Social Exchange Theory: Participants who reported greater value in opportunities for tangible benefits provided by AECT (i.e., discounts, journal subscriptions, lines for their curriculum vitae, etc.) and/or report that the benefits they reap from membership outweigh the costs will express positive intentions for future membership.

Conversely, the second hypothesis from the current study, rooted in the assumptions of Social Identity Theory, was that participants who report a combination of ‘socially’-focused reasons for joining (i.e., professor/mentor recommendation, opportunities for networking, division participation, convention participation, etc.) will be more likely to maintain membership in the organization and express intentions for maintaining future membership.

In accordance with the aforementioned research questions and hypotheses, four predictor variables were also identified: a) demographic variables; b) professional identity; c) AECT membership exchange; and d) institutional and/or
collegial influences. The key findings related to these predictor variables will be discussed with the context of the study’s guiding research questions.

Discussion of Major Findings

The results of the current study bore out the two hypotheses. Namely, in the context of the aforementioned theoretical framework, members expressing the strongest connections to AECT through their involvement, leadership, multiple years as members, and/or future membership intentions expressed motivations for membership that were consistent with Social Identity Theory. Conversely, those current and former members who indicated weak intentions to remain with AECT or renew their membership going forward were likely to provide motivations for membership that were more consistent with the assumptions of Social Exchange Theory. Motivations endorsed by this group included, for example, tangible benefits of membership such as accessing publications, adding accomplishments to their curriculum vitae, and/or accessing discounts.

Demographic Trends

Demographic trends noted in the survey responses provided important context for why individuals initially joined AECT. First, it is important to note that the survey respondents from the Current Professional Members group were significantly older than those from either the Current or Former Graduate Student Members groups. This makes sense, given the interview results showing that the members of this group were
typically established professionals who had, in many cases, held membership in AECT for much longer than respondents from the other two groups. Likewise, significantly more females responded to the Current and Former Graduate Student Members surveys than to the Current Professional Members survey. Although the gender distribution for respondents from the Current Professional Members group was roughly even, still slightly more women from this group took the survey as well. AECT does not currently collect information on the gender distribution of its members, so it is impossible to confidently say how representative this sample is of the organization’s membership as a whole. With that said, educational technology is still largely viewed as a male dominated field and attendance at the annual AECT conference is generally reflective of this.

**Research Question 1: Why do graduate student members initially join AECT?**

Although the aforementioned demographic findings varied between groups, there existed some interesting consistencies in their responses to commonly asked questions. Specifically, when asked about their reasons for initially joining AECT, respondents from all three groups consistently rated, “recommended by professor or institution” highest followed by “access to journals/publications”, “networking”, and/or “participation in the annual conference” out of all of the answer choices.

Another important facet specifically impacting the Current Graduate Student Members’ commitment and receptiveness toward maintaining membership in AECT and increasing their involvement over time was their reasons for initially joining.
Like the other groups, the most common reason for joining was because it was strongly recommended by a professor or was a requirement of the student’s graduate program. For students who had positive experiences with their professors and/or institutions, they were more likely to join AECT with an open mind.

**Research Question 2: Why do individuals continue their membership in AECT?**

The thematic analyses of the semi-structured interviews provided invaluable lenses through which to better interpret how individuals from the various groups’ reasons for being members of AECT changed over time. Specifically, those interviewees from the Current Professional Members group who had the longest memberships and highest levels of involvement/leadership expressed clear shifts in their current reasons for membership when compared to their initial motivations for joining.

Although their reasons for initially joining AECT mirrored those of the other two groups, the interview respondents from the Current Professional Members group evidenced a motivational shift regarding membership that can be explained, in part, by their longer tenure in AECT and the subsequent relationships and other benefits they reaped as a result of that exposure. When specifically focusing on the interviewees who had been members for a decade or more, their buy-in and commitment to AECT was unquestionable. A poignant shift was noted in several of the interviews as the term “networking” gave way richer descriptions of the interpersonal interactions that commonly take place at AECT events. These
descriptions included words like “fellowship” and “professional family.” With this shift also came increased opportunities for research collaborations and the mutual benefits of organizational service. These results support the conclusion that once an individual is a member for 10 years, AECT will likely have them for the duration of their careers if not beyond into retirement.

An important theme uncovered from the Former Graduate Student Members’ responses was that having a negative relationship with the professor who recommended or required the respondent to join increased the likelihood of membership nonrenewal. Likewise, those graduate students who were required to join but subsequently were not provided with any form of follow up orientation or mentoring from the recommending professor were less likely to engage in meaningful participation, let alone leadership activities, going forward. As such, students who were required to join but were also, for example, given the opportunity to attend the annual conference and co-present with a faculty member expressed more positive intentions about their future membership.

Of the three groups included in this study, the Former Graduate Student Members group had the shortest average length of membership. For example, over half of the interview respondents had been members two years or less. Length of membership served as an important contextual variable framing responses provided by the members of this group. This finding, when considered along with the length of membership and organizational involvement reported by interview respondents from the other two groups, suggests that the longer a person is a member of AECT the
more likely individuals are to retain membership and participate in organizational activities.

Some shift away from their initial reasons for joining AECT was also noted in the interview responses of individuals from the Current Graduate Student Members group. Although not as stark of a shift as observed in the Current Professional Members group, the current graduate students’ evolving perspectives and motivations toward membership give credence to the positive affect of getting student members involved. Specifically, the data suggests it is important for graduate students to become involved in organizational activities and make connections to peers and mentors as early as possible after joining AECT. Also, the interviews suggested that Current Graduate Student Members who had been with the organization longer (e.g., 3-5 years) evidenced greater involvement in AECT events and leadership roles and firmer intentions to maintain membership with the organization going forward.

**Research Question 3: Why do individuals discontinue their memberships?**

An important finding from the Former Graduate Student Members group, in particular, was many of respondents joined AECT solely because it was a requirement of their programs. In most cases, membership was required so that these graduate student members could access publications for use in their coursework. In some cases, individuals from both student member groups joined in order to present with a professor at the annual conference, but many other members of the Former Graduate Student Members group were not able to associate that kind of mentorship
with their earliest AECT membership experiences. Although some individuals
reported having received no guidance or mentorship as new members, still others
reported disappointing early membership experiences such as not feeling welcomed at
the annual conference. These kinds of experiences appeared to factor into their
decisions of discontinue membership in AECT.

Although it was an issue of concern to various degrees for all groups, the cost
of membership relative to perceived benefits as well as the ability to pay from year to
year weighed heavily on the graduate student members’ decision to renew. The
former graduate student group appeared most heavily burdened by financial concerns.
In several cases, the former members came from practitioner-focused programs. As
such, their careers may have been in another field entirely, but they were learning to
incorporate educational technology principles. For some of these respondents, their
first priority was to maintain membership with their respective practitioner
organizations. Some of these individuals found value in AECT while others not as
much. Some indicated that AECT’s research focus was not necessarily in line with
their career trajectories.

Lastly, several interviewees from this group reported that their membership
had expired without them realizing it. They reported having not received any
communication from AECT warning them that their membership was about to expire.
In one case, a former graduate student member in this situation stated that he simply
had not yet renewed after the lapse but likely would do so at some point. Another
member from this group indicated that, after receiving no proactive renewal warnings
or communications foretelling the expiration of her membership, she felt as though AECT did not value presence or potential contributions to the organization.

**Conclusions & Implications**

The results of the current study suggest that challenges related to maintaining membership roles, particularly with regard to graduate students, are systemic issues within AECT. The results of this study help to clarify the complex nature of, and interplay between the various factors contributing to this issue including ability to pay membership fees, perceptions of cost vs. benefit, networking opportunities, access to resources, and ability to participate in organizational events. In addition to surveying and interviewing both current and former graduate student members, examining the experiences of current professional members who were also in AECT as graduate students helped to isolate protective factors and experiences that produced not only involved, contributing members but also organizational leaders.

**General Recommendations**

**Recommendations for Change**

In light of these findings, AECT may consider taking steps to address the pressing question of what steps can be taken to foster positive membership intentions and strengthen the commitment of graduate student members. Organizational leaders may considering the following action steps:
• Increasing organizational contacts and opportunities for personal connections early and often in one’s time as a member is key;

• Because money concerns are prevalent for all groups, but particularly graduate students, attending the annual conference may not be an option for all. As such, publicizing alternative, non-conference events such as webinars while also encouraging members to engage through the various AECT social media outlets may be another potentially beneficial step;

• To address financial concerns of members who are in transition between graduate school and career, AECT might consider creating a bridge membership rate for those who do not yet have a faculty position or who work in a practitioner role and do not receive any institutional support to fund their membership and/or attendance at the annual conference;

• To better address these issues, AECT might consider putting together a Membership Committee similar to the one that was disbanded several years ago;

• It may be beneficial to expose new members to a sort of orientation in order to acquaint them with AECT’s various divisions and their focuses as well as the myriad of involvement opportunities that exist for all members. This may be accomplished through any number of modalities including webinars, screencasts, or personal mentoring;
• Since the results of the current study indicated that a large number of new student members joined at the recommendation of their professors or as a requirement of their universities, AECT may consider developing training resources with talking points for these professors to use to articulate the many benefits of membership beyond simply access publications for use in coursework;

• A subset of survey respondents also expressed concerns with AECT related to branding, communication, and accessibility that may adversely impact their decision to continue membership. Several respondents complained about the quality and accessibility of the AECT website noting that it was not what they expected from the premier professional association representing the field of Educational Technology. For example, some reported that the journals were difficulty to search and thus less useful that the databases offered through their universities;

• Still other respondents complained that they were never contacted to remind them that their memberships were about to lapse nor were they contacted after their membership expired. Several respondents, particularly from the Former Graduate Student group said that this lack of communication made them feel as though their membership was no valued or that they were just seen as a number;
• The leadership of AECT may also consider devising strategies that reinforce a “big tent” paradigm in order to appeal to members who espouse practitioner-focused career goals so that they may be more likely to call AECT their professional home. AECT might address this by highlighting practitioner-focused divisions such as Organizational Training and Performance (OTP) and School Media and Technology (SMT). These divisions may be directed to reach out to members as soon as possible after joining to orient them on their missions;

• Similarly, Professors who are members of AECT who have corporate-focused students join AECT might also proactively explain how AECT can be beneficial to their careers and possibly connect them to mentors from within the organization’s membership rolls;

• AECT can attract practitioner oriented students by further publicizing and even expanding upon corporate sponsored programs such as the annual PacifiCorp Competition. In systematically taking these kinds of steps, graduate student members who have come to believe that AECT is only geared toward traditional academic pursuits would be exposed to ways practitioners are valued and actively involved at all levels of the organization;

• The relatively new Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) appears to have strengthened the organization since its 2006 inception by giving students a unique professional home within the organization to call their own. Some new
student members, though, may benefit from being invited into the GSA fold or at least shown how to get connected with it through social media;

- It is important to keep in mind that, for some new graduate student members, AECT may be one of the first and only international professional organizations to which they have been exposed. As such, it will also be important to clearly articulate the vision and mission of the organization as well as dispel any myths new members may have;

- It may also prove beneficial to make new members aware of all of the service and research activities they can get involved in from the beginning so as to prevent them from belaboring under the false assumption that they would first have to pay their proverbial due to access such opportunities;

- AECT may also consider fine-tuning existing mentorship efforts and/or also look into establishing a graduate student peer mentorship program. Graduate student members who have become involved in AECT and can easily articulate its value could be trained as ambassador who could serve as either a formal or informal support system for new graduate student members.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

As noted in the review of literature, research on graduate student membership in professional organizations is relatively scarce. As such, it is a ripe avenue for further investigation. Whereas this study specifically focused on three separate groups within the past and present membership of AECT, future research may focus on one
group at a time. For example, if the recommendation of creating an organizational orientation program for new members were to come to fruition, AECT might conduct a study comparing the retention rates, event attendance, and/or leadership development of those new members to those who had no received an orientation upon first joining. Moreover, any one of the success of any of the aforementioned action steps could be investigated. AECT could also examine other themes that came out in the interviews including burnout and perceived thankless nature of organizational service expressed by at least one very active member. Lastly, consistent with the findings discussed in Wiley (2015), AECT might further investigate graduate student membership as well as the social exchange related priorities of both Millennial members and those members representing Generation X.
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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Online Survey Consent

Title of Project: Factors Influencing Graduate Student Membership in the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT)

You are invited to participate in a research study that looks to identify factors impacting membership in AECT. This study is conducted by Paige Hale, a Doctoral Candidate in the Educational Technology Leadership program at Morehead State University, under the supervision of Dr. John Curry.

This study will take approximately 10 minutes of your time. This study seeks the participation of three distinct groups: 1) Current professional members of AECT, 2) Current graduate student members, and 3) Former members of the organization. You will be asked to complete an online survey that asks reasons for joining and/or maintaining membership in AECT.

Your decision to participate or decline participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty. If you want do not wish to complete this survey, just close your browser window.

Your participation in this research will be completely confidential and data will be averaged and reported in aggregate. Possible outlets of dissemination may be presentation at the annual AECT conference and subsequent publication. Although your participation in this research may not benefit you personally, it will help us understand membership in AECT.

There are no risks to individuals participating in this survey beyond those that exist in daily life.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 859-812-0--- or vphale@moreheadstate.edu if you have study related questions or problems.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at the Morehead State University at 606-783-2010.

Please print a copy of this consent form for your records, if you so desire.
- I have read and understand the above consent form, I certify that I am 18 years old or older, and I am willing to voluntarily take part in the study.

- I have read the information in this form and do not consent to take part in the research.
APPENDIX B: FULL INSTRUMENT #1

Retention Survey
Current Professional Members
Who Were Graduate Student Members

We are seeking to understand why some graduate student members continue their membership in AECT following attainment of their degree while others do not. *If you joined AECT as a graduate student, please help us by responding to the following questions.*

1. Please indicate your age bracket.
   - Under 21
   - 21-30
   - 31-40
   - 41-50
   - 51-60
   - Over 60

2. Please indicate your gender:
   - Male
   - Female
   - No Response

3. Have you been a continuous member since joining AECT as a graduate student?
   - Yes, I have been a continuous member since initially joining.
   - No, I was a nonmember for one or more years immediately following my time as a graduate student member.
   - No, I was a nonmember for one or more years during some other time(s).

4. If you have not been a continuous member, please tell us why you chose to discontinue your membership temporarily.
5. Please rate your reasons for initially joining AECT. (1=Not important/not applicable, 2=Not very important, 3=Somewhat important, 4=Very important)
   o Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor
   o Access to professional journals and other publications
   o Discounts on AECT/Springer professional books
   o Opportunity to participate in the AECT International Convention
   o Online and in-person networking with other professionals in my field
   o Tuition discounts at Walden University
   o Opportunity to participate in one or more AECT Divisions

6. Are there other reasons you joined AECT? Please comment.

7. What is your current position? (check all that apply)
   • Professional – PK-12 education
   • Professional – Higher education
   • Professional – Business/industry
   • Professional – Other (please specify)
   • Student
   • Retired

8. We plan to follow up with some respondents by email or phone. May we contact you? If so, please indicate your preferred contact method by filling in the box with your email address, Skype address, or phone number.
APPENDIX C: FULL INSTRUMENT #2

Retention Survey
Current Graduate Student Members

Please help AECT better understand your continuing professional needs by responding to the following questions:

1. Please indicate your age bracket.
   • Under 21
   • 21-30
   • 31-40
   • 41-50
   • 51-60
   • Over 60

2. Please indicate your gender:
   • Male
   • Female
   • No Response

3. Please rate your reasons for initially joining AECT. (1=Not important/not applicable, 2=Not very important, 3=Somewhat important, 4=Very important)
   o Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor
   o Access to professional journals and other publications
   o Discounts on AECT/Springer professional books
   o Opportunity to participate in the AECT International Convention
   o Online and in-person networking with other professionals in my field
   o Tuition discounts at Walden University
   o Opportunity to participate in one or more AECT Divisions

4. Are there other reasons you joined AECT? Please comment.
5. Do you plan to continue your membership after you complete your degree?
   • Yes
   • No (If no, please tell us why you plan to discontinue your membership.)

6. We plan to follow up with some respondents by email or phone. May we contact you? If so, please indicate your preferred contact method by filling in the box with your email address, Skype address, or phone number.
APPENDIX D: FULL INSTRUMENT #3

Retention Survey
Former Graduate Student Members

As a former AECT member, please help us better understand the needs of our graduate student members by responding to the following questions:

1. Please indicate your age bracket.
   - Under 21
   - 21-30
   - 31-40
   - 41-50
   - 51-60
   - Over 60

2. Please indicate your gender:
   - Male
   - Female
   - No Response

3. Please rate your reasons for initially joining AECT. (1=Not important/not applicable, 2=Not very important, 3=Somewhat important, 4=Very important)
   - Recommended or required by my institution, professor, or mentor
   - Access to professional journals and other publications
   - Discounts on AECT/Springer professional books
   - Opportunity to participate in the AECT International Convention
   - Online and in-person networking with other professionals in my field
   - Tuition discounts at Walden University
   - Opportunity to participate in one or more AECT Divisions

4. Are there other reasons you joined AECT? Please comment.
5. Do you plan to renew your membership at some point in the future?
   • Yes
   • No (If no, please tell us why you do not plan to renew your membership.)

6. We plan to follow up with some respondents by email or phone. May we contact you? If so, please indicate your preferred contact method by filling in the box with your email address, Skype address, or phone number.
APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Voluntary Semi-Structure Interview Questions

For Current Members (both graduate student and professional members)

- Why did you join AECT in the first place?
- How long have you been a member?
- Have you participated in any AECT events or leadership roles (annual conference, webinars, sit on a committee, etc.)?
- What are your current reasons for being a member of AECT?
- Have your reasons for membership changed over time? If so, how?
- Do you plan to continue your membership into the future? Why or why not?
- What benefits of membership are most appealing to you?

For Former Graduate Student Members

- Why did you join AECT in the first place?
- Approximately how long were you a member?
- Were you a member for any amount of time following graduation?
- Did you participate in any AECT events or any leadership roles (annual conference, webinars, sit on a committee, etc.)?
- Did you benefit from your membership? If so, how? If not, why?
- Why did you discontinue your membership?
- Are you currently a member of other professional organizations? If so, how would you describe your current involvement with them?
VITA

VALERIE PAIGE HALE

EDUCATION

May, 2005  Bachelor of Arts
Transylvania University
Lexington, Kentucky

August, 2006  Master of Science
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky

August, 2008  Educational Specialist
University of Kentucky
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Morehead State University
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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

2015-present  Instructor & Online Course Developer
Knowledge Elements
Franklin, Tennessee

2012-present  School Psychologist
Lincoln County Schools
Stanford, Kentucky

2011-2011  School Psychologist
Nelson County Schools
Bardstown, Kentucky

2008-2011  School Psychologist
Brown County Educational Service Center
Georgetown, Ohio
2007-2008  School Psychologist Intern  
Ross-Pike Educational Service Center  
Chillicothe, Ohio

2009-2011  Adjunct Faculty for Professional Development  
Ashland University, Great Oaks  
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2006-2007  Staff Support Associate  
University of Kentucky Medical Center  
Lexington, Kentucky

Summer 2007  Research Assistant  
University of Kentucky  
Lexington, Kentucky

2004-2006  Patient Relations Assistant  
University of Kentucky Medical Center  
Lexington, Kentucky

Summer 2003  Preschool Teacher & Counselor  
Ramapo Anchorage Camp  
Rhinebeck, New York

HONORS

2014  AECT Leadership Internship, Strohbehn Intern  
Association for Educational Communications & Technology  
Bloomington, Indiana

2014  AECT 3-Minute Thesis Competition Finalist  
Association for Educational Communications & Technology  
Bloomington, Indiana

2014  MSU Celebration of Student Scholarship Certificate of Merit  
for Outstanding Graduate Student Oral Presentation  
Morehead State University  
Morehead, Kentucky
2014 Outstanding Doctoral Student in Educational Technology
Morehead State University
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2013 Outstanding Doctoral Student in Educational Technology
Morehead State University
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2004-2005 Psi Chi Psychology Honorary
Transylvania University
Lexington, Kentucky

2004-2005 Delta Sigma Pi Spanish Honorary
Transylvania University
Lexington, Kentucky

2001-2005 Hagan Memorial Scholarship
Portsmouth West High School
West Portsmouth, Ohio

2001-2005 Hugh O’Brien Youth Leadership (HOBY) Award
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2001-2005 Morrison Scholarship
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2003-2004 Study Abroad Scholarship
Transylvania University
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PUBLICATIONS


Hale, V. P. (2014). The role of students in online graduate programs: From learning to leadership. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 36*(1), 61-64.